Ms. Krista Newkirk, Commission Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:33 AM. Ms. Newkirk welcomed all in attendance and requested a roll call of the Commission Members participating on-site and via conference call.

Ms. Newkirk called for a motion to approve the Minutes of the June 19, 2019 Commission Meeting and the December 18, 2019 Special Commission Meeting. Dr. Roslyn Clark Artis moved to approve the Minutes. Dr. Evans Whitaker seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved by the Commission.

Ms. Newkirk called on Ms. Katie Harrison, Commission Executive Director, to provide the Final Report on Program Reviews for 2018-2019 SC Tuition Grants Program at Participating Colleges. Ms. Harrison reported that all Program Reviews had been closed prior to the December 31 deadline. Out of the twenty-one colleges, eighteen had no findings; two had repeat findings, of which the Financial Aid Director and the College President have been made aware; and one had only one finding. The findings included non-compliance with the 5-day posting requirement of funds, the 30-day refund policy deadline, and awarding a Tuition Grant to
students without a Drug, Alcohol, and Felony Affidavit on file. Ms. Newkirk called for questions, there being none, the meeting continued.

Ms. Newkirk called on Ms. Harrison to provide an update on the 2019-2020 Award Year. Ms. Harrison pointed out the increase in State Recurring funds between the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 Award Years as a result of the approved budget increase provided for the 2019-2020 Award Year. Ms. Harrison also explained that funds received from the Commission on Higher Education (CHE) through the Children’s Educational Endowment Fund increased from last year. All increases in funds for the 2019-2020 Award Year allowed the Commission to increase the Maximum Grant to $3,500, which was a $200 increase of the Maximum Grant over the 2018-2019 Award Year Maximum Grant of $3,300. Ms. Harrison also stated there was roughly a 5% decrease in the number of students receiving a Tuition Grant this year, which allowed the Commission to provide an additional one-time Spring Supplement. Ms. Harrison reported most funds for the Spring Semester have been disbursed, and only a few Non-Traditional Enrollment Reports are left to be processed, based on the enrollment patterns of those programs. Ms. Newkirk called for questions, there being none, the meeting continued.

Ms. Newkirk called on Ms. Harrison and Mr. Eddie Shannon, Executive Vice President of South Carolina Independent Colleges & Universities (SCICU), to report on Legislative Outreach and Letter Writing Campaign Update. Ms. Harrison reported that since 2007, the Commission has contracted with a company called Crescerance (formally Capitol Impact) that provides exact geocoding of the districts for state legislators. This information is used in two ways; the first allows each college to access the geocoded information for each Tuition Grant recipient so they can write to their State Representative and State Senator. The second allows the Commission to send each State Legislator a listing of Tuition Grant recipients from his/her district to emphasize how much money and how many students from their area benefited from the Tuition Grant funding. Ms. Harrison explained that this effort is well received and appreciated by the Legislators. Ms. Harrison asked Mr. Shannon to provide information concerning the Letter Writing Campaign. Mr. Shannon explained that most colleges have either completed, or are close to completing, their campaigns. Mr. Shannon stated that April 5, 2020, is the last day to provide all requested information to SCICU in time for the Independent Colleges Day at the State House on April 8, 2020, where SCICU will announce the total number of letters written. Mr. Shannon stated additional reminders will be sent out to the colleges to remind them of the deadline. Ms. Newkirk called for questions, there being none, the meeting continued.

Ms. Newkirk called on Mr. Earl Mayo, Commission Deputy Director, to discuss the Adoption of the Agency Strategic Plan. Mr. Mayo stated that in the 50 years the Commission has been in existence, there has never been a Strategic Plan. Mr. Mayo discussed the content, which was provided publicly with the Agenda items, including the goals and plans for future Program success. Such goals and plans for future Program success include the continuation of providing information to the legislators and the Commission’s dedication to protecting vital information. Ms. Newkirk called for any questions or comments. There being none, Ms. Newkirk called for a motion to approve the Agency Strategic Plan. Dr. Artis moved to adopt the Agency Strategic Plan. Mr. Stephen Pettit seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved by the Commission.

Ms. Newkirk called on Ms. Harrison to discuss the adoption of Agency Employee Code of Conduct. Ms. Harrison stated that in 2014, former Governor Nikki Haley established the State Employee Code of Conduct Task Force which resulted in Executive Order 2014-23 applying to all Governor’s Cabinet Agencies. Ms. Harrison stated the Agency Employee Code of Conduct was provided prior to this meeting along with the other Agenda items. Ms. Harrison explained that while the Commission is not a cabinet level agency, and thus is not required to adopt the State Employee Code of Conduct, a model was provided to all State Agencies in which Commission Staff already followed the guidelines. Adopting this Employee Code of Conduct, Ms. Harrison stated, puts the Commission ahead of the curve if a broad state-wide adoption were to be required in the future. Ms. Harrison explained the only variation between the model code and the one being proposed is in regard to the Requirement of Financial Disclosures with the Statement of Economic Interests through the Ethics Commission each year; All Commission Staff are required to file the Statement of Economic Interests through the Ethics Commission each year; All Commission Staff are required to file the Statement of Economic Interests.
annually, as all positions within the Agency fall within a category required to file, pursuant to § 8-13-1110 of the South Carolina Code of Laws. Ms. Newkirk asked for any questions. Dr. Rusty Monhollon asked if the Division of State Human Resources has reviewed the Code of Conduct; Ms. Harrison explained that, as a cabinet agency, they are subject to this same code. Ms. Newkirk called for a motion to approve the Agency Employee Code of Conduct. Dr. Whitaker moved to approve the Code of Conduct. Dr. Artis seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved by the Commission.

Ms. Newkirk called on Ms. Harrison to discuss the Staff Recommendation for Initial Maximum Award Amounts for 2020-2021. Ms. Harrison explained that the Budget Request for the 2020-2021 Award Year was for a $1.13 million increase in General Appropriations for the Program. This request has been approved by the House Ways and Means Committee and is currently being discussed by the Senate. Ms. Harrison also explained that there is an estimated increase of $600,000 in the amount of funds received by CHE through the Children’s Educational Endowment fund, if the budget request to increase funds for the South Carolina Need Based Grant (SCNBG) is approved, which the House Ways and Means Committee has. Ms. Harrison explained that with the expectation that the Senate will concur with the House Ways and Means Committee, Commission Staff recommend the Initial Maximum Grant for 2020-2021 be set at $3,750; this is a $250 increase over the 2019-2020 Maximum Grant of $3,500. This figure was calculated using the current projected funds available for 2020-2021, while factoring in the 5% reduction in students during 2019-2020 and estimating a 0.5% increase in students for 2020-2021. Ms. Newkirk expressed the benefit this increase would be to students. Ms. Newkirk called for any questions or comments; Dr. Monhollon asked if this figure is contingent upon final approval of the Budget, to which Ms. Harrison stated that yes, the Initial Maximum Grant amount is contingent upon the final approved Budget, and the Commission would revisit the Award amount at that point in time, if necessary. Mr. Mayo explained that historically, the Commission has based the Initial Maximum Grant calculations off the House Ways and Means proposed budget and in the last 20 years, the Maximum Grant amount had to be decreased only once. Mr. Mayo further explained that during some years, the Commission had to increase the Maximum Grant based on the final approved Budget but had to decrease the Grant only once. Ms. Newkirk called for a motion to approve the Initial Maximum Grant at $3,750 contingent on the approved final Budget for 2020-2021. Dr. Whitaker moved to approve the Initial Maximum Grant at $3,750 for the 2020-2021 Award Year contingent on the approved final Budget. Mr. Pettit seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved by the Commission.

Dr. Whitaker asked if any attempt to increase the Statutory Limit should be made as the Maximum Grant continues to rise closer to that allowable maximum; Dr. Jeff Perez, President and CEO of SCICU, explained that Ms. Harrison and he have had discussions about that possibility, with adjustments being made to that limit on his legislative agenda for next year’s Legislative Session.

Ms. Newkirk called on Ms. Harrison to discuss the review of the 2020-2021 Budget Request. Ms. Harrison explained that the process began last June when the Commission voted to request the funding necessary to increase the Maximum Grant by $100 to $3,600 for the 2020-2021 Award Year. The Commission submitted documents in September 2019 to the State Executive Budget Office requesting an increase of $1,128,792. Ms. Harrison updated everyone on the dates of each budget hearing and presentation. On October 2, 2019, the Commission appeared before the staff from the Governor’s Office. In January, Governor McMaster released his 2020-2021 Executive Budget which, for the first time in recent history, recommended the full request put forth by the Commission, including the increased funding for Tuition Grants, administrative/personnel requests, an increase in Authority to Spend existing funds received through State Interest Earnings, and approval for funds necessary for the agency to begin the bid and procurement process for an integrated computer system that would allow more secure and efficient administration of the Tuition Grants Program. On January 28, 2020, the Commission appeared before the Higher Education Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee. The full House Ways and Means Committee has approved and submitted to the full House a budget which has recommended the $1,128,792 increase in General Appropriations for the Tuition Grants Program, along with other requests; however, the approved budget did not include a recommendation for the funds requested to begin the competitive bid process for a new computer system to manage the
Tuition Grants Program. Ms. Harrison explained this is the second year in a row that the House Ways and Means Committee has recommended an increase in funding for the Program. Ms. Harrison stated that the Commission is scheduled to appear before the Senate Finance Higher Education Subcommittee on March 12, 2020, where the focus will be on securing the funding for a new computer system, replacing the rapidly aging home-grown database system currently being used. Ms. Newkirk called for any questions, there being none, the meeting continued.

Ms. Newkirk called on Mr. Mayo to discuss the Upcoming Financial Aid Administrators Training Meetings. Mr. Mayo reported that for many years the Commission has held an annual meeting to provide updates and training with the financial aid staff at the colleges. Mr. Mayo explained that at these meetings staff working with the Program have the opportunity to provide feedback that would provide improvements to the administration of the Tuition Grants Program, benefiting students and the financial aid offices. Mr. Mayo reported that two meetings are scheduled; one to be held on March 17, 2020, at Southern Wesleyan University, and one to be held on March 23, 2020, at Coker University. Mr. Mayo explained that by having two meetings on different dates at different locations, the Commission hopes all colleges will be able to participate. Ms. Newkirk called for questions, there being none, the meeting continued.

Ms. Newkirk reported on Agency Personnel Updates and explained this is Mr. Mayo’s last Commission Meeting. Ms. Newkirk stated that Mr. Mayo, who has been a Commission Staff member since April 1, 1995, when he began as the Commission’s Deputy Director, will retire on April 1, 2020. Mr. Mayo served as the Commission’s Deputy Director until 2008, when he was promoted to Executive Director. In 2017, upon conclusion of the State’s TERI program and with the promotion of Ms. Harrison to Executive Director, Mr. Mayo was rehired as the Commission’s Deputy Director. Mr. Mayo explained that he has had a fantastic career, serving in the Student Financial Aid profession at various colleges and organizations since leaving the Navy, including his time at the Commission. Ms. Newkirk announced that the Commission has a resolution, which was read aloud. Ms. Newkirk stated there are other Agency Personnel Updates and called on Ms. Harrison to report on those changes. Ms. Harrison thanked Mr. Mayo for his countless years of service to the Commission and for his mentorship. Ms. Harrison announced that upon Mr. Mayo’s retirement, Mr. Zachary Christian, Commission Financial Aid Counselor and IT Director, will be promoted to Deputy Director effective April 2, 2020. Ms. Harrison explained that because of Mr. Christian’s promotion, the Commission had a vacancy and is happy to announce that Ms. Monique Lemmon from Morris College, who was in attendance at the meeting and was introduced, will be joining the staff as the Commission’s Program Coordinator, beginning April 2, 2020.

Ms. Newkirk reminded everyone that the Statement of Economic Interests is due by March 30, 2020; failure to complete this requirement will result in a penalty of a $100 fine per day it is not submitted.

Ms. Newkirk called for any other new business. Dr. Perez, on behalf of SCICU, thanked Mr. Mayo for his service and stated that he, Ms. Harrison, and Mr. Christian met with Senate Staff to express the importance of the need for a new computer system to manage the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program. Ms. Newkirk asked if it would be beneficial for the Commission to write a letter in support of this piece of the budget request. A draft letter of support will be circulated to the Commission.

Ms. Newkirk reminded everyone that the next Commission Meeting will be Tuesday, June 16, 2020 at 10:30 AM. Ms. Newkirk adjourned the meeting at 11:13 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Zachary R. Christian
Acting Secretary for
Dr. Roslyn Clark Artis, Secretary
SC Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission