

Minutes
Frontier Culture Museum Board of Trustees Meeting
April 17, 2015 9:00 a.m. - Lecture Hall

Members Attending:

Nwachukwu Anakwenze, T.E. Beck, Jr., Joseph Fitzgerald, Dianne Fulk, Cliff Garstang, Benjamin Cline, Emmett W. Hanger Jr., John Higgs, William Sibert, Norman Smiley, Elly Swecker, Emmett Toms, Paul Vames (*Chairman*)

Members Absent:

Richard P. Bell, Pamela Fox, Reo Hatfield, John Ijem, R. Steven Landes, Kenneth Plum, Nanalou Sauder, Peggy Sheets, William Stanley, Frank Wagner, Tony Wilt

Guests Attending:

Elizabeth Griffin (*Office of the Attorney General*), John Dod (*President, American Frontier Culture Foundation*), Justin Reiter (*Executive Director, American Frontier Culture Foundation*),

Staff Attending:

John Avoli (*Executive Director*), Eric Bryan (*Deputy Director*), Joseph Herget (*Marketing Director*), Lydia Volskis (*Operations Manager*), Andrew Richardson (*Education Director*), Alex Tillen (*Interpretation Director*), Frances Carrington (*Foundation Administrator*)

CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Paul Vames called the meeting to order at 9 a.m. and each person attending introduced himself or herself. The minutes of the September 2014 meeting were approved as distributed.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Executive Director John Avoli thanked the Board members for their time and effort in supporting the Museum and its numerous projects and initiatives. He also thanked the American Frontier Culture Foundation for its unwavering support and fundraising. He thanked the Museum's much-appreciated volunteers for their work and Trustee Peggy Sheets and Museum Operations Manager Lydia Volskis for their management of the volunteer program. And he lastly thanked the Museum staff for their hard work and good cheer in delivering the Museum's programs every day.

During the past six months the Museum has presented a number of events, made planning decisions on several more events, and contended with difficult winter weather.

- The Oktoberfest two-day event was a great success; the location was moved to a large tent adjacent to the German Farm.
- After a three-year run at the Museum, the Chamber of Commerce has moved its event, "Good Times Tastes and Traditions" elsewhere.
- After a six-year run, the Brews and Blues Festival will move to a location near the Wharf in downtown Staunton with the hope that this will bring some much-needed visitation to the downtown area.
- The Museum will premiere two new events: the American Roots Music series on three Sunday evenings in August with authentic bluegrass music, and a new version of the classic

“Frontier Festival” on September 19th and 20th. The Frontier Festival will be a family-friendly non-alcoholic event with a number of local sponsors.

- Creepy Tales and Lantern Tours were a success this year, and plans are already underway for next year.
- The dedication ceremony for the Mt. Tabor Church exhibit is set for Saturday June 6. The local Methodist Church Pastors and congregations and other guests are among those who will be invited.
- Two wigwams on the American Indian site burned down after a spark accidentally traveled from the dugout canoe work nearby. They are currently being rebuilt by staff and volunteers.
- The Mill Committee is working steadily under the direction of Deputy Director Eric Bryan and in conjunction with design firm Studio Ammons. Mr. Bryan will report more details later in the meeting.
- Mr. Avoli thanked the Legislative members of the Trustees Board - Senators Hanger, Stanley and Wagner, and Delegates Bell, Cline, Landes, Plum and Wilt - for their support of the Museum’s Maintenance Reserve requests during the recent General Assembly Session. The Museum’s total Maintenance Reserve funds total slightly over \$800,000 and will be used for a variety of projects such as main restroom renovation, loop road and parking lot paving, and some landscaping and pond dredging. The Cochran Pavilion has been painted and refreshed for the season; bids to complete the paving projects will be announced soon.
- The Museum experienced a reduction in General Fund appropriation this year and will experience a slightly larger reduction next year. The result is that we have not been able to fund a full-time staff position, and possibly a few part-time positions. Ms. Swecker asked if the Museum will actually lose the positions. Mrs. Schoonover responded that the positions still exist; we have just lost the funding at present.

A. Budget and Technology

Fiscal Director Merritt Schoonover said that after some difficulties, the state’s new Cardinal accounting system is now running more smoothly, and she called attention to the new format of the financial reports generated through the system. She reviewed the Museum’s appropriations, expenditures and revenues, and explained the coding system of the various funds listed. She also explained several recent maintenance reserve project expenditures which included the new HVAC system in the administration complex and the new patio awning for the Museum Store. She said that while the winter months are generally slow revenue months, we are entering the busy spring and summer visitation period which will significantly increase non-general fund revenue. She will also invoice the Foundation for the current Sheetz lease income in the near future. She has learned that the reason for the delay by the Auditor of Public Accounts (APA) in concluding the Museum’s most recent audit is due to staff turnover within the APA; the audit should be completed soon, and she does not expect any serious issues.

She next reviewed the revenue status report as of the end of March, described various accounts and estimated revenue for this Fiscal Year (FY15) as compared to last Fiscal Year (FY14). She explained the process by which the Museum’s assumed management of the Annual Pass program formerly overseen by the Foundation. Highlighting several other items in the report such as a recent decline in golf cart rentals, and recent collaboration with the Foundation on education grant expenditures. She noted that the Museum is now receiving funds from facility rentals directly, as well as film shoot fees. School visitation revenue has been strong, summer camp revenue will likely increase as we have expanded to eight weeks of camp for the upcoming summer, and we have received the insurance recovery funds from the Division of Risk Management for the fraudulent spending by a former employee.

Mrs. Schoonover then compared the year-to-date expenditures for general fund and non-general fund personnel costs; she said that over the course of the fiscal year changes in staffing levels cause some fluctuations in these budgets. She described the Museum's first two Quasi-fulltime ("Q") status positions, which are entry-level full time positions who work 80% of a normal fulltime position (about 32 hours a week). They earn 80% of the salary and leave, but are able to have the full state benefits package. These positions are popular with state agencies who can offer an attractive package to prospective employees while maintaining tight budget control.

She reviewed the monthly revenue comparison charts for FY14 and FY15, as well as a chart detailing special events revenue and attendance for FY 12 to the present. In an aside Mr. Higgs noted that more sponsorships are needed for this year's Wine and Jazz Festival, scheduled for late June.

Mrs. Schoonover reported that the Museum's monthly VITA bill is currently \$870 which includes six computers (4 laptops and 2 desktops), help desk support, Sharepoint, network access, disaster recovery and storage. We have explored options to replace the Museum's aging telephone system, either including this need in our next budget decision package with the Department of Planning and Budget or getting VITA to help us find a less costly option. Mr. Vames thanked Mrs. Schoonover and Trustee Mr. Smiley for their attention to the finances and audit, and Mr. Smiley in turn complimented Mrs. Schoonover for her work to prepare the new financial reporting format while simultaneously implementing the new state accounting system (Cardinal). He noted that one of the most important duties of a Trustee Member is to pay special attention to the financial situation of the Museum.

B. Capital Projects and Maintenance Reserve

Deputy Director Eric Bryan reminded attendees that capital funds are a part of the Museum's appropriation from the state and are different from operating appropriations and funds. In various updates he reported that:

- The Mt. Tabor church exhibit dedication is set for June 6. The Dominion Foundation has supported the project with a grant of \$50,000. Extra logs for the reconstruction have been generously donated by Blue Ridge Lumber.
- Planning for the Early American Industries Exhibit (Mill) is proceeding, next will come basic schematics, then machinery schematics. Studio Ammons is collecting data and beginning work on the design. The goal is to construct a working, water-powered grist mill based on historic designs.
- Two projects were approved in the Museum's FY16 budget submission (non-general funds): an English Barn and an 1820's American Barn.
- In Maintenance Reserve news, as has already been reported, the HVAC system in the administration complex was replaced in the Fall of 2014 and some old trees were removed and pavers updated in the Visitor Center courtyard. The next projects will be the paving of the loop road and Dairy Barn parking lot, upgrading the Visitor Center restrooms, the two ponds to be cleaned and dredged, and other landscape improvements to be completed.
- In collaboration with the Foundation, a large, fourteen-passenger electric tram vehicle has been selected and purchased, (which has been paid for by a kind-hearted private donor at a cost of about \$18,000). Mrs. Fulk suggested that a small donation box could be attached to the tram, pointing out that while the ride is free, many people might be so grateful that they'd gladly donate a little to its upkeep.

C. Education

Andrew Richardson, the Interim Education Director, reported that as of March 31, the Museum had welcomed about 14,149 elementary, middle and high school students on field trips, with 7,215 set to visit before the end of the school year. The projected total is about 1,000 more than two years ago and a thousand less than the 22,970 student visitors last year. It is likely that some other schools will also reserve four times before the end of the year. Schools that visit are mostly from the Shenandoah Valley and Piedmont areas but also include some groups from other areas of the state. School visitation this year has been impacted by extremely cold weather in early Spring as well as some rainy days.

The Charles Fund (managed through the Foundation) donation of \$75,000 for the school year has allowed over 5,200 students from around the state from Title I schools (schools with over 40% of students below the federal poverty line) to visit the Museum. A few schools have visited under the grant from West Virginia and North Carolina. The grant covers admission fees, transportation, lunch and gift bags for the students. Mr. Richardson described the Charles Fund's originator, former Foundation Director and Vice-President Edward Eisenhart, who wanted his donations to really make a practical difference to underprivileged students in Virginia. Mr. Eisenhart was fond of saying that the Frontier Culture Museum is "the nation's best-kept secret". The Charles Fund and the Eisenhart family's support of the Museum has totaled over \$715,000 over more than 25 years.

Mr. Richardson reviewed several photographs of Museum staff presenting outreach programs in schools around the state; many of which visits were funded by the Target Corporation. The Museum will have served about 3,021 students by the end of FY15, less than in FY14 mainly due to inclement weather.

Spring Home School Day is scheduled for Friday, May 1. Generally, the Spring Home School Day's attendance is less than Fall Home School Days. Mr. Richardson will also attend, as he did last year, the Home Educators Association Conference of Virginia in June.

The Museum will offer eight weeks of summer camp for 5-8 and 9-12 year olds. As of today, about 42% of the spaces are already reserved for the younger kid's camp and 66% of the spaces are reserved for the older kid's camp. The camps sell out each year without any paid advertising – by word of mouth.

The Education Department plans to develop new programs and brochures during the upcoming year, continue to monitor Museum programs in relation to the state Standards of Learning, make improvements to online reservations, and build relationships with regional colleges and universities.

Mr. Richardson reviewed slides detailing the numerous college interns the Museum has hosted over the past five years, several of whom went on to become Museum employees. James Madison University alone contributed twenty interns during the past five years, including five new applicants during the past few days. Other colleges and universities sent us twenty-one interns during the same period; among them Bridgewater College, The University of Virginia, Virginia Military Institute, Western Carolina University and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

He then reviewed slides detailing the numerous connections the Museum has to James Madison University in terms of faculty who have served on the Museum's Boards and who volunteer at the Museum, classes which have visited and collaborative programs.

D. Interpretation

Mr. Tillen, as Interpretation Director discussed the number of full-time and part-time staff working in costume on the historic sites. The staff are scheduled to cover the ten outdoor exhibits in operation from March through December each year. The costumed staff conduct outreach programs, mentor the John Lewis youth volunteers, and conduct farm and yard work, animal care and general site maintenance in addition to their duties as historical interpreters to the public and schoolchildren. There are ten volunteers who work in costume on the historic site; several are former John Lewis Society youth volunteers. A slide showed several of the Museum's newest staff members.

This year historic site staff have planned weekly interpretive topics and themes to guide onsite activities which are coordinated across the Museum site and all farms. These weekly themes are advertised via social media such as Facebook.

He described the types and numbers of the Museum's livestock, and noted that we work to make the animals more closely accessible to the visitors.

This year the John Lewis Society, the Museum's youth volunteer society, has 57 students participating this year. The programs begin each January with training and costume preparation, and the students are assigned to a farmsite for March-December each year where they work alongside and are mentored by the adult staff. With a small staff to oversee and mentor the students, the Museum must currently limit membership in the program.

E. Marketing

Mr. Herget as Marketing Director reported that over the past two fiscal years the Museum has experienced visitation growth of between 8-9%; he hopes that the current fiscal year will also show strong growth.

Mr. Herget gave an overview of various events planned for the rest of 2015, including the American Roots Music Series in August (a collaboration with WAMU public radio in Washington DC) and the Frontier Folkways Festival (the return of an older, much-loved Museum event, which will be alcohol-free and family-friendly) in September which are new this year, the Mt. Tabor Church dedication in June and the visit of the Hordt Municipal Band in the Fall. He also highlighted returning events and programs such as summer camps (now extended to eight weeks), Wine and Jazz Festival, Independence Day, Oktoberfest, Fright Nights and Holiday Lantern Tours.

The Museum will follow a four-part marketing strategy; marketing "living history" via social media and other means, an educational program marketing campaign, facility rentals advertisement, and special events advertising and promotion. We will limit the use of traditional media, such as print media and rack cards, whose influence is evidently waning all across the tourism and marketing spectrum and will begin to shift emphasis to social and digital media. A good example is the weekly interpretive themes that Museum staff have developed and will promote. Ms. Swecker asked how the Museum generally approaches Facebook and other social media promotions; Mr. Herget replied that interested people can access the information by visiting the Museum's Facebook page, and noted that we also pay to "boost" some of the content we feature each week, which pushes the news and information to a larger audience. In order to keep close budget control of the small marketing budget, we carefully select which events and programs to "boost".

The Museum's Visitor Center will lose several staff and gain several new staff over the next month or two; all remaining staff will undergo a refresher course in customer service training, and all new staff will be carefully trained. They will work to pro-actively sell Annual Passes to customers who may visit regularly, collect email addresses for e-blast communications, and support the facility rentals program. The Museum has hired two new Q-status staff members to act as Rentals Coordinator and Visitor Center Lead. A Q-status position carries full health benefits and earns leave, but works about 32 hours a week, or 80% of a regular full-time position. Mrs. Fulk asked if we will consider any incentives for staff to sell the Annual Passes; Mr. Avoli said that we will, once the new staff have arrived and all have been retrained. Mr. Sibert noted that the Annual Pass is a great bargain for families who visit often.

III. REPORT FROM THE FOUNDATION

John Dod, President of the American Frontier Culture Foundation reviewed a report on the general philanthropic outlook for 2015-16, and said that charitable giving is projected to increase. The Foundation's Annual Fund has increased by 54% over the same time period last year, and corporate gifts have increased by 15%. He reviewed several steps which the Foundation will take in order to reach 100% of their goal for the Annual Fund. He also gave an overview of the Foundations fundraising events this year. A slide showed the Foundation's support of the Museum which included \$100,000 to support part-time staff, \$85,000 in field trip grants, \$18,500 from an anonymous donor for the new tram vehicle, and various other funds totaling \$290,000. He described the steps the Foundation Board will take as it prepares for fundraising in 2016 and beyond.

The Foundation staff offices have a new Information Technology (IT) infrastructure with new computers and server, and the Museum Store has upgraded to a new point-of-sale system.

Mr. Vames thanked the Foundation members for their continued and unwavering support of the Museum. Mr. Avoli noted that Mr. Dod would be rotating off of the Foundation Board and thanked him for his years of service and leadership.

IV OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Sibert thanked the men and women of the American Frontier Culture Foundation for their vital assistance in keeping the Museum operating smoothly, especially for their substantial contribution towards part-time staff salaries. He added that the financial support of all Trustee Members is very important, the amount not as important as the fact that all Trustees contribute in some way. Mr. Avoli especially thanked Dr. Anakwenze for his generous gift of numerous drums and artifacts for the West African farm, and for his hard work to locate the items in Nigeria and have them transported to the Museum.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Ratification Items

To allow more time for review and to make any other needed changes, Mr. Vames said that the Bylaws updates would be tabled until a later meeting.

B. Property development

Mr. Rye Winston of the Colette Company in Charlotte, NC, whose firm is working on the front property development, reported that negotiations are ongoing with prospective tenants for the property. One business is asking for a few changes to a year-old letter of intent, which Colette is considering. As a way to give a general overview of progress, he posed and answered several basic questions:

What has been accomplished so far? The City of Staunton has approved the Master Plan for the site, Phase I and Phase II for the entire 42 acres. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the City have approved a revenue-sharing plan, and up to \$1million dollars in road improvements as needed. The City of Staunton Economic Development Office has agreed to partial rebates on property and sales taxes. The site work plans are mostly finished and ready for the City's final review, and about \$200,000 has been invested in the project to date during these preliminary phases.

What remains to be done? We are awaiting wetlands permits and an easement from the state concerning a water retention pond. Negotiations with the Sheetz Corporation have been ongoing and are nearing closure. Four businesses have signed letters of intent for outparcels, which will convert into two sale contracts and two ground leases. A 1.3 million dollar deposit has been made to the City of Staunton to support approval of the plans and to advertise for the road-building component of the project. There will be a City contract for the road-building and a private contract for other needed work.

When will dirt move? Once all the afore-mentioned issues are resolved, actual construction will begin. The businesses planning to occupy the outparcels have expressed a hope for pads ready for construction by the Spring of 2016. In order to meet this timeline various issues will need to be resolved in a timely manner.

When will cash flow? Typically, income flow begins about six months after the pad is delivered ready to build, so at the earliest we would see "cash flow" in September of 2016. City grant funds are paid annually, so the first rebate dollars from the City would begin in September of 2017 and continue for fifteen years. Mr. Higgs asked about the DeJarnette demolition; Mr. Winston responded that it is expected that it will cost around \$1 million dollars to remove, but that this will happen when an anchor tenant is ready to occupy the site. This will most likely not be necessary in Phase I of the development plan.

C. Miscellaneous

Mr. Avoli reported that some years ago a sculptor created a large piece for the proposed slave museum in Fredericksburg; a museum which never came to fruition. Currently stored in Staunton, the piece has been offered to the City of Staunton, which is considering the matter. The piece is a partially abstract, somewhat graphic depiction of the conditions enslaved people endured while being transported to the New World on the "Middle Passage", the commonly used term for the slave trader's route. Mrs. Swecker asked if the Museum has a policy for such an item; Mr. Avoli responded that we do have a collections policy but in general it does not cover such a large outdoor sculpture. Several Members expressed the view that it should be evaluated by a small committee of Board and staff members, as to whether or not its theme is sufficiently related to our mission, and if we have a place to put it that is appropriate. After some discussion it was

decided that such a review committee would be formed to examine the sculpture before proceeding to a discussion on its merits and suitability for the Museum, as well as to determine what the City plans to do, as the offer to the City is still undecided.

D. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

VII. NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting of the Board of Trustees is set for Friday September 18 at 9 a.m. in the Lecture Hall.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:55 a.m.