**MINUTES**

**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY**

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING**

**Saturday, February 10th, 2024**

The one hundred forty fourth meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History was held at the Virginia Museum of Natural History at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, February 10, 2024.

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| Trustees Present: | Ms. Lisa Carter, ChairMr. Mark Buss, Vice-ChairMs. Jennifer BurnettMr. Nathan SanfordMr. Cord Cothren | Dr. Art EvansDr. Carole NashMs. Lauren WoodsonDr. Tom Benzing |
| Trustees Virtual: | Mr. Roberto Quinones (distance)Ms. Jennifer Burnett (illness) | Ms. Sherri Jordan (illness) |
| Trustees Absent: | Ms. Anne BurnettDr. Makunda Abdul-Mbacke | Ms. Emma Ito |
| Staff Present: | Dr. Joe Keiper | Mr. Ryan Barber |
|  | Mr. Jonathan Martin  | Ms. Christy Deatherage  |
|  | Mr. Ben Williams  | Ms. Mary Zell Galen  |
| Others Present: | Mr. Bill Kirby– VMNH Foundation Board of Directors Ms. Abby Gump– Office of the Attorney General |

**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 nine members present, three virtual, and three absent, which established a quorum.

Ms. Lisa Carter:

* Welcomed new representative from the Office of the Attorney General, Abby Gump.
* Welcomed Dr. Hayden Bassett home from deployment and thanked him for service.
* Reminded the Board about nominations occurring at today’s meeting.

**Approval of Minutes**

Dr. Art Evans moved that the minutes of the November 2023 Board meeting be approved, and Dr. Carole Nash seconded the motion. A voice call vote was held, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

**Chair’s Report**

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

* Congratulated everyone on the *Masters of the Night* Festival and recommended checking out gift shop. Thought the exhibits were fabulous.
	+ Dr. Joe Keiper: Every board member has a bat key ring at their spot.
* Had recent success in the General Assembly.
	+ Dr. Joe Keiper: Budget is not finalized, but VMNH has level funding. VMNH staff and Board members spent time in Richmond talking with legislators.
	+ Dr. Tom Benzing: Had lots of conversations with the General Assembly and focused on members of the Appropriations Committee. Bills have passed the House of Delegates and Senate and are now being considered by the Capital Outlay Committee. Other budget amendments are being considered for VMNH-W construction and VMNH will know their status on February 20. All legislators and staff received information on the museum and said positive things.
	+ Dr. Joe Keiper: This district has a new representative in House of Delegates, as Del. Les Adams resigned. Now, Del. Eric Phillips is our representative and is from the Martinsville area.
* Concerned about the May meeting schedule and surveyed the Board about schedule conflicts. Requested to move the May meeting to an all-virtual meeting.
	+ Dr. Joe Keiper: May meeting is when Board votes for new officers, so having a quorum is important.
* Have budget updates and will go over details later in the meeting.
* VMNH is hiring two diversity interns this summer, and Smithsonian is paying them.

**Staff Profile**

Ms. Lisa Carter introduced Mr. Ben Williams, Science Administrator, to highlight his experience working for VMNH:

* + Administrator of Science for just over 5 years, and also volunteered at VMNH in 1996.
	+ Administrator of Science helps serve as liaison for research and collections side of the building and assists with everything they need. As of recently, is serving as the direct supervisor for all five curators.
	+ In addition, serves as point person to sell publications, licensed as alcohol purchasing agent, interim director of CMHL when staff is in field, maintain the VMNH Arcade in the basement, hosts the VMNH podcast, serves as the licensed drone operator.
		- Ms. Lisa Carter: Complimented Ben in Nature social media post series.
		- Dr. Art Evans: Thanked for all the help with running the Research and Collections Committee.

**Deep Dive**

Ms. Christy Deatherage, Education Manager, presented a deep dive on the Microscopy Lab:

* Room previously served as storage, but repurposed space into a lab.
* With help of an IMLS grant, lab is set up for education department, research and collections interns, and citizen science projects.
* Room has only been open since December 2022, and has worked with close to 1,000 students in the room, not counting research components.
* Did overview of using the microscopes and presented a sample lesson to trustees.

**Nominating Committee Report**

Ms. Melany Reeves Clark, Nominating Committee Chair, presented the report:

* Board as a new slate of officers for the 2024-2025 year: Ms. Lisa Carter as Immediate Past Chair, Mr. Mark Buss as Chair, Ms. Melany Clark as Vice-Chair, Ms. Lauren Woodson as Secretary, and Mr. Cord Cothren as Treasurer.

**Treasurer’s Report**

Mr. Cord Cothren, Finance Committee Chair, presented the report:

* Missed the Finance Committee meeting, but Mr. Ryan Barber kept up with updates. The Education Department has secured funding to work with Martinsville-Henry County for FY24.
* FY23 was very successful and had higher than usual carry over.
* Board needs to vote on the proposed budget for next year.
	+ Dr. Joe Keiper: During the Executive Committee, there was a request to see profit/ loss statements. Will provide both VMNH and Foundation statements.
	+ Ms. Lisa Carter: A lot of assumptions go into the budget, including forecast of classes.
		- Dr. Joe Keiper: In current budget, anticipating seeing a 38% increase of participation in education programs.
		- Ms. Christy Deatherage: Participation numbers are now back to where they were pre-pandemic.
		- Dr. Joe Keiper: Asked about increased fees? Ms. Christy Deatherage: Yes, currently raising prices for summer camps, and in the fall will charge more for classes.
* Since the November Board meeting, secured significant gains from federal research grants. Thanked Mr. Ryan Barber for his work.
	+ Dr. Carole Nash: Does VMNH have overhead for federal grants? Mr. Ryan Barber: VMNH is in between negotiated rates and using a 10% overhead. Before, VMNH was using a 30% rate.
* Mr. Mark Buss: Is there any guidance from the state making things more difficult for the year? Dr. Joe Keiper: VMNH is following standard operating procedures and were encouraged not to lowball estimates. Mr. Jonathan Martin: General Assembly is still in session, which makes it more difficult to pin it down estimates, including for staff raises and a new accounting software.
* Ms. Lisa Carter: Are there changes to the budget, and do we need to revote after the General Assembly session ends? Mr. Jonathan Martin: No and will keep Board updated after the session ends.
* Dr. Carole Nash moved to approve the proposed budget, and Mr. Mark Buss seconded the motion. A voice call vote was held, and the budget was approved unanimously.

**Executive Director’s Report**

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

* Staff is doing very well and had a successful deinstallation of the *Dinosaur Discoveries* exhibit and installation of *Masters of the Night* exhibit. Encouraged board to check out today’s festival.
* Have a few special events coming up, including a social event on March 2nd, Speakeasy on Starling. Event will include a silent auction, and Board can contribute to it. Goal is not to make money but instead provide an event for the community.
	+ Dr. Carole Nash: If cannot attend, can the Board buy tickets to be given away? Dr. Joe Keiper: Yes, and VMNH can give those to educators and other groups.
* Hosted a music event last night with Move to Martinsville, to reach out to the community in new way.
* Have Reptile Festival scheduled in April and will serve as a larger festival. Festival model happened because VMNH learned that majority of guests visit during events. VMNH will work with Bee City and other partnerships for event. VMNH will aim for citywide event next year.
	+ Mr. Ryan Barber: Events calendar is currently planned through 2026, including partnerships, funders, sponsorships, etc.
* Not willing to change dates for festivals.

**Development/Marketing Committee Report**

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

* Thanked Mr. Bill Kirby from the Foundation for attending the meeting.
* Thanked curators for work on federal grants.
* Internship program is being run by Smithsonian, and they process all applications. VMNH will get final say who VMNH hires. Any student can apply, and research is focused on climate change.
	+ Dr. Carole Nash: Asked about housing for interns. Mr. Ryan Barber: Students are paid, and museum will help them find housing.
	+ Dr. Joe Keiper: Shared with new city manager about housing challenge for staff. She is working to use VMNH’s situation as justification for new housing plan.
* Contributions are up at the Foundation, and memberships are rising. VMNH continues to sell and renewal memberships at festivals. Made minor changes to membership program over the summer to simplify program and add more benefits.
* Endowment changes by the hour, but is currently in the mid-$900,000s. The million-dollar mark is a long-term goal, and next target will be to raise $5 million. Money can also be easily transferred to the museum.
	+ Dr. Joe Keiper: Mr. Gary Collins from Stifel explains that the Foundation maintains a conservative investment plan, so VMNH will be sheltered from whims of the stock market.
* *Museums for All* has done well, with 20% of visitors attending through that program. Great program at festivals. VMNH’s goal is to continue program, and has Hooker Furnishing, Carter Bank and Trust, and the Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia as partners.
* Science Festival Initiative snapshot: Board identified festivals as a major growth opportunity in 2017 and shows trends and progress of the museum. Festivals are a strong collaboration between Foundation and the staff.

**Research and Collections Committee Report**

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

* Draws Board’s attention to the board report, especially concerns about space for new collections. Space requirements for collections should be one of the top priorities, including through Douglas Ave. renovations, expanding this building, and acquiring other buildings nearby.
* Four of five curators attended R&C committee today. Thanked the curators for their time.
* New publication on isopods in Virginia has been released, and event will be held in April to launch it.
* Ms. Lisa Carter: Learned at committee meeting that the first horses appeared in North America, and they were very small.
	+ Dr. Joe Keiper: Found the palate of a horse about the size of a dog at Carmel Church quarry.

**Education and Public Programs Committee Report**

Mr. Nathan Sanford, Education and Public Programs Committee Chair, presented the report:

* Committee covered what the education department is working on. Participation numbers are up from pandemic, with 32% increase of folks served from same period last year.
* Getting a high demand for home school programs, and all programs are booked for the full year.
* Have a broad age diversity served in programs, including that Charlottesville educator is offering programs at senior living communities. Museum is also creating resources for teacher professional development.
* Night at the Museum sleepovers continue to be popular with scouts and other groups.

**Facilities Committee Report**

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

* Hearing the message from Research and Collection Committee for a need to have a strategy to expand storage space. Need to make upgrades in a way that facilitate more space for collections.
* No updates on the YMCA building at this point.
* Starting to reap the rewards of our energy efficiency activities, including a savings on the utility bill, largely due to LED upgrades and HVAC changes. EV charging stations have been in use.
	+ Mr. Jonathan Martin: City has several different rates for electricity. As the museum is in the bracket for the large consumer rate, VMNH has been granted that rate, saving money.
	+ Dr. Joe Keiper: Mr. Jonathan Martin was also the one who identified the ESCO project, which is leading to savings.
* Pavilion project is on a slight delay, but construction will occur soon.
	+ Ms. Lisa Carter: Asked about timeline for the project. Mr. Jonathan Martin: 90 days after groundbreaking.
	+ Ms. Lisa Carter: Requested that VMNH host a celebration once the project finishes.

**Waynesboro Advocacy Committee Report**

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

* Committee has been meeting monthly and are advocating in the General Assembly for VMNH-Waynesboro.
* Shared flyer from advocacy day with Board and encouraged them to reach out to their representatives about the budget amendments.
* Converting the mobile science outreach trailer which was inherited from the VMFA.
* Working on designing exhibits now for VMNH-W.
	+ Ms. Lisa Carter: Suggests having exhibits about horses, as region as strong horse heritage.
	+ Dr. Carole Nash: Suggests reaching out the Community Foundation of the Central Blue Ridge and asked about meeting with director. Mr. Ryan Barber: Museum has been in touch and has an active grant with them.
	+ Mr. Mark Buss: Complimented the trailer’s ribbon cutting. Dr. Joe Keiper: VMNH will be working to continue to repair trailer ahead of Riverfest in April.
* Dr. Joe Keiper: VMNH received permission to move to next stage of preliminary design.
* Mr. Roberto Quinones: Curious if anyone ran across the legislation about the Transportation Museum of Virginia trying to become a state agency.
	+ Dr. Tom Benzing: Saw legislation but didn’t know details.
	+ Mr. Nathan Sanford: Has been bill for next several years, and area near museum has been redeveloped as a transit station.
	+ Mr. Jonathan Martin: Reason for initiatives this year is because of new jobs and tax revenue from Wells Fargo coming to Roanoke.
	+ Mr. Roberto Quinones: Concerned about their financial impact statement, and risk of adding more museums to state funding.
	+ Dr. Tom Benzing: VMNH estimates $4.2 million annual impact once construction is complete for VMNH-Waynesboro campus.
	+ Dr. Joe Keiper: VMNH has a business plan for VMNH-W and strong cost and revenues estimates.
* Northrop Grumman also coming to Waynesboro and bringing 300 jobs, and potentially have opportunity to earn matching funds.
	+ Dr. Joe Keiper: Had German firm, SCHOCK, coming to Martinsville. They bought a building, but never opened the factory.
	+ Dr. Tom Benzing: Northrop Grumman had protestors at groundbreaking, and maybe museum can help them polish their image.

**Strategic Planning Committee Report**

Mr. Mark Buss, Strategic Planning Committee chair, shared the report:

* A lot of items were covered under other discussions. Our current plan ends in May 2025, and it’s imperative to lock in new plan before November of this year.
* Had initial discussion about outline of how to approach, and next step is to have an extended meeting at the August board meeting to spend more time discussing the aspects of the plan, with input from Foundation and staff.
* Will likely bring in a facilitator to keep conversation on track. We know August meeting often conflicts with holidays and would like to plan for a full day session, not just the morning. Meeting will be on Saturday, August 10.
* Mr. Nathan Sanford: Requested to send out a copy of the last strategic plan to the full board.
* Ms. Lisa Carter: Need to include a policy review to the plan.
* Reminded that staffing is critical and need a clear plan.
	+ Ms. Lisa Carter: Suggests making business portion of the meeting shorter to allow for more time for strategic planning.
	+ Dr. Joe Keiper: New considerations will include Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion and VMNH-Waynesboro.
* Ms. Lisa Carter: Asks the board to consider larger geopolitical influence and how it impacts the museum.
	+ Dr. Carole Nash: In another organization, had a lot of planning for how the strategic plan is used on a regular basis. Wants to make sure it’s a living document. Mr. Mark Buss: The Director’s Report is based on the plan, and museum staff uses it.
	+ Dr. Tom Benzing: May want to consider doing a consent agenda to keep the meeting a little more efficient.
		- Ms. Abby Gump: Confirmed that BOT has the authority to do a consent agenda.
	+ Ms. Melany Clark: Wants to make sure full board understands the plan.

**AAM Reaccreditation Committee Report**

Mr. Roberto Quinones, AAM Reaccreditation committee chair, shared the report:

* Planning is going fine and had side discussion during the Strategic Planning Committee meeting.
* Need to look to redevelop polices and make sure things are looked at on a more frequent basis.
* Need to speak with Executive Committee and staff when creating report.
* Calendar has been nailed down and is included in packet. Anyone else on Board is also welcome to share feedback on reaccreditation.
* Dr. Joe Keiper: Thanked staff for their work on the policy review, to make sure everything is up to date.
* Don’t know to what extent VMNH needs board around for AAM site visit.
	+ Dr. Joe Keiper: Best anticipated site visit timeline would be sometime around March 2025.
	+ Mr. Nathan Sanford: Asked about process. Dr. Joe Keiper: Reviewers show up with checklists, documents to review, and people to talk to. Review will take two full days. Will have a dinner with board members, as well as one-on-one time during the first or second day.
	+ Dr. Carole Nash: Does Dr. Joe Keiper serve as external reviewer? Dr. Joe Keiper: Yes, he does, but have no ability to request VMNH’s reviewers.

**Announcements**

Dr. Joe Keiper:

* Leading a Master Naturalist trip to view two owls at Guilford Farms east of Greensboro.

Dr. Tom Benzing:

* Science speaker series continues in Waynesboro, and 2/13 will be hosting a speaker on stormwater cleanup. Talks are also livestreamed and archived online. Riverfest is April 27th, and exhibit trailer will be opened.
* Dr. Joe Keiper: The Center for Coldwaters Restoration and Board has ensured the series has momentum, which has been essential.
* Always looking for new ideas, so if anyone has a topic, please share. Looking for an April speaker on wildfires.
	+ Dr. Art Evans: Requested more information and may have someone.
	+ Ms. Lisa Carter: Suggested Dominion Energy biologists.
	+ Dr. Carole Nash: Volunteered as a speaker.

Ms. Mary Zell Galen:

* Provided logistical updates, including reminders about name tags/ plates, ID badges, travel reimbursements, and lunch.

Ms. Lisa Carter:

* Thanked everyone for their various assistance running meeting. Encourages future Board officers to make any changes to the meeting.

**Adjournment**

With no further business to come before the Board, Ms. Lisa Carter adjourned the meeting at 12:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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Nathan Sanford Lisa Carter

Secretary Chair