

Board of Trustees Quarterly Meeting
Saturday, February 1, 2025
Virginia Museum of Natural History
Walker Lecture Room 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, February 1, 2025.

Trustees Present: Dr. Art Evans Mr. Cord Cothren
Dr. Tom Benzing Dr. Melany Clark
Dr. David Furth Ms. Cathy Hincker
Ms. Lisa L. Carter Mr. Will Clements
Mr. Nathan Sanford

Trustees Virtual: Dr. Carol Nash (unable to attend – illness)
Ms. Emma Ito (unable to attend – distance)
Ms. Lauren W. Hall (unable to attend – personal reasons/work obligation)

Trustees Absent: Ms. Anne Burnette Mr. Mark Buss
Ms. Jennifer Burnette

Staff Present: Dr. Joe Keiper Mr. Ryan Barber
Mr. Ben Williams Ms. Christie Deatherage
Ms. Jill Harris Ms. Bobbie Dillon
Ms. Jennifer Whitlow

Others Present: Ms. Elizabeth Carter Bailey, VMNH Foundation Board of Directors, Liaison to the Board of Trustees
Ms. Abby Gump, Office of the Attorney General
Ms. Lauren Coleman, Office of the Attorney General

WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 AM by Dr. Melany Clark (Vice-Chair). Dr. Clark will be moderating the meeting today. Welcome to all participants online and in-person. Roll call attendance taken and a quorum was found to be physically present. Welcome to our legal representatives Ms. Gump and Ms. Coleman. Ms. Gump shared that Ms. Coleman will be taking over as primary legal

council for VMNH. A special welcome was extended to our three new Board members: Dr. David Furth, Ms. Cathy Hincker, and Mr. Will Clements.

Dr. Evans made the motion to approve the Board of Trustee meeting minutes from May 18, 2024, August 10, 2024, September 26, 2024, and November 16, 2024. Ms. Carter seconded. Minutes as presented were approved unanimously.

There being no physical quorum at yesterday's Executive meeting, Dr. Evan's on behalf of the committee made the motion to request and further recommend the board take action to approve the Executive Committee meeting minutes dated November 15, 2024, as issued to the Executive Committee. Ms. Carter seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- Dr. Clark expressed appreciation for the Board Strategic Plan feedback. A synopsis was compiled by staff and is included in the Board packet. Dr. Clark reminded the Board that the strategic plan is still being crafted to allow for peer review during the reaccreditation visit planned for spring 2025. Adoption of the 2025-2030 will be delayed allowing time to incorporate any feedback from the reaccreditation committee.
- Twenty-six-year staff member, Jill Harris, Registrar gave a brief overview of her experience and ongoing work for the museum.
- Dr. Kal Ivanov provided a "Deep Dive" into the frozen tissue collections held by the museum. Dr. Ivanov explained the importance of the collection for future research and to have our collection data available electronically for world-wide research.

Considering the recent utility failures in Richmond, Ms. Carter asked about collections back up plan including generated power, fire suppression, and fresh water. She would like for staff to conduct a review of emergency operations and provide a status report to be shared at the next meeting.

Dr. Clark invited any interested Board members to look at our collections following the meeting and Dr. Keiper said he would lead a tour at our Douglas Ave. building (1001 Douglas Ave., Martinsville, VA 24112). The public is invited to attend either tour.

- Dr. Clark mentioned that due to the recent changes to the composition of the Board, committees will need to be realigned. Committee assignments will be handled by the chair.
- Dr. Keiper spoke in Mr. Martin's absence about the letter writing campaign to Secretary of Education, Aimee Guidera. Board members should send their own letter in support of the Waynesboro project. For maximum impact, their letter should be sent between 3.1.25 and 4.1.25.
- Dr. Keiper asked Board members in attendance to use the note card provided to write a brief thank you note to some of our recent donors.
- Dr. Evans noted that the top bullet of the Research and Collections section of the Strategic Plan Synopsis indicates a new FTE but the discipline TBD. Dr. Evans recommends preparator to be clarified as the discipline.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

- Dr. Clark read the proposed slate of officers for 2025-2026. These will be voted on at the next Board meeting.
 - Chair - Mr. Mark Buss
 - Vice-Chair – Dr. Melany Clark
 - Secretary – Ms. Lauren W. Hall
 - Treasurer - VACANT

Dr. Clark opened the floor for nominations for the Treasurer's position. Having no nominations, Dr. Clark instructed anyone interested in the position to please email Mr. Buss. An updated Board roster containing contact information will be provided to Board members.

TREASURER'S REPORT

- Mr. Cothren reported for the Finance Committee and noted the financial stability of the museum, even experiencing some growth in the endowment. Some may notice a spike in expenditures due to professional memberships paid in January, this is typical.

Dr. Evans made a motion to approve the treasurer's report and Mr. Sanford seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- Dr. Keiper noted a graphic that indicates our state budget appropriation over the previous twenty years. He noted the museum's appropriation hasn't been adequately adjusted for inflation in many years. This equates to currently operating the museum on significantly less money than what was available fifteen years ago.
- Endowment rate of giving and investment strategies are strong, and projections indicate that in another fifteen years we should have an endowment of 18.4 million.
- Curatorial staffing has increased in the last fifteen years and plans are to continue to request funding for more research and collections staff members.
- Social media has been successful through organic and targeted advertising.
- Zip code heat map shows continued growth in all markets in Virginia as well as stretching into North Carolina. Dr. Benzing noted the heat data in the Shenandoah Valley area seems to be increasing.
- Dr. Keiper noted the endowment is currently in growth mode and should not be relied upon in the absence of state funding.
- AAM reaccreditation committee will be here for two days in March or April. No specific date has been set yet. The Board and other community partners will be called upon to assist in the onsite visit through Zoom meetings and possibly other involvement. Staff expect suggestions because of this site visit but anticipate approval for full accreditation.
- Board engagement sheet provided to board members per their request at the last meeting. There are many ways the Board can show support.
 - New event series planned for October 4, 2025 "The Natural History of Chocolate".

- Support the Waynesboro capital campaign through monetary gifts. Two million dollars needed as matching funds for the project. Currently identifying potential donors in the Shenandoah region.
- Board members can give securely through our website.
- Ms. Carter noted that some employers match charitable giving. Be sure to request it for the museum.
- Reminder to Board, next year the museum will be concentrating on Thomas Jefferson's contribution to natural history in Virginia. Events and a special exhibit of a first English language edition of Jefferson's book, "*Notes on the State of Virginia*" are planned.
- Dr. Nash and Ms. Ito echoed for those interested that earlier maps of Virginia can be found through the Library of Congress, Encyclopedia of Virginia, and Library of Virginia.

ADVANCEMENT

- Mr. Barber reported that the number of charitable gifts, amounts of gifts, memberships, and visitation have increased. The first and second quarters of this year are one of the best periods on record.
- Hooker Furnishings just renewed their partnership for the "Museums for All" initiative as well as support for the Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab.
- Congressionally Directed Spending Request has been updated and will be resubmitted requesting funds to renovate the current library to the Young Explorers Center.
- Upcoming events include: The Age of Dinosaurs preview reception is February 13th with the public opening on Saturday, February 15th. The Speakeasy on Starling event is Saturday, February 22nd.
- Festival planning for the remainder of the year is underway.
- In the second quarter, Museums for All program accounted for 19.7% of visitors.
- Dr. Keiper and Mr. Barber reminded the board that the purchase of memberships comes with additional benefits. Dr. Clark encouraged all board members to become a member if they are not already. Dr. Benzing noted donating travel reimbursement as a means of museum support.
- Mr. Sanford asked for a report of staff board service be sent to all Board members.

RESEARCH AND COLLECTIONS

- Mr. Sanford made a motion for Arianna Kuhn to become a research associate for the Virginia Museum of Natural History. Seconded by Ms. Carter. Unanimously approved.
- Dr. Evans spoke about the deficit of collections space. Curators have been tasked with determining what items can be stored at Douglas Ave. and what type of environmental upgrades will be necessary to store those items.
- A joint meeting of the Facilities Committee and the Research and Collections Committee is suggested for May. Board members are encouraged to participate in this important endeavor.

EDUCATION AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

- Mr. Sanford reported that the Education team is now fully staffed.
- Currently seeking out scholarship opportunities for summer camp participants.
- Education team is using 3-D printed hands-on educational models of fossils.

FACILITIES

- Dr. Benzing encouraged all Board members to participate in their assigned committee meetings and invited anyone interested in facilities to join the committee.
- The committee plans to work closely with the Research and Collections Committee to determine path forward for space needs of the museum.
- Other ongoing projects include the pavilion at Starling Ave. and the exhibit trailer in Waynesboro.
- Dr. Nash reported that she was contacted by the Shenandoah Valley Gem and Mineral Society about collection donations. Dr. Nash urged those making space decisions to bear in mind as the museum continues to expand into the Shenandoah Valley region, collectors will be more likely to donate to those collections, thereby increasing space needs more quickly than originally planned. Dr. Nash will begin collecting names of potential collection donors to help the committees more effectively plan space.
- Dr. Benzing confirmed the Waynesboro facility will include minimal collection areas. This facility is dedicated primarily to exhibit space.

WAYNESBORO (AD HOC)

- Dr. Benzing encouraged each Board member to support the Waynesboro project by participating in the letter writing campaign, directly addressing the Secretary of Education to be included in the Governor's biennial budget. This budget will be released in December 2025. To be most effective, please send the support letter between March 1st and April 1st.
- Dr. Benzing is also working with the state legislators to introduce a budget amendment about our educators' salaries.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Dr. Clark encouraged all Board members to demonstrate their commitment to the Board through financial giving. She reminded the Board that grant applications sometimes require reporting of Board giving and we want to report 100% support. This reminder is also in direct agreement with the Strategic Plan.

CLOSED SESSION

Dr. Clark moved that the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History enter closed session pursuant with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act Code section 2.2-3711 A(7)(8) for consultation with legal counsel and discussion of contractual awards. Mr. Sanford seconded the motion. Roll call vote taken to unanimously enter closed session

OPEN SESSION

Dr. Clark moved that the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History reconvene following closed session. Unanimously approved.

Certification: Whereas the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History convened in

closed meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; and
Whereas Virginia code §2.2-3712 requires a certification by this Board that such closed meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia law;

NOW, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History hereby certifies that, to the best of each member's knowledge: (1) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements under Virginia law and (2) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion by which the closed meeting was convened were heard, discussed, or considered in the closed meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History.

Closed session certification approved by roll call vote of all Board members physically present and remote.

- Motion made by Dr. Evans to authorize the Executive Committee to act on behalf of the board regarding the contract matter before the Board. Dr. Benzing seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND OTHER MATTERS

- Dr. Clark read a resolution to recognize Ms. Sherri Jordan for faithful service to the Virginia Museum of Natural History Board of Directors.
- Dr. Clark read a resolution to recognize Mr. Roberto Quinones for faithful service to the Virginia Museum of Natural History Board of Directors.

Ms. Carter moved to adopt both resolutions. Dr. Evans seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Clark presented Dr. Keiper a framed certificate in honor of his fifteen years of service to the museum.

Acting chair, Dr. Clark made a motion to extend the meeting for a walk through of the Douglas Ave. facility; 1001 Douglas Ave, Martinsville, VA 24112. As a change in the agenda by the chair a second is not needed. Motion passed unanimously.

The public is invited to join in this walk through.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Sanford made a motion to adjourn seconded by Ms. Carter. Motion passed unanimously.

The next meeting of the Virginia Museum of Natural History Board of Directors

Saturday, May 16, 2025, 10 AM
Virginia Museum of Natural History
21 Starling Ave.
Martinsville, VA 24112