

Hybrid Special Meeting: Building I Boardroom

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Hybrid Regular Meeting: Culinaire Room (I-108)

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I. SPECIAL MEETING

1. Call to Order

Board Chair Tim Cooper called the meeting to order at 1:00 P.M. and noted a quorum.

2. Public Comments

There were no public comments

II. EXECUTIVE SESSION

1. At 1:40 P.M. an Executive Session was called to review the performance of a public employee for purposes of Tenure, in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act (RCW 42.30).
2. The Executive Session concluded at 2:04 P.M.
3. Return to Open Session

III. SPECIAL MEETING

1. Meetings

A. Regular Board Meeting – December 17, 2025

The next regular Board meeting is scheduled for December 17, 2025, at 3:00 P.M.

2. Adjournment

There being no further business, Trustee Zappone motioned to adjourn the Board of Trustees meeting at 2:05 P.M. Trustee Entenman seconded, and the motion carried.

IV. REGULAR BOARD MEETING

1. Call to Order

2. Board Chair Tim Cooper called the meeting to order at 3:00 P.M. and noted a quorum.



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3. Adoption of Minutes

A. November 19, 2025 – Special and Regular Meeting

Trustee Zappone introduced a motion to approve the minutes for the regular meeting held on November 19, 2025. Trustee Norouzi seconded and the motion carried.

4. Action Item

A. Tenure Advancement

1. Second to Third Year Advancement

After considering the recommendation of the tenure review committee and all other recommendations, Trustee Entenman moved that Felisha Jackson be promoted from second to third year status. Trustee Norouzi seconded and the motion carried.

5. Communications

A. General Information/Introductions

Executive Director Doris Martinez introduced two new leaders joining the college community. Yalda Naimzadeh was welcomed as the new Executive Assistant to the Executive Director of DEI, bringing valuable experience from her previous role as a Student Success Specialist. E.D. Martinez also introduced Le'Onna Lee, who will serve as the interim Director of Student Life after previously leading the Outreach Community Recruitment team.

VP Stephanie Delaney followed with the introduction of Zefire Skoczen, who has been appointed as the permanent Dean of Health and Human Services. VP Delaney highlighted the expertise and stability Zefire brings to the division in this new leadership role.

B. Correspondence

There was no correspondence

C. Public Comments from the Audience

There were no public comments

D. Student Leadership

Treasurer Afonso Vaituma and Secretary Mirella Valle shared their enthusiasm for the upcoming Winter Quarter and the New Student Orientation (NSO), noting that this year's event will include interactive games to help build community. They highlighted plans for a bingo activity designed to engage both new and returning students during orientation.

ASG will also host a welcome table on January 5th to greet students as they return to campus. The table will offer hot chocolate and cider, along with printed schedules and a QR-code survey to encourage student feedback and participation. Students who complete the survey will have the opportunity to win prizes, helping to create a warm and engaging start to the quarter.

E. Renton Federation of Teachers

Dr. Huma Mohibullah, President of the Renton Federation of Teachers (RFT), joining the meeting remotely, thanked the trustees for revisiting the financial emergency declaration last month. She shared that the RFT has conducted its own review of the college's financial position, using publicly available dashboards and information provided through collaboration with Vice President Jackson. She emphasized that labor is one of the institution's greatest assets and should be viewed as such in financial planning. Dr. Mohibullah noted that while the upcoming legislative session will be challenging, RTC has already taken significant steps to adjust its budget, whereas many other colleges are still in the early stages of doing so. She expressed RFT's view that the current deficit does not warrant the continuation of the financial emergency, particularly given the uncertainty and anxiety it creates across campus. RFT has identified approximately \$1.5 million in potential support that could help resolve the deficit, and she pointed to ongoing bonuses, hiring, and construction projects as indicators that the emergency was declared in anticipation of losses rather than in response to them. She invited the Board to meet directly with RFT to discuss the college's financial position, noting that faculty remain unclear about the source of some financial figures and would appreciate further clarification. She also echoed comments made by Trustee Entenman regarding the importance of transparency and shared understanding. Dr. Mohibullah briefly addressed the trustee appointment process, noting that colleges statewide are emphasizing that many issues are local and that accountability questions should also be directed internally. She reported that the recent Professional Development Day was a success, with leadership providing flexibility and expanded options for faculty—particularly helpful during the recent flooding. She thanked those who coordinated the flex option, set up Zoom rooms, and organized the agenda. She closed by wishing everyone a restful holiday break. Chair Cooper thanked her for the update and apologized for not having immediate responses to some of the questions raised, noting that follow-up conversations will occur.

F. Written Communication Reports

Chair Cooper thanked for all the reports, and especially enjoyed the videos.



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6. Action Item

A. Board Reserve Action

The Board engaged in an in-depth discussion regarding the college's reserve levels and long-term financial stability. Chair Cooper opened the conversation by reiterating the trustees' responsibility to ensure RTC remains financially healthy for decades to come. He emphasized the importance of understanding how much the Board Reserve currently holds, how much is needed, and how RTC compares to other community and technical colleges—especially given ongoing financial uncertainty across the sector.

At the previous meeting, Trustee Norouzi requested examples from peer institutions. In response, Vice President of Administration Jake Jackson provided a comparative overview. Clover Park, which is approximately 10% larger than RTC, operates with a \$29.1 million reserve. Lake Washington Institute of Technology uses a 15% reserve guideline and delegates reserve-related decisions to the president. Bellingham Technical College maintains a reserve equal to 15% of operating expenditures, totaling \$11 million, despite being one-third the size of RTC. Tacoma Community College sets aside 17% of operating expenditures, and Pierce College maintains 15%.

VP Jackson then reviewed RTC's own reserve policy, which includes:

- A minimum reserve equal to two months of operating expenditures for cashflow stability
- An emergency reserve for unexpected repairs
- An innovation fund equal to two weeks of operating expenditures

Together, these components total approximately \$14 million, or 27% of RTC's operating expenditures—placing RTC in the mid-range compared to other institutions, whose reserves span from 11% to 49%.

VP Jackson also provided an update on the Certificate of Participation (COP) financing. RTC had anticipated signing COP documents in February, with a debt service payment due in June. Due to logistical timing—specifically the need to go out to bid for the J Building remodel in March—the signing will now occur in June, shifting the first payment to December. As a result, the administration recommended transferring the unspent \$500,000 debt service allocation into the Board's operating reserve to support next year's financial obligations.

Trustees raised several questions during the discussion. Trustee Entenman asked whether the delay in signing the COP was due to financial concerns; VP Jackson clarified it was strictly logistical. Chair Cooper asked whether other colleges were experiencing similar enrollment trends. VP Jackson noted that Clover Park is growing rapidly, Bellingham Tech has recovered well but remains below pre-COVID

levels, and Lake Washington is the most stable—placing RTC near the middle of the pack.

Trustee Norouzi expressed difficulty comparing reserve percentages across institutions, given their varying sizes and structures. Trustee Entenman asked whether RTC should consider growing its reserve. VP Jackson explained that doing so would require setting aside additional operating funds, which is challenging given the tight budget and the new allocation model that recalculates funding annually based on FTE relative to other colleges. This makes long-term projections more complex.

Trustees also asked whether the surplus could be used for purposes other than reserves. VP Jackson recommended placing the funds into the operating reserve, which currently holds approximately \$800,000. He explained that the operating reserve provides the president with flexibility to balance the budget in deficit years. Although RTC has never needed to tap into it, increasing the reserve to roughly \$3 million would strengthen the college's financial resilience.

When asked what circumstances would trigger the use of the Board Reserve, VP Jackson noted that this would occur only if the state legislature failed to pass a supplemental budget and adjourn by June 30, preventing OFM from releasing funds on July 1—a situation that has not occurred in over a decade.

Following discussion, Chair Zappone moved to approve the transfer of the unspent \$500,000 debt service payment into the Board's operating reserve. Trustee Norouzi seconded the motion, and it passed. Trustee Entenman requested that the Board formally explore proactive strategies to increase the reserve in the future, and VP Jackson agreed to bring forward recommendations.

7. Discussion/Reports

A. President's Report

President Harden opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and acknowledging the impact of the recent flooding across the region. While RTC experienced only minor water intrusion from the heavy rains, the college closed temporarily to help keep employees and students off the roads during the worst of the conditions. She expressed concern for those in the community who were more directly affected.

She thanked faculty, staff, and administrators for their work throughout Fall Quarter and for navigating difficult conversations and decisions that continue to strengthen the college. President Harden shared that she recently participated in a joint Instruction and SSLT retreat, where teams reviewed program-by-program enrollment trends and operational constraints. She noted that there is much to celebrate as the college moves into 2026, with enrollment

increasing across General Education, Professional-Technical programs, and tuition-paying FTE overall.

As the college transitions into Winter Quarter, several major initiatives are underway. Boeing has officially gifted \$250,000 to support the Renton Promise program—the largest contribution from Boeing on record. This effort reflects a strong partnership between the City of Renton, the RTC Foundation, and the college. The city has also committed \$200,000 over the next two years to further support the program.

President Harden highlighted the success of the RTC Culinary Holiday Buffet, thanking Trustees Zappone and Takamura for attending. The event even received attention on social media, where an Instagram influencer featured it as an “economic date” option. She also praised the recent All-College Professional Development Day, noting the high quality of workshops led by RTC faculty and staff, particularly those focused on accessibility and artificial intelligence.

She shared that she and Executive Director of Innovation & Strategic Partnerships, Wade Parrott, recently met with representatives from Year-Up, an international organization interested in partnering with RTC and Swedish; more information will be forthcoming as discussions continue. She also attended the South Puget Sound legislative breakfast with Foundation Executive Director Carrie Shaw, where state representatives discussed anticipated challenges in the upcoming session, including impacts on transportation funding.

On a personal note, President Harden shared that she has resigned from the Alliance for Education Board. With the organization’s new strategic plan focusing more directly on Seattle Colleges and Seattle Public Schools, she felt it was more appropriate for representatives from those institutions to serve in that role.

Looking ahead, the college is preparing to go out to bid for the Funding Hub and the remodel of Building L. Legislative priorities continue to take shape, and the Governor’s budget is expected next week. RTC will provide a campus update in January. President Harden will coordinate with Trustee Zappone on upcoming legislative visits, and Trustee Entenman suggested that January would be an ideal time to meet with legislators.

Dr. Harden closed by noting that with the new state allocation model, RTC will need to develop a strong strategy around retention and class size management to ensure continued enrollment growth and financial stability.

B. Financial/Budget Status

VP Jacob Jackson shared an update on the college's financial performance through the end of November 2025. To date, the college has collected 51% of its annual revenue, with fees and tuition trending in the mid-70% range. Winter Quarter tuition has already been collected, totaling \$5.5 million compared to \$4.8 million at this time last year, reflecting the college's enrollment growth. While the college is producing fewer goods overall, the cost of goods has increased; however, travel restrictions have helped offset some of these rising expenses. CTS Executive Director John Henry Whatley was recognized for his effective work in replacing equipment and negotiating favorable pricing with vendors. Student aid expenditures are currently lower than last year because the state delayed releasing Opportunity Funds until this month.

Chair Cooper noted that the college is currently \$4.1 million ahead in revenue and \$700,000 ahead in expenses. VP Jackson explained that tuition revenue will plateau after Spring Quarter registration, with no additional tuition collected after February. State allocation revenue will also stop accruing in April. Because most revenue is received in the first nine months of the fiscal year while expenses continue through year-end, the financial picture will naturally rebalance over time. Chair Cooper emphasized that, given the declared financial emergency, the college should closely examine whether the current surplus will be needed to offset projected expenses and increased enrollment. VP Jackson agreed and will begin including forward-looking projections in next month's report.

VP Jackson also reviewed operating revenue and expenditures for the month ending November. Fees and tuition collections remain strong at 75%, and the \$5.5 million collected so far reflects the college's enrollment increases. Running Start and Youth High School enrollments are consistent with last year, with potential growth expected in January or February. Enterprise revenues are up compared to last year, and staffing levels in the Scott and Innovation divisions are slightly higher. Expenses remain favorable overall, with total spending \$200,000 below last year. Benefits costs are down, goods and services are slightly behind projections, and travel may increase modestly. E.D. Whatley's cost-saving efforts in technology replacement continue to positively impact the budget. Student aid remains lower than last year due to delayed state disbursements. The college has spent approximately \$13 million to date, leaving a \$4.8 million gap in net dollars.

Facilities updates were also provided. Sound-masking systems will be installed in Building I in December, with potential expansion to other areas if successful. The college has submitted paperwork to convert the Trades Building major capital project into an intermediate project, with projections coming in lower than originally anticipated. The college anticipates receiving \$15 million to remodel Building A. Work continues on Building L, and several classrooms in Building C have been refreshed to provide larger instructional spaces.

Chair Cooper suggested that including financial projections would provide clearer visibility into future conditions, and VP Jackson confirmed that these projections will be incorporated beginning next month.

8. Board of Trustees

A. Foundation Liaison Report

The position remains vacant at this time. Chair Cooper expressed appreciation to the Foundation for their continued dedication and hard work during this period, noting the important role they have played in maintaining momentum and supporting ongoing initiatives despite the vacancy.

B. Legislative Action Liaison Report

Vice Chair Bob Zappone provided the Legislative Action Report and noted that Dr. Harden had already covered most of the key updates. He acknowledged Trustee Entenman's earlier comments regarding the timing of legislative visits and agreed that her perspective was helpful. At this stage, there is little new information coming out of Olympia, and the overall climate remains marked by uncertainty and apprehension. Trustee Zappone emphasized that the release of the governor's proposed budget will be an important turning point, as it will give the college a clearer foundation for planning. He added that the upcoming short legislative session is expected to heighten both difficulty and tension.

Dr. Harden additionally shared that February 5th will be Student Legislative Day and that she is working with ASG to coordinate student participation.

C. Community Advisory Committee Liaison Report

Trustee Norouzi provided an update on the College Advisory Council (CAC), noting that a new meeting has been scheduled for early in the new year. She expressed appreciation to E.D. Parrott for spearheading the launch of the

council and helping establish its initial framework. Dr. Harden added that the upcoming meeting will focus on outlining the council's mission and objectives, beginning with a core group of members before expanding participation as the structure becomes more defined. Jessica shared that additional updates will be available in January as the work progresses.

9. Meetings

A. Regular Board Meeting – January 21, 2026

Chair Cooper shared that the Board held its retreat last week, where members reviewed the college's accreditation and Strategic Enrollment Plan updates. He noted that it was encouraging to see how the college is performing and how progress toward institutional goals is being measured. The retreat also included a discussion about the broader system landscape, particularly the political and financial uncertainty facing community and technical colleges across the state. The Board spent time reviewing its own policies to strengthen rigor and clarity, including those related to the Board reserve. The day concluded with a productive conversation with Foundation leadership and a review of their annual report, which Tim commended for being fully online—an approach that improves accessibility and reduces mailing costs.

Dr. Harden announced that the Student Success Gala will take place on March 7, and tables are now available for purchase.

Trustee Entenman shared that she has been appointed by the Governor to serve on the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. Because she cannot serve on two boards simultaneously, she will be stepping down from the RTC Board, though she emphasized that she will always remain a member of the RTC community. She expressed deep gratitude for the opportunity to serve over the past eleven years and spoke with pride about the college's progress and the dedication of its employees. Trustee Entenman reflected on the retreat discussions, noting the robust conversations around the budget, the Strategic Enrollment Plan, and the college's position within the statewide system. She appreciated the review of Board policies and valued the time spent with the Foundation, which continues to build strong support structures for students. She also thanked staff for providing electronic report packets, which she found easier to read. She closed with heartfelt remarks about her service.

10. Adjournment

Chair Cooper closed the meeting by expressing the Board's gratitude for the years of service and expertise contributed, and he extended warm holiday wishes to everyone in attendance. Following his remarks, Trustee Zappone moved to adjourn the meeting, and Trustee Norouzi seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor, and the meeting was adjourned at 4:16 p.m.