**MINUTES**

**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY**

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING**

**Thursday, January 26th, 2023**

The one hundred thirty fifth meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History was held at 3:00 p.m. Thursday, January 26, 2023, at the Virginia Museum of Natural History in at the Dominion Energy Headquarters in Richmond, VA.

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| Trustees Present: | Ms. Lisa Carter, Chair  Mr. Mark Buss  Ms. Lauren Woodson  Dr. Tom Benzing | Mr. Nathan Sanford, Secretary  Ms. Anne Burnett  Ms. Sherri Jordan  Dr. Art Evans | |
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| Trustees Participating Virtually, via WebEx: | Ms. Melany Stowe (work)  Mr. Roberto Quinones, Vice-Chair (personal) | Ms. Jennifer Burnett (illness) |
| Trustees Absent: | Dr. Carole Nash  Dr. Makunda Abdul-Mbacke | Mr. Cord Cothren, Treasurer  Ms. Emma Ito | |
|  |  |  | |
| Staff Present: | Dr. Joe Keiper | Mr. Ryan Barber | |
|  | Ms. Bobbie Dillon | Ms. Christy Deatherage | |
|  | Ms. Mary Zell Galen  Ms. Lynn Elmahmoud | Mr. Zach Ryder (virtual) | |
|  |  |  | |
| Others Present: | Dr. DB Poli– VMNH Foundation Board of Directors (virtual) | | |

**Welcome and Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Ms. Lisa Carter, Chair. A roll call vote of trustees was held, and it was determined that there were seven members present, three virtual observers, and five absent, which did not establish a quorum. As late arrivals were anticipated, all action and voting items (including the approval of the minutes and resolutions) were saved on the agenda until after a quorum was achieved. Additionally, Ms. Carter welcomed Dr. DB Poli, of the VMNH Foundation, to the meeting.

**Chair’s Report**

Ms. Lisa Carter, Chair, presented a brief report:

She completed several introductions and acknowledgements, including:

* VMNH had a strong meeting with Virginia Senate staff from the State Appropriations Committee.
* Resolution of issues with the museum’s wireless access.
  + Mr. Ryan Barber reported: VMNH has met with the City of Martinsville. VMNH’s Wi-Fi system is obsolete, and the city will resolve the issues free of charge. This resolution is separate from the State’s VITA network.
* VMNH is in the process of identifying a contractor for the Gene S. Adams Education Pavilion. After bids are received, a contractor will likely be identified next month.
* The personnel matters discussed in closed session at the last meeting have now been resolved.
  + The VMNH Foundation is putting $7,500 in their budget for museum staff development.

**Staff Profile**

Ms. Carter introduced Ms. Lynn Elmahmoud, Security Officer, to highlight her experience working for VMNH:

* Ms. Lynn Elmahmoud reported on her work: She does security, schedules museum events, manages the fleet of vehicles, and orders supplies.

**Deep Dive**

Mr. Ryan Barber, Deputy Director, presented a deep dive on VMNH’s General Assembly appropriation:

* Presented graphs of appropriated funds, and differentiated museum earned revenue.
* Highlighted past pushes to hire new staff, with waves in 2004 and 2007/2008 (at opening of new building).
* Museum’s appropriations peaked in 2008. Offices like publications and in-house graphic design have been eliminated. VMNH has made a concentrated effort to rebuild the Research and Collections team.
* Ms. Lisa Carter asked if other museums faced cuts. Mr. Barber explained that all state institutions faced the 2008 cuts.
  + Dr. Keiper: Provided more context about the cuts, including a force reduction in 2017. VMNH has been able to grow staffing since then through funding from the General Assembly.
  + Ms. Carter asked the outlook after today’s lobbying. Dr. Keiper feels strong about the state of the Commonwealth. All state employees will receive a 5% increase in salary after July 1. However, very little of appropriation goes to mission-based programs; instead, most funds go to salaries and operating costs.
  + Dr. Art Evans: Spoke highly of state progress and funding, under Dr. Joe Keiper’s leadership.
  + Dr. Keiper: Celebrated strong progress with advocacy work, thanks to the Board’s involvement. Ms. Carter thanked everyone for their involvement.

**Executive Director’s Report**

Dr. Joe Keiper, Executive Director, presented his report:

Most information will be provided in committee reports, but he presented several highlights:

* VMNH continues to push towards achieving strategic plan.
* As of halfway through fiscal year, VMNH is doing fine financially with strong revenue. We have a general trend of growth for attendance and spending. In two years, the museum anticipates returning to pre-pandemic visitation levels.
* VMNH hired a new research technician to support Dr. Kuhn and Dr. Moncrief.
  + Ms. Carter clarified if staff are happy about shifting responsibilities. Dr. Keiper explained that staff is driving changes.
* VMNH celebrated Pliny the Elder 2000th birthday, with an event and publication.
* Museum has had increasing financial support locally and in Waynesboro area.
* VMNH-Foundation is approaching their first million dollars in the endowment. The Foundation will hold a celebration when that point is reached.
* Ms. Carter: thanked for excellent visit to Douglas Ave. in November and wants something done with shoulder mount conservation. She wants VMNH to come up with a plan to restore, donate or destroy specimens.
  + Dr. Evans: Suggests this is a task that falls to curatorial staff, which is problematic because if staff are stretched too thin.
  + Dr. Keiper: Asked staff to do an assessment to determine what is wrong with materials, what needs to be done, etc. He explains many items were on display at old building and were previously damaged. VMNH may deaccession taxidermy but wants to ensure all is transparent and ethical.
  + Ms. Carter/ Dr. Evans: Suggests the potential to use these items for traveling exhibits, teaching collection, etc.

**Development/Marketing Committee Report**

Mr. Ryan Barber, Deputy Director, presented the advancement report:

* Reported about the Museums for All program, designed for individuals as part of the SNAP program/ EBT cardholders.
  + Increased percentage of visitors who are EBT cardholders
  + Hooker Furnishings is currently funding the program and will be doubling their support. Carter Bank and Trust will also support in the future, which will triple support of the program.
* Highlighted grants in support of science outreach initiatives, led by the Patterson Foundation and other partners. These grants support festivals, scholarships for education programs, etc.
* The *Dinosaur Discoveries* exhibit opens in February, and the Dino Festival will be hosted in July. VMNH had 4,600 visitors at last Dino Festival and hopes to exceed that in 2023.
* VMNH exhibit and event schedule has been finalized for the remainder of 2023, and 2024 partnerships are in place for events.
* Finalized the selection of the Museum Experience Manager position, and the candidate will be moving to the area from Tampa, FL.
* Foundation’s endowment has continued strong growth and new gifts (10%).
* VMNH revenue is up from last year, and on track for pre-pandemic festivals attendance/ spending.
  + Bug Festival (upcoming) is highest reviewed festival with both staff and visitors.
    - Dr. Evans: suggested hosting Bug Festival in summer months, to have live more organisms.

**Research and Collections Committee Report**

Dr. Art Evans, Research and Collections Committee Chair, presented the report:

* Highlighted the committee’s need to meet during quarterly board meeting, which became a problem when the meeting is tied to the General Assembly visit. No committee meeting was held this month.
* In the process of revising Collections Policy as part of AAM reaccreditation, Dr. Evans advised board members to review the document.
* Working on the Live Animal Policy for the museum. VMNH needs plan to care for living collection, especially as the collection may expand with the Waynesboro facility.
  + Dr. Tom Benzing: seconded the need for Board members to review the living collection policies.

**Education and Public Programs Committee Report**

Mr. Nathan Sanford, Committee Chair, presented the report:

* Committee held a virtual meeting last week, following the new state policy.
* Museum has updated the number of individuals served; program participation is back at pre-pandemic levels.
* VMNH has a new microscope lab through an Institute for Museum and Library Services grant. It opened in December, has already been used by school groups, and the technology will be shared with the local school systems.
* Ms. Christy Deatherage: VMNH is in the first year implementing the KidWind program, which is a statewide program.
* Dr. Keiper: VMNH is investigating the Virginia laboratory school program, which will help provide hands-on programs. VMNH will have access to state funding and is exploring a partnership with New College Institute (NCI).
  + Dr. DB Poli: Shared that Lisa Stoneman is helping develop laboratory schools in Roanoke. Program is aimed to assist with underprivileged students.
  + Dr. Benzing: When he met with Senator Stanley, he mentioned the partnership with lab schools and NCI.
  + Dr. Evans: Warned of programs that are STEM-focused because they typically do not include natural history/ biological sciences.

**Facilities (Operations) Committee Report**

Dr. Tom Benzing, Facilities (Operations) Committee Chair, presented the report:

* Committee had minimal updates.
* Ms. Carter: asked if need more committee members, as have had meetings with one individual. Dr. Benzing: explained number was adequate, but others were welcome to join.
* Dr. Keiper: Provided updates on the ESCO project. VMNH is waiting on several pieces of equipment. Challenges arose with installing some lights. Electric Vehicle chargers (provided by state) do not plug into all vehicles, but working with Siemens to find permanent adaptors, and it will be fixed for free. Huge credit to Tim King and Jonathan Martin for their work.
* Ms. Carter: Asked about changes in the energy bill. Dr. Keiper: not on paper, because of increased energy use at Douglas Avenue. Ms. Carter suggested getting separate bills.
* Ms. Carter: asked about a public featuring solar. Dr. Keiper: A gallery display is in the works.

**Electronic Participation/ Virtual Meeting Policy**

Upon achieving a quorum, a motion was made to admit the virtual trustees (Mr. Roberto Quinones, Ms. Jennifer Burnett, and Ms. Melany Stowe) to the meeting so they may participate remotely was made by Ms. Lisa Carter and seconded by Dr. Art Evans. With no discussion, a roll call vote was held, and the motion unanimously passed.

Following, a motion was made to allow the virtual trustees (Mr. Roberto Quinones, Ms. Jennifer Burnett, and Ms. Melany Stowe) to act as voting members for the Board meeting was made by Ms. Lisa Carter and seconded by Dr. Art Evans. With no discussion, a roll call was held, and the motion unanimously passed.

Dr. Joe Keiper, Executive Director, reported on the new electronic meeting policy from the state:

* Board can hold 100% virtual meetings (not hybrid), but everyone must come from different locations. Board must continue to keep minutes, broadcast the meeting, and cannot hold sequential virtual meetings.
* For Board members who live more than 60 miles from the site of the meeting, they can attend virtually without penalty. They do not count towards the quorum.
* This virtual policy will be updated in official museum policy.
* Ms. Carter: This policy will assist with empowering committee chairs.
* Mr. Roberto Quinones: The policy allows the agency to meet virtually but must be made a policy of our board. Ms. Carter: Asked if we need to hold off on voting until May or could vote now. Suggested voting now. Ms. Jennifer Burnett: Need to provide reasons for absence if new policy does not apply.

A motion to follow the state’s electronic meeting policy was made by Ms. Lisa Carter and seconded by Mr. Nathan Sanford. With no discussion, a voice vote was held, and the motion passed with abstentions from Dr. Tom Benzing and Dr. Art Evans.

**Approval of Minutes**

Dr. Tom Benzing moved that the minutes of the November 2022 Board meeting be approved, and Dr. Art Evans seconded the motion. Ms. Carter outlined changes about language describing the relationship of the VMNH-Foundation (Page 5). A voice call vote was held, and the minutes were approved unanimously with amendments.

**Resolution**

Ms. Lisa Carter presented a resolution in remembrance of R. Gene Smith, for his service to VMNH:

* Dr. Keiper and Dr. Evans shared additional memories about Mr. Smith.
* Ms. Carter: Suggested revitalizing Board mentorship program, which Mr. Smith participated in.
* A motion to pass the resolution was made by Dr. Art Evans and seconded by Dr. Tom Benzing. With no discussion, a voice vote was held, and the motion passed unanimously.

**Treasurer’s Report**

Mr. Ryan Barber, Deputy Director, presented the report and information from the Profit and Loss Statement:

* State appropriation is higher mid-year than at the beginning, because of staff raises and bonuses.
* Overall revenue has increased throughout the museum.
* The Education Department has secured 100% of funding from the City and County.
* Grant programs is strong, and several grants are lined up for next quarter.
* Have received funds from the VA Department of Energy for the ESCO project
* Utilities are slightly higher than previous expenses but will work to separate Starling Ave. and Douglas Ave. bills.
* Dr. Keiper: Report also includes updates on capital projects, but no major changes have occurred. Adams Education Pavilion will have bids in February.

Dr. Tom Benzing moved to accept the Treasurer’s Report, and Ms. Lisa Carter, seconded the motion. A voice call vote was held, and the report was accepted unanimously.

**Waynesboro Advocacy Committee Report**

Dr. Tom Benzing, Waynesboro Advocacy Committee Chair, presented the report:

* Expressed sadness over Gene Smith’s (committee member, VMNH-F), death.
* Continued hosting Science Talk series at the Wayne Theatre, with several talks upcoming. All talks are recorded and archived on YouTube.
* Hosted public meetings at the Waynesboro Library on third Fridays. Well attended and sharing comments with museum staff.
  + Most common questions are about loss of parking spots. Will lose about 120 spots.
  + Other concern is about flooding. Building footprint will be outside floodplain.
* Thanked Board for legislative visits. Project is not in the Governor’s budget for construction. However, Senator Hanger has put in a request for VMNH-Waynesboro to be added in a language-only proposal.
  + Mr. Mark Buss: Asked when VMNH will know if amendment is finalized. Dr. Benzing: Decisions will be made by Sunday, Feb. 5th. Does not have to be in House budget since both sides will have a budget bill.
  + Ms. Sherri Jordan: Asked the amount of the cost estimate. Dr. Benzing explained that it is language-only, and the amount is not finalized.

**Strategic Planning Committee Report**

Mr. Roberto Quinones, Strategic Planning Committee chair, shared the report:

* Committee held one meeting and is working to find ways to measure both short- and long-term success of the museum. VMNH needs to plan for success for short-term goals.
* Need to strategize about use of annual strategic report, which shows direction and could be used as a leave-behind for Lobby Day.
* Created a stakeholder list, which could be expanded to help understand who has connections with legislators.
* Committee is improving museum’s DEAI efforts.
* Dr. Keiper: Mr. Buss has created efforts to line up budget/ strategic plan with the Code of Virginia. These areas have strong alignment
  + Mr. Buss: Wants to make sure the state code is still relevant.
  + Dr. Evans: Many of these topics were discussed at the workshops last summer. Could this be added into the broader strategic plan?
* Ms. Carter: Museum can expand on internships for students of diverse backgrounds. Dominion has put a program in place for students of diverse backgrounds and has helped Dominion dramatically increase diverse hires.

**Announcements**

Dr. Keiper: wants to discuss situation with CMHL:

* VMNH has need to protect the success of the Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab, as multiple issues with reporting issues from the state hotline.
  + Will have a password protected router for CHML
  + Have contacts with outside agencies completing a cybersecurity analysis.
  + Board can create policy for CHML to say mission of CHML is approved by the trustees and this program and the military reservists is essential to achieve VMNH’s mission.
  + Ms. Anne Burnett: Suggested adding more specific language about need for armed conflict in mission of CHML.
* Ms. Carter: Will vote on this policy at our next meeting in May.

Ms. Carter: Next meeting can be virtual. Board members should let her know about their preferences.

**Adjournment**

With no further business to come before the Board, Ms. Lisa Carter adjourned the meeting at 5:00 pm. Mr. Mark Buss made the motion to adjourn, and Ms. Lisa Carter seconded.

Respectfully submitted,

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Nathan Sanford Lisa Carter

Secretary Chair