Chair Timothy DelGiudice called the Special Meeting to order at 5:31 pm. and acknowledged that a quorum was present for this meeting.

Present:  Timothy DelGiudice, Barbara Cottam, Dennis Duffy, Rachelle Green, Thomas Izzo, Michael Mello, Barbara Mullen and Marianne Monte.

Absent:   Jeffery Williams.

1. Acceptance of the Agenda

2. Open Forum

No one signed up for the open forum.

3. Discussion Items

3a) Discussion of the Community College of Rhode Island’s proposed FY21 Budget.

There has been a 1.7% increase in enrollment at CCRI, the first uptick since 2011. President Hughes acknowledged the diversity of the student body and how the Promise Scholarship has helped the CCRI student population. She mentioned the wide range of student academic goals and highlighted the success of select students.

President Hughes discussed the three main goals that are the foundation of CCRI’s strategic plan – enhance student success, expand partnerships and programs, and strengthen institutional effectiveness. The College has been working toward the goals of the strategic plan for three years and has experienced positive outcomes. Some of these include remedying schedule conflicts by implementing a master schedule, adopting the use of intrusive advising for students, and expanding offerings to include year-round learning. President Hughes thanked the Council for supporting the procurement and use of the Starfish platform, which has been received well by the CCRI community and has helped to relieve some of the issues related to academic advisors having an overwhelming caseload that exceeds recommendations for best practice.

She then presented a video to discuss the necessity and success of guided pathways for students.

President Hughes moved on to discuss the rise of graduation rates at CCRI over the last year to rival
national levels at other community colleges and attributed that success to the Promise Scholarship. The President then discussed how the Promise Scholarship program has helped improve overall college attendance and graduation rates in the Ocean State and encouraged the Council to extend their support for the continuation of the Promise, which is currently a pilot program, when the time comes. President Hughes fielded questions about the transfer rate of CCRI students into other RI public institutions.

Next, she addressed the FY21 budget request of $119.5 million and discussed the reasoning behind an increased budget proposal. An increase in enrollment signifies an increased need for many student support services – advising, financial aid counseling, access to technology, tutors, etc. – offered by the institution to aid in student success. This is especially true for the typical CCRI student, who is usually a low-income or first-generation college student. The request reflects a $4.1 million overall increase. There will be an increase in tuition and fees for students, which translates into a $160 increase per student for the upcoming academic year. This increase will maintain CCRI’s level of affordability among community colleges in New England and will not exceed the maximum Pell Grant amount available to students.

The President pointed out that there are four key areas that the College would like to make new investments in: hiring five academic advisors, strategic marketing for enrollment and retention, professional development, and cybersecurity, technology, and processes. She moved on to discuss requests for capital improvements. CCRI requests $10.8 million in RICAP funding for previously approved projects, as well as $62.9 million in a general obligation bond to be put forward to the State. President Hughes noted that this is the first bond request from CCRI in 20 years. Investment in capital improvements would help increase building energy efficiency, improve campus traffic flow, modernize classrooms, ensure ADA compliance, and jumpstart many other critical facility upgrades.

President Hughes closed the presentation by expressing gratitude for the Council’s past support and asked for continued support for this budget cycle as well. She then fielded questions about the core building infrastructure upgrades, the need for four CCRI campuses, and athletic programs.

3b) Discussion of the Office of Postsecondary Commissioner’s proposed FY21 Budget.

Acting Commissioner Cavallaro began by highlighting the statutory duties required of OPC that have not changed, although the funding for the Office has been cut significantly over the past few years. He then discussed the attainment goal, of having 70% of Rhode Islanders having earned a degree or credential of value by 2025, set forth by Governor Gina Raimondo; we are currently at 46%. To reach the goal, OPC has grounded its work in three key focus areas: attainment, equity, and affordability. He highlighted the success of OPC’s work to help protect student loan borrowers in the state, which led to Governor Raimondo ceremoniously signing the Student Loan Borrower Bill of Rights into law one week prior.

Acting Commissioner Cavallaro discussed the cuts recommended by the Efficiency Commission and their impact on the Office. They included eliminating six FTEs, reducing the operating budget by $1 million, and moving to a new location. To help remedy the staffing cut, OPC is seeking assistance in the form of graduate students and interns, but are not equivalent to having a professional staff. He also discussed grant funding awarded to the Office, which has been helpful to offset some of the budget cuts, but still require staff on hand for grant maintenance and deliverables. He then discussed
the implications of OPC being understaffed, the key initiatives OPC is working on, and the need for the additional FTE the office is requesting – an Academic Affairs Research Assistant.

Next, the Acting Commissioner discussed the supplemental request for FY20. The requested $417,000 will cover things like the move from the Warwick office to OPC’s new location, data storage, increased Promise costs at CCRI, and a technical correction to the amount budgeted for employee benefits. He then discussed the FY21 general revenue budget request, which separated the operating and non-operating budget for the office. Acting Commissioner Cavallaro went on to discuss that while the annual budget totals just over $45 million, only $2.5 million goes toward OPC’s operating costs as most of the funding is considered pass-through funds. This is evidenced by the most expensive line items – state need-based grants, the Rhode Island Promise program, dual and concurrent enrollment, and the future North RI Education Center.

4. Upcoming Meeting

a. The next meeting of the Council on Postsecondary Education is scheduled for October 23, 2019 at 5:30 p.m., at the University of Rhode Island – Higgins Welcome Center.

5. Adjournment

Chair DelGiudice called for a motion to adjourn.

On a motion duly made by Thomas Izzo, and seconded by Rachelle Green, it was

VOTED: THAT The Council adjourn the meeting of October 9, 2019.

VOTE: 8 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Timothy DelGiudice, Barbara Cottam, Dennis Duffy, Rachelle Green, Thomas Izzo, Michael Mello, Barbara Mullen and Marianne Monte.

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 PM.