

Minutes
Frontier Culture Museum Board of Trustees Meeting
April 12, 2013 9:00 a.m. - Lecture Hall

Members Attending:

Nwachukwu Anakwenze , T.E. Beck Jr., Richard Bell, William Card, Pamela Fox, Emmett W. Hanger Jr., John Higgs, R. Steven Landes, Scott MacMillan, Frank McDonough, Lynn Mitchell, Kenneth Plum, Rhodes Ritenour, Peggy Sheets, William Sibert, Cheryl Talley, Emmett Toms, Paul Vames, Frank Wagner

Members Absent:

Benjamin Cline, Reo Hatfield III, Ophie Kier, Philip Rundle, Beverly Sherwood, William Stanley

Guests Attending:

John Dod, Laurel Cartwright, James Russell, Norman Smiley, Stan Manoogian, Rye Winston

Staff Attending:

John Avoli, Eric Bryan, Lydia Volskis, Mark Gatewood, Merritt Schoonover, David Puckett, Anne McPherson, Fran Carrington

Call to Order and Approval of Minutes:

Paul Vames called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and asked all attendees to introduce themselves. The minutes of the September 2012 meeting were approved as corrected.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Executive Director John Avoli gave an overview of activity at the Museum since the last Board meeting. Thanking the staff and Board for their hard work over the past months, and separately but especially the American Frontier Culture Foundation for their support of the Museum during the economic downturn, he expressed our gratitude fro the efforts of Board Members who serve in the General Assembly for their support in obtaining funds to replace the old HVAC systems in the administration building, gift shop and visitor center. In other news:

- He reviewed a press release announcing that the Museum and its partners received a \$100,000 grant from the state Department of Housing and Community Development to begin plans for an artisan's center located on the front property. Partners include the State and the Virginia Artisan's Center, formerly of Waynesboro, with offices now located at the Museum.
- Museum part-time wage staff will have their hours reduced to no more than 29 hours per week. This is required by the state in response to the new federal HHS mandate that business offer health benefits to employees working more than 29 hours a week. These wage staff will now work all twelve months of the year, rather than being laid off in January and February; their total number of hours worked in one year will be the same.
- Mr. Avoli described two new additions to the Museum "staff"; two large Percheron horses, Mike and Chip. The horses belong to Matt and Stacey Hickey, proprietors of Classic Carriages, and will live at the Museum during most of the year. Stacey has joined the staff as a paid part time interpreter, and the horses will be in use when she is on site.
- A local landscaping firm finished work on the Dod Amphitheater. All Trustees are invited to visit the site and see the beautiful landscaping around the stage.

- The Museum has produced a small informational brochure with pictures and information about the beautiful reproduction furniture made in the Dairy Barn woodshop by several volunteers who are master woodworkers. The finished pieces can also be seen on several Museum exhibit sites.

Budget and Finance

Fiscal Director Merritt Schoonover gave a Power Point presentation of payroll and operating expenses and of revenue, including a comparison of the Museum's financial situation this fiscal year to date with that of the same months in FY2012. In passing, she noted the increased income from golf cart rentals and summer camp fees. (Reports attached for archive.)

Information Technology

With the past computer difficulties in mind, Deputy Director Eric Bryan said that the Museum has only two VITA (Virginia Information Technology Agency) computers remaining, and that these are used by the Fiscal Department to conduct state business via a VPN (Virtual Private Network) connection. The Museum retains several state email addresses for official business. The monthly cost for these two computers is about \$282, as opposed to nearly \$10,000 per month prior to the reduction of the number of state-owned computers. Plans for the future include a request to the American Frontier Culture Foundation for an online reservations system, which will offer online sales, reservations and better customer tracking.

Capital Projects

General Administration Manager Mark Gatewood reported that upcoming capital projects are as follows with preliminary cost estimates by staff in parentheses:

- Replacement of the twenty-five-year-old HVAC systems in the administration, visitor's center and store buildings (\$250,000)
- Paving and grading work on the Dairy Barn parking lot (\$70,000)
- Pave the lower Octagonal Barn lot and driveway (\$60,000)
- Carpet replacement in the administration building (\$15,000)
- Underbrush clear cutting around site (\$5,000)
- Resurface road leading to New World sites (\$20,000)

He also noted several projects which may be needed in the future:

- Replacement and widening of bridges on the Old World loop road
- Ponds dredged
- Improvement of walkways in the Old World to all-weather surface
- Create master utility plan for entire Museum complex
- Re-key all buildings, also interior locks and padlocks
- Signage plan for entire site

Education and Interpretation

Mr. Bryan reported that the Museum hosted 11,029 students during the first three quarters of FY13, an increase of 2,272 over last year. A large part of the increase is due to "outreach" programming, which is supported by grant funds from the American Frontier Culture Foundation. During the first three quarters of FY13, the Foundation sponsored over 5,000 student field trips to the Museum, receiving \$50,000 from the Charles Fund and \$6,200 from other sources.

There are about 7,300 students scheduled for April-June 2013, and the total increases daily as new schools make reservations. Interim Education Director Andrew Richardson has worked to re-contact schools who have previously scheduled field trips but that have not visited the Museum recently.

Home School Day will be held Friday May 3. (In October 2012 the Museum hosted about 800 home schooled students and parents.)

Delegate Bell asked if interpretive staffing levels were adequate. Mr. Bryan reported that the situation is “ok”, but that the Museum hopes for funding for about ten more part-time staff to be able to more fully staff the exhibit sites, school programs and outreach programs.

Summer camp planning is underway and registrations have begun as well. Mr. Bryan reviewed current registration totals for the six weeks of camp, and noted that camps for 5-8 and 9-12 year olds will run each day simultaneously. Revenue and attendance have grown over the past two years. The cost is \$125 for one week of all-day camp and \$75 for one week of half-day camp. Museum staff recently attended a camp fair in Charlottesville to highlight our offerings. Delegate Bell asked if scholarships for campers are available; no scholarship options exist currently, but could be an option in future. Mr. Toms asked about the capacity of the summer camps; Mr. Bryan replied that the Museum is close to capacity now, as there are no more weeks left in summer, and we must have a certain number of staff for a certain number of children per camp in order to ensure safety and a meaningful experience. He noted that occasionally other camp groups come to the Museum for a day trip as a part of their own camp experience; generally they take tours and enjoy hands-on activities on the farms rather than joining the Museum’s camps which are already full.

For its programs the Museum employs nine full-time and seventeen part-time staff, who are assisted by two other staff who can work in costume if needed, and about a dozen adult volunteers who also work on the farmsites. These staff and volunteers must cover ten outdoor exhibits daily and also serve school groups, outreach programs and special event’s needs. Ms. Elizabeth Griffin, representing the Office of the Attorney General, noted that the original mandate of restricting hourly staff to twenty-nine hours has been slightly re-interpreted and may offer some relief for the Museum and similar agencies. When she learns the new instructions she will offer advice as needed on implementation. Senator Wagner asked for some clarification on the point as to whether an hourly employee’s hours are to be averaged over the course of a year or are strictly limited to no more than twenty-nine hours in any given week. Ms. Griffin will find out.

Mr. Bryan continued that the Museum regularly updates its programs, many of which coincide with the state “Standards of Learning”. As the Museum programs are unique to our site, we do not design programs around the SOL’s, but rather regularly check the SOL updates for those which relate to the Museum’s offerings. There is a wide spectrum of teacher interest in SOL correlated programs; some seek close connections, many are more interested in other aspects of the Museum visit.

Dr. Talley noted that she has learned that the Staunton City Schools are receptive to the idea of planning an academic camp here at the Museum and has applied – unsuccessfully - for a grant to host an academic and wellness camp for disadvantaged students here at the Museum.

Mr. Bryan reported that this year’s class of the John Lewis Society, the Museum’s volunteer program for 6-9th graders, is the largest ever with fifty members. Twenty-two are returning members and twenty-eight are new members. In 2012, the forty-three members contributed over 3500 hours to the Museum’s volunteer program. He noted that while the Museum hopes to maximize the opportunities for students to participate, we cannot overload the site with student volunteers, as they require supervision and mentoring by the small number of adult staff who have other responsibilities.

Museum staff hosted a dinner with the congregation of the Mt. Tabor United Methodist Church in October of 2012, and received a letter from United Methodist Church Staunton District Superintendent Rev. Michael Houff releasing the old building to the Museum. The Museum received a key to the building in December 2012, and completed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Mt. Tabor congregation in February of 2013. In March of 2013 the Staunton News leader ran a story about the Mt. Tabor Church project. Fund-raising is underway to preserve, move, and reconstruct the small church.

Visitor Experience and Satisfaction

Mr. Bryan reported that the Museum received 158 report cards from visitors during the first three quarters of FY2013; 100% rated the Museum as good or excellent, but this represents less than 1% of visitors, and the goal is to have about 5% of visitors complete the report card. The Museum has added an online survey with a discount coupon for the Museum Store.

Marketing

Mr. Bryan reported that in 2012 the Museum's marketing resources focused on television, radio, internet and special events advertising expended and reviewed a chart showing the breakdown of marketing expenditures. We have arranged cooperative ventures with local and regional tourism groups as well. The old Travel Information Center, located in the Museum's Visitor's Center, while no longer funded and staffed by area localities, remains open and hosts a variety of brochures and other informational materials. This allows the Museum to maintain important signage on area highways, and offers tourists a variety of brochures and informational materials. Some funds have also been expended on increased education program marketing.

Overall visitation is down about 7% from last year, but school and outreach visitation has increased. The marketing plan for the upcoming year includes hiring a new Marketing and Sales Director, continuing work to improve education program marketing, seeking free advertising opportunities and keeping our website and signage current. Mr. Avoli noted that an ongoing challenge is the slim budget available for marketing. Delegate Plum asked if the Museum is connected to social media; Mr. Bryan responded that we have a Facebook page and also use Twitter.

Special events since the last Board meeting include "Good Times, Tastes, and Traditions" the new Chamber of Commerce Festival, Oktoberfest, Ancestral Skills weekend, Creepy Tales and Lantern Tours, Winter Lecture Series and the Igbo Council meeting. Dr. Anakwenze described the Igbo Council meeting as hosting members from around the world. He noted that their next meeting will be in June 2014, also at the Museum.

REPORT FROM THE FOUNDATION

American Frontier Culture Foundation President John Dod reported that, at the end of the 3rd quarter of the fiscal year, the Annual Fund has raised \$56,000, or 76% of the goal of \$75,000. Foundation Special Events have raised \$213,000, or 128% of the goal of \$203,000 and the Friends of the Frontier Program has raised \$11,500, or 53% of the goal of \$22,000. Combined, these three "pillars of fundraising:" have raised 105% of the total goal to date.

Recent grant funding has brought 1,828 students from 15 schools to the Museum on field trips. Grantors include Target (\$8,000), Sun Trust (\$2,500) and the Perry Foundation (\$4,900 – matched by the Foundation). In addition, the Charles Fund supported over 1,500 students from 15 schools on field trips.

Various other grant applications are in process, including to Dominion Power for funds to complete the Mt. Tabor Church project.

The Foundation will host a late Spring fundraiser at Sugarloaf Farm on May 31 with the theme of "Dance Till the Cows Come Home".

OLD BUSINESS

No items of Old Business were brought forward.

NEW BUSINESS

Ratification Items

Curator David Puckett described the items proposed for de-accessioning (list included in Board Member packet). Mr. Card made a motion, seconded by Mr. Beck, that the Board approve the request to de-accession items submitted by Mr. Puckett. There was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Vames noted that Mr. Ophie Kier is rotating off of the Board, and that we have prepared a framed resolution of appreciation for him.

Property Development:

Mr. MacMillan stated:

“I move that the Board of Trustees of the Frontier Culture Museum go into closed session for a discussion of matters pertaining to the discipline and resignation of a former museum employee, pursuant to the personnel exemption in Virginia Code § 2.2-3711(A)(1); and for consideration of the acquisition of property for a public purpose, pursuant to the real estate exemption in Virginia Code § 2.2-3711(A)(3).

The motion was seconded by Mr. Sibert, there was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously. Mr. Vames requested that staff leave the room, and noted that Members of the Foundation Board are requested to remain. The Board entered Closed Session at 11:10 a.m.

At 12 noon Mr. Sibert stated:

“I move that the Board enter open session.”

The motion was seconded by Mr. Toms, there was no discussion, and Mr. Vames read the following statement:

“Whereas, the Board of Trustees of the Frontier Culture Museum 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 Frontier Culture Museum 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 Frontier Culture Museum.”

Ms. Volskis conducted a roll call vote of all Members; all voted “aye” to end Closed Session and to affirm the statement read by Mr. Vames.

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting of the Board of Trustees is set for Friday September 20 at 9 a.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Toms made a motion, seconded by Delegate Landes that the meeting adjourn at 12:10 p.m. There was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.