

I. SPECIAL MEETING

1. Call to Order

Board Chair Tim Cooper called the meeting to order at 1:32pm and noted a quorum

2. Public Comments

There were no public comments

3. Welding Program Tour

4. Quarterly Review of President/Board Goals

5. Meetings

A. Regular Board Meeting – January 21, 2026

B. Dr. Harden recommended postponing the discussion of the President and Board goals to the February meeting. Vice Chair Zappone motioned, Trustee Norouzi seconded, motion carried.

6. Adjournment

There being no further business, Vice Chair Zappone motioned to adjourn the Board of Trustees Special meeting at 2:33pm. Trustee Norouzi seconded, and the motion carried.

II. REGULAR BOARD MEETING

1. Call to Order

A. Board Chair Tim Cooper called the meeting to order at 3:02 P.M. and noted a quorum.

2. Adoption of Minutes

A. December 8, 2025 – Special Meeting: Trustee Norouzi motioned to approve the minutes for the Special Meeting, Vice Chair Bob Zappone seconded, and the motion carried

B. December 17, 2025 – Special and Regular Meeting: Trustee Norouzi motioned to approve the minutes for the Special and Regular Meeting, Vice Chair Bob Zappone seconded, and the motion carried

3. Communications

A. General Information/Introductions

VP of HR, Lesley Hogan introduced Yunhee Cho as the new HR Assistant and announced that Soha will soon be retiring. She also welcomed Oscar Gelo, who has joined the team as the HR Generalist and Benefits Manager in training. With these additions, Lesley shared that the HR department is now fully staffed.

B. Correspondence

There was no correspondence

C. Public Comments from the Audience

Marty Cooksey, on behalf of RFT, presented a request for the Board to adopt a standard operating procedure that would automatically freeze hiring and travel during periods of financial emergency. The rationale emphasized the importance of demonstrating fiscal restraint to the community, ensuring consistency and transparency in decision-making, and establishing clear controls that eliminate ambiguity during challenging budget conditions. It was noted that if such measures had been implemented at the outset of the current financial situation, the college could have avoided approximately a quarter million dollars in expenditures. The request specifically included placing a hold on all travel during financial emergencies, with the reminder that previous travel activity represented an area where significant savings might have been realized.

D. Student Leadership

The Student Life team shared several updates on recent and upcoming engagement activities. Students were welcomed back to campus in January with hot cocoa, followed by a campus-wide scavenger hunt that helped reintroduce them to key resources and services. February programming includes a series of Black History Month events, as well as a Lunar New Year celebration featuring lion dancers and community activities. The team is also preparing students for upcoming Student Advocacy Days, where participants will learn about legislative processes and practice speaking with legislators. Their current legislative priorities include expanding housing support, advancing eligibility for financial aid, and one additional priority still being finalized. In addition, discussions are underway regarding how best to support students observing Ramadan. Upcoming events include a Black History Month spoken word and poetry performance with food on February 5, a Lunar New Year lion dance and community celebration on February 17, and a Family Feud-style activity on February 7.

E. Renton Federation of Teachers

RFT President Huma Mohibullah emphasized that ending the financial emergency and addressing questionable purchasing practices must remain a top priority. She reiterated that the RFT has invited the Trustees to meet privately to review the union’s financial analysis, noting that the invitation remains open as an effort to avoid unnecessary public spectacle and instead engage in a more constructive setting. Faculty expressed concern that the college is now entering a second year under a financial emergency designation, despite data that, in their view, does not justify such a status. RFT’s analysis identified a surplus at the outset of the declaration, and members argued that an emergency should be reserved for extraordinary circumstances that threaten the institution’s survival. They noted that other colleges’ collective bargaining agreements outline specific criteria for declaring an emergency, and that RTC’s reserves exceeded Board policy thresholds, signaling more flexibility than an emergency designation would suggest. RFT representatives also stressed that existing policies within bargaining agreements should be utilized rather than circumvented. They highlighted months of reporting that instruction—described as the statutory core of the institution—has been overlooked, despite assurances that programs were being “pruned” rather than dismantled. Faculty voiced concern that the current approach does not reflect democratic values and instead consolidates decision-making power. They questioned whether the challenges facing the college are being addressed in a manner that protects its core mission.

F. Written Communication Reports

Trustee Norouzi expressed her appreciation for the written reports provided to the Board. Chair Cooper followed by commending the Marketing team for their strong outreach efforts to prospective students. Also noted that planning is underway for a Student Success event scheduled for March.

4. Discussion/Reports

A. President’s Report

President Harden began by recognizing the anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the college’s fourth annual MLK Week, expressing appreciation to the committee members and to all students, faculty, and staff who contribute to the campus community each day. She also addressed concerns raised the previous day regarding reported ICE sightings near SPS. After contacting the Mayor of Renton and receiving updates from the Renton Police Department, she confirmed that there

have been no reports of ICE activity in the area, though RPD continues to monitor social media. RPD has also reached out to ICE regarding any planned visits but has not received a response. Campus Security has reissued guidance on how to contact security and clarified the distinctions between private and public spaces on campus. The President noted ongoing collaboration with Executive Director Martinez to organize Know Your Rights workshops.

Dr. Harden offered a commendation to the New Student Orientation planning group, noting that this year's cohort was one of the largest since her arrival at RTC. She also shared, with the support of Executive Directors Carrie Shaw and Wade Parrott, that the first meeting of the President's Advisory Committee was held, with participation from school districts and nonprofit partners and additional members expected to join. In recent weeks, she has met with several organizations to explore potential partnerships, including a visit to the Kent Valley to discuss K-12 collaboration and a meeting with Boeing regarding training opportunities as the company prepares for increased hiring. She highlighted recent media coverage of the Renton Promise program in the Renton Reporter and the Seattle Times. President Harden provided updates on governance and staffing, noting that interviews for a new trustee have taken place and results are pending. The search for the Executive Assistant to the President and Secretary to the Board is progressing, with reference checks underway and hopes of identifying a finalist by next week. She also shared enrollment updates, reporting a 12% overall increase, with professional-technical programs up 6% and continued growth across the system.

Construction and facilities updates included progress on Building C classrooms, which are expected to be completed by the end of the month, and ongoing permitting work with the City of Renton for Building L. The campus sign at the front entrance is scheduled for removal tomorrow, with coordination underway between the college, the insurance company, and the city.

As the legislative session continues, President Harden, along with Trustee Vice Chair Bob Zappone, Instructor Rick Geist, VP of Administration and Finance Jacob Jackson, and a student representative, will travel to Olympia on Monday for four scheduled meetings. Key topics include advocating against a COLA fund split, supporting increased utility funding, and communicating the local impacts of potential budget reductions. A second visit is planned for February 23. Dr. Harden noted that the Governor's proposed budget would result in an estimated \$100,000 impact to RTC. In response to financial pressures, the college has halted out-of-state travel and is limiting in-state travel to essential commission activities. She reaffirmed that no additional staffing cuts are planned and acknowledged that 31 employees have already experienced reduced pay through furloughs. A financial update will be provided at the All-College Meeting on February 5.

B. Financial/Budget Status

VP of Admin & Finance, Jacob Jackson provided a mid-year budget update, noting that state allocations for FY26 came in lower than originally projected. While tuition revenue was budgeted at just over \$7.1 million, fee waiver collections continue to trend below tuition collections, as expected. Running Start enrollment is performing better than projected, and Innovation/Scott Center revenues are anticipated to exceed the original budget by approximately \$600,000. Other grant revenues are not reflected in the current projections aside from Running Start and High School Completion. Based on revised revenue estimates, the college has collected roughly 52 percent of projected revenue to date, including 82 percent of tuition and 79 percent of fees.

On the expenditure side, the college is projected to end the year approximately \$900,000 above the original budget. Travel spending is expected to decrease significantly in the second half of the year, helping offset some of the overages. VP Jackson reviewed the Board's reserve policy (EL-4), explaining that the Innovation Fund represents roughly two weeks of operating expenditures. The college currently holds \$4.8 million in cash, \$15 million in investments, and just under \$16 million in Board reserves. He emphasized the distinction between the college's operating surplus and Board reserves, noting that the Board has set an expectation to continue building the college surplus. This includes moving \$500,000 from Debt Service into the college surplus this year to provide a stronger cushion for unforeseen expenses.

Looking ahead, VP Jackson projected a budget deficit for next year, driven largely by anticipated reductions in state allocations. The Governor's proposed budget includes an estimated \$300,000 reduction for RTC, which, while modest compared to impacts on four-year institutions, still requires careful planning. He reiterated the college's goal of avoiding any additional staffing cuts, aligning with the President's earlier remarks. In response to trustee questions, he clarified that the \$500,000 surplus transfer is included in current planning assumptions. He also noted that many colleges across the system are facing significant financial strain due to insufficient reserves, and that maintaining healthy Board reserves remains essential for RTC's long-term stability. Board reserve dollars are held in the Local Government Investment Pool, and the college's current bonds yield just over 3 percent, with a few additional bond purchases made in recent months.

5. Board of Trustees

A. Foundation Liaison Report

The position remains vacant at this time

Chair Cooper shared an update on the upcoming Mardi Gras-themed gala, noting that tables are still available and that proceeds will support the Bridge Grant. Additional event information is available on the Foundation's website. The gala is scheduled for March 7, and momentum continues to build. E.D. Carrie Shaw commended Dr. Yoshiko for successfully filling multiple Board tables, and Tim was recognized for his partnership work with Kaiser. Plans include a silent auction, and the event will center around a New Orleans theme.

B. Legislative Action Liaison Report

Vice Chair Bob Zappone provided an update on legislative activities, noting that the schedule for Legislative Days is particularly aggressive this year. He emphasized that the outlook from the state remains concerning, with budget forecasts continuing to signal significant challenges ahead. In alignment with earlier comments shared by Dr. Harden, he reiterated that the budget situation is far from resolved and that the broader system is facing troubling financial indicators. Vice Chair Zappone noted that all technical and community colleges are being strongly encouraged to meet with legislators to advocate for support and to help mitigate the impacts of the anticipated shortfall.

C. Community Advisory Committee Liaison Report

Trustee Jessica Norouzi expressed her appreciation to E.D.'s Shaw & Parrott for their work supporting the committee's launch and noted the strong attendance at the first meeting. She highlighted the diversity of participants and the broad range of organizations represented, including the opportunity to hear directly from community partners and the mayor about the challenges they are facing. Workforce needs emerged as a central theme, and Trustee Norouzi emphasized the important role RTC can play in helping address regional workforce gaps. She shared that the committee intends to bring on a new member each year to support ongoing relationship-building and continuity. Trustee Norouzi also noted her appreciation for the extensive outreach and preparation efforts undertaken by faculty, staff, and deans to support students from the start of their programs through completion. She expressed enthusiasm about continuing to serve on the committee.

6. Meetings

A. Regular Board Meeting – February 18, 2026

Chair Cooper also extended his thanks to the Welding team for providing a tour of their program, noting the impressive growth the program has experienced over the past several years.

Trustee Norouzi shared that she especially appreciated hearing about RTC's partnerships with local high schools and the grant-supported opportunities that help students grow and transition successfully into college pathways. She noted that these collaborations highlight the significant time and dedication faculty and deans invest in supporting students. Trustee Norouzi added that she values the extensive outreach and preparation work carried out by faculty, staff, and deans to guide students from the beginning of their programs through completion, emphasizing how deeply this commitment reflects the college's mission.

7. Adjournment

Trustee Norouzi motioned to adjourn; Trustee Zappone seconded the motion.

The Board voted unanimously in favor, and the meeting was adjourned at 4:11 P.M.