**MINUTES**

**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY**

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING**

**Saturday, February 22nd, 2022**

The one hundred thirty second meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History was held at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, February 22, 2021, at the Virginia Museum of Natural History

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| Trustees Present: | Mr. Nathan Sanford, Secretary | Ms. Anne Burnett  |
|  | Dr. Tom Benzing  | Dr. Art Evans |
|  | Mr. Mark Buss |  |
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| Trustees Absent: | Ms. Sherri Jordan | Ms. Emma Ito |
|  | Mr. Michael Phillips Dr. Carole NashMr. Roberto Quinones Ms. Jennifer Burnett  | Ms. Lisa CarterDr. Makunda Abdul-MbackeMr. Cord CothrenMs. Melany Stowe |
| Staff Present: | Dr. Joe Keiper | Mr. Ben Williams |
|  | Dr. Hayden Bassett | Mr. Jonathan Martin |
|  | Ms. Mary Zell Galen | Mr. Zach Ryder |
|  |  |  |
| Others Present: | Ms. Audrey Burges – Attorney General’s Office, via Zoom  |
|  | Mr. Gene Smith– VMNH Foundation Board of Directors |

**Welcome and Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Nathan Sanford, Secretary. A roll call vote of trustees was held, and it was determined that there were five members present which did not establish a quorum.

**Approval of Minutes**

The approval of the minutes was tabled until the May Board of Trustees meeting, as there was not a quorum to previous vote on it.

**Chair’s Report**

In place of Ms. Jennifer Burnett, Chair, Dr. Joe will Keiper presented the report:

* He will schedule Zoom calls next week individually and in two on one groups with absent members to catch them up on recent events at VMNH.
* Board activities for advocacy last week in Richmond were very productive. No movement before crossover has changed VMNH’s projects. Most legislators and legislative aides indicated that we should expect full support and have nothing to worry about. Throughout the advocacy day, board members primarily lobbied for funds to support construction and staff for the Early Childhood Learning Center, an additional technician for the Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab, and a green energy technician to service VMNH’s new alternative energy projects.
* Dr. Keiper shared that the Secretary of Education reached out for agencies to provide projects related with infrastructure. Curators provided a vast amount of project language, and other staff provided material about the Waynesboro Branch Campus, the Canopy walk, and other projects. This language was submitted to the Secretary of Education yesterday. There are a total of $100 billion in discretionary grants to distribute, and more information will come on that.
* VMNH is in the process of scheduling the Board of Trustees Retreat at JMU with the help of Dr. Carole Nash, with more details to follow.
* The Board of Trustees has several new board members, which will impact future committee assignments.

**Treasurer’s Report**

In place of Mr. Roberto Quinones, Treasurer, Mr. Jonathan Martin presented the report, along with the profit and loss statements:

* There are new changes to current VMNH budget. Festivals at the museum have picked up, which add additional revenue. Costs are in line with past years; however, but costs on facilities projects are currently higher than average.
* He thanked all who attended the Richmond Advocacy Day. Raises for VMNH staff are still being considered in the state’s budget, as well as the additional projects.

Dr. Keiper provided further updates:

* He reported that the current budget seemed fine, with some areas ahead and behind on spending. Spending on equipment is currently behind schedule, just because VMNH has not needed it.

Dr. Tom Benzing asked a question about the increased utilities costs. Mr. Martin explained that the higher costs were because of tests on the HVAC system before updates were installed and that the costs will even out by the end of the year.

The approval of the financial report was tabled until the May Board of Trustees meeting, as there was not a quorum to previous vote on it.

**Executive Director’s Report**

Dr. Keiper, Executive Director, reported:

* He updated that attendance has picked up as at VMNH as the museum has returned to hosting festivals and other events, but still not at pre-pandemic levels. Thanks to gift from Hooker Furniture, VMNH is continuing to offer free admission to EBT card holders and has seen an increase of use.
* Major capital projects will be discussed in later committee reports, including facilities projects, the Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion, and the Waynesboro campus (in the Waynesboro Advocacy Committee report).
* Additionally, Dr. Keiper intends to expand on preparations for the Canopy Walk.
	+ He wanted to thank Mr. Mark Buss, Ms. Lisa Carter, and Ms. Jennifer Thomas (VMNH Foundation) for their research.
	+ The City of Martinsville reached out to VMNH, after receiving American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, and hopes to invest into the Canopy Walk project. The amount has not been finalized, but this is potentially a multi-million dollar gift. To complete a canopy walk at the size VMNH wants (approximately 1000 feet) will cost around $12 million.
		- The Harvest Foundation and the Tobacco Commission can also provide support. The Appalachian Regional Commission officers have also interested to support.
	+ Dr. Keiper proposes visiting current canopy walk projects.
		- Mr. Buss has made strong progress working with the Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS), but less progress in Atlanta and other sites.
		- Ms. Mary Zell Galen also shared updates on connections with the Canopy Walk for Wild Center.
	+ Dr. Keiper sees VMNH’s unique opportunity to cater to scientific research and interpretation, and VMNH can potentially bring other scientists to assist with the project.
	+ The City of Martinsville needs a commitment by 2024, and to spend the funds by 2026.
	+ Dr. Keiper suggested, based on talks with Mr. Martin, that VMNH would be responsible for building the bridge and the VMNH-Foundation could be responsible for the Canopy Walk through the park. The plan will provide VMNH with more flexibility, and allow more options in terms of construction.

Following the report, other updates were shared:

Dr. Benzing mentioned he visited Kew Gardens while traveling to London, and suggested including interpreted signage along the rails of the Canopy Walk. He also suggested the interpretation a dead trees, because it still provides a valuable educational experience.

Dr. Art Evans asked if any consideration to emerald ash wood, because of tree’s decreasing population. He asked if city has completed a tree survey, especially If population of ash trees is high. Dr. Keiper stated that Roanoke College completed a survey, but will share with Dr. Evans if there are any red flags in the report.

**Facilities (Operations) Committee Report**

In place of Ms. Jennifer Burnett, Facilities (Operations) Committee Chair, Mr. Jonathan Martin presented the report:

The Douglas Avenue roof project continues, and they are bringing in heat system for workers.

The Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion is ready to go out to bid for a second time.

The ESCO project is well-underway, with motors and fans being changed out of filters, and lighting team is in place to complete the retrofits. It does not need through the Department of General Services (DGS) to be approved. The installation of the electric vehicle chargers is delayed because of issues trying to find the conduit.

The Waynesboro project is right in line, and project managers working closely with the team. There have been lots of questions about budgets from different firms, which VMNH cannot disclose. At least eight hard inquiries from different architecture and engineering firms have been made.

The Early Childhood Learning Center will be making progress shortly. Additional allocated funds have moved the project forward five years. Assuming the project continues to survive in the General Assembly, VMNH will be able to continue quick progress on the project.

**Research and Collections Committee Report**

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

The committee had no quorum, so it delayed the nomination of two research associates and renewal of six current research associates.

Herpetology:

Once again, the full research and collections report is in the board packet. The museum has hired a new herpetologist, Dr. Ariana Kuhn, who is currently completing a post-doc in Alberta. She will begin at VMNH in the fall. She sees VMNH as an opportunity to switch research to Appalachia, especially with the high population of salamanders in the region.

Paleontology:

Preparations of Petra the Ancient Cave Cat is still in progress and being carefully completed, but work has slowed because of mineral deposits. Other microfossils were discovered to be associated with remains, including a bat skull in the nasal cavity of the cat.

Recent Invertebrates:

Great media interest in current research, including the discovery of the first true millipede with over 1,000 legs. Dr. Jackson Means was part of the research team, along with other associates at Virginia Tech.

Archaeology:

Dr. Hayden Bassett reported that he will begin a new research project next month. The Smith River Survey, an archaeological survey of Smith River Valley, will excavate the seven to eight American Indian village sites in region. Survey hopes to identify the integrity of sites, to ensure if they still survive.

Additionally, the Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab has an increasing demand of research and services. The lab that monitors sites domestically and worldwide. Currently, they primarily work with the Department of State to support the renewal of a bilateral agreement with Mali, as well as identified sites in Ukraine that may be impacted by armed conflict. There was a budget item is for additional staff, as there is high demand for their work. Dr. Bassett was recently interviewed by the *New York Times* about his research.

**Development/Marketing Committee Report**

In place of Roberto Quinones, Development/Marketing Committee Chair, and Mr. Ryan Barber, Dr. Joe Keiper presented the report.

Dr. Keiper presented the advancement report. Page one highlights VMNH has increasing visitors and revenue. Visitors to the museum are spending more money per visit than in 2019, but revenue levels are still recovering from COVID closures.

Trends showing strong earned revenue continue both for the museum and the VMNH Foundation. The endowment continues to grow. Dr. Keiper thanked Mr. Gene Smith for all the work the VMNH Foundation does to support the museum. The Hoffman Endowment continue to make impressive growth, allowing Dr. Kal Ivanov to draw money from revenue for investments in his research program.

Mr. Pete Hennika recently invested funds for graduate student research in natural history. The funds supported one project pre-covid, and VMNH will continue to award two $3000 grants in the spring.

Since VMNH reopening during COVID, the museum has had a higher percentage of out-of-state visitors, especially for festival attendance.

**Education and Public Programs Committee Report**

In place of Mr. Cord Cothren, Education Committee Chair, and Ms. Christy Deatherage, Dr. Joe Keiper also presented the report.

Dr. Keiper shared three points from Ms. Deatherage:

* Program participation numbers continue to grow post-covid and the team has also continued distance learning programs.
* Four hydroponic growing units for the Science and Engineering Homeschool Academy were installed at VMNH. The students are growing lettuce and herbs, allowing students to run experiments on their growth. The company that will work with for Waynesboro on the project’s windows and other green technology.
* The Monogram Loves Kids Foundation, which has provided money to support 10,000 for scholarships to education programs, will receive a Thomas Jefferson Award from VMNH this spring.
* Seimens provided grant for SOL-based educational programs to highlight solar energy work done on the building.

Dr. Benzing asked about Waynesboro activities, especially participating in Riverfest. There are no plans for festival in Waynesboro, but VMNH will participate in Riverfest.

**Waynesboro Advocacy Committee Report**

In place of Dr. Carole Nash, Waynesboro Advocacy Committee Chair, Dr. Joe Keiper presented the committee’s report.

He shared the upcoming schedule for the Waynesboro Advocacy Committee (WAC), as they have been charged helping staff select architecture and engineering firm for the project. The bid envelopes will be opened on March 3rd in Waynesboro. An official review session of the bids will occur in early March, and the staff will leave copies in the Waynesboro Economic Development office. A team of five will score the proposals, including Dr. Joe Keiper (representing VMNH), Mr. Jonathan Martin (serving at the VCOO and CFO on the project), Dr. Tom Benzing (representing the Board of Trustees), Ms. Nancy Cromwell and Mr. Rick Miller (JMU team, serving as construction managers for the project), and Mr. Greg Hitchin (representing the community). However, anyone is welcome to participate in the discussion. Interviews will be very quick, and after waiting period, VMNH can enter negotiations with the firm. In early April, VMNH will require any team hired to meet with supporters in the Waynesboro/ Augusta County region.

Dr. Evans shared questions about staffing for building. He feels this museum is understaffed, and would like to see every effort made to ensure staff for Waynesboro institution. He wants to make sure staff in Martinsville won’t have to manage it at a distance.

Mr. Martin shared Waynesboro Branch Campus business plan. The plan outlines building costs for pre-planning, detail planning/ schematic/ preliminary work, and working drawing/ construction. It outlines the operation cost of the building. It expanded cost and revenue model of institution, based on projected visitor numbers for the facility. It will have funding by state operation for emergencies, but otherwise will be self-sufficient. VMNH hopes to develop a branch-specific endowment after the construction is completed. Several areas of the project will save the Commonwealth funds, including that staff like fiscal officer, human resources, etc. will complete their work in Martinsville.

Following the presentation, questions were asked about the breakeven costs for the project. A feasibility study occurred before the expansion of Constitution Park and the Frontier Cultural Heritage Museum expansion. Numbers are compared in the presentation, based on staffing needs of Danville Science Center. Mr. Martin will share presentation with board.

**University Partnerships Committee**

In place of Ms. Jennifer Burnett, Board Chair, Dr. Joe Keiper provided a brief report.

He shared at VMNH is working with the University of Utah and Howard University to while applying for a National Science Foundation grant to create an exhibit for Martinsville based on work that scientists are completing. Exhibit will also travel to other locations.

**Strategic Planning Committee Report**

In place of Ms. Lisa Carter, Strategic Planning Committee Chair, Dr. Joe Keiper presented the report.

Much of the material was previously covered in other reports, but the VMNH currently plans to hold a board retreat in May. It will serve as a review at the two year mark in the current Strategic Plan, to modify the plan for the remaining two years. The meeting will occur at the Hooke House and the Board will gather JMU for an optional social activity. Activities include a late afternoon board meeting and dinner. Dr. Evans has agreed to lead an insect light demonstration for the group to observe.

The following day, workshops will begin at the Hooke House. The pavilion at the Hooke House will serve as the space for the for main group, and smaller groups will have breakout sessions inside inside house. Ms. Galen will share details in the upcoming weeks.

**Executive Session**

No executive session occurred.

**Announcements**

Dr. Joe Keiper reminded the board that the nominating committee traditionally occurs at the February meeting, but will be voted on at the retreat because the meeting did not have a quorum.

**Adjournment**

With no further business to come before the Board, Mr. Nathan Sanford adjourned the meeting at 11:39 am.

Respectfully submitted,

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Nathan Sanford Jennifer Burnett

Secretary Chair