

Centralia College Trustees Eye Return of Walton

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After the firing of Centralia College President Robert Frost late last year, the board of trustees has decided to ask former President James Walton to fill the interim position as the college searches for a full-time leader.

Following executive session at the board's monthly meeting Thursday, Board of Trustees member Stuart Halsan moved to allow the chair of the board to contact Walton to see if he was available and willing to serve as the interim president of the college. The five-member board unanimously supported the motion.

Walton was the college's president for 12 years and retired from the position in 2014. Chairwoman Joanne Schwartz said it was evident at meetings with staff and other groups that people wanted someone who was familiar with the college.

"It was made loud and clear ... that people did not want an unknown," she said at the meeting.

Other board members also conveyed that although there was a list of external names considered for the position, the best thing was to pick someone with firsthand knowledge and experience of the college's operations.

"Everyone is considered our family at this college. They don't want someone else to come in with a wrecking ball and do any further upsetting," Halsan said. "They wanted someone from the inside who is familiar with the college and the people in the college."

Vice Chair Doris Wood-Brumsickle said after the meeting that if Walton accepts the offer, he would work for the college on a part-time basis, maybe two or three days a week.

Before the decision is finalized, Board of Trustees Chairwoman Joanne Schwartz said the college would have to negotiate a contract with Walton.

As of now, the board of trustees is thinking about doing a search in-house instead of hiring a consulting firm.

The board is also looking at amending some of the executive limitations at the college.

“Obviously we’re not doing this to put anyone in a straight jacket but some of the stuff that came up within the last 18 months blindsided us and we don’t like being blindsided,” Halsan said of the former administration.

The board of trustees terminated Robert Frost’s three-year contract in December, citing the lack of a strong working relationship between the president and the board.

Frost was hired to succeed Walton in an unanimous vote by the board in May 2014. He began in his position on July 1, 2014.

The college will pay Frost \$202,000 to fulfill requirements of the contract.

Now, with a new interim president in sight, the college hopes to continue moving in a positive direction.

“We’ve come through a period of time with a lot of internal friction and damages that have occurred,” Steve Ward, vice president of finance and administration at the college, said.