**MINUTES**

**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY**

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING**

**May 15, 2021**

The one hundred twenty-ninth meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History was held at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, May 15, 2021, and hosted by the museum via a *Zoom Conference* during the Governor’s Emergency Declaration related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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| Trustees Present: | Dr. Tom Benzing, Chair | Dr. Art Evans, Vice Chair |
|  | Jennifer Burnett, Treasurer | Nathan Sanford, Secretary |
|  | Anne Burnett | Mark Buss |
|  | Cord Cothren | Lisa Moerner |
|  | Dr. Carole Nash | Roberto Quinones |
|  |  |  |
| Trustees Absent: | Makunda Abdul-Mbacke | Faye Cooper |
|  | Michael Phillips | Siri Russell |
|  | Melany Stowe |  |
| Staff Present: | Dr. Joe Keiper | Ryan Barber |
|  | Dr. Hayden Bassett | Christy Deatherage |
|  | Dr. Kal Ivanov | Jonathan Martin |
|  | Dr. Jackson Means | Dr. Adam Pritchard |
|  | Zach Ryder | Ben Williams |
|  | Rhonda Casey (minutes) |  |
| Others Present: | Audrey Burges – Attorney General’s Office | |
|  | Len Poulin – VMNH Foundation Board of Directors | |

**Welcome and Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Tom Benzing, Chairman. A roll call vote of trustees was held and it was determined that there were ten members present which made a quorum.

Dr. Benzing welcomed the two newly appointed trustees, Mr. Mark Buss and Ms. Anne Burnett, and congratulated the three trustees who were reappointed. He also welcomed Ms. Audrey Burges, legal counsel, and Mr. Len Poulin, representative from the VMNH Foundation.

**Approval of Minutes**

Dr. Evans moved that the minutes of the February 2021 Board meeting be approved and Ms. Moerner seconded the motion. With no discussion, a roll call vote was held and the motion unanimously passed.

**Chairman’s Report**

Dr. Tom Benzing presented the report. Dr. Benzing highlighted his activities as Chair since the last Board meeting and also reviewed his tenure as Chair from 2019-2021.

Dr. Benzing announced that Ms. Diane Clark, Visitor Services Manager, is retiring as of May 31, 2021. He read a resolution honoring her 15 years of service to the museum. Mr. Sanford moved that the motion be accepted; Mr. Quinones seconded. With no discussion, a roll call vote was held and the motion unanimously passed.

**Treasurer’s Report**

Ms. Jennifer Burnett, Treasurer, presented the report.

* Profit and Loss statement (information)

Ms. Burnett said that the museum is doing very well. Obviously admission has been down since the museum has been closed due to the pandemic; revenues are looking good; expenses are mostly in line. She noted that agency service charges will continue to increase to due to work on capital projects.

**Executive Director’s Report**

Dr. Joe Keiper, Executive Director, said that VMNH is in a good position in spite of the pandemic. The museum has received its full appropriation plus funding for detailed design plans for Waynesboro.

The strategic plan “A Museum Without Walls 2020-2025” is underway and includes:

* Establishing three VMNH Research Centers
* Rehab of the Douglas Avenue facility to support collections growth
* Obtain reaccreditation from the American Alliance of Museums (AAM)

Dr. Keiper said to enhance draw and impact of VMNH plans to:

* Create an early childhood activity and learning center
* Build the Jean S. Adams Educational Pavilion
* Explore the Treetop Canopy Walk concept
* Establish the first permanent branch campus of VMNH in Waynesboro.

Regarding pandemic response, Dr. Keiper said the staff had been very disciplined about wearing masks, social distancing, and sanitizing. Much of the mask mandate has now been removed by Governor Northam, but the museum staff will continue to wear masks since the museum is considered an entertainment venue; the box office and store personnel are considered retail so they will also continue to wear masks.

Dr. Keiper said that the museum is currently open 2 days a week. The museum will move to a schedule of being open 3 days a week after Memorial Day. By July 1 he expects that the museum will return to being open 6 days a week. The museum will be closed to admissions on Mondays so that maintenance, exhibits work, and repairs can be done while closed to the public.

Dr. Keiper also said that the Starling Avenue facility is being updated using a federal grant offered through the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy.

VMNH is also a finalist for the National Museum Medal through the Institute for Museum and Library Services. A decision is expected in spring 2021.

The VMNH Foundation sponsored the annual Thomas Jefferson Awards ceremony on March 18. The award recipients were Dr. DorothyBelle Poli, Dr. Lisa Stoneman, Cynthia Eanes Gray, Dr. Jim Beard, and the National Society of Black Engineers.

Dr. Benzing asked whether the Board could continue to meet by Zoom. According to Ms. Burges, legal counsel, she said once the emergency declaration is lifted, all boards will revert to in-person meeting with very limited exceptions. She said trustees should direct comments to Dr. Keiper if they want to continue meeting via Zoom so he can discuss with sister institutions and the Secretary of Education.

Advancement Report

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

Mr. Barber said the Foundation is ahead of last year due to grants that were received and partnerships for admission-based programs. Endowment has grown significantly due to investment growth. Memberships are down but plans are for a big membership drive in August through mailings, social media push, targeting previous members and new members. An updated visitor survey will be launched in January.

Mr. Barber said that there were several corporate partnerships in place:

* Hooker Furnishings – $2,500 – scholarships for underserved schools plus underwriting of remaining admissions charge for *Museums For All* participants
* Harvest Foundation - $5,000 – grant to provide multilingual elements for the upcoming Science of Flight exhibit
* Boxley Materials Company - $10,000 – scholarship support for distance and outreach programming in regional schools

Mr. Barber included statistics on monthly visitation and revenues, exhibits, upcoming events, media coverage, and Facebook statistics. He also included Diversity and Inclusion information and staff and visitor demographics.

Mr. Barber called on Mr. Zach Ryder to demonstrate the redesign and features of the new dynamic VMNH website.

**Facilities (Operations) Committee Report**

Ms. Jennifer Burnett, Facilities (Operations) Committee Chair, presented the report. She highlighted a few items on the report. She said that the Douglas Avenue roof project was in its final stages. Inmate labor is being used to clean up the Douglas Avenue property. The elevator project has been completed and has been certified. Upgrades to the Hall of Ancient Life include the audiovisual system, the addition of speakers for the educational pavilion, large screen TVs, and projectors.

**Research and Collections Committee Report**

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

Dr. Evans commended the curatorial staff for adding to and caring for the collections as well as expanding museum reach in terms of programming and professional contacts.

Highlights of the report are:

* Dr. Hayden Bassett and Madeleine Bassett have completed archaeological fieldwork at the first site in the Smith River Survey.
* Dr. Jackson Means will present an overview on the latest developments in his millipede research after this meeting.
* Dr. Nancy Moncrief is continuing her work with several colleagues on three manuscripts including one on armadillos in Virginia.
* Dr. Ivanov recently presented research findings at the Entomological Society of America – Eastern Branch.
* Dr. Adam Pritchard has submitted his monographic description of the gliding *Weigeltisaurus* which he expects to have published in Q2 2021. Dr. Pritchard will be conducting field work near Ashland, Virginia, soon.

**Development/Marketing Committee Report**

Ms. Jennifer Burnett, Development/Marketing Committee Chair, presented the report.

Ms. Burnett said that most of the information had already been covered in other reports. She did note that FY21 and FY22 budgets were identical except that FY22 includes an across the board raise for all staff.

**Education and Public Programs Committee Report**

Mr. Cord Cothren, Education Committee Chair, presented the report.

Mr. Cothren said that 63 cars came through the Waynesboro Drive Thru event for a total of 150 people served. The education department is almost finished with distance learning programs for the spring; to date they have had 17 sessions for homeschoolers.

There are four camps planned for the summer—2 in June, 2 in July. Each camp will be limited to 10 participants each due to the pandemic.

**Waynesboro Advocacy Committee Report**

In the absence of Ms. Faye Cooper, Waynesboro Advocacy Committee Chair, Dr. Carole Nash presented the report.

Dr. Nash noted that VMNH-Waynesboro is moving into the detailed design phase of the project. An RFP will be posted in July.

Other efforts to raise awareness in Waynesboro are:

* Continuing the Wayne Theatre lecture series
* Sign unveiling at the branch campus site on May 19, 2021 at 2 pm

Dr. Nash said that the committee recommends that the Waynesboro Advocacy Committee be empowered to represent the Board of Trustees regarding the selection of the design firm and advise the staff as the process moves forward. Being a committee recommendation, no motion was needed. A roll call was held and the recommendation passed unanimously.

**University Partnerships Committee**

Dr. Joe Keiper said that the goal of this committee is to develop interest in using VMNH as a partner for community outreach efforts outlined in university grant proposals. A copy of the report is in the Board packet. Dr. Keiper noted that similar programs have been developed in other museums.

**Strategic Planning Committee Report**

Ms. Lisa Moerner, Strategic Planning Committee Chair, presented the report.

Ms. Moerner said that the committee had met April 14. There were three items covered:

* Strategic plan
* Museum’s pandemic response
* Diversity discussion

Since the first two items have already been discussed in other reports, the committee recommends the following regarding diversity:

* A diversity and inclusion framework
* Internship program
* New and innovative technology

She noted that a diversity and inclusion framework would be developed by Dr. Keiper and his team. VMNH should develop a pipeline of people who would be interested in a museum career by starting as an intern.

They also discussed new and innovative technologies such as virtual reality and how they might be used successfully at the museum.

Mr. Quinones said that this may require funding; maybe it would be a good idea to give a heads up to the Foundation.

**Nominating Committee Report**

Ms. Lisa Moerner, Nominating Committee Chair, presented the report.

The Nominating Committee has put together a slate of officers, which will be voted on at the May Board meeting.

The proposed slate is:

Chairman – Ms. Jennifer Burnett

Vice Chairman – Ms. Lisa Moerner

Treasurer – Mr. Roberto Quinones

Secretary – Nathan Sanford

Dr. Benzing will remain on the Board’s Executive Committee as immediate past chair.

With no discussion or nominations from the floor, a roll call vote was held and the slate of officers unanimously passed.

Dr. Benzing congratulated the new officers and thanked them for their support during his tenure as Chairman.

**Announcements**

Ms. Burnett said that if anyone is interested in serving on a particular committee to let her know.

Ms. Burnett presented a resolution in honor of Dr. Benzing. The motion was made by Dr. Evans and Ms. Moerner seconded. A roll call vote was held and passed unanimously.

Dr. Keiper highlighted some upcoming events:

July 22 – evening opening reception for butterflies exhibit

July 24 – Bug Day (smaller scale festival)

October 16 – Dragon Festival (full scale festival)

Ms. Burnett highlighted future Board meeting dates:

Saturday, August 21, 2021

Saturday, November 20, 2021

Dr. Joe Keiper introduced Dr. Jackson Means, Myriapodologist, who made a presentation on his research on millipeds.

**Adjournment**

With no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 12:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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Nathan Sanford Thomas R. Benzing, Ph.D.

Secretary Chairman