

Board of Trustees Quarterly Meeting
Saturday, November 16, 2024
Walker Lecture Room with Zoom option

The Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History was held at the Virginia Museum of Natural History at 10 AM on Saturday, November 16, 2024.

Trustees Present: Mr. Mark Buss Dr. Tom Benzing
Ms. Emma Ito Dr. Arthur Evans
Mr. Nathan Sanford Ms. Melany Stowe Clark

Trustees Virtual: Ms. Jennifer Burnett (unable to attend – personal reasons)
Ms. Anne Burnett (unable to attend – distance)

Trustees Absent: Mr. Cord Cothren Ms. Lauren Woodson Hall
Mr. Lisa L. Carter Ms. Sherri Jordan
Dr. Carole Nash Mr. Roberto Quinones

Staff Present: Dr. Joe Keiper Mr. Ryan Barber
Mr. Jonathan Martin Mr. Ben Williams
Ms. Christy Deatherage Ms. Jennifer Whitlow

Others Present: Ms. Elizabeth Carter Bailey, VMNH Foundation Board of Directors
Liaison to the Board of Trustees
Ms. Abby Gump Office of the Attorney General
Ms. Lauren Coleman Office of the Attorney General (Virtual)

There was no quorum present, therefore no votes to be taken.

WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order and welcome by Mr. Buss at 10 AM. Welcome to new members Elizabeth Carter Bailey and welcome to special guest Lauren Coleman from the Office of the Attorney General's Office who was viewing the meeting.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- Mr. Buss reviewed the order of the meeting and discussed the Douglas Avenue project renovations to meet the immediate storage needs for Research and Collections. The Board will recess later to travel down the street to see the progress being made.
- Mr. Buss asked the committee to review the strategic planning synopsis document prepared by staff for clarity and corrections.
- Mr. Buss welcomed and asked Jennifer Whitlow to introduce herself as the new Administrative Coordinator.
- Mr. Buss explained that open board seats and expired term seats must go through the Secretary of the Commonwealth. Dr. Keiper and Ms. Gump are assisting in the effort to fully seat the board. Dr. Keiper is willing to take recommendations for board members. Dr. Benzing congratulated Dr. Nash on her reappointment to the board and the James Madison University feature article. As a matter of best practice, board members who would like to be reappointed for a second term should write to your delegate and request reappointment.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Mr. Sanford pointed out strong revenue streams and urged the board to pay attention to the footnotes on the finance report.

- Dr. Keiper noted that \$5000 from the Henika endowment will be used to support the research at JMU of "cave shield" sample. Following the research the specimen will be donated to the museum collection.

Mr. Sanford noted the "Young Explorers Center" funding is ongoing. Staff is seeking numerous avenues of funding, one being federal funding.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS REPORT

- Dr. Keiper reported that the AAM reaccreditation package was submitted in early November. Foundation members provided some edits. Reminder that there will be a site visit and review in the spring. After the visit there may be some action items recommended by the peer review. Dr. Keiper asked the board to consider delaying the adoption of the strategic plan until after receiving the peer feedback.
- The Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion continues to take shape. All components of the project are progressing as planned with the hope that the exhibits will be completed by the next board meeting.

ADVANCEMENT REPORT

Mr. Barber reported that visits are up this quarter and the number of donations is up 17% from last year. Grants and donation partnerships are robust.

- Bonez & Booz event was well attended and successful
- **Masters of the Night** exhibit will be closing and new exhibit will open on February 6.
- Speakeasy is planned in February. Board encouraged, if possible, to donate items for silent auction gift baskets. Gift baskets range in price \$25.00 and up. The last Speakeasy earned a profit. Lessons were learned from the last speakeasy and necessary changes/improvements will be made to the event.

Dr. Benzing noted the Shenandoah Valley representation of visitors increasing.

Wondering if this is due to the trailer in Waynesboro or perhaps direct social media campaign in the valley. It was noted that the *Museums for All* program is statewide so that anyone with a snap card can participate.

Dr. Keiper recognized the Route 58 road improvements over Lover's Leap in Patrick County will hopefully aid in attracting additional South West Virginia visitors.

RESEARCH AND COLLECTIONS

Dr. Evans encouraged everyone to read report.

- Recognition to Dr. Ivanov and his research on one of the smallest creatures in Virginia.
- Jackson Means in his study of centipedes and millipedes. VMNH has one of the world's most important collections of millipedes.
- Dr. Keiper added that due to their expertise, Dr. Means and Dr. Ivanov are assisting scientists in Alabama with new species identification found in caves.
- Dr. Bassett is expanding his work to include underwater archaeology of Smith Mountain Lake. Continues to work internationally with the Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab.
- Dr. Pritchard is finishing a manuscript about a 55-million-year-old snake found in VA related to the boa.
- Dr. Pritchard is also completing a chapter about an ancient chameleon-like reptile.
- Dr. Kuhn is heading to Madagascar and is working on a new species of lungless salamander.
- Also receiving an orphan herp collection from Sweet Briar College.
- Mammologist position is needed to replace retirement.
- Space needs of collections still of primary concern.

EDUCATION AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Nathan Sanford reported for the Education and Public Programs Committee

- A teacher appreciation event, hosting 100 teachers was held.
- Discussion of summer camps success and timing strategy is under consideration for summer 2025.
- Have hired and are looking forward to our new educator to join staff full time in December.

FACILITIES

Dr. Benzing updated the board on several projects underway.

- Pavilion work continues
- Project to reseal the parking lot is planned with funding from maintenance reserve.
- Reuse of the library space into the Young Explorers Center project funding is ongoing. Staff will continue to seek federal and state funding for the project.
- Staff is securing a contractor to rehab the mobile science trailer using \$100,000 of maintenance reserve. The goal is to have the trailer remodeled and ready to welcome visitors for RiverFest in Waynesboro in the spring.

Dr. Keiper added Dr. Evans and Ms. Ito have contacts with people familiar with managing mobile museums and will connect with them for best practices.

Mr. Sanford asked how long the trailer has been in Waynesboro. It has been there for over a year. It is open for festivals and Saturdays for the Farmer's Market and utilizes volunteer labor whenever possible.

RECESS

At 10:50 Mr. Buss called a recess for the Board to take a tour of the Douglas Avenue site.

RECONVENE

Mr. Buss reconvened the meeting at 11:45.

Dr. Clark thanked all staff for the significant improvement in the Douglas Avenue project.

WAYNESBORO ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

Dr. Benzing urged the entire board to connect with their local representative especially those who are newly elected.

- Dr. Means will be hosting a talk at the Wayne Theatre on Tuesday, November 19, 2024
- Dr. Keiper is collaborating with Waynesboro Parks & Recreation about new walkway exhibit signs.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Mr. Buss suggested the Board, Foundation, and staff take some time to review the synopsis document. He encouraged everyone to think bigger about funding and future projects. Also to think of ways to grow the endowment.

Dr. Evans mentioned the Douglas Ave. as being a temporary collection home. A short-term solution of five years. Long term, the board should consider other options including expanding the footprint of the existing building or purchase adjoining property.

Mr. Buss agreed we need to consider storage and the amount of room required to maintain collections, perhaps utilizing a feasibility study of space needs.

Mr. Buss suggested that staff develop an electronic means of collecting board comments about the strategic plan then develop an expanded document based on those comments.

Mr. Buss asked for further comments about the Museum Board Report published by the American Alliance of Museums. Assured the board that more conversations would occur in committee regarding this report.

Dr. Clark asked that the board tie all aspects of the strategic plan back to the mission of the museum and the code of Virginia.

OTHER MATTERS

In his closing statements to the board, Mr. Buss

- Thanked all committee chairs for their work.
- Highly encouraged all board members to attend events and festivals at the museum.
- Would like to change the format of board meetings to encourage strategic and dynamic meetings and to increase participation.
- Mr. Buss thanked new board liaison Ms. Carter Bailey for her participation and work.

Mr. Buss asked for any other matters or comments from the board. There were none.

Motion made by Dr. Evans and seconded by Dr. Clark to adjourn. None opposed. Meeting adjourned at 12:00 PM

Next Board Meeting

February 1, 2025

Virginia Museum of Natural History