



# Cornell University Employee Assembly

**Cornell Employee Assembly**  
Minutes of the October 16, 2019 Meeting  
12:15-1:30 PM  
701 Clark Hall

## I. Call to Order & Roll Call

- a. Chair Howell called the meeting to order at 12:15pm.
- b. *Members Present:* A. McCabe, A. Miller, B. Goodell, R. Lochner, C. Wiggers, J. Cooley, H. Sheldon, S. Burke, J. Withers, A. Brooks, K. Barth, E. Miller, J. Michael, L. Taylor, K. Mahoney, K. Surpon, A. Sieverding, D. Hiner, C. Sanzone, B. Fortenberry
- c. *Members Absent:* K. LoParco, A. Howell, H. Depew, M. Benda, E. Ivory, S. Barry, A. Haenlin-Mott, J. Creque, T. Chams

## II. Approval of Minutes

- a. J. Withers made a motion to amend the October 2, 2019 EA meeting minutes by replacing “previously served” with “currently serve” in Section V.a.i. J. Michael and L. Taylor currently serve on the UA Campus Codes and Judicial Committee – **approved** with no dissent
- b. Motion to approve the minutes – **approved** with no dissent

## III. Business of the Day

- a. Charles Van Loan, Craig Higgins, Kathy Griffith: Ad Hoc Budget Planning Advisory Committee
  - i. Chair of the Ad Hoc Budget Planning Advisory Committee Charles Van Loan gave an outline of the committee’s background. The Faculty Senate’s Financial Policies Committee regularly meets with the Provost and VP for Budget and Planning Paul Streeter. A question of whether membership on the committee should include more than faculty came up in the UA, and they decided to form an ad hoc committee that will look into the idea alongside other issues. The committee is very small, and aims to draft a layperson guide on the budget process. The idea is to broaden the set of people on campus who understand the budget, which he noted is not always aligned with what is best. The guide will allow for students, faculty, and employees to communicate trade-offs and to see the big picture as much as possible. It will also inspire confidence in the process and allow for more people to look into issues when they come up. The committee is now collecting big questions. C. Van Loan highlighted some large issues. For example, the energy use at Gates Hall is about \$22 per hour. He questioned how much would be saved if the heat was turned down by two degrees, and to what could the additional money go towards. Another large issue concerning staff and faculty is transportation, and the guide could address how parking is paid for and how rates are generated. People can also understand the deferred maintenance issue, including how the bill has gotten to almost \$200 million and how it can be corrected.
  - ii. K. Griffiths added that she works directly with faculty and students in a large department with a variety of funding sources, including college allocations and tuition. She is frequently asked about transparency and why there is not enough money for certain initiatives.
  - iii. C. Higgins added they are attempting to explain the budget to each new cohort of people. New faculty come onboard each year and it is important to capture these questions and issues so that it is not up to the last person to explain it to the new person.
  - iv. C. Van Loan noted that the goal is not to tell colleges or units what to do, but explain what they do. This would also serve to make them more accountable. He asked EA members what part of finances they find most mystifying or troubling on campus.

- v. An employee from the Humphreys Service Building stated that the carbon neutrality goal by 2035 is the largest concern to him. To fund the projects, over a quarter billion dollars will be needed. However, he has not seen money being allocated.
  - vi. K. Supron works in the Office of Community Relations, and part of her work includes explaining how Cornell's budget interfaces with the money that goes out into surrounding communities. Some surrounding municipalities do not think Cornell does very much for them. She does a local economic snapshot of Cornell's impact every year. She hosts a budget session where municipalities and community organizations are invited to a one hour presentation on the Cornell budget. The economic snapshot is a complicated picture and she pushed for more understanding on what those amounts are and how they go out.
  - vii. K. Barth expressed an interest in knowing more about what areas of the university are working together and what areas are not. He pushed for more clarity in the breakdowns of categories all units are all paying for, such as electricity. The budget on the state side of the university may also run into conflict on how it works on the endowed side. More clarity can also lend to collaborative initiatives. For example, if someone is trying to reserve a conference room in a department they are not a part of, the department may deny the request. He pushed for further collaborative space use on campus and virtual video conferencing to decrease traveling and its associated carbon emissions. After being at Cornell for five years, he still does not understand why they do not do certain things holistically.
  - viii. L. Taylor explained that she serves international people. Her office is centrally funded but serves the entire institution, and there has always been confusion about how funding in her unit has been perpetuated.
    - 1. C. Van Loan replied that the Provost takes 10% of tuition dollars. This would be something in the document.
    - 2. C. Higgins explained the cost of all central units are billed out to the colleges. Central units include CIT, HR, Division of Financial Affairs, and other offices. They do not make money, and the cost of all those entities are divided by metrics out into the colleges.
  - ix. C. Sanzone said a lot of staff wonder why they have to subsidize the cost of parking and transportation through parking fees. Many do not feel it is right they have to pay to park. She is curious about how the fee structure is set up and whether there is a better way that would align with Cornell's goal of becoming sustainable.
  - x. C. Sanzone relayed a constituent comment. There is a big push for the "One Cornell" initiative and goal. However, the current budget model may be doing the opposite for the Ithaca campus. Colleges have discouraged students from taking courses in other colleges due to costs involved. The constituent suggested there may be value in revising the model.
    - 1. C. Van Loan added that when Cornell Tech started, the Ithaca campus was given assurances that there would be a firewall between its budget and Cornell Tech's. However, he has been concerned about those effects potentially hurting the Ithaca campus due to the way Cornell Tech is set up and how it resonates with alumni.
  - xi. E. Miller works in the research department for the Weill Institute for Cell and Molecular Biology. When faculty members receive research grants, there is a cost deducted. They do not see those dollars for their research and want to know where the money is going.
  - xii. B. Goodell stated concerns about the competitiveness of the preferred vendor system on campus. When vendors are acquired, they seem to lock in and increase prices dramatically. In addition, he asked how accurate the deferred maintenance costs were. He believes the amount is actually much higher and is not being accurately projected by the different departments. It may be hard to get back on course if realistic numbers were not available.
  - xiii. C. Van Loan stated he will send a link in a follow-up email to the EA where members can forward additional issues and questions. The committee will release rough drafts soon.
- b. Gordon L. Barger: Open Enrollment Presentation

- i. G. Barger gave an overview and update of the retiree endowed health insurance plans. Overall, retirees are having a good experience and he does not anticipate many of them dropping coverage.
  - 1. They have begun open enrollment for retirees. There will be special retiree center meetings. Retiree insurance on the endowed side is split between those under 65, and those over 65. There are about 800 retirees on the endowed side under 65, and there is one plan offered to them that is similar to the Cornell Program for Healthy Living.
  - 2. Last year, the office had to pass on a 6% contribution increase to retirees. This year, this group has its own medical plan and is a part of the overall prescription coalition. Cornell is a part of a group of 40 universities that have banded together. G. Barger reported that projections have been good and they are able to keep retirees in line at a 4.7% increase this year.
  - 3. Medicare is the primary coverage for retirees 65 and older, but Cornell continues to offer coverage. There are about 160 retirees on the old plan, the Medicare Supplement Plan, that was frozen about five years ago. Those retirees will see no rate increases for the year. However, the challenge for small plans is that if a couple retirees have big expenses, it may throw up costs dramatically for everyone.
  - 4. There are two other plans offered. The 80/20 Plan, in which Cornell covers 80% of the costs and retirees cover 20%, has about 1500 retirees enrolled. These retirees will not see a rate increase. The other plan, the Medicare Advantage Plan, began being offered about four years ago as an alternative to the 80/20 Plan. It replaces Medicare entirely and retirees do not need multiple cards and insurances. The plan is offered through Aetna. Uptick has been a little low with about 400 retirees. The government is involved in this plan as it is federal, and there is a health insurance fee. Up until 2020, Congress has waived the fee. However, it has not waived the fee for 2020, and this year Cornell is passing that on to the 400 employees.
- ii. G. Barger gave an overview and update of the Active health insurances.
  - 1. Nationally, there is a 6-7% increase in the cost of healthcare delivery and claims. Cornell reviewed the past 12 months for projection and 24 months for anomalies. They found a lower consistent growth, but a higher quantity of high-cost claims.
  - 2. They are working with other universities on getting better rates. Cornell put through a 4.7% increase, which is about two points under the national trend.
- iii. G. Barger announced that Cornell is now offering two improved plans (dental and vision) at very low rates. With new dental and vision plans, everyone has to reenroll this year by electing to switch over.
  - 1. Regarding the Active Endowed Dental/Vision Insurance, the office completed the request for the proposal for standalone dental and standalone vision plans in 2010. They found the current Plan B was no longer viable and not meeting New York state guidelines for new plans. They sought a stronger dental network and a commitment to increase network size in the Ithaca area. G. Barger reported that they were successful in this and were able to find a new vendor with a stronger network in both dental and vision. The new vendor has committed to increasing network size in Ithaca for dental and to not change the cost of design for vision for the next three years.
  - 2. For dental insurance, the new vendor compared to Ameritas has a huge market share in New York, covering 1.3 million lives compared to Ameritas' 140,000. It has a larger bargaining ability. It is also more experienced with large, complex employers and works with six other Ivy-Plus institutions. It has a broader network with deeper discounts that are 13% better than those of Ameritas. Of the providers used in 2018, 62% of them will be in-network, compared to 39% with Ameritas. Only 2% of the current in-network providers for Ameritas, or 39 providers, will be out-of-network with the new vendor. Those 39 providers are the new vendors' first priority. The new vendor has guaranteed a 10% growth in-network by the end of Cornell's first year.

3. For Endowed Dental Insurance, there are two plans: Dental Standard and Dental Plus. The Dental Standard plan is very similar to the old Plan A. Due to larger networks, Cornell has secured great in-network deductibles. For example, 100% of preventative diagnostic services, 90% of basic restorative services, and 50% of major restorative services will be covered. The maximum benefit for a calendar year is \$1250 per member. For Dental Plus, there will be a \$50 annual deductible and a calendar-year maximum benefit of \$5,000 per member.
4. For the Endowed Vision Insurance, the new vendor is offering many perks for members who stay in-network. For example, if members go to providers that offer Davis Vision frames, any of the three tiers (fashion, designer, premier) will be free. Members who go to Davis providers will only pay a \$20 copay for single, bifocal, trifocal, and lenticular lenses. Certain lens extras, such as tinting, scratch-resistant coating, kids' polycarbonate, and oversize lenses, will be free or at an extremely low cost. At Visonworks retail locations, members will get an allowance of up to \$200 for frames, plus 20% any coverage over \$150. For regular eyecare doctors, members can get an allowance of up to \$150 covered towards frames, plus 20% off any coverage over \$150. However, G. Barger noted that members will have to make a choice of getting contact lens or glasses each year.
- iv. C. Wiggers asked if there is parity for the goals on the state side.
  1. G. Barger responded that they have been talking to the state and got feedback about dentists pulling out of insurance. The state is going to renegotiate what they are doing with providers, and Cornell does not have control over that.
- v. H. Sheldon asked if these options will be available to retirees.
  1. G. Barger said no. They have a broker they refer retirees too.
- vi. G. Barger gave an overview of the communication plan for reenrollment notices.
  1. October 18, 2019: Letter will drop to Endowed homes. There will be a high level summary of the information, including dental and vision charts and costs. No vendor names will be revealed yet.
  2. October 25, 2019: Vendors will send direct-to-home packages with more details on plans, links to microsites, and customer service numbers.
  3. October 30 or October 31, 2019: Reminder that the open enrollment event on Workday will appear on November 1, 2019.
  4. November 1, 2019: The Endowed open enrollment opens in Workday. The onsite information and vendor sites will be available. Workday has improved its layout and will resemble the phone version with icons for health, dental, and vision. However, people will have to click into each icon to take an action, and they are trying to disseminate that message as well.
- vii. E. Miller asked about the health plan. On the EA Benefits and Policy Committee, there was a constituent who asked about the prescription drug formulary. The constituent stated that the formulary is recalculated twice annually, and the information is not readily available. She asked how they can find the information.
  1. G. Barger replied that the formulary gets announced twice a year, typically featuring more changes in January than July. Optum sends out direct mailings about 45-60 days before the changes. Cornell usually does not put the formulary on its website because it does not own it. However, they did put it up this last year and is looking to find ways to continue doing so.

#### IV. Committee Reports

- a. Communications & Awards Committee
  - i. C. Sanzone reported that the committee is meeting next week. The most pressing issue is the tabling opportunity happening one week from Saturday at the Employee Celebration event. EA members who want to volunteer should contact E. Miller. The committee is preparing for the event and doing brochure work. C. Sanzone said she is also working with H. Depew on the summary report of the Priorities Poll. At the next EA meeting, she will have something to share.

- ii. E. Miller stated she will resend the volunteer signup link as they do need more volunteers.
- b. Employee Education & Development Committee
  - i. C. Wiggers said the committee had a lunch meeting last Friday with Employee Degree Program (EDP) representatives. They discussed ways the committee could support the work EDP is doing and possibly forming a partnership. The committee is looking to review the EDP program that existed at Cornell from 1997-2001, which brought professors from TC3 for on-campus classes. They are looking to see how the program started and how it ended. Maureen Brull from Benefit Services suggested there may have been low participation rates at which it was no longer cost effective to have professors come. The committee is also looking to have a conversation with HR to see if they could restart the program.
  - ii. C. Wiggers highlighted the two main keys of contact for EDP:
    - 1. Maureen Brull: [mph8@cornell.edu](mailto:mph8@cornell.edu)
    - 2. Michelle LaFave: [met27@cornell.edu](mailto:met27@cornell.edu)
- c. Employee Welfare Committee
  - i. K. Mahoney stated that the committee met with Associate Director of Work/Life to discuss the brochure on wellness at Cornell. They provided feedback and recommendations on how the information is packaged, and suggested short cards that could be of use as a quick reference. Next week, the committee is meeting with transportation representatives.
  - ii. A. McCabe noted that Delia Herrin will be participating in the Welfare Committee as an employee representative.
- d. Benefits & Policy Committee
  - i. A. Sieverding reported the committee met last week and had a discussion about the EA Charter and issues they can and cannot address under the charter. They are looking at ways to move forward with the ongoing paid time off discussion and the redlining, or salary-capping, concerns. The committee will meet again next Tuesday at 10:00am.
  - ii. A. Miller added that regarding the vacation time off policy, Associate VP of Human Resources Allan Bishop and his team has been collecting institutional data on the topic and were receptive to what T. Chams did. By November, A. Bishop is hoping to have all the information and a chance to review it. They are still working on this, and are open to having conversations. A. Howell also met with the group recently, but she does not know how the meeting went.
- e. Executive Committee
  - i. A. McCabe reported that participation and activity were successful at the President's Address to Staff event. There were 618 responses to the Priorities' Poll, with 300 of them being written responses. C. Sanzone and H. Depew are working to go through all the responses.
- f. Elections Committee
  - i. J. Withers stated that recruitment is open for the next couple of weeks. She asked EA representatives to reach out to anyone they know who may be interested. The vacant seats are representatives for the Division of Alumni Affairs and Development, Hotel Administration, Division of Financial Affairs, and Geneva Campus. The committee did get contacted by someone from Hotel Administration, and she reached back out to the Geneva Campus.
  - ii. J. Withers said the satellite event for the President's Address to Staff on the Geneva Campus was great. Turnout was slightly low, but she was told that 70% of the Geneva Campus staff work outside in the field. There may have also been timing concerns as the address took place over the lunch hour. However, she enjoyed going to the campus and suggested it was something they should do regularly, especially since the Geneva Campus representative seat is vacant.
  - iii. C. Sanzone stated that the turnout for the President's Address to Staff event was lower this year. She suggested figuring out how the time change and date change away from Fall Break affected turnout. Cornell Chronicle Staff Writer Melanie Lefkowitz estimated there were about 200 people in attendance, but E. Miller stated she did not feel it was that much. C. Sanzone estimated turnout was about half of what it was last year. However, the Geneva Campus turnout compared to last year was about five to six times as many people. The livestream turnout was still strong, and they had almost 600 unique identifications watching. There was lots of online engagement

as well.

**V. Adjournment**

- a. A. McCabe adjourned the meeting at 1:30pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
*Catherine Tran*

Clerk of the Assembly