**MINUTES**

**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY**

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING**

**February 13, 2021**

The one hundred twenty-eighth meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History was held at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, February 13, 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 |
|  | Dr. Makunda Abdul-Mbacke | Faye Cooper |
|  | Lisa Moerner | Dr. Carole Nash |
|  | Michael Phillips | Roberto Quinones |
|  | Siri Russell | Melany Stowe |
| Trustees Absent: | Cord Cothren |  |
| Staff Present: | Dr. Joe Keiper | Ryan Barber |
|  | Dr. Hayden Bassett | Christy Deatherage |
|  | Dr. Kal Ivanov | Jonathan Martin |
|  | Zach Ryder | Rhonda Casey |
| Others Present: | Audrey Burgess – Attorney General’s Office |
|  | Len Poulin – VMNH Foundation Board of Directors |

With twelve (12) members of the Board of Trustees present, a quorum was established.

**Welcome and Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 10:30 a.m. by the Chairman.

**Approval of Minutes**

After discussion, it was decided to amend the minutes of the last meeting on November 21, 2020 regarding CARES Act funding. Dr. Art Evans explained that YMCAs and other institutions receive the CARES Act funding which would then flow to the museum’s education programs. Dr. Evans moved that the minutes be approved as amended 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, Chairman, presented the report.

* He recently contacted his state representatives and encouraged them to continue to support the museum in the current budget session. He reminded them of the museum’s statewide mission.
* He attended the recent Foundation Board meeting. He noted that Mr. Len Poulin was the Foundation Board’s representative at today’s meeting.
* Dr. Benzing noted that the Foundation Board is seeking nominations for open positions on their board. He asked the Foundation Board to send nomination request forms to the trustees.

**Treasurer’s Report**

Ms. Jennifer Burnett, Treasurer, presented the report.

* Profit and Loss statement (information)
	+ Ms. Burnett highlighted revenues – she said that the museum has been fully funded by both Martinsville and Henry County in FY 21. The education department is already working to renew funding for FY 22.
	+ The museum has received $12,503 in CARES Act funding.
	+ Under Operating expenses, Equipment is 445% year to date. The reason for this overage is the shift of savings from utilities to equipment for the curators.
	+ She noted that agency contractual services will increase dramatically since the museum has been wrapping up several state-mandated projects, including the Human Capital Management (HCM) project which will replace the current system developed in 1984. Also, there were 2 audits this year: Department of Accounts (DOA) audit and a VITA audit. The cost of the VITA audit was $45,671; DOA audit has not been billed yet. Ms. Moerner asked if the museum had passed the audits. Mr. Martin responded in the affirmative.

**Executive Director’s Report**

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

* Dr. Keiper noted that since the pandemic began the museum had been open at least 1-2 days a week.
* One recent achievement is the setup of a modern molecular lab. Because of recent retirements and low operating expenses, the curators have been able to purchase equipment to furnish the lab. There are 3-4 more items of equipment to increase the lab’s functionality on order. After those orders come in, the scientists can begin analyzing materials. He asked Dr. Ivanov to comment on the equipment being installed in the lab.
* Dr. Alex Hastings formerly of VMNH and Dr. Adam Pritchard, assistant curator of paleontology, have found a well preserved prehistoric cat (about 6 ft. long) in a cave. Extraction of the specimen has been tentatively scheduled for September. The Foundation will provide funds as a match to the funds supplied by the regional cave board.
* *Lepidoptera*, a worldwide butterfly exhibit, has been installed in the hallway to the Walker Lecture Hall. He thanked Dr. Ivanov, Ryan Barber, and Jessica Davenport for their work on this exhibit.
* In addition, the staff have made additions to the *Wild Watersheds* exhibit, enhancing the museum’s “Trout in the Classroom” presence by installing a 400 gallon fish tank. Plans are to install a video projection on the floor so that visitors can interact with moving images.
* The *Wild About Cats* exhibit will extend its stay in the temporary exhibits hall.
* Staff are also in the process of creating a new exhibit *The Science of Life* which will include insects, bats, birds, atlatl, and a gliding reptile from the Solite Quarry. Dr. Keiper has challenged the Foundation Board to find corporate partners to support this exhibit.
* Last week Dr. Jim Beard presented a talk about the geology of the Shenandoah Valley as a part of the Wayne Theatre signature speaker series. The final count was 1400 participants online.
* Dr. Keiper said that the museum was in good financial shape.
* Mr. Quinones asked about the makeup of the Foundation Board. Dr. Keiper responded by saying that it is a diverse group from different aspects of the community. The Foundation helps with getting corporate sponsorships, grants, and other means of support.
* Dr. Evans asked if the participation numbers on Facebook for the Beard lecture are part of the museum’s marketing analytics. Dr. Keiper said yes.
* Dr. Abdul-Mbacke asked if the museum had considered doing an astronomy festival. Dr. Keiper said there was some momentum about this before the pandemic and would be considered in the future. He noted that the museum had recently purchased a telescope with a GPS unit.

Advancement Report

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

* Mr. Barber noted that on Page 4 of the report that there was a full page of social media statistics. Charitable giving to the Foundation is up. Museum revenue is down, but the museum is still bringing in store sales and admissions. Museum programs have transitioned to virtual and corporate partners--Carter, SOVAH, Boxley, and Patterson Foundation--are sponsoring. Mr. Barber said the museum has an ask to the Harvest Foundation for a COVID-19 sustainability program. He will find out about the grant in late February and share with the Board.
* The Annual Thomas Jefferson Awards ceremony will be held virtually on March 18 from 6:30-7:30 pm. It will be via the Zoom platform and live broadcast on YouTube. There will be links on social media and the webpage.
* A special events committee of the Foundation Board is working to develop a month-long event in place of the annual gala. There are two goals: (1) find support for our mission and (2) give donors real examples of what they are supporting. There will be an online giving option.
* Mr. Barber noted that the statistics for diversity/inclusion information have been expanded to include museum business partners, vendors, and those reached through education programs. Also, this includes a report on full-time and part-time staffing. On the last page, he noted that the report on visitation shows that 74 percent of visitors come from outside Martinsville and Henry County.
* Ms. Stowe asked if the museum had many Spanish-speaking visitors. Mr. Barber said somewhat, but he said the museum wants to reach more. Dr. Keiper said that the new exhibit *The Science of Life* will be bilingual.
* Ms. Russell asked what was done with the statistics collected. Mr. Barber said that the data was used to see what populations the museum is reaching and those not being reached. Dr. Keiper said that it also helps us with targeting social media ads.
* Ms. Russell suggested that minority category be broken out further. She said that she would be interested in learning about the museum’s diversity goals. Ms. Moerner suggested that Ms. Russell join the next strategic planning committee meeting. She agreed and Dr. Benzing appointed her to that committee.
* Dr. Abdul-Mbacke asked if this is the first time minorities have been reported. Dr. Benzing said it was fairly new and early on in the process. Mr. Quinones said that it was the second time.
* Dr. Nash asked if staff numbers could be broken down by job titles. Dr. Benzing said yes.
* Ms. Moerner asked if more details could be provided on social media statistics. Mr. Barber said he would work with Mr. Ryder to get that information.
* Ms. Stowe suggested on having statistics on staff ages. Dr. Keiper noted that more information from human resources can be added to the report.
* Dr. Keiper said there is a committee on university partnerships. That committee has helped to make connections to colleges and universities. He said particularly the museum want to connect with grants with outreach outcomes, translating science into public digestible form. For example, he noted that staff are working with Dr. Ray Bernor of Howard University and a VMNH Research Associate, on a NSF grant proposal which would include VMNH research and education teams.

**Facilities (Operations) Committee Report**

The Facilities (Operations) committee met with Dr. Keiper.

* It was noted that a proposal has been chosen to perform the investment grade audit; the process will right-size the museums’ energy system. This ESCO (Energy Services Companies Proposal) will make the museum more energy efficient. This audit will begin in the next week
* The passenger elevator is being upgraded and work is scheduled to be completed by mid-March.
* Ms. Moerner asked if there were preparations to be made for the return of public visitation. Dr. Keiper noted that Mr. Martin had procured CARES Act funds for sanitation by the museum’s building and grounds staff. In the ESCO audit, they will be looking at ways to modify the air handling system, with filters drawing the air up from the ground level to the ceiling. In addition, the museum will use these upgrades to inform the public about the museum’s energy usage, how the museum generates energy as well as human health considerations. Ms. Moerner added that she hoped this information would be in Spanish as well as English.
* Recognition of Dr. Barry Dorsey
	+ Dr. Benzing noted that Dr. Barry Dorsey, past chair of the Board of Trustees, had passed away recently. Dr. Dorsey had served on the executive, facilities, finance, development, and marketing committees of the Board. He noted that Dr. Dorsey was also instrumental in the educational pavilion project. A photo slide presentation was shown.
	+ Dr. Benzing read a resolution in Dr. Dorsey’s memory. Mr. Sanford moved that the resolution be adopted, Ms. Cooper seconded. With no discussion, a roll call vote was held and the resolution passed unanimously.

**Research and Collections Committee Report**

Dr. Art Evans, Research and Collections Committee Chair, presented the report. Dr. Evans noted that in spite of the pandemic the museum is still acquiring specimens and artifacts and adding to the collections. He noted that on Page 8 is an executive summary, a new feature of the full report.

* The Research and Collections Committee recommended that Dr. Katherine M. Harrell be appointed a research associate. A roll call vote was held, and the motion passed unanimously.
* The Research and Collections Committee recommended the reappointment of Dr. Michael Johnson and Dr. Paul Olsen as research associates. A roll call vote was held, and the motion passed unanimously.
* Dr. Evans noted that Dr. Hayden Bassett, assistant curator of archaeology, had updated the Research and Collections Committee regarding the repatriation of Guatemala antiquities and street art at their meeting. There are four possibilities: (1) transfer it to the Guatemalan embassy (2) work with the Smithsonian to discuss options (3) low-cost direct transfer from VMNH to the national museum in Guatemala (delivered personally) or (4) donate the artifacts to a more appropriate local institution. His preference is option 1. Dr. Bassett expects to receive more information next week. Mr. Phillips noted that the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts might be a possible repository for the Guatemalan art collection. He said he had worked with the curator of ancient art there and would be glad to reach out if needed. Dr. Evans said that it was preferred for the art to go back to Guatemala.
* Dr. Keiper said that the establishment of a modern molecular lab makes VMNH a go-to institution for other agencies that want to take advantage of our equipment and also provides student training opportunities. In addition, the museum is establishing a lab for visiting researchers, a lab for zooarchaeology specimens, and a STEM lab, which will include a 3D printer and other digital assets. The STEM lab will have a screen to monitor activity in the room for visitors to see.
* One new addition to the research staff is Dr. Jackson Means, who is digitizing the millipede collection of Dr. Richard Hoffman. The museum’s millipede collection is of international renown and contains over 22,000 specimens. Within the collections are at least 600 new species and 200 new genera.
* Mr. Quinones noted that the 3-D printer could be used for printing items for sale in the gift shop. Dr. Keiper noted that casts were for sale in the gift shop. Ms. Moerner said that 3-D printers are extremely popular with the middle-school and below age group; she noted that there is a lot of wear and tear on the printer.

**Development/Marketing Committee Report**

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

* Ms. Burnett said that the committee met on January 15. They reviewed the second quarter financials, including operating expenses and capital projects.
* She said that general funding looks stable. Revenues are 95% of last year’s total. Memberships are down.
* Ms. Moerner asked the reason for the increase in charitable giving. Mr. Barber said that once the pandemic began they reached out quickly to partners and members to push for donations. He found that the virtual programming was very popular and the museum can learn from that in the future. Dr. Keiper added that the 85% in charitable giving is based on grant funding which is cyclical. For example, Hayden and Madeleine Bassett received $100,000 from the Department of Historic Resources for the Smith River Survey. In addition, they also received $50,000 over two years from the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) for a 2 year survey of Leatherwood plantation in Henry County.

Mr. Quinones asked about the audits. Mr. Martin said they are published on the Department of Accounts website. Dr. Keiper said the museum would post a link to the audit reports on the website.

Mr. Quinones asked if the Board needed to approve the audits. Ms. Audrey Burgess of the Attorney General’s office said that, since the museum uses the state audit process, there is no need for approval from the governing board.

**Education and Public Programs Committee Report**

In the absence of Mr. Cord Cothren, education committee chair, Ms. Cooper presented the report. She said that the committee met with Ms. Christy Deatherage, education manager earlier that morning. Ms. Cooper said that she was impressed with the number of education department virtual program offerings. She noted that participation has dramatically increased in outreach and other programming because of the virtual format.

**Waynesboro Advocacy Committee Report**

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

* Ms. Cooper said that they have received very encouraging news in that the House has approved the release of $10 million of the original $18 million that was put on hold due to the pandemic. Now it goes to the Senate.
* She said the Wayne Theatre lecture series continues to be very successful.
* There will be another brainstorming session for educators for exhibit content and design planned in the near future.

**Strategic Planning Committee Report**

Ms. Lisa Moerner, Strategic Planning Committee Chair, presented the report. She said that the committee had not met since the last full Board meeting. She said she would schedule a meeting soon.

**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 – Mr. Nathan Sanford

Vice Chairman – Ms. Lisa Moerner

Treasurer – Ms. Jennifer Burnett

Secretary – Mr. Roberto Quinones

Dr. Benzing would remain on the board as an *ex officio* member.

Mr. Sanford declined to be nominated. Dr. Keiper and Dr. Benzing will coordinate with Ms. Burgess to discuss other nominations for Chair.

Nominations are closed until the May meeting.

**Announcements**

* Dr. Benzing thanked Mr. Len Poulin of the Foundation Board for attending the meeting and asked him for any comments or announcements. Mr. Poulin said he would take back information on diversity and financial support to the Foundation Board for discussion at their next meeting.
* Dr. Keiper said that Board members can attend the Virginia Association of Museums conference online; they should let him know if they are interested. He noted that Dr. Bassett is a featured speaker; Dr. Keiper will be on the “Museums and Environmental Justice” panel discussion.
* Dr. Benzing said to expect the nominations form from the Foundation; he noted that there are openings on the Board of Trustees as well.
* The next Board meeting is in May in Waynesboro, depending on the lifting of the emergency order by the Governor.

**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