

Minutes
Frontier Culture Museum Board of Trustees Meeting
September 18, 2015 9:00 a.m. - Lecture Hall

Members Attending: Richard P. Bell, Kevin J. Callanan, Joseph Fitzgerald, Dianne Fulk, Clifford Garstang, John Higgs, Emmett Hanger, Frank Nolen, R. Steven Landes, Kenneth Plum, William Sibert, Peggy Sheets, Norman “Butch’ Smiley, Elly Swecker, Emmett Toms, Paul Vames, Kenneth Venable, Tony Wilt

Members Absent: Nwachukwu Anakwenze, Benjamin Cline, Pamela Fox, Reo Hatfield III, John Ijem, William Stanley, Frank Wagner

Staff Attending: Executive Director John Avoli, Deputy Director Eric Bryan, Operations Manager Lydia Volskis, Fiscal Director Merritt Schoonover, Marketing Director Joe Herget, Education Director Andrew Richardson, American Frontier Culture Foundation Executive Director Justin Reiter, Fiscal Technician Kelly Price

Guests Attending: Ned Ruby, President, American Frontier Culture Foundation, T.E. Beck Jr., Former Member Board of Trustees, M. Elizabeth Griffin, Office of the Attorney General

I. CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chair Paul Vames called the meeting to order at 9:05 and each attendee introduced him or herself. Deputy Director Eric Bryan introduced historic site interpreter Casey Musselman who will present a program, and new historic site interpreters Hunter Cridlin, Megan Sullivan and Mary Kate Claytor. Mr. Vames introduced Justin Reiter, Executive Director of the American Frontier Culture Foundation and Ned Ruby, President of the American Frontier Culture Foundation.

Delegate Landes made a motion that the minutes of the April 2015 meeting be approved as distributed. The motion was seconded by Mr. Smiley. There was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

II. REPORT FROM THE FOUNDATION

Foundation President Ned Ruby gave an overview of the Foundation’s financial position as of June 30, 2015. The overview included cash, cash equivalents, investments and property. During FY14 the Foundation decreased expenses by 70%, increased the annual fund by 25%, increased event revenue by 7.5%, increased planned giving, and achieved 100% Board of Director financial support. He also described the new office and administrative plan and reviewed the various funds provided to the Museum by the Foundation.

Foundation Executive Director Justin Reiter described several areas that the Foundation staff will focus on during the upcoming year. They are; donor relations, major donor cultivation, working to allow donors to see specific impact of donations, cultivation of baby-boomer donors and their special interests, mega-donor cultivation, donors as volunteers, and database update and expansion. He said that other goals for the Foundation during the upcoming year include increasing the annual fund by 10%, premiering several new fundraising events to replace older events which have declined, increase corporate giving, promote more planned giving, increase the number of donors and the amount of their gifts, and continue to decrease expenses. He noted that the goal and intention of the Foundation is that ‘everything we do is in support of

the Frontier Culture Museum!” and that the Foundation’s business and financial strategies and decisions are in service of the outcome, not the profit.

Mr. Sibert thanked Mr. Ruby, Mr. Reiter and the Foundation for their support of the Museum, and Mr. Vames also complimented the Foundation’s work and goals. Mrs. Sheets noted that the Board of Directors has achieved 100% financial participation from its Members, and that the Board of Trustees should also strive to reach the same goal.

III. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Executive Director John Avoli welcomed attendees and especially thanked Trustee Ted Beck, who is rotating off of the Board after serving for over sixteen years. He thanked Mr. Beck for being a mentor, confidant and advisor for both himself and the Museum staff. Mr. Avoli complimented the Museum staff and volunteers for their hard work and noted that without the volunteers the Museum would not be able to maintain its high standards. The Museum’s volunteer group, which includes Board Members, youth volunteers and adult volunteers gave nearly 11,000 hours to the Museum during the last fiscal year. He thanked Mr. Ruby and Mr. Reiter and the Foundation, and said that the Foundation’s support is vital to the Museum. He thanked the Legislative members of the Board for their help in securing maintenance reserve funding in the last several budget cycles to maintain the Museum’s facilities; currently the loop roads and parking lots are being resurfaced, and soon the Welcome Center restrooms will be refurbished. Upcoming projects also include dredging the Museum’s two ponds and possibly re-roofing the two Dairy Barns.

Mr. Avoli continued that Museum visitation has been strong, with increases in student field trips. In other news:

- The Igbo Conference in late July was a success and nearly 700 people attended during some part of the weekend. The group plans to return next summer for a subsequent conference.
- The Wine and Jazz Festival went well this year and a planning meeting to begin work on next year’s event is scheduled soon.
- The Food Truck Battle to benefit the MaDee project which the Museum hosted recently was a great success, with twice as many attendees as were expected. More vendors will be added next year.
- This year’s Italy fundraising trip for the Foundation was a success and trips in June and September 2016 are already being planned and are nearly full.
- Oktoberfest 2015 is set for the weekend of October 3-4, and the Hordt Municipal Band will be at the Museum on the weekend of October 23-24 (Board Members will be invited to a dinner with the band). Mr. Sibert noted the importance of the Village of Hordt and of Former Mayor and Foundation Board of Directors Member Berndt Dollt in acquiring the German Farm for the Museum.
- The Museum will host the return of Frontier Festival tomorrow; the event is a family-themed day with special interpretations, food truck vendors and music.

Mr. Vames said that the Museum hosted a wonderful Naturalization Ceremony this past Tuesday at which 76 people took the Oath of Citizenship.

Mr. Vames also complimented Mr. Avoli for his years of hard work and dedication to the Museum, and noted that a great deal of the success of the Museum is due to Mr. Avoli's skills in shepherding and advancing the Museum.

A. Budget and Technology

Fiscal Director Merritt Schoonover reviewed the final budget for FY2015 (July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015), the Museum's regular audit by the Auditor of Public Accounts (APA) from 2014 and the recent Procurement Review.

She reviewed the Statement of Appropriations, Allotments and Expenditures for all funds from the end of FY15; the statement covers the state appropriation, non-general funds earned, maintenance reserve, the Sheetz fund and capital projects. She also reviewed the FY15 Revenue Status Report, a comparison of monthly revenue for FY14 and FY15, and year-to-date expenditures in both general and non-general funds.

She described the 2011-2012 APA audit, from which she received management comment letters in July of 2015; these results were delayed by substantial turnover in staff in the APA's office. She is awaiting the final report. She reviewed recommendations made by the APA which were to improve internal policy documentation (including an updated policy manual), and to improve internal controls for fiscal operations. She has made many of the specific changes suggested, even in advance of the official final report. Delegate Landes asked if the Museum will receive a letter from the APA as an "all clear: once we have made the corrections they recommended. Mrs. Schoonover stated that we will make an official response to the final report with a letter, and that when the next audit begins in a year or two, the APA will begin by reviewing the status of our compliance with previous recommendations.

She also reviewed the recent procurement management review by the Department of General Services, and will work to implement the several small "findings" which can be easily corrected. Ms. Schoonover pointed out that the procurement review is not an audit, and she reviewed the regulations the Museum must follow in order to conduct purchasing, and described some of the places the Museum must search before purchasing locally. All purchases, unless they are "over-the-counter" purchases, must still be entered into the EVA system and the Museum must pay a user fee to EVA for its transactions, even if the purchases are not made via EVA. Delegate Landes said that of the time for price comparisons and documentation become too onerous, that Mrs. Schoonover should let the Legislative Members know specifics of the situation, as often Legislators hear of general concerns about the EVA purchasing system, but do not get specific examples to use to recommend improvements.

She reviewed the upcoming Decision Packages which will be submitted to the Department of Planning and Budget for funds during the upcoming budget cycle. Delegate Landes asked if the volunteer tram drivers were well-trained to drive the golf cart trams; Mr. Avoli replied that they were, and that the Museum is covered for any accidents through the state's Risk Management division. Mr. Smiley asked about the funds requested to move the library from Dairy Barn I to Dairy Barn II, and wondered if these funds could be better used to hire much-needed extra staff. Mrs. Schoonover explained that the Museum has repeatedly asked for permanent funding for more staff with no success, and that the one-time funds to move the library to a more secure location with efficient shelving, would allow the current library space to be re-tasked into a rental space. The funds garnered from the rental of the space could then be used to hire more staff, as this income would be counted as non-general fund revenue. Mrs. Swecker asked if the library move was related to the safety of the book collection; Mr. Bryan responded that we do not have any books in the library which require special climate or care. Mr. Sibert asked if the proposed move would have any effect on the Artisan's Center staff? Mr. Bryan replied that he has some thoughts on how things might work. Mrs. Sheets pointed out that in the past when the Museum has submitted funding requests for staff in the Decision Packages, the first item removed from the list by DPB is the staffing requests.

Mrs. Schoonover described the Museum's current use of VITA (Virginia Information Technology Agency) services, and the telephone replacement plans. The Museum's current telephone system is nearly 30 years old and in dire need of replacement.

Mr. Vames pointed out that the most important responsibility of a Trustee Board Member is to review the agency finances. He also noted that Members may always choose to send a question to the Fiscal Director via email or make an appointment to stop by the Museum with questions.

B. Capital Projects and Maintenance Reserve

Deputy Director Eric Bryan reported on recent capital projects such as the recently completed and dedicated Mt. Tabor log church, and the small West African site forge. A current maintenance reserve project is the loop road and parking lot repaving project. In the FY16 budget two non-general fund projects have been approved, an English Farm barn and an 1820's American Farm barn.

The Early American Industries Exhibit (Mill) is a pool-funded project (a part of the state's new capital funding system) is in the preliminary design phase. Studio Ammons Inc. is the design firm handling these plans, and there will be a meeting of the Mill Committee October 1 to review progress. The next step will be to submit the Mill plans to the Bureau of Capital Outlay Management (BCOM) for a cost review. The goal is to next move the project to the construction funding phase; preliminary cost estimates are about 1.2 million dollars.

C. Marketing

Marketing Director Joe Herget reviewed visitation numbers for FY15, noting the overall 2% increase for the year. He noted that the Museum, as an outdoor venue, is affected by seasonally bad weather. He also showed quarterly visitation comparisons from FY13, FY14 and FY15. Delegate Landes asked how we compare to other sites in the Valley and statewide; Mr. Herget responded that the Woodrow Wilson Birthplace and Museum in Staunton has been struggling for visitors recently, and that the Jamestown-Yorktown site is also affected by weather. He also noted that both Monticello and Colonial Williamsburg have been struggling to attract and retain their customer base. Mrs. Sheets said that after a recent visit she understood that Colonial Williamsburg has had a significant visitation decline and some staff layoffs.

Mr. Herget reviewed the Museum's general marketing objectives; education, event development, and general visitation. The Museum's marketing approach in general has four areas of concentration; education, living history, special events, and annual pass development. He discussed the Museum's marketing communications objectives; to drive annual pass sales, to attract local repeat visitors, and attract initial visits from local and regional/distant markets. An important way to increase annual visitation is to work on annual pass sales development. He also reviewed the new Education programs poster, which was sent to several thousand teachers across the state recently to promote the Museum's programs.

The Museum's marketing strategy involves retaining some traditional media such as printed rack cards, but shifting emphasis to digital and social media, which offer a wider reach for less cost. The Museum will also use radio and television advertising as needed and as funds allow.

Mrs. Fulk asked about the various levels of the annual pass system, and Mr. Herget described each level of membership.

Delegate Plum, who is a Facebook “friend” for the Museum, observed that Luray Caverns send several communications a week to its friends and members, and suggested that the Museum might try such an approach to maintain regular communications and updates with those who support its programs. Mr. Herget described the practice of “boosting” on Facebook and noted that it now costs money to reach our following.

IV. EDUCATION & INTERPRETATION REPORTS

A. Education and Interpretations reports and special presentation

Mr. Bryan introduced Mr. Richardson as the Museum’s new official Director of Education; he won the permanent position recently after serving as interim for several years. Mr. Richardson reviewed school visitation and outreach numbers for FY15; The Museum served a total of 23,865 students in FY15, from across Virginia and from other states. In FY12 the Museum served 15,032 students, in FY13 there were 20,585 students and in FY14 there were 22,970 students on field trips and outreach programs. He said that we are also presenting some paid outreach programs to schools, in addition to the grant-funded programs.

So far for FY16 field trip and outreach reservations are underway with 11,386 having already visited or scheduled to visit the Museum. Mr. Richardson reviewed the history and contributions of the Charles Fund to the Museum’s school programs, noting that the Fund has contributed over \$715,000 over the years to the Museum’s school programs.

The Museum’s popular summer camps were filled nearly to capacity this year, with the 5-8 year old camp at 81% capacity and the 9-12 year old camp at 102.5% capacity. Next summer, Museum staff plan to increase the spaces available in the older children’s camp.

Mr. Richardson introduced Casey Musselman, a costumed interpreter, who portrays the schoolmaster for many outreach and site programs. Mr. Musselman explained about the program he would present and then assumed a “first-person” character and for a short time interacted with the Board Members as if they were a class of students in a mid-nineteenth century Valley schoolhouse.

Fall Home School Day is scheduled for Friday October 2, and a number of home school families and groups have already reserved tickets.

Mr. Richardson will represent the Museum at the Virginia Council of Social Studies conference in October’ he will stock an exhibit table with informational materials, and will also assist in a presentation by a James Madison University professor on cultural universals.

Mr. Richardson gave the interpretation department report on behalf of Mr. Tillen and reviewed current staffing levels. He introduced Megan Sullivan, who is a new fulltime interpreter, to present a small part of a program about historic parlor games. He reviewed several slides describing the animals at the Museum, and the youth volunteer group, the “John Lewis Society”. Mr. Sibert said that the Museum has twelve structures/sites and operates seven days a week for 362 days a year, and that the interpreters are the heart of the Museum. The Museum needs more interpreters to properly staff the exhibits, and stated that the Museum is at its best because of the people.

V. OLD BUSINESS

No items of old business were discussed.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Ratification Items

Mr. Avoli described the resolution to approve the storm-water and sewer easements for the front development property. The Office of the Attorney General prepared the documents and the Executive Committee approved the resolution, pending clarification of the exact physical parameters of the easement area. Mr. Sibert will represent the Executive Committee and Board in clarifying the final parameters of the easement area and overseeing the corrected plat from Bohler. Delegate Landes made a motion, seconded by Delegate Plum that the Board approve the resolution as submitted regarding the storm-water and sewer easements, with the understanding that Mr. Sibert will represent the Board to oversee clarification of the exact boundaries of the storm-water easement. There was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

B. FOIA Review for Trustees

Ms. Elizabeth Griffin of the Office of the Attorney General presented a video on the Freedom of Information Act regarding board service, based on the Code of Virginia. She answered several questions from Members and conducted a short informational quiz on the material presented.

C. Property Development

No items regarding property development were discussed.

D. Miscellaneous

Senator Nolen wondered if the Museum or Foundation could sell naming rights to the Dairy Barns – as no cows have inhabited the barns for a number of years!

E. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

VIII. NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting of the Board of Trustees is set for Friday April 15, 2016 at 9 a.m.. in the Lecture Hall.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m.