

MEETING OF THE U.S. MERCHANT MARINE ACADEMY
BOARD OF VISITORS
FRIDAY, 26 JULY 2024
IN-PERSON MEETING

ATTENDEES:

BOARD OF VISITORS MEMBERS: Senator Mark Kelly (AZ); Senator Roger Wicker (MS) via Zoom; Representative Andrew Garbarino (NY); Representative David Valadao (CA); Representative Tom Suozzi (NY); Claudia Cimini; Eric Ebeling; Nicholas Logothetis; Michael Rodriguez; Rear Admiral Phil Sobeck, and Rear Admiral (RDML) Wayne R. Arguin Jr., in place of Vice Adm. Peter Gautier USCG (Ex officio appointee, Deputy Commandant for Operations USCG)

Via proxy: Representative Mikie Sherill (NJ) to Sen. Kelly; Representative Jack Bergman (MI) to Rep. Garbarino

MEETING CALL TO ORDER:

Senator Kelly officially called to order the July 26 meeting of the United States Merchant Marine Academy Board of Visitors at 9:18 a.m. Subsequently, he turned the meeting over to the Designated Federal Officer (DFO), Michael O'Hagan, of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, to call the roll and confirm sufficient attendance to constitute a quorum. Once confirmed, Senator Kelly indicated that the next order of business was to discuss a proposed charter amendment and elect a vice chair. He informed the Board of his plan to propose an amendment to the Charter. The amendment would formalize the established practice of the DFO and the Board Chair working together to set meeting agendas and review meeting minutes—a topic previously discussed at the last meeting. He emphasized that this practice reinforces the Board's role as an independent oversight body for the Academy.

In the absence of questions, Senator Kelly called for the adoption of the amendment, asking all in favor to say "aye" and those opposed to say "nay." With no nays, the amendment was adopted.

At the request of Senator Kelly, Michael O'Hagan called for nominations for a vice chair of the Board. Congressman Suozzi offered a nomination for Representative Garbarino. The vote was unanimous in favor.

OPENING REMARKS:

Senator Kelly reminded the Board that the Charter would remain in effect until March 2026 and then welcomed Board members to the first in-person meeting at Kings Point in nearly two years. He also thanked Vice Admiral Nunan and her team for hosting the event, offering special thanks to Michael O'Hagan (DFO) and Veronica Barry and Rebecca MacPherson of USMMA, who facilitated the agenda, a tour of the campus and luncheon.

Senator Kelly thanked the Board members who were in-person and online, and briefly shared memories of his experience as a midshipman at Kings Point and the difference it made in the

trajectory of his life. He encouraged others to visit the Academy. He noted how important Kings Point is to National and economic security before announcing that since the previous Board meeting, the Academy graduated another 214 licensed mariners, in the Class of 2024. They and their families heard remarks from National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan who sees how vital Kings point graduates are. Senator Kelly shared the following points related to the critical role Kings Point graduates' play:

- They make sure ammunition reaches Ukrainian soldiers
- The presence of U.S. flag vessels in the Pacific, crewed by Kings Point graduates, deters Chinese aggression and upholds the freedom of navigation in the Pacific.
- Kings Point graduates are vital to maintaining commerce in the face of unprecedented attacks in the Red Sea between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.
- The American economy and military strength rely on a strong merchant marine

He expressed his excitement about the graduating class and his enthusiasm about the Class of 2028, which consists of 301 plebes. He reminded the Board that they would be meeting them when they join the regiment for lunch.

Senator Kelly thanked Admiral Nunan for another successful recruiting year and successful "INDOC." He gave updates on congressional resources (July appropriations) to the Academy, noting:

- The Academy's request for facilities, maintenance, and capital improvement was fully funded.
- Congressman Garbarino, Congressman Suozzi, and Congressman Valadao all played key roles in supporting this funding.
- The House still recommends a reduction in funding for Academy operations. As a follow-up to this point, Senator Kelly underscored that a reduction could have serious repercussions for the Academy and asked that Administrator Phillips and Admiral Nunan speak to what cuts would mean in the Senate. The Senate Appropriations Committee released its draft bill the previous day, which fully funded the Academy's budget request for infrastructure and operations funding.

Senator Kelly asked the Board to remain united in advocating for a strong well-resourced USMMA during the Fiscal 2025 funding cycle.

He reiterated that he is advocating for the long-term authorization of the Academy's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and noted that he hoped to receive an update on the draft version of the Master Facilities Plan. Additionally, he reiterated to both Administrator Phillips and Vice Admiral Nunan that they should communicate any challenges they might encounter in obtaining approvals from the Department of Transportation (DOT) or Office of Management and Budget (OMB). He also asked for an update on the progress that is being made with ongoing construction projects for Samuels Hall and other challenges, including delayed hiring processes for senior roles, delayed reimbursements for midshipmen, and admissions updates and ways the Board can boost applications.

Senator Kelly also requested updates on how the Academy is preparing for the upcoming Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) accreditation process. During the 2016 accreditation process, the Academy was found to have failed 5 evaluation criteria and was issued a warning that future accreditation was at risk—pointing out that the issues “had nothing to do with academics,” they were about planning, resource allocation, leadership and governance, and student services. He added that the leadership team at the Academy has undergone significant positive changes since 2016, in particular the addition of Superintendent Nunan and, thanks to Administrator Phillips, the Academy has been addressing issues raised during accreditation about sexual harassment on campus and during Sea Year, and with the EMBARC (Every Mariner Deserves a Respectful Culture) standards program. He stressed that the safety of midshipmen on campus and at sea is absolutely critical.

Requesting updates on what the Academy is doing to address findings from the last accreditation process, Senator Kelly specified consistent questions during the 2016 process—including whether the bureaucratic process involving multiple approvals from Academy leadership, MARAD, and OMB hurts students and faculty. Again, he stressed to both Administrator Phillips and Vice Admiral Nunan to alert the Board if there are any ways that Congress can help get past this bureaucratic barrier.

Taking a moment for housekeeping duties, he reminded the meeting attendees that they would meet until 11:30 a.m., at which time they would go to Delano Hall for lunch with the regiment, which musters at 11:50 a.m., followed by the campus tour that was planned to last until approximately 2 p.m.

Michael O’Hagan noted that meeting minutes from the previous meeting were complete and would be distributed for approval.

BOARD BUSINESS:

Maritime Administrator Ann Phillips, RDML USN (RET), Welcomed and thanked the Board and thanked Senator Kelly for agreeing to chair it. She continued to make MARAD team introductions, including the Executive Director, Jack Kammerer; the Deputy Chief Counsel, Cameron Gore, and Laura Ziff, from the Office of the Secretary of Transportation (OST) Budget, currently on detail to support the Academy; and Christopher Piechocki, Government Affairs Representative. She noted that the Deputy Administrator, Tamekia Flack, has departed the Department of Transportation.

Administrator Phillips added that the Academy was thrilled about the 214 June 2024 graduates and to have had the U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, DOT Deputy Secretary Polly Trottenberg, as well as U.S. Marine Corps Commandant General Eric Smith, along with Rear Admiral Michael Platt, Commander, USCG District One, who administered the officer commissioning oath and U.S. Coast Guard Licensed Officer oath respectively.

She spoke of the honor and value of more than 160 USMMA cadets currently sailing on U.S. flag vessels, further noting that none of them refused to sail knowing they would serve in an area where they might encounter difficult circumstances.

The Administrator added that USMMA, MARAD, and the Department of Transportation are committed and engaged in building capacity despite longstanding challenges in personnel and resource shortfalls. She further shared that she believes reductions in the House version of the bill would impact that capacity in many areas, including teaching/instruction, athletic events, construction, managing the many Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) requirements, leadership matters, infrastructure, and bringing more midshipman on board. She said capacity was needed not only with respect to the congressional funds, but also staff with the expertise to oversee and execute these responsibilities.

She said that upcoming speakers would report on their preparations for the academic year for the MSCHE accreditation, athletic requirements, and other issues—in particular, infrastructure—noting again that staff is critical. She thanked the congressional members for considering their funding requests, as they are not fully funded.

Subsequently, Administrator Phillips shared progress on filling critical leadership positions, including the Provost, for which they posted a solicitation for an academic research firm after a previous, failed Provost search. Additionally, the Academy is about to advertise for its Director of Facilities and Infrastructure, as Rebecca MacPherson will finish her two-year detail in November.

Administrator Phillips highlighted the twenty-one new positions included in the President's 2025 budget request, but are missing in the House version of the appropriations bill. She thanked the congressional members for consideration on that matter.

Affirming their continued focus on the EMBARC program, for which the rulemaking process is nearly complete, Administrator Phillips asked for consideration in helping to move the process in OMB forward. She also affirmed they are working with their partners in Military Sealift Command (MSC) and the U.S. Coast Guard for the safety of midshipmen and all mariners at sea.

Noting that infrastructure projects currently underway include Samuel Hall and Fulton/Gibbs Halls, which the Board would soon tour, she promised an update on the MSCHE reaccreditation and challenges being worked through to provide additional cyber and internet capacity, including staff to safeguard against security threats.

She thanked the Board and yielded to the Superintendent, Vice Admiral Nunan.

Vice Admiral Joanna Nunan greeted the Board, offered insight into campus culture, and introduced the members of the Kings Point team. She clarified objectives of the meeting: 1) to impress upon the Board of the importance of continued financial support; 2) to raise the topic of additional authorized positions; and 3) to address the topic of granting greater autonomy to Academy leadership.

Starting with USMMA culture, she said: the first trimester of the new school year is underway, the two-and-a-half weeks of Indoctrination (INDOC), the integration of new students into the regiment, was tremendous and set a high standard of performance for the Academy.

Vice Admiral Nunan noted that during INDOC, candidates get haircuts, are provided uniforms, and are assigned to a company and platoon. They move everywhere in formation, participate in physical fitness training, academic and athletic orientations, seamanship training at the waterfront, and they learn the rudiments of military drill.

Considered critical to success: they are placed in pressure situations to develop critical thinking under stress as well as time management. Further complimenting the midshipman leadership, she explained, on the day of their arrival, Day 0, July 5, 2024, parents heard from Vice Admiral Nunan, as well as the Commandant, the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office Director, the Chaplain, the Clinic Director, and others, but the last to speak, Midshipman First Class Captain Geoffrey Gumport, USMMA Regimental Commander, was truly impressive. He spoke about the quality of his USMMA experience and his commitment to their sons and daughters.

During the next 2 weeks of INDOC, the cadre, the platoon leaders, taught the candidates everything. Waterfront staff manned the training vessels, taught them firefighting, and got them out on the water. Emergency medical technicians, the students who are trained to save lives and handle injuries out at sea, looked after everyone on some very long and hot days. First, Second, and Third Class Midshipmen were in each of these components, and they all rose to the occasion.

Vice Admiral Nunan said this past Saturday, July 20, just two weeks after their arrival, new students participated in a drill competition with the platoons marching on the football field. They were sharp and were praised by the Marine Corps Gunnery Sergeant, who said they accomplished in two weeks what it would take United States Marines three months.

She also praised the Sunday celebration of field day events at the waterfront, featuring tugs of war, Monomoy races, survival suit races, swim races, and leaping off the upper deck of the T/V *Kings Pointer*. Afterwards, Vice Admiral Nunan noted that students told her that not having phones during INDOC and communicating face-to-face enhanced team building and drove their success.

The Vice Admiral introduced key members of the Kings Point team that made everything possible:

- Rear Admiral David Wulf, Deputy Superintendent
- Captain Tony Ceraolo, Chief of Staff
- Dr. Susan Comilang, Acting Provost
- Captain Paul Aquaro, Director, Academic Center for Excellence
- Captain Ian Jones, Director, Midshipman Professional Development and Career Services
- Rebecca MacPherson, Director of Facilities and Infrastructure
- Kris Schnatz, Athletic Director (She noted that 60 % of the incoming class are athletes.)
- Commander Keith Watson, Deputy Director, Admissions
- Anton Tripolskii, Director, Office of Sexual Assault, Prevention, and Response
- Commander Drew McCarthy, Deputy Commandant of Midshipmen
- Michael O'Hagan, Director, External Affairs
- Veronica Barry, External Affairs / Public Affairs Officer
- Ms. Dionne Kettl, Director of Human Resources

- Ms. Sophia Soler, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Manager

Vice Admiral Nunan shared that the Academy is preparing to hire a Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging.

Subsequently, she addressed what she deemed a pressing concern: the importance of ensuring greater autonomy for Academy leadership that it is important to lead and make the timely decisions that impact the effectiveness of the Academy and the success of its critical national security mission.

Vice Admiral Nunan reminded the Board that managing an educational institution is different from commanding a ship or other entity, and can be challenging, given their constraints.

She said that the Deputy Secretary of Transportation asked for a memo identifying authorities that Academy leadership believes should be delegated to manage campus and operational protocols.

Academy leadership seeks to establish with MARAD, a set of written procedures by which the Academy can operate autonomously, specifically, in the areas of hiring priorities, budget development and execution, facilities, management, and promoting student welfare. The last category includes information technology policies that have made learning on campus and at sea needlessly difficult. These areas are under the scrutiny from MSCHE, as it considers operating with autonomy in these areas as critical to the well-being of an institution. There were issues in the past but new processes and internal governing bodies are now in place to enable the Academy leadership to succeed, and there is a new leadership.

Before introducing leadership, Vice Admiral Nunan yielded to Congressman Suozzi, who praised the operation and offered that the Academy has been treated poorly by the federal government because of a lack of understanding whether it is military or civilian. While it is a civilian institution, the Armed Services Committee has some oversight over the Academy; he pledged his support to help restore autonomy and make the Academy easier to run, and to obtain more resources for operations and capital improvements.

When the Congressman yielded, Senator Kelly asked Vice Admiral Nunan to share anything she is particularly proud of over the last several months or any challenges she wanted to share. Vice Admiral Nunan said she is proud of the midshipman leadership and the team that is being built at the Academy. She also mentioned that as 80 percent of the Navy's Strategic Sealift Officers are USMMA Alumni, she is proud of the spotlight the school is receiving because of their contributions.

As for challenges, she cited the lack of resources, including not receiving new positions, and trying to accomplish facilities and infrastructure initiatives while understaffed and without a full team or a Federal construction agency to help.

She answered questions about the ability to carve out positions with the existing budget, responding that right now, they are trying to pay bills in a timely manner and hesitate to hire people without authorization, as they don't necessarily have the funding that keeps that going in perpetuity.

Agreeing that they are in a flat financial position, the Board asked for a dollar figure needed for infrastructure (which they deem the greatest priority) in hopes of getting the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) involved, as they help with other institutions and have an office in New York.

After more brief affirmative discussion about why infrastructure is necessary, including recruiting the best and brightest, Vice Admiral Nunan yielded.

Dr. Susan Comilang, Acting Provost, outlined the following academic goals:

- Explore generative artificial intelligence (AI) and how it is impacting higher education
- Increase the opportunities for faculty professional development by offering more sessions on pedagogy, outcomes assessment and AI
- Figure out how/if continuing resolutions impact faculty travel
- Determine how to improve the use of technology on campus

Next, Acting Provost Comilang spoke about accreditation and assessment and provided slides to support updates since the 2016 accreditation process. She highlighted that the student support issue was addressed with training in the Commandant's Department. In addition, the Class of 2024 is the first class with the new curriculum. Students are allowed to have two in-residence terms and lag courses if they fail a course, as well as time to reorient themselves to campus culture after being away at sea.

Several members of the Provost's staff addressed a request to explain how the three sea splits work. She explained the three groups of midshipmen who start their Sea Year assignments at different points in academic career. Once questions were satisfied, the Acting Provost continued, offering that every student has the opportunity to participate in NAVY SEAL, Marine Corps Leatherneck training, and similar training, if they wish. All students are supported to achieve their goals.

Acting Provost Comilang affirmed that all midshipmen have an internship requirement, and Shipyard Management students have a longer (6-week) internship.

Questions were raised about the percentage of the recent graduating class joining the military and which branch. Captain Paul Acquaro answered that active duty accessions were 24 percent of the class, with many being drawn to commercial shipping.

More discussion ensued about governance and the civilian vs. military lack of understanding, with remarks made about who has oversight authority, and the need for more local autonomy and funding support.

Vice Admiral Nunan added that most USMMA 'grads' serve in the Navy and Navy reserves, but they may serve in any branch of the military or reserve.

Senator Kelly asked, "What is pass rate for the U.S. Coast Guard [exam]?" Captain Paul Acquaro responded that the first-time overall pass rate was approximately 72 percent, but rose to 100 percent at graduation.

There was additional conversation about the difference in curriculum and hands-on experience at Kings Point (where students are “boots on the ground”) vs. state schools, where students receive less hands-on learning and develop problem-solving skills later in the process. Kings Point has been lauded for its experiential learning through Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) accreditation.

There was more discussion regarding the sea time credit Kings Point cadets receive aboard commercial and military versus with their state school counterparts, who receive additional credit while assigned to a training ship.

Admiral Nunan invited the attendees to return on September 18 for Sea Fair Day, where hiring officials from MSC, unions, and commercial entities come and engage with students and talk about the companies they represent.

As requested by the Chair, Dr. Comilang walked the Board through the accreditation steps.

She said the accreditation process started two years ago with the formation of the steering committee. Every steering committee chair led a working group tasked with standards to align with the strategic plan.

The MSCHE standards in 2016, which were shared with the Board, and requirements of affiliation and the school’s strategic plan didn’t align, particularly on education delivery and student culture. She said one of issues when writing the self-study design was that the plan was in draft form, had not been approved by MARAD, and didn’t reflect the institution working cohesively with the mission and priorities stated therein. There was a need to ratify the strategic plan and there were issues with metrics. Once the strategic plan is finalized, the draft will be submitted to the team chair for MSCHE.

Over the last year, the working groups have been compiling evidence/data to support what is asserted within the self-study narrative.

Asked if she felt confident about the upcoming MSCHE visit and accreditation review, Dr. Comilang said, “I do. I know that there are areas that we still have issues with,” but she enumerated being confident in the learning experience, the culture, and changes that have been made with it.

Dr. Comilang shared some concerns, including Samuels Hall, which is much further along in construction since 2016 but still not functional. (ABET recognized the changes there and the refresh of the Fulton/Gibbs Complex.).

The Chair acknowledged member Mike Rodriguez, who identified himself as Class of ’79, and said he visited earlier in the month. He thanked the Superintendent and her staff for their time briefing him.

Mr. Rodriguez explained that he was the Deputy Maritime Administrator during the 2016 accreditation process. He recalled that the institution was placed on probation and agreed that autonomy (thanking Representative Suozzi for bringing it up) is critical in ensuring that the institution does not repeat the past. He was emphatic that it was inappropriate for MARAD and the Department of Transportation to be involved in that process. Further, he said MARAD’s role

is to support the process with people, with resources, and with whatever else is necessary for a successful accreditation assessment.

He cautioned Vice Admiral Nunan that the Maritime Administration and the Department getting involved in an area where it's inappropriate for them to be involved puts staff here in a very difficult position in terms of what their response to the assessment, making a tense situation even more tense.

Dr. Comilang agreed, saying the institution's story is good and with autonomy and the right resources, they can improve the hiccups. She noted how challenging it has been to make do with inferior resources, and highlighted challenges:

- *Staffing*: USMMA is finding that potential faculty candidates, especially in Engineering are either working in industry or choosing not to live in New York. Advertisements have come up short, so they are aware that they have to find creative ways to attract talent. Otherwise, the curriculum cannot change, as instructors are overloaded (working more credit hours than expected) the institution has been unable to refresh the curriculum or take sabbaticals. In fact, Marine Engineering has not offered sabbaticals in four years. Faculty will continue to be overloaded due to illness and retirements.
- *Technology*: USMMA lacks the ability to connect students to instructional staff. Students need access to online resources. Security concerns can be an impediment to learning, these concerns necessitate them using Gmail accounts instead of a USMMA domain when students are at sea. The institution needs Federal government employees to advance technologically.
- *Infrastructure*: Is another challenge and that Rebecca MacPherson would address infrastructure in her presentation.

Mr. Logothetis asked, with respect to autonomy, is there an agreement between the Academy and MARAD that autonomy should be provided?

Response from VADM Nunan: "I think we have a lot of work to do." Further, she spoke to spending the past year building a team, improving processes to gain support and inspire confidence that the institution can make decisions and choices and ideally to reduce the layers of bureaucracy.

Congressman Suozzi asked for further clarification and VADM Nunan explained that Academy staff would need about a month to write and submit the memo requested by the Deputy Secretary, which will include issues that would require decisions at both the departmental and MARAD levels. Addressing day-to-day requirements makes it difficult for planning,

Representative Suozzi asked Administrator Phillips if there is anything she can do to assist in this situation. Administrator Phillips said the answer is staffing and capacity. The Academy needs professors and infrastructure, and staff to work on the facilities and infrastructure.

Captain Ian Jones presented two slides and spoke about total USMMA Sea Days, broken out by vessel category. He reported about 60 percent go to commercial vessels to earn their sea time and 40 percent to MSC. He also spoke of relying heavily on industry partners who have signed on to

EMBARC, sharing a list of existing partners and affirming that MARAD's EMBARC program is critical to their success.

Rebecca MacPherson, Director of Facilities and Infrastructure, provided an update on active projects and a broad overview of the Master Facilities Plan, offering, in the interest of time, to answer questions during the campus tour. She included the following high-level updates:

- Samuels Hall has been actively under construction for roughly a year and a half despite being empty since 2020. The scope of the project by 2023 was significantly different than the original contract that was awarded in 2020. Notwithstanding several of the challenges being faced, there is a firm commitment to have Samuels Hall suitable for occupancy by students at the beginning of academic year 2026.
- As to Fulton/Gibbs, it was adversely cited in a previous ABET visit, so it was decided very quickly that those concerns were best addressed with a comprehensive, complex renovation. As the work cannot be done in one cycle because the building is occupied, the anticipated completion is summer of 2026.
- There is also a focus on the IT issues on campus, which are inadequate. The existing IT fiber optic ring requires upgrading and is underway. The initial phase of construction work is complete. New conduits have all been laid. The amount of cable to be laid has doubled. That cable is on back order, so the completion date has moved to November. Phase two deals with telecommunications. Right now, every existing telecommunications closet on campus has a problem. Many of those problems are related to their location, which may be broom closets that have leaky sinks, laundry rooms with active leaks or steam. Phase two addresses that element of the project. It has been approved by the Mariners Council and is scheduled to be presented to the Office of the Secretary of Transportation Merchant Marine Academy Capital Council (OMMACC), which is the Department of Transportation Oversight Board, at their next meeting.
- The Stormwater Management System is a new project that will be funded from the FY 2024 budget request, which was fully funded from the Hill. The stormwater management system is done in conjunction with repairs and replacement of the seawall. The Stormwater Management System must take place first, because it is necessary to build out from the interior. Initial cost estimates have been performed, and some bids have been received, coming in at about \$55 million, which included some work that is not deemed necessary. That said, the request for \$50 million is about right but things come up as we discover things underground. Even using ground penetrating radar to detect noise, you don't know what it is without seeing it. It could be a tree root or a utility line. That is an unexpected challenge.
- In terms of the seawall, the estimate to repair and replace is \$20 million. There is less confidence in that number because the target size was a smaller target size. A pretty good part of the sea wall that would be affected is currently covered by Cressy Pier so it will not be until it has been torn down that it can be determined how high to raise the seawall. Additional costs will be determined once there is a decision on how high to raise the seawall. We are relying on Volpe, which is one of the federal construction partners, to do an assessment of potential of anticipated sea rise and changes in storm surges.

- The Campus-wide Maintenance Contract is approximately 18 months old. In April, a new task order was issued in the amount of \$2.8 million to cover the next 12 months of preventive maintenance, focusing primarily on mechanical systems.
- The largest mechanical system is the Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning (HVAC) system, which continues to be of significant concern. Consequently, an additional \$700,000 has been targeted primarily toward repair of systems as they break. With the existing contract, work can be assigned much more quickly than through a traditional procurement.

Finally, Ms. MacPherson shared that there is a first draft the Facilities Master Plan, which is in refinement. The goal is to have a Facilities Master Plan that is ready for coordination and concurrence by headquarters, the departments, and OMB by the end of the fiscal year.

That will be challenging and unfortunately, because of a lack of coordination, details of the plan are scant; however, Facilities Director MacPherson said it does not look dramatically different in terms of identified projects from previous versions, none of which have been approved.

Facilities Director MacPherson noted that they will also work with individuals at headquarters who will be critical for making sure that it can be carried out, mainly budget procurement, the agency's sustainability officer, and a representative from the office of environmental compliance, all of whom play a critical role in these significant facility infrastructure projects on the campus.

In conjunction with the Facilities Master Plan, a Deferred Maintenance Plan, will address how the institution will address those buildings that either are not in the Facilities Master Plan or our projects identified in the Facilities Master Plan but for which there is no intent on addressing in the near term. The master plan, because it is a capital improvement program, will be reviewed approximately every five years. The Deferred Maintenance Plan would be updated every year.

Senator Kelly asked when those two plans would be finalized.

Ms. MacPherson said the intent is to have both finalized by the end of the fiscal year, and will be released with USMMA's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) Report. She added that it would go to Congress and that the Board would be kept abreast of its progress.

In response to a question about permits, Ms MacPherson explained that approval is required from both the Corps of Engineers and the New York Coastal Resources Commission on the seawall, as well as any buildings that are directly on the waterfront. While there is no concern regarding the seawall, there is concern about the possibility of shadow on the water, as that can impact the fish package and put a permit in jeopardy.

Congressman Suozzi ask if the two plans would be completed by November, the end of MacPherson's detail.

Ms. MacPherson said the draft is estimated to be done by December, and Laura Ziff from DOT will be onsite until January, and will work to get it over the finish line.

Congressman Suozzi asked MacPherson who would backfill her when she leaves. . She responded that Admiral Wulf will fill in until a new hire is made. The intent is to get a vacancy

announcement on WWW.USAJOB.SGOV. She offered that if the top applicant is already a member of the Senior Executive Service (SES), the process would be quicker.

Members asked about any ongoing discussion with the Army Corps? Ms. MacPherson responded Discussions are ongoing and that there is an existing interagency agreement that expires at the end of the fiscal year and they are working with the Corps to renew the agreement.

An additional point was made by Ms. MacPherson to remind the Board that even if there is a relationship with a Federal construction manager, adequate resources and commitment must be applied at the Academy to provide the requisite oversight. The USACE does great work, but it is simply a contract.

Vice Admiral Nunan added that while she agreed with Facilities Director MacPherson about not turning over the program to a Federal contracting agency, she also believes if they can have a partnership with the Army Corps, it could be a “game changer” in that they have expertise, and onboarding would be quick and efficient. She explained in the discussion that West Point had a partnership with the USACE but after a brief group discussion she explained that the two Academies are too dissimilar to be compared.

Congressman Suozzi asked Ms. MacPherson about the size of her staff. Ms. MacPherson said she is short 17 new positions based upon the reorganization that was recently signed off on, and also short staffed due to people who have left. She elaborated that she lacks the Capital Improvement Plan staff, who are responsible for major maintenance. She said she has two Contracting Officer Specialists but not Contracting Officers; two Program Managers but no managers in that area; a Senior Program Manager who it's been in an acting capacity since November; and no additional support. Her immediate needs include a Master Scheduler and a budget person who can work with our budget people.

Additional discussion was had about what the staff looked like upon her arrival and how it was an all-hands-on deck proposition to get the work done.

Kristofer Schnatz, USMMA Athletics Director (AD), Provided an update on the athletics program. He shared his priority is to focus on recruiting and retention, and pointed out that the recruiting process starts about two years before any candidate really arrives on campus. He said that athletes make up 60 percent of the incoming class, with football recruits accounting for 19 percent. Seventy-five percent of the women who arrived on campus on July 5 were recruited athletes (that is 45 out of the 61 women on campus).

He further pointed out that the athletics department has outgrown O'Hara Hall and needs a mariner training center to accommodate the health and wellness, fitness, aquatics training, and National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) competition. The current building was not built for women, who now have seven varsity programs.

Congressman Suozzi asked what the price tag was to address these concerns. Ms. MacPherson responded on behalf of the AD, confirming that it's the most expensive item on the Master Plan at \$155 million, which does not include the government premium.

The AD reiterated how important an adequate athletics facility is to recruitment as over 50 percent of the student population are varsity athletes and 100 percent of the students use that facility throughout their time on campus. He concluded by inviting the Board to the November 16 annual Secretaries' Cup football game between USMMA and the Coast Guard Academy, which is being streamed on ESPN+.

Commander Keith Watson, Deputy Director of Admissions, was excited to speak of the incoming class, as the number (301) beat a ten-year record, despite applications being down significantly over the last three years (a trend that aligns with other institutions nationally). The team found success through more aggressive focus on tracking and actively recruiting individuals. He noted a 20.3 percent increase in women recruits over last year. In terms of diversity, he mentioned that Black enrollment was basically flat at 25.3 percent.

Asked how many seats were offered, he responded 468. Following was discussion about the factors that have led to decreased applications, including the price of education and the inability to find jobs that will allow employees to raise a family on without a four-year degree.

Admiral Nunan added of the of the 301 are expected to remain/graduate, it is expected that approximately 70 percent will graduate in four years.

There was additional conversation about increasing the number of applications using marketing and branding efforts, getting the word out in conjunction with industry, and encouraging more congressional members to nominate candidates for the incoming class.

Senator Kelly asked that of 535 members of Congress, how many congressional districts do not nominate anyone to USMMA. CDR Watson confirmed that 130 of these did not nominate anyone.

Anton Tripolskii, Director of the Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPRO), encouraged everyone to review the Sexual Assault Annual Report to Congress that was released in June. It discussed the Academy's work in changing the culture and in updating policies and procedures. He also referenced the Service Academy Gender Relations Survey (SAGR) that was taken in 2022 and reflects a point-in-time.

He also noted a positive external assessment done here by the Association of Title IX Administrators (noting that USMMA midshipmen are not subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice). The Department of Education released a new Title IX rule several months ago, and SAPRO is revamping policy procedures so that midshipmen have the best protection. He also mentioned that cadets returning from sea are now responding positively to EMBARC program policies that were put in place to protect all mariners.

Deputy Superintendent, Rear Admiral David Wulf, USMMA spoke about the Academy's internal governance efforts, which focuses on its ability to manage affairs, including business processes, budget, finance, staffing priorities, etc.

He mentioned the strength of the team, saying he believes management is in a solid place. Members have been focused on shoring up internal processes and internal governance structures

from a management standpoint, across a wide range of Academy committees. (A representative sampling from various operating components was provided on his slide.)

RADM Wulf highlighted one particular area where significant progress is being made: management of workforce planning and budget formulation and execution efforts. Along with the Chief of Staff, Director of Human Resources, and Director of Finance, they are working through a newly established Strategic Workforce Planning Group and collaborating across all departments to build out annual program guidance that the Superintendent issues to guide the development of resource proposals and to funnel into the development of well-supported, justifiable budget proposals that will be ready to funnel into the departments and help position ourselves better from a budget standpoint, particularly with respect to the operational budget.

From a coordination and transparency perspective, USMMA has been bringing together all the business owners across the Academy to engage in discussions that provide transparency into the budget and spending, which affords everyone the opportunity to provide input on budget execution staffing and associated priorities.

Given the constraints that had previously been mentioned with respect to operational resources, he affirmed that the Academy's budget was the "shoe stringiest" with which he had ever worked with, with faculty being overloaded, and staff working with outdated equipment.

Despite faring well with capital improvement appropriations, there is a great need for increased operational funding. RADM Wulf also expressed a hope to be able to add hires to the great team already in place to be able to manage the affairs of Academy effectively and professionally while building toward the future.

Senator Kelly asked about changes in midshipman travel reimbursements, and RADM Wulf responded (in the absence of the finance director) that the finance staff has been working closely with affected midshipmen, and we have made travel reimbursement to the classes that have graduated. However, the Academy lacks the staff to quickly process travel reimbursement for midshipman, faculty. New hires are in the works, and contract help is coming aboard, but it remains a resource issue.

Commander Drew McCarthy, Deputy Commandant of Midshipmen, noted the start of the new academic year, and provided a few highlights from indoctrination and highlighted training that midshipmen were doing currently.

He shared that everyone is coming back from sea so reintegration is the focus, and utilizing feedback from the Department of Shipboard Training to support training improvements.

Commander McCarthy highlighted that midshipmen went to Auschwitz to learn from the Jewish Center Foundation. It was the first year taking place in the American Service Academies Program, which uses the holocaust history as a platform for participants to confront issues through leadership and ethics, unionization, hatred, and genocide.

He provided an update on the mental health app that provides resources 24/7 from anywhere around the world is almost ready. He also shared that the choir just returned from Normandy,

where they participated in the 80th anniversary of D-Day landing, and that the midshipmen were in Palermo, Italy, for the International Peace Conference.

Midshipman Captain Geoffrey Gumport, Regimental Commander (RC) thanked the members of Congress for their ongoing support and affirmed that the midshipman leadership team is working hard to develop themselves and make the Academy a better place. He noted that the Public Affairs team is doing an outstanding job promoting the Academy on social media and has seen a growing following. He says the development of professional standards is positive, noting that he is already impressed by the Class of 2028. He says they are motivated, passionate, driven, and responsive to training.

He noted, however, that civilian leadership should be aware of some issues, including information technology issues, noting that they do not have the capability to work in a shared collaborative digital workspace (like Microsoft Teams and Google Drive) due to cybersecurity concerns. Additionally, in January, they lost the ability to access the Academy network using personal licenses, making it even harder for us to work collaboratively on school projects, regimental operations, etc..

Senator Kelly asked whether the students lacked permission to use the platforms, or if the platforms do not work on the Academy's system. MIDN Gumport and Dr. Comilang responded that this is the result of a combination of factors, including licensing and security.

MIDN Gumport further added that transparency about security issues and more precise explanations about why decisions are made would help the midshipmen be more understanding and accepting of their lack of technological capabilities.

He also spoke about physical infrastructure, noting that midshipmen are frustrated with the slow progress and would appreciate transparency about the process by which decisions are being made. MIDN Gumport cited Samuels Hall, Melville Hall, mold in the barracks, the slow pace of barracks renovation, leaking in academic buildings and the barracks, and HVAC issues as examples when queried.

Congressman Suozzi commented that Melville Hall is in disrepair, and probably one of the most beautiful pieces of property in the United States of America.

Jim Tobin, President and CEO of the USMMA Alumni Association and Foundation (AAF), opened his statement acknowledging the 50th anniversary of USMMA admitting women, making it the first service Academy to do so. Subsequently, he thanked the Board of Visitors for its dedication to the Academy.

He shared two issues of concern to the (AAF). The first was related to infrastructure, and that the Full Speed Ahead Plan has been submitted for the Congressional Record, and he believes it contains answers needed to address infrastructure going forward. He expressed appreciation to Congress members Suozzi, Garbarino, and Valadao for introducing House Resolution 8498. He also expressed appreciation for Senators Kelly and Senator Wicker for trying to have similar language put into the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). He concluded that \$54 million is required the first year for the design and program management of that ten-year project.

He noted that while the Alumni Association & Foundation wish to bring diverse candidates to the Academy, it is not happening with the campus in its current condition.

The second concern he addressed was accreditation. He believes that if the Academy were not a Federal Service Academy, the 2016 accreditation outcome would have been worse. Further, he said he does not think MSCHE will grant the Academy accreditation if the issues surrounding autonomy are not resolved. He emphasized that the Superintendent is a college president and should be allowed to function in that role.

CLOSING REMARKS:

Senator Kelly closed saying that money is critical for USMMA and that the four congressional members would continue working on getting the budget at the right level.

He said another meeting before year's end was needed and it needed to be an hour longer so as to avoid being rushed. He also said the Regimental Commander should go first in the next meeting. No objections were offered.

A request for discussion time was made. Senator Kelly agreed it would be included in the additional hour. He also promised that his staff would work on a report of the day's discussion for distribution to Board for comment.

Without additional comments, the meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

Submitted by: Michael O'Hagan, ohaganm@usmma.edu ,
Designated Federal Officer, USMMA Board of Visitors



I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes of the USMMA Board of Visitors are accurate and complete. These minutes will be formally considered by the Board at its next meeting, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes of the meeting.

Senator
~~Representative~~ Mark Kelly, Chairman, USMMA Board of Visitors
Date: 11/22/2024