

**MINUTES**  
**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY**  
**BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING**  
**November 21, 2020**

The one hundred twenty-seventh meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History was held at 10:00 a.m. Saturday, November 21, 2020, and hosted by the museum via a *Zoom Conference* during the Governor’s Emergency Declaration related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Trustees Present:   Dr. Tom Benzing, Chairman                   Dr. Art Evans, Vice-Chairman  
                          Nathan Sanford, Secretary                 Jennifer Burnett, Treasurer  
                          Faye Cooper                                     Cord Cothren  
                          Dr. Barry Dorsey                                 Lisa Moerner  
                          Dr. Carole Nash                                 Michael Phillips  
Roberto Quinones

Trustees Absent:   Dr. Makunda Abdul-Mbacke                 Siri Russell  
                          Melany Stowe

Staff Present:       Dr. Joe Keiper                                     Ryan Barber  
                          Dr. Hayden Bassett                             Christy Deatherage  
                          Jonathan Martin                                 Zach Ryder  
                          Ben Williams                                     Rhonda Casey

Others Present:    Audrey Burgess – Attorney General’s Office  
                          Len Poulin – VMNH Foundation Board of Directors  
                          Gene Smith – VMNH Foundation Board of Directors

With eleven (11) members of the Board of Trustees present, a quorum was established.

**Call to Order and Approval of Minutes**

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by the Chairman. With no changes to be made to the 15 August 2020 Minutes, Dr. Art Evans moved that the minutes be approved and Dr. Barry Dorsey seconded the motion. With no discussion, the motion unanimously passed.

**Chairman’s Report**

Dr. Tom Benzing, Chairman, presented the report.

He welcomed Mr. Gene Smith of the Foundation Board who asked to make comments. Mr. Smith commended Dr. Joe Keiper for his recent presentation at the Order of World Wars meeting in Lynchburg.

- Dr. Benzing announced that a new *ad hoc* committee has been formed. This committee will be purposed with the task of exploring ways of expanding the museum's connections with colleges and universities. Trustees Dr. Art Evans and Dr. Carole Nash serve on the committee along with Foundation Board members Dr. D. B. Poli and Dr. Kathy O'Neal.
- Dr. Benzing said that he had recently participated in the taping of videos to promote the Waynesboro project.
- Dr. Benzing announced that there would be a FOIA training held in closed session at today's meeting.
- Dr. Benzing announced that Senator Mark Warner has nominated the VMNH for an award from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The Museum is in the process of completing its application for the award now.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Ms. Jennifer Burnett, Treasurer, presented the report.

- Profit and Loss Statement (information)
  - She highlighted that \$27,000 is expected from the City of Martinsville.
  - Funds are on hold for the Jean S. Adams Educational Pavilion.
  - The VMNH received \$12,500 in federal funds from the CARES Act.
  - Under operating expenses, the passenger elevator has to be replaced. This cost will come out of maintenance reserve funds.
  - The roof at the Douglas Avenue building needs repairs. This cost will also come out of maintenance reserve funds.
  - Agency service charges increased this year due to 2 audits.
  - Travel and utilities costs are decreased due to reduced staff travel and reduced staff in the building.

### **Executive Director's Report**

Dr. Joe Keiper, Executive Director, reported the following:

- The state has announced that the museum will not receive any budget cuts this year. Level funding is expected next year.
- Waynesboro will not be funded until 2022.
- Professional development through ASTC for staff on the topics of diversity and inclusion was held with 15 staff participating.
- Dr. Keiper has directed staff to plan for summer camps, Dragon festival in October 2021, possibly another festival (depending on the pandemic).

- The VMNH Foundation is submitting a nomination for the annual innovations award presented by the Virginia Association of Museums. The event we are nominating is Dragon Festival.

### Advancement Report

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

- Visitation is averaging between 50-100 visitors per week.
- No exhibit rentals this year – some are pending for 2021.
- Endowment continues to be strong in spite of market volatility.
- New pages have been added to the Advancement report, including social media and outreach data; small, women-owned and minority-owned businesses that the museum partners with; and staff diversity data.
- Thomas Jefferson Awards – scheduled for March 2021
- Grapes & Grains – scheduled for spring 2021.

Dr. Carole Nash suggested that employee roles be added to the staff diversity report to expand on the men, women, and minority categories. Mr. Roberto Quinones added that Board diversity should also be included.

### Nominating Committee Report

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

- A proposed slate of officers for the Board of Trustees will be presented at the February 2021 meeting.
- The slate of officers will be voted on at the May meeting.

### Strategic Planning Committee Report

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

- After the pandemic, board meetings may continue being virtual.
- VMNH does a great job maintaining a social media presence, i.e., Ben in Nature.
- Plans are to translate museum signage into other languages.
- The committee wants more staff demographic data.
- The committee plans to investigate opportunities for internships for under-represented and disadvantaged students.

### Waynesboro Advocacy Committee

Ms. Faye Cooper, Waynesboro Advocacy Committee chair, presented the report.

- Even though funds are on hold for the Waynesboro project, the WAC continues to engage the community.
- On October 27, 2020, they convened an educator roundtable and discussed exhibit design especially for the K-5 audience. More of these sessions are planned for the future.
- The Dino Drive-Thru experience was held in Waynesboro on October 10, 2020. It was a sell-out. Staff engaged the visitors with dinosaur fossils and displays which were well received. Promotional materials about the Waynesboro museum were also available.
- A lecture series continues to be held and recorded at the Wayne Theatre and plans are to make those presentations available on the internet.
- Four promotional videos have been recorded to promote the Waynesboro museum. One video was played for the trustees.

In discussion, Dr. Nash said that the Archeological Society of Virginia wants to connect with the Waynesboro museum to have a stronger presence in western Virginia. She asked Dr. Keiper to speak at the ASV January meeting. Ms. Moerner said further discussion would be at the WAC committee meeting in December.

### **Operations Committee Report**

Dr. Barry Dorsey, Operations Committee Chair, presented the report.

- The passenger elevator is currently under renovation; cost for repairs comes out of maintenance reserve. Project is to be completed in early 2021.
- The museum is upgrading its energy systems using federal funds. This includes installation of solar panels, an energy audit, and upgrading of equipment for energy efficiency. Mr. Jonathan Martin, Chief Financial Officer, described the details of the project.
- Funds for the education pavilion are on hold, as noted in the financial report.

### **Development/Marketing Committee Report**

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

- EBT cards are being accepted for museum admission.
- New equipment has been purchased for virtual learning, including new camera lenses.
- The museum website has been redesigned and launched.

### **Research and Collections Committee Report**

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

- The Research and Collections Committee recommended the Dr. Jim Beard, retired VMNH Curator of Earth Sciences and former Director of Research and Collections, be awarded the title of “curator emeritus”. The motion passed unanimously.
- The Research and Collections Committee recommended that Dr. Jackson Means be awarded the title of research associate. The motion passed unanimously.
- Dr. Evans said that during the pandemic the curators have increased their writing of scientific papers and doing local field work.
- Public inquiries have increased substantially.
- A collection of street art from Guatemala will be repatriated. Mr. Quinones offered to assist in making contacts with the Guatemalan embassy.
- A recommendation to establish a molecular lab at VMNH was discussed.

### **Education Committee Report**

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

- Educators are manning activity tables in the exhibits area of the museum on Fridays.
- Educators have produced professional development videos.
- In early January the educators expect to receive another installment of CARES Act funding.

### **Executive Session**

Dr. Benzing moved that the Board meet in Executive Session. Dr. Evans seconded. With no discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

The Board returned to open session after a 30-minute closed session. Dr. Benzing moved that the Board reconvene in open session; Dr. Evans seconded. With no discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

### **New Business**

- No new business was discussed

### **Announcements**

- There were no announcements.

**Adjournment**

- With no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 noon.

Respectfully submitted,

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Nathan Sanford  
Secretary

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Thomas R. Benzing, Ph.D.  
Chairman