

**VMNH Board of Trustees
Executive Meeting
Friday, November 14, 2025
Executive Director's Conference Room**

Trustees Present: Dr. Melany Clark (Chair)

Trustees Remote: Ms. Lauren Hall (Secretary) (attending remotely due to distance)
Mr. Will Clements (Treasurer) (attending remotely due to distance)

Absent: Ms. Lisa Carter (Vice Chair)

Staff: Dr. Joe Keiper (Executive Director)
Ms. Jennifer Whitlow (Staff)

Others Present: Ms. Ambria Wood (OAG Representative)

WELCOME

Dr. Melany Clark welcomed all in attendance and opened the meeting at 3:33. No quorum was found to be present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

With no quorum present, the August 8, 2025 minutes could not be approved.

CHAIR'S REPORT

Dr. Clark reported that two vacant seats remain for the Board of Trustees. If anyone has suggestions, or know of interested parties, please encourage them to apply.

In light of budget concerns in VA, the museum is extremely thankful for the gift from Mr. Frank Mariels. Dr. Clark expressed hope that the museum will receive funding from the state to support staff retention efforts.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Mr. Will Clements presented a strong financial report with sufficient funds available for operation.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Dr. Keiper reported that attendance was down slightly at the latest festival, Bonez and Booz in October, but noted there were many other community activities on the day of the festival which may have contributed to fewer guests. Despite a slight dip in overall attendance, there were over 1000 individuals admitted through the Museums for All program.

Due to overwhelming interest, the Education Department began offering two homeschool sessions running every other week this semester. Both sections are full.

The Natural History of Chocolate was a success and could be ongoing with additional conversation.

In celebration of VA 250, a membership event will be held on February 19th which will include a sample of Jefferson's corn beer and other natural history highlights from Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

The museum's annual "gala" fundraising event is scheduled for March 21st with a Bridgerton-inspired theme.

The museum has hired a new Exhibit Manager who will be starting on November 17th. She is experienced and looking forward to moving to Martinsville and beginning her work.

The herpetology position is in the Zoom interview phase with several candidates. Following Zoom interviews, applicants will be narrowed to the top three and each will receive an invitation to the museum for a tour and to give a presentation to staff and the community.

Work on the Douglas Ave. rehabilitation project continues in the planning phase. It has been determined that asbestos removal will be completed first before any other phase of work. Following asbestos abatement, HVAC replacement will begin. Additional work will continue as funds are available.

Museum staff are actively supporting the Waynesboro project and are poised to engage community leaders and government officials depending on the outcome of the Governor's proposed budget.

Based on preliminary information from the contracted repair company, the outreach trailer will no longer be mobile. The undercarriage is worn out due to general wear and tear. However, the trailer may be able to be used as a stationary structure for a short period of time especially while the permanent building is under construction. A full scope of work and cost estimate is expected soon.

Following a Strategic Plan Committee meeting, the Strategic Plan document was distributed to Board members for final review. The full board will vote to approve this plan in either November 2025 or February 2026

Dr. Keiper reported that the interest income from endowment investments will begin to be available in October 2026-2027. The initial spending will be focused on developing the Young Explorer Center and the Petra exhibit with additional priorities to be established each October for the following year.

Ms. Jennifer Whitlow shared some preliminary planning information about the Young Explorers Center. Potential element examples along with rational were shown. Members of the committee were encouraged to submit any additional ideas to staff for consideration.

Dr. Keiper has been in contact with inventors about a potential exhibit involving a 3 D printed Hadrosaur skull. The skull is anatomically correct and includes technology which allows a guest to blow into a microphone and hear what the hadrosaur may have sounded like. Currently, the museum is negotiating borrowing this skull and technology at no cost.

Dr. Keiper concluded by pointing out that the Strategic Plan creates a pathway to study the expansion of the Starling Avenue facility as well as facilitation of a collaborative vision for Wilson Park.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Dr. Clark echoed the need to continue fundraising and to bring public attention to the good work of the museum.

Ms. Hall suggested a vendor that she has worked with in the past called *Free Notes Harmony* which specializes in musical instruments as a potential vendor for the Young Explorer Center.

Mr. Clements suggested staff take time to visit other museums and children's areas to borrow best practices.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further discussion Dr. Clark closed the meeting at 4:20 PM.