



The Facilities Stewardship Oversight Role of Governing Boards

By E. Lander Medlin

APPA has been working closely with the Association of Governing Boards (AGB) for the past couple of years providing workshops on “The Campus as a Physical Asset” and “The Physical Plant of the Modern University” in order to increase the awareness of the facilities profession’s needs and issues with senior institutional officers. This relationship recently brought the opportunity to assist in rewriting their monograph on Buildings & Grounds to be used by a governing boards’ standing committee for facilities. It is in this context that I write about the latest project with AGB.

Harvey Kaiser, a former vice president for facilities at Syracuse University, prolific writer, and now individual consultant, is no stranger to the APPA community. Harvey’s accomplishments are many, and he has most assuredly assisted APPA over the years in communicating the needs and issues of the built environment. His latest book through APPA, co-authored with Eva Klein, *Strategic Capital Development: The New Model for Campus Investment*, has been well-received and continues to make its way onto the bookshelves of senior institutional officers. However, it is Harvey’s latest monograph written for AGB that is center stage here.

This new monograph was written as an update to the AGB primer for governing boards and trustees and their committee on buildings and grounds under AGB’s Effective Committee Series. The purpose of the committee is to strengthen the role of key standing committees of governing boards

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and trustees in alignment with certain principles, practices, and procedures. AGB states that the focus of committee work should be in alignment with the institution’s strategic vision, goals, and priorities, which then translate into annual actions and work plans that would serve to monitor an institution’s strategic progress.

Striking the right balance between “too much” or “too little” information is critical to an appropriate partnership role and relationship with the institution. The committee wants to make sound recommendations and ensure adequate oversight by the board and the Buildings and Grounds committee. In the broadest context, this committee has responsibility to oversee an institution’s capital assets of buildings, grounds, and infrastructure, stressing the difference between oversight and the actual administrative responsibilities of the institution. What makes this new, updated replacement monograph so important is the context Harvey lays out. “Facilities stewardship as an institutional value,” which he further delineates as follows:

Stewardship of institutional capital asset—buildings, grounds, and infrastructure—is a fundamental governing board responsibility. These assets

represent a large share of total institutional assets, possibly even greater than the endowment....The notion of value can, and should, mean financial value. But value has broader implications, which include the value an institution ascribes to the protection of its symbolic campus features and to the continued utility of its buildings and grounds for the functions they serve.

The following, from *Strategic Capital Development*, is guidance for the facilities committee’s role in facilities stewardship:

Facilities stewardship therefore means a high-level and pervasive commitment to responsibility for optimizing capital assets, to achieve a high-functioning and attractive campus. It includes a major commitment to capital asset preservation and quality. Stewardship is about the long view of an institution’s past and future. It forms the backdrop for hundreds of discrete facilities investment and management decisions. Ultimately, facilities stewardship is one of the most compelling responsibilities of institutional leadership. And facilities stewardship expresses core values of the institutional culture.

Harvey captures the mission-critical nature of an institution’s physical assets and further ascribes their importance to the institution’s culture by establishing that compelling sense of place. At SCUP’s

summit on the Campus Heritage Preservation Project, Glenn Smith (director of facilities services at Bryn Mawr College) did an outstanding job communicating the importance of physical space in preserving campus traditions, when they are strategically aligned with the organizational culture of the institution. It can be done and done right.


Further on in the Buildings and Grounds monograph, Harvey lays out the macro to micro environmental issues that directly and indirectly affect and/or provide additional challenges for our institutions and facilities in particular. He again brings back into focus the critical notion of stewardship when it comes to the governing board committee's oversight role for campus facilities.

The stewardship notion, quite simply, is the continued care and management of capital resources for the benefit of future generations. The facilities committee's

stewardship role is deeply involved in ennobling the past, enhancing the present, and providing for the future by balancing continuity and change. Oversight to ensure preservation of a historic legacy is a weighty responsibility for committee members...

The context he lays out provides the necessary focus of a long-term preservation view of the buildings, grounds, and infrastructure. With this context and focus, the committee's tasks consisting of long-range planning, capital renewal, operations and maintenance, capital projects, facilities related policies and procedures, and sustainability policies and implementation, when conducted in partnership with the institutional administration, can be enabling for everyone. To this end, he provides an appendix of critical questions within this purview of tasks and responsibilities the governing board committee should be querying in

order to carry out their facilities stewardship role effectively and comprehensively.

This monograph revision is timely and spot on. As facilities professionals, we need to be equally aware of and interested in the needs and requirements of our governing boards and trustees. Therefore, I encourage you to secure a copy of this monograph when it becomes available in late April (we will endeavor to carry it in the APPA Bookstore) to keep you abreast of the questions noted in its appendix, as well as the overall issues, needs, and concerns that governing boards and trustees should have. Thus, you'll be prepared to respond and deliver the data and information needed to carry out the facilities stewardship role properly and effectively for your institution. 

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