

Frontier Culture Museum Board of Trustees

Minutes

April 15, 2016 9:00 a.m. - Lecture Hall

Members Attending:

Richard Bell, Kevin Callanan, Benjamin Cline, Joseph Fitzgerald, Cliff Garstang, Emmett Hanger, John Higgs, Steven Landes, Kenneth Plum, Frank Nolen, Peggy Sheets, William Sibert, Norman Smiley, Emmett Toms, Paul Vames, Kenneth Venable, Frank Wagner, Tony Wilt

Members Absent:

Nwachukwu Anakwenze, Pamela Fox, Dianne Fulk, Reo Hatfield, John Ijem, William Stanley, Elly Swecker

Guests Attending:

Ned Ruby, President of American Frontier Culture Foundation, Dorothy Nelson, Member, American Frontier Culture Foundation Board of Directors

Staff Attending:

John Avoli, Executive Director, Eric Bryan, Deputy Director, Merritt Schoonover, Director Agency Administration, Lydia Volskis, Senior Administrative Coordinator, Joe Herget, Director of Marketing, Andrew Richardson, Director of Education, Megan Sullivan, Interpretive Supervisor, Misti Furr, Interpretive Supervisor, Chris Furr, Interpretive Supervisor, Jean-Claude Hatungimana, Interpreter, Kerri Donnelly, Rentals Coordinator, Bridget Pumm, Interpreter

I. CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Trustees Board Chair Paul Vames called the meeting to order at 9 a.m. The minutes of the September 2015 meeting were approved as submitted.

II. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Executive Director John Avoli reported that Trustee Dr. Anakwenze is still recuperating from a fall in South African last year and send his greetings to the Board. He thanked both the Museum staff for their hard work and the American Frontier Culture Foundation for their support. He thanked Marketing Director Joe Herget for his efforts and noted that the fiscal report would also be positive.

Mr. Avoli thanked Delegate Landes for inviting Museum staff to make a presentation before the House Appropriations Committee in Richmond during the recent General Assembly session, and thanked all of the legislative Trustee Members for their support in including funds for the Mill project in the budget. He reported that the Museum received \$527,000 for maintenance reserve projects the first year of the biennium and \$530,000 for the second year of the biennium, and \$150,000 in each year of the biennium for additional staff. Mr. Sibert noted that even with the extra staff funds in the current budget, the Museum is expanding and will still need a number of

additional staff over the next several years in order to offer the same level of educational support and customer service.

The fire in the roof of the Irish Farm was unfortunate, but no one was hurt and the damage is reparable. The roof was slated for replacement in August, and the Museum is currently soliciting bids for the work, and pursuing an insurance claim for the damage. A prominent thatcher of national reputation, who is originally from England, lives nearby in Staunton.

Mr. Avoli will lead one fund-raising trip to Italy this year. He also noted that planning for the Igbo Conference in July is progressing as are plans for the Wine and Jazz Festival, Food Truck Battle and other special events.

A. Budget and Technology

Director of Agency Administration Merritt Schoonover reviewed the Statement of Appropriations, Allotments, Expenditures and Revenues for all funds. She also reviewed the FY2016 Revenue Status Report, highlighting the fact that Welcome Center staff have been vigorously promoting sales of Annual Passes. Soon, she will submit an invoice to the Foundation for reimbursement for their payroll. She reviewed the year-to-date expenditures chart for service areas for funds 0100 and 02239 as of 3/31/16. Mr. Sibert asked how much of the \$85,000 balance in the 09650 Mill Fund is available for planning purposes; Mr. Bryan responded that all of the remaining funds might be used for planning if needed.

Mrs. Schoonover reviewed the current monthly VITA bill of \$974.16, which includes a number of computers and laptops and VPN (Virtual Private Network) access for several users to access state applications in finance, human resources and administration. She is working closely with VITA representatives to plan the Museum's replacement telephone system; we received \$25,000 in the last budget to fund the project. The old telephone system has been in place for over twenty years and is unreliable and obsolete.

Delegate Landes asked if, when the new computer decision package is submitted for new equipment during the next budget cycle, the older computer equipment will still be able to be used. Mrs. Schoonover responded that most of the equipment will be able to be retained and upgraded. She noted that we will have a virtual server with backup, disaster recovery, and other features. Mr. Sibert asked if the current interactions with VITA were positive, as some years ago the Museum was forced to eliminate VITA computers and equipment due to outrageous, escalating costs and lack of appropriate support. Mrs. Schoonover responded that VITA has changed its structure to allow small agencies to purchase only what they need, and that their customer service is much better than in the past. She also reported that the Foundation donated several computers for interpretive staff use, which have been installed in the Dairy Barn staff work room. Senator Hanger said that the state is moving towards the end of the contract and "disentanglement" with Northrup Grumman for VITA services. He noted that the successor to NG would be more user-friendly and offer size-appropriate economical services for small agencies.

B. Capital Projects and Maintenance Reserve

Deputy Director Eric Bryan reported on maintenance reserve funds, which are funds appropriated by the state to maintain the physical plant and to complete new and emerging needs and projects. Recent projects at the Museum include the paving of the loop road and Dairy Barn parking lot for about \$466,332, the renovation of the Welcome Center public restrooms, and the resurfacing of the pavilion floor. Upcoming

projects include Sill replacement on the German and English farms, 1850's Barn repairs, and Irish house thatched roof replacement.

Capital projects planned at the Museum include the Early American Industries Exhibit (Mill). The draft Mill plan is complete, a new site has been selected, and the detailed plan is nearing completion. Other projects are: building an 1820's American Barn (funded by the Foundation), and a long-planned English Farm barn, for which no funding has currently been identified. Mr. Sibert asked what the expected time frame is for the 1820's Barn; Mr. Bryan responded that he hopes it will be completed by late this year. Mrs. Sheets asked if the funding secured for the barn includes funds for staff to interpret the space. Mr. Bryan responded that it does not. Mrs. Sheets noted the continued lack of needed staff for the interpretive site, and urged the Trustees not to build other exhibit structures until we have secured funding to staff the sites. Mr. Sibert asked about the status of the English Farm cattle shed. Mr. Bryan responded that it will continue to be used as it has been, as an animal shelter and for storage. Mr. Sibert asked if the 1850's barn was moved by in-house staff or by a contractor; Mr. Bryan responded that it was moved by a professional firm. Senator Nolen also asked if the barn's maintenance issues were the result of the reset on its new location or general aging and deterioration; Mr. Bryan responded that he believed both of those factors contributed to the barn's maintenance issues. Delegate Landes asked if there were also maintenance issues with the 1850's house, which was also moved to its new location in one piece. Mr. Bryan responded that there is a minor sill problem which museum staff will be able to repair.

C. Marketing

Marketing Director Joe Herget reviewed the visitation report as of 3/31/16 and reported double-digit growth for four of the last five months. The current annual visitation growth rate is 17%. He reviewed a monthly visitation comparison chart for FY14, FY15 and FY16, and discussed each year's unique challenges which affected visitation totals. He reviewed annual pass sales by month and compared growth in annual pass sales over the past several years. He also discussed how annual pass sales affect overall visitation, as pass holders visit the Museum on a more regular basis. He reviewed marketing communication objectives, and said that the Museum seeks growth in three major areas; education and interpretation, special events, and general visitation. He also reviewed "drivers" for overall visitation.

Mr. Herget gave updates on various upcoming Museum programs and events, including new activities such as the toddler program, the children's Easter workshop, the Spring (formerly Winter) lecture series, the summer camp scholarship program, skills and crafts workshops, Folkways Day, American Roots Concert Series, Fall Frontier 5K, Holiday Market's Return, and Children's Christmas workshop. In addition, the Museum will host its regular special events such as the Wine and Jazz Festival, Naturalization Ceremony, Octoberfest and Holiday Lantern Tours.

He continued with an overview of traditional and more contemporary multi-media marketing strategies employed by the Museum. He described the proposed fee increase structure which the Board will vote on later in the meeting and in response to a question from Mr. Sibert, described the structure of the more expensive annual passes.

Senator Wagner made several suggestions on attracting college students and special demographic groups such as re-enactors to Museum events, and asked about the Museum's front signage. Mr. Avoli responded that the front sign is a temporary one, and that after the development has been completed, the Museum has the funds to redo the sign to make it larger and more attractive.

III. EDUCATION & INTERPRETATION REPORTS

A. Education and Interpretations reports

Director of Education Andrew Richardson reported that 26,016 schoolchildren have either already visited the Museum, received an outreach program or are scheduled to come before the end of June. Most schools visit from the Shenandoah Valley or Piedmont regions, but also from other areas of the state and some from adjoining states. Outreach programs reached 3,716 children so far this year, with many grant-funded by the Foundation. Grant funding from the Foundation – mainly from the Charles Fund – allowed over 10,000 students to either visit or receive an outreach program.

Summer camp spaces are filling up; so far we have filled 82 of 200 spaces in the 5-8 year old camp and 101 of 240 in the 9-12 year old camp. Home School Day has been moved to Saturday April 30, and we have 76 signed up so far – many may use their tickets purchased for last Fall's "rained out" Home School Day; often families wait until closer to the event date to register due to weather concerns. Mr. Richardson also reviewed details of the new Birthday party program.

Mr. Richardson said that Education Department plans for the rest of 2016 include preparing new, updated education posters, which were well-received last year, continuing the education newsletter to reach current and prospective educators and schools, and to continue the development of new onsite and outreach programs which correlate to the Virginia Standards of Learning.

Mr. Sibert cited the Henrico teacher who recently described her school's field trip to the Museum as "better than Jamestown" – and noted that Museum staff and Board should be proud of such an evaluation. He also noted that with even more staff, the Museum could welcome more guests and offer more in-depth programs. Delegate Landes suggested we use that quote on our marketing materials!

Mr. Richardson reviewed interpretive staff totals and updated the Board on staff changes since the last meeting. He also noted that a number of volunteers assist on the site, some in costume. Mr. Vames asked how many staff – both fulltime and part-time – will be hired with the \$150,000 annually the Museum received in the last budget. Mr. Bryan responded that we will hire either 4-5 fulltime or 8-9 part-time or some combination of the two categories. He also said that under the state's Performance Budgeting guidelines, we must demonstrate that we need more staff through increased visitation. Mrs. Sheets said that the Museum's staff have done a great job with the resources available to them.

Delegate Landes asked if we report our visitation numbers in the same manner as other Museums; Mr. Bryan answered that we report on who actually comes here to the Museum site, rather than online visits, website hits etc... Mr. Avoli noted that we do record "usage" numbers for those who use the site for other reasons, such as facility rentals etc... but that these numbers can be somewhat fluid as well.

Mr. Avoli told the Board of a new fulltime interpreter, Jean-Claude Hatungimana, who has worked at the Museum for several years as a wage interpreter. Mr. Hatungimana is originally from Burundi, and is working towards gaining his citizenship, hopefully later this year. He will be posted on the West African site.

Mr. Richardson concluded his report by giving an overview of the Museum's livestock, and sharing that the John Lewis Society (youth volunteer society) volunteers worked about 6,000 hours in 2015.

Mr. Vames thanked the legislative Board Members for their support in securing funding for staff during the recent legislative session.

IV. REPORT FROM THE FOUNDATION

American Frontier Culture Foundation President Ned Ruby gave the Foundation report and complimented the Museum on the positive development of the annual pass program. He reported that:

- Foundation fundraising revenue from four events totaled \$73, 179
- Annual fund contributions as of 4/1/16 are at \$76,437 with a goal of \$110,000 by June 30, 2016
- Two extraordinary gifts in 2016 were \$100,000 for the 1820's Barn and \$100,000 from the Doris Smith Trust
- The Foundation Executive Committee has reviewed and approved the FY2017 budget and will present to the FDN Board this afternoon for approval

In a Foundation "report card", during the past six months the Foundation has, in addition to regular business activities, secured a major gift, grew the legacy society, cut expenses, increased special events revenue, worked to increase annual fund giving, and managed grant funds for the field trip program

Foundation Executive Director Justin Reiter reported that the Foundation will continue the campaign for the annual fund before the end of the fiscal year. He also reported that the Spring newsletter will be released next week, and that the new issue is a collaboration between the Foundation and Museum staff, and will increasingly be "museum-centric" and focused on Museum events, programs and topics.

In the upcoming year, donor loyalty will be a major focus for Foundation staff and Board members, as will efforts in fundraising to view and present fundraising as philanthropy. In the contemporary business and philanthropic scene, it has been noted that most potential and new donors respond most positively to "philanthropy" as opposed to "fundraising", which can evoke pushiness or overly assertive sales efforts. Additionally, the Foundation staff and Board leadership will focus on clearly defining expectations of a Board of Directors Member, so that they will be able to understand what they are to do as BOD members, and thereby be more effective in their roles.

V. OLD BUSINESS

No items of Old Business were discussed.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Ratification Items

Mr. Sibert explained the Executive Committee's discussion concerning the proposed rate increases, noting that there have been no increases since 2003, and that the proposed increases are minimal and admission costs here are still very low compared to other similar venues. He said that he believes such increases are overdue.

Mr. Sibert said:

"I move that, as approved by the Executive Committee, the Board approve a new admission pricing structure beginning July 1, 2016. Adult admission would rise from \$10 to \$12 per person, senior admission would rise from \$9.50 to \$11.50 per person, student (non-field trip) admission would rise from \$9 to \$10 per person, and child admission (6-12 years) would rise from \$6 to \$7 per person. Children five years old and younger are free. Field trip prices will remain the same. An annual family pass will increase by \$10 to \$60, the Old World Pass will increase from \$125 to \$150 and the Frontier Pass will increase from \$250 to \$350. A new pass has been created for non-profits and similar organizations called the Community Pass which costs \$250 per year."

The motion was seconded by Mr. Callanan, there was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

B. Property Development

Discussion deferred to Closed Session.

C. Miscellaneous

Trustee Mrs. Peggy Sheets gave the Museum volunteer report, noting that the Museum requires adult volunteers to submit an application, come for an interview, and undergo mentoring or training at their assigned job. She described several new volunteers and noted that at the end of the last fiscal year, the volunteers gave the Museum over 10,000 hours of service. Mr. Vames thanked Mrs. Sheets for her work with the volunteer committee.

VII. CLOSED SESSION

At 11:50 a.m. Delegate Landes said:

I move that the Board of Trustees of the Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia enter closed session for: Discussion concerning a prospective business or industry or the expansion of an existing business or industry where no previous announcement has been made of the business' or industry's interest in locating or expanding its facilities in the community, pursuant to the exemption in Virginia Code § 2.2-3711(A)(5), and related to the potential sale or lease of real property conveyed by the Museum to the American Frontier Culture Foundation.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Nolen, there was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously. All staff and guests left the room; Members of the Foundations Board of Directors were invited to remain.

At 12:14 p.m., Delegate Landes said:

I move that the Board enter open session.

Whereas, the Board of Trustees of the Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia 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 of Virginia.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Sibert, there was no discussion, and the motion passed unanimously. Each Member certified verbally that no other matters had been discussed.

VIII. NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting date will be Friday September 16 at 9 a.m. in the Dairy Barn Lecture Hall.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.