

**Board of Trustees Quarterly Meeting
Saturday, May 17, 2025
Virginia Museum of Natural History
Conference Room 273 A with remote participation option**



The quarterly meeting of 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, May 17, 2025.

Trustees Present: Ms. Cathy Hincker Mr. Nathan Sanford
Dr. Carole Nash Dr. Melany Clark (Chair)
Ms. Anne Burnett Dr. Art Evans
Mr. Cord Cothren Ms. Lauren Hall

Trustees Remote: Dr. Tom Benzing (unable to attend – distance)
Dr. David Furth (unable to attend – distance)
Ms. Lisa Carter (unable to attend – providing medical care to relative)

Trustees Absent: Ms. Jennifer Burnett Ms. Emma Ito
Mr. Will Clements

Staff Present: Ms. Christy Deatherage Mr. Jonathan Martin
Mr. Ryan Barber Dr. Joe Keiper
Mr. Zach Ryder (Remote) Ms. Jennifer Whitlow (Minutes)
Dr. Collin Van Buren Mr. Ben Williams (Remote)

Others Present: Ms. Elizabeth Carter Bailey, VMNH Foundation Board of Directors, Liaison to the Board of Trustees (Remote)
Ms. Lauren Coleman, Office of the Attorney General
Dr. Noel Boaz, Former VMNH Executive Director

WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 10:03 AM by Dr. Melany Clark. Dr. Clark welcomed all participants online and in-person. A quorum was found to be physically present.

Dr. Clark called for a Moment of Silence for the late chairman, Mr. Mark Buss. Following the Moment of Silence, several board members shared fond memories and appreciation for the work of Mr. Buss. His dedication will be missed by Board members and staff alike.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Continuing the meeting, Dr. Evans made a motion and Ms. Burnett seconded, to approve the minutes from the February 1, 2025, Board of Trustees meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

CHAIR'S REPORT

VMNH Visiting Scholar, Dr. Collin Van Buren introduced himself and gave a brief synopsis of his research background. Dr. Van Buren stated biodiversity is his specialty and while he is here, he will be working with the biodiversity surrounding beaver habitats among other systems.

Dr. Noel Boaz gave a deep-dive presentation into the establishment of VMNH and how VMNH acquired the original museum collections. Dr. Boaz pointed out an act of the General Assembly of Virginia in 1877 as establishing collection efforts. Collections have moved back and forth between The University of Virginia and the Martinsville site for many years as logistics for housing collections changed. Dr. Boaz is authoring a book to be published to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the museum.

Dr. Boaz noted currently, some collections are housed at the Department of Forestry in a warehouse.

Dr. Boaz recommended several actions the Board might consider.

- Draft a new Memorandum of Agreement with the Virginia Department of Energy, Division of Geology and Mineral Resources, to replace the prior MOA with the University of Virginia, Department of Environmental Sciences, whose orphaned collections were de-accessioned in 2008 after its VMNH Branch Museum was closed in 2004. Should the VDGMR decide to de-accession any of these collections, particularly those of international provenience, from any now held in storage, those collections should be remanded to the care of the VMNH for curation, according to state mandate.
- Draft a Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Virginia, Department of Environmental Sciences (the institutional successor to the Department of Geology and the former departmental site of the VMNH Branch Museum at U. Va.) to permanently transfer all the de-accessioned former Brooks Museum collections to the care of VMNH, including those that have now been provisionally catalogued and curated in VMNH collections and those orphaned specimens remaining in Clark Hall at U. Va., according to state mandate.
- Draft a Memorandum of Agreement with the Thomas Jefferson Foundation to replace the agreement between the U. Va. Library (Special Collections) appertaining to all now orphaned Virginia natural heritage collections transferred by the will of Thomas Jefferson to U. Va. in 1824 and currently on loan and on display at Monticello, according to state mandate. This MOA would not cover Jefferson's personal library that is on loan from U.Va. and on display at Monticello.

Following Dr. Boaz's talk, several Board members thanked him for his work and indicated board support for the actions mentioned.

Due to the many upcoming vacant Board seats, Dr. Clark asked all Board members to recruit colleagues who would be active in the mission and represent a diversity of disciplines and geography. Dr. Clark also asked Board members to consider their membership renewals and donations as Board support is crucial when applying for grants.

Ms. Lauren Coleman reviewed changes to the Electronic Meeting policy. Of note, BOT members attending a meeting remotely due to caring for someone with a disability or having a disability themselves, can be counted toward a quorum. The electronic meeting policy must be approved by the BOT each year, so Anne Burnette made a motion and Art Evans seconded to approve the policy

as presented. Out of an abundance of caution, a roll call vote was taken with all voting Yes to approve the electronic meeting policy.

Mr. Martin reported that the letter writing campaign is proceeding as planned with positive feedback from our state budget analyst.

NOMINATION COMMITTEE

The Board voted on all 2025-2026 Executive Committee members.

- Dr. Clark volunteered to finish Mr. Buss's term as chair and continue as chair of the Executive Committee. Mr. Cothren moved to accept Dr. Clark as chair with Dr. Evans seconding. Motion approved unanimously.
- Lisa Carter was nominated by Dr. Clark to serve as Vice Chair. Mr. Sanford moved to accept the nomination and was seconded by Dr. Evans. The motion was unanimously approved.
- Mr. Will Clements was nominated by Dr. Clark to serve as Treasurer. Dr. Evans moved to accept the nomination and was seconded by Dr. Nash. The motion was unanimously approved.
- A motion was made by Mr. Cothren to reappoint Ms. Lauren Hall as Secretary. Seconded by Dr. Nash. The motion was unanimously approved.

The slate of Officers for 2025-2026 will be

Chair – Dr. Melany Clark

Vice-Chair – Ms. Lisa Carter

Treasurer – Mr. Will Clements

Secretary – Ms. Lauren Hall

TREASURER'S REPORT

Mr. Martin reported that 3rd quarter revenues are on track. However, expenses for utilities are over budget, but this is being addressed. Staff are using maintenance reserve funds to replace some aging air handling components. Furthermore, until the end of the fiscal year, Dr. Keiper is personally approving all purchases.

The museum will receive an increase in state funding to improve salaries for the lowest paid employees. Dr. Nash moved to approve the budget as presented by Mr. Martin. Ms. Burnett seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

Staff presented a proposal to increase museum general admission, festival admission, and rental fees on July 1, 2025. Other fees will increase in phases to be fully implemented by 2027. Dr. Clark made a motion to approve the fee increase and Dr. Evans seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Dr. Keiper reported that the AAM site visitors have submitted their report to AAM. Staff expect feedback to be available around the end of June.

Dr. Keiper explained that the attached Emergency Action Plan is an expanded version of the state-required COOP (Continuity of Operations Plan). Dr. Clark moved to approve the Emergency Action Plan with Ms. Hall seconding. Approved with no corrections by unanimous voice vote.

Dr. Keiper presented an updated "Code of Ethics" this is also required by AAM to be approved by the BOT. Mr. Sanford made a motion to accept the Code of Ethics with two clarifications 1) include "International" in item 6 in the "Collections" section. 2) Replace "him" with "their" on line 7 in the Staff Responsibilities section. Dr. Evans seconded the motion. Motion carried by voice vote.

Mr. Barber gave a synopsis of the Advancement Committee report. All areas of giving are up, and the endowment continues steady growth. The Jane S. Adams Educational Pavilion ribbon cutting will be planned following exhibit installation completion. The Pavilion will be used during Dino festival in July. A mammoth exhibit is coming from Maryland to be on display during Dino Fest. This exhibit is over 50% real bones.

Staff is expecting to hear from the Virginia Tourism grant in Mid-June. This grant is to help with the cost of the VA250 celebration events planned for 2026.

Finally, Mr. Barber noted that regular and long-time corporate supporters have asked for different options in the wake of economic uncertainty.

RESEARCH AND COLLECTIONS

Dr. Evans expressed appreciation for the work done by curators and staff and noted that Paleontology and Archeology storage are almost at capacity. Douglas Ave. restoration is of utmost importance. Staff member Marshall Boyd is completing a floor plan that will be used as restoration is completed and collections are moved. Dr. Evan's noted the Strategic Plan should include how the research and collection work impacts legislation, communities, and individual lives.

FACILITIES

Dr. Benzing reported that the Douglas Avenue property is currently being evaluated for lead and asbestos abatement. The mobile museum trailer in Waynesboro is at a standstill while waiting for a scope of work estimate.

WAYNESBORO ADVOCACY

Dr. Benzing reported that money donated to the Waynesboro project has been added to additional general funds to complete the detailed design shortfall. Most recent preliminary cost estimates of \$32 M - \$38 M are projected for completion of the Waynesboro project.

EDUCATION

Mr. Sanford highlighted the education report. He noted there was a dip in the number of contacts, but this can be attributed to the 3rd quarter weather and strategic staffing. The 4th quarter is expected to be back to normal visitations. Dr. Furth asked about distance learning popularity

following COVID. Mr. Sanford reported that while distance learning is still available most students and teachers prefer the face-to-face experience.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Dr. Keiper encouraged Board members to review the latest iteration of the Strategic Plan document. Board members should consider how they can better collaborate, consider what the museum needs and what they can offer to meet those needs. More work to quantify points will be needed as the committee continues to work toward a functional document.

RESOLUTIONS

Dr. Clark read and made motions to approve resolutions of appreciation for Ms. Anne Burnett, Mr. Cord Cothren, and Mr. Mark Buss. Motions were seconded by Mr. Sanford and Dr. Evans. Motions passed unanimously.

Dr. Keiper reminded everyone that Mr. Buss' Celebration of Life will be July 11th.

Dr. Clark mentioned the Upcoming Events sheet at the end of the Board packet with a special invitation to help and/or visit during festival days.

Dr. Clark made a motion to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Dr. Nash. The meeting adjourned at 11:56 AM.