

Vote to dissolve Baylor Alumni Association fails

September 7, 2013

WACO—Approval of an agreement that would have disbanded the [Baylor Alumni Association](#) fell short of the two-thirds vote required.

At a Sept. 7 called meeting in Waco Hall on the Baylor campus, 55 percent of the alumni association members present voted to approve an agreement that would have disbanded the 154-year-old organization, allowed [Baylor University](#) to assume all alumni-engagement activities and created the Baylor Line Corporation to preserve what proponents called “an independent alumni voice.”

Alumni association members voted 830 to 669 to approve a [transition agreement](#) Baylor’s board of regents and the Baylor Alumni Association officers agreed upon May 31 and that the alumni association board of directors endorsed Sept. 3. However, that fell 170 votes short of the two-thirds required.

Can’t use ‘Baylor’ name

Since Baylor University already gave notice it was terminating its licensing agreement with the alumni association Sept. 8, the vote leaves the group operating without the ability to use the “Baylor” name legally—at least according to some lawyers.

Under the terms of the agreement, the 17,000-member Baylor Alumni Association—which operated 35 years outside university control—would have dissolved, and the university-sponsored Baylor Alumni Network would have assumed all activities related to alumni. Last year, the Baylor Alumni Network held about 850 events in 150 locations worldwide that involved

more than 35,000 alumni and supporters, the university reported.

Baylor University gave notice May 31 it unilaterally would terminate contracts and license agreements with the Baylor Alumni Association on Sept. 8. However, the letter from Charles Beckenbauer, Baylor general counsel, said, if the association voted to implement the transition agreement, the university and the alumni association would terminate the agreements by mutual consent.

“We are thankful that the majority of BAA voters supported the transition agreement, which was also endorsed by the association’s leadership. The 55 percent majority fell short, however, of the necessary super majority required by BAA’s bylaws,” Baylor President Ken Starr said. “We thank all those who rallied to express their enthusiastic support for a new day at Baylor as we continue to seek to move our beloved university forward.”

Three choices

In addressing the group, BAA President Collin Cox framed the vote in terms of three choices—approve the transition agreement and maintain an independent alumni voice through the Baylor Line Corporation, enter into costly litigation over use of the “Baylor” name or surrender and retain nothing.

Current members of the alumni association’s board would have been given the choice of serving either on the new Baylor Line Corporation board or on the university’s newly created Baylor Alumni Advisory Board. Baylor regents also would have created a non-voting position on the regent board, to be selected by the regents with input from the Baylor Alumni Advisory Board.

“All of us care very much about Baylor. All of us care very much about the Baylor Alumni Association,” Cox said at the beginning of a two-hour open forum prior to the alumni association business meeting.

Among the most recent 69,000 Baylor University graduates, only 3,400 joined the alumni association, and the average alumni association member is 58 years old, he reported.

'Times have changed'

"Times have changed," said Cox, a Houston attorney. He attributed the association's inability to attract large numbers of recent graduates both to the organization's strained relationship with the university during much of the last decade and to larger changes in society.

During the summer, alumni association board member Ella Prichard of Corpus Christi assembled a panel of professional journalists who are Baylor graduates to serve as a journalism advisory group for a new license agreement for the Baylor Line Corporation, Cox said.

The advisory group recommended editorial and ethical guidelines—stronger than guidelines currently in place, he said—that were incorporated into the licensing agreement with the university.

The resulting document provides "a fierce but fair voice" for alumni—a magazine that is self-governing but respectful of the university and whose writers have access to newsmakers in Baylor life, Cox added.

Debate retraced escalating tensions

In both the two-hour open forum and the 30 minutes dedicated to debate during the alumni association's business session, numerous speakers retraced a long history of escalating tension between the group and the university's administration and board of regents.

More than 10 years ago, the university developed its own alumni services office—the Baylor Alumni Network—and began publishing its own magazine for alumni and donors.

In 2009, Baylor presented the alumni association a proposal asking the group to give up its independent status and come under the authority of the university administration. However, Baylor withdrew that proposal about six weeks later, citing what it perceived as the alumni association's lack of positive response.

The university ceased to grant the alumni association access to students at graduation and homecoming, and it no longer provided a list of graduates—grievances numerous alumni mentioned during times of debate about the transition agreement.

Variety of opinions on display

Some alumni who gathered in Waco Hall expressed support for the current Baylor administration, appreciation for President Ken Starr's attempts to unite alumni and pride in Baylor's recent athletic accomplishments.

Some wore green T-shirts with gold lettering that said, "Truth and Integrity through Independence." Some of those alumni voiced grief over perceived attempts to "crush the alumni association" and over the recent demolition of the Hughes-Dillard Alumni Center, leveled to make room for a plaza leading to a pedestrian bridge connecting the campus and the new Baylor Stadium.

Many spoke of their desire to stop fighting and to "move forward" under the terms of the transition agreement.

Bette McCall Miller of Pittsburg, daughter of former Baylor President Abner McCall, described the agreement as a "demolition ultimatum" that leaves alumni with next to nothing.

"Moving forward is not always progress. Sometimes it is just rolling rapidly downhill," she said.

After the vote, Cox issued a statement noting uncertainty about the future.

“The vote today by the membership of the Baylor Alumni Association not to approve the transition agreement between the BAA and Baylor University means uncertain times ahead for the BAA. We are disappointed that the compromise represented by the transition agreement did not garner sufficient votes to be implemented. This may mean the loss of permission to use the Baylor name. But we respect our members’ decision,” he said.

“Despite the outcome, we want to express our sincere gratitude for the selfless service of so many loyal members of the Baylor family. We also are grateful that almost 1,500 voters came to express their opinions. The BAA board of directors will be meeting in the coming days to determine what options are available to us.”

Editor’s Note: The 4th paragraph was edited and the 7th paragraph and last three paragraphs were added after the article originally was posted.

See previous articles:

[Baylor Alumni Association vote sparks media blitz](#)

[Judge lifts injunction delaying alumni center demolition](#)

[Baylor regents OK alumni event center at stadium](#)

[Judge sends Baylor factions to mediation](#)

[Judge halts demolition of Baylor alumni center](#)

[Group opposes proposal to dissolve Baylor Alumni Association](#)

[Baylor Alumni Association and university reach proposed agreement](#)