



## Richard Bland College BOARD OF VISITOR

### **DRAFT SEPTEMBER BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

**September 23-24, 2025 | 10:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. | AIC Boardroom**

#### **TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23 - Rector's Dinner**

On Tuesday evening, September 23, 2025, voting members of the Richard Bland College Board of Visitors (Board) and Richard Bland College President Debbie Sydow convened at 6:00 p.m. at the Hotel Petersburg, located at 20 W. Tabb St., Petersburg, VA 23803, for a dinner hosted by Mayor Sam Parham. Conversation centered on college, community, and commonwealth interests and priorities. The remainder of the evening was purely social, and no business was conducted.

#### **BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT FOR THE RECTOR'S DINNER:**

- Mr. John Rathbone, Rector
- Mr. Albert Poole, Vice Rector
- Ms. Vickie Schray, Secretary
- Hon. James Dyke Jr.
- Hon. Sam Parham
- Ms. Bouwien Smits

#### **ABSENT FROM THE RECTOR'S DINNER:**

- Mr. Charles Patton

President Debbie L. Sydow was also present at the dinner.

#### **WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24 - Board of Visitors Meeting**

The Board convened on campus in the Academic Innovation Center Boardroom at 10:30 a.m. following the Finance, Audit, and Compliance Committee meeting.

#### **BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT FOR THE BOARD MEETING:**

- Mr. John Rathbone, Rector
- Mr. Albert Poole, Vice Rector
- Ms. Vickie Schray, Secretary
- Hon. James Dyke Jr.
- Hon. Sam Parham

- Ms. Bouwien Smits
- Mr. Jason Pode, Faculty Representative

**ABSENT FROM THE BOARD MEETING:**

- Mr. Charles Patton
- Ms. Lilli Brown, Student Representative

**OTHERS PRESENT FOR THE FULL BOARD MEETING:**

- Dr. Debbie Sydow, President
- Dr. Kimberly Boyd, Vice President and Chief Research & Innovation Officer
- Dr. Tiffany Birdsong, Chief of Staff
- Stacey Sokol, Chief Business Officer
- Eric Kondzielawa, Chief Operations Officer
- Justin May, Chief Enrollment Management Officer
- Jesse Vaughan, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer
- Charita Johnson, Chief Information Officer
- Vicki Humphreys, Chief Development Officer
- Dr. Adam Zucconi, Interim Chief Academic Officer
- Melissa Mahoney, Controller
- Dr. Evanda Watts-Martinez, Director of Counseling Services
- Christie Clarke, Director, Dual Enrollment and High School Programs
- Dianna Banks, Director of Human Resources
- Dr. Susan Clair, Information Security Officer
- Dr. Ann Ifekwunigwe, Director, The University Center
- Ben Thoreson, Director of Student Success
- Ashley Fuller, Data and Compliance Officer
- Terelle Robinson, Associate Director of Government Relations
- Lisa Pond, Associate Director of Administrative Services
- Jeff Palmore, Principal, Capital Strategies
- Nathan Moberley, College Counsel
- Dr. Eileen Stempel, Strategic Planning and Governance Consultant
- Gerrit Smith, Senior Executive Administrator and Clerk to the Board of Visitors
- Other RBC Faculty & Staff

**Welcome and Introductory Remarks**

Rector John Rathbone called the Board meeting to order at 10:35 a.m. Recognizing that a quorum was present, Rector Rathbone asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the August 27, 2025, meeting. The motion was made by Mr. Parham, seconded by Ms. Smits and approved by voice vote.

At the request of Rector Rathbone, Ms. Smits provided a summary of the Finance, Audit, and Compliance Committee meeting that took place earlier in the day. With a focus on risk analysis/management, liability mitigation, and finances, the Committee received presentations from David Rasnic, Director for Higher Education at the Auditor of Public Accounts (APA); Mike Cullen, Principal with Baker Tilly, the College's internal auditor; Melissa Mahoney, RBC Controller; and Stacy Sokol, Chief Business Officer.

### **President's Report**

President Debbie Sydow provided an overview of the September Board meeting's thematic focus on college assets, noting that oversight and stewardship of all college assets—fiscal, financial, technology, human, and physical—is a primary responsibility of the Board. She also introduced Professor Jason Pode, the new Faculty Representative to the Board. Dr. Sydow reminded Board members of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Substantive Change Committee's on-site visit to campus on October 28, 2025, stating that this is one more step in the accrediting body's process for reviewing the College's governance change. Dr. Sydow noted that the SACSCOC Board of Trustees is expected to take final action to approve RBC's governance change at their June 2026 meeting. President Sydow then introduced Dr. Kim Boyd, Vice President and Chief Research and Innovation Officer.

Dr. Boyd introduced herself and provided a summary of grants assets, highlighting grant assets obtained since 2022 (~\$10 million) and highlighting initiatives such as the RBC "Health Zone," the new RBC Workforce and Career Readiness Center on Crater Road in Petersburg, and the RBC Table Dealers Institute. She emphasized community partnerships and the alignment between grants and RBC's strategic priorities.

Charita Johnson, Chief Information Officer, introduced herself to the Board and discussed the College's technology assets, highlighting the Technology Strategic Plan. Ms. Johnson highlighted strategic focus areas of the plan, including enhancing data driven decision making, protecting institutional and personal data, and harnessing artificial intelligence for teaching and learning.

Eric Kondzielawa, Chief Operating Officer, provided an overview of the College's physical assets, noting features of the 800-acre campus on the Facilities Master Plan, including the RBC Business Innovation Park. Mr. Kondzielawa informed the Board about the development of auxiliary revenue through campus housing, dining, Grove Market, and other enterprises, as well as partnerships with entities like the Department of Forestry that manage timber sales. Mr. Kondzielawa reviewed capital projects proposed in the 2026-32 Capital Outlay Plan.

### **Working Lunch - Higher Education Consolidation: An Overview**

Following a break at 11:45, the meeting resumed at noon with a working lunch. Dr. Eileen Strempe, Consultant to the Board of Visitors, introduced John MacIntosh, Managing Partner of

SeaChange Capital, who joined via Teams to discuss the growing trend of mergers and acquisitions in higher education. SeaChange Capital supports colleges and universities to explore strategic alliances and collaborative partnerships that have the potential to improve student success. The process for applying for funding through SeaChange Capital was explained. Dr. Stremmel presented the Board with a framework for investigating Primary Models and Options for Consolidation in Higher Education.

After the working lunch, Dr. Adam Zucconi, Acting Chief Academic Officer, provided an overview of academic assets, including instructional faculty and degree programs and credentials offered. He highlighted future program development and innovation, especially planned certificate programs in data science, cyber security and healthcare. Dr. Zucconi shared that 86% of tenured and continuing track faculty hold terminal degrees and full-time faculty teach approximately 70% of classes. He also reported on faculty-led experiences for students during the last year and library and Academic Innovation Center resources available to students.

Ben Thoreson, Director of Student Success, introduced himself and highlighted student success assets, including the College's Guided Pathways to Success (GPS) program designed to help students stay on course to reach their academic and career goals. Mr. Thoreson explained the role of learner mentors who are full-time professional advisors assigned to every student. The key priorities for student success at RBC are retention, graduation, and helping students persist toward the next step in their educational journey. Mr. Thoreson described how he and his team use data interventions to assist students who encounter academic challenges. He shared success stories of three recent RBC graduates and how they are thriving at their four-year universities, including Princeton, Amherst, and UNC.

### **Committee Reports**

[See Welcome and Introductory Remarks.]

### **Action Items**

After Mr. Thoreson's presentation and conclusion of the President's report, the Board took a 15-minute break. At 1:45 p.m. the meeting continued with Dr. Sydow summarizing each of the eight resolutions presented for Board approval.

**Resolutions 1**, Appointment to Fill Vacancies in the Instructional Faculty; **Resolution 2**, Award of Academic Promotion; and **Resolution 3**, Approval to Fill Vacancies in the Professional Faculty, were voted on as a block. Rector Rathbone requested a motion to approve Resolutions 1 through 3. The motion was made by Mr. Albert Poole, seconded by Ms. Smits and approved by voice vote.

Rector Rathbone then requested a motion to approve **Resolution 4**, Approval of the College Workforce Planning and Development Report. The motion was made by Ms. Vickie Schray, seconded by Mr. Poole and approved by voice vote.

**Resolution 5**, Approval of 2026-2032 Capital Outlay Plan and **Resolution 6**, 2026-2032 Six-Year Plan, were voted on as a block. Rector Rathbone requested a motion to approve Resolutions 5 and 6. The motion was made by Mr. Poole, seconded by Ms. Schray and approved by voice vote.

Rector Rathbone requested a motion to approve **Resolution 7**, Approval of BOV Status Update Report. The motion was made by Ms. Schray, seconded by Mr. Poole and approved by voice vote.

### **Closed Session**

After passage of Resolution 7, Rector Rathbone requested a motion to move the Board meeting into closed session for the purpose of discussing the selection of a presidential search firm pursuant to Virginia Code §2.2-3711.A.29 Discussion of the award of a public contract involving the expenditure of public funds, including interviews of bidders or offerors, and discussion of the terms of scope of such contract, where discussion in an open session would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the public body. The motion was made by Mr. Poole, seconded by Ms. Schray and approved by voice vote. The Board went into closed session at 2:02 p.m.

### **Open Session Resumed**

The Board reconvened in open session at 2:16 p.m.

Rector Rathbone requested a motion that the Board certify by roll call vote that, to the best of each member's knowledge, only matters lawfully exempted from the open meeting requirements and the Virginia Freedom of Information Act were discussed and only matters identified in the motion to have a closed session were discussed. The motion was made by Mr. Poole, seconded by Ms. Schray. Gerrit Smith, Senior Executive Administrator and Clerk to the Board, called the roll, and all six Board members present "certified yes."

Rector Rathbone requested a motion to pass **hand-delivered Resolution 8**, Authorizing the Selection of the Presidential Search Firm and Appointing an Ad Hoc Presidential Search Committee. The motion was made by Ms. Schray, seconded by Mr. Parham and passed by voice vote as amended.

There being no further business, Rector Rathbone adjourned the meeting at 2:21 p.m.