



Approved Minutes
Quarterly Board of Trustees Meeting
Zoom
2500 West Broad Street

April 22, 2021
3:00 pm

Present: Dr. Denise Walters, Dr. Richard Groover, Glenn Davidson, JoAnne Carter, Patricia Nicoson, Amy Laufer, David Mills, Cristina Ramirez, Eucharia Jackson, John Benton, Lauren Mathena, Dr. Rodney Barry, Elsa Falls, Mary Ward

Staff: Richard Conti, Elizabeth Voelkel, Timshel Purdum, Courtney Moyer, Kinsey Peeler, Jim Blow

Other Attendees: Cynthia Norwood, Virginia State Attorney General's Office

Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Davidson welcomed everyone, verified that a quorum was present, and called the meeting to order at 3:01 pm. Mr. Davidson introduced a new Trustee, Mr. Rodney Berry. Mr. Berry has worked in education for over 26 years, and is a Richmond native.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Davidson asked the Trustees to review the January 21, 2021 meeting minutes. Mr. Benton noted a small correction on page 3 and moved to approve the January 21, 2021 meeting minutes with corrections. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mills. Mr. Davidson called for a vote which passed unanimously without objection.

Mr. Davidson then handed the meeting over to Ms. Voelkel who delivered the Operations update.

Operations Update

Mrs. Voelkel highlighted the following points:

- Guests' check in experience has changed from a self check in tables to a socially distanced check in queue at the Guest Services desk

- Renovations to the 2nd floor East Gallery are underway, including new carpet and retrofitting the EcoLab to serve as a digital demo studio.
- The HyperWall has also been installed as part of the NOAA and IMLS Grant projects.
- The HyperWall features localized environmental, social, and climate science stories through data visualizations
- The 2nd floor East art gallery is currently hosting, “Creative Arts Therapies” developed by Registrar Lori Buckley-van den Putte in collaboration with community partners.
- The Virginia Senate returned to finish their regular, special, and reconvened sessions
- The Special Events team coordinated and ensured smooth operations for the Virginia Senate while the Museum was open to the public
- Repair and replacement of a major section of the roof of Broad Street Station is underway and should wrap up at end of May
- As of April 1st, the Governor has increased COVID limits on gatherings to up to 50 guests indoors and 100 guests outdoors
- Due to the change in gathering limits, wedding rentals will resume

Dr. Walters complimented the Museum staff for their efficiency while hosting the Virginia Senate.

Director’s Report

Mr. Conti discussed current projects:

- The Parking Deck is taking shape, it is a \$14M project with S.B.Ballard as the contractor
- There have been a few minor issues with construction that have been resolved
- The deck will feature 400 straight-in parking spaces on 3 levels
- The Green Space project planning is going quite well, Phase 1 will cost approximately \$3.5M
- The General Assembly created the project for the Museum, but did not appropriate funds to complete it.
- The Green Space will be privately funded, the hope is to have funds to put Phase 1 out to bid by July.
- Over 97 artists from across the globe submitted proposals to design art feature in the Green Space
- A piece entitled “Cosmic Perception” was selected with community and Board input.
- The feature will be 23ft high and 35ft wide, the designers are based in Texas.
- Funding for the art piece is separate, a patron is currently being sought.
- A smaller art piece featuring a sundial in the shape of a bird will be incorporated on the corner of Broad St and Terminal right next to the Bus stop.

- Great care is being taken to select Virginia Native plants, grasses and trees for the Green Space
- The Museum has located a grove in Georgia that will supply mature elm trees for use with the Green Space landscaping

Dr. Berry offered potential partnership opportunities with his agency and its horticulture program to be involved with the Green Space development.

Ms. Falls expressed excitement and complimented the avian sundial design. Mr. Conti asked for any input regarding the type of bird to feature for the sculpture. The exact type is still under consideration, but the Museum will commission an artist to carve the bird and then create a bronze cast.

Mr. Mills asked about plans for the front entryway after the Green Space is completed. Mr. Conti responded that the parking will be removed, and the circle drive will be narrowed and resurfaced with pavers. The hardscape will be narrowed out and the landscaping will be increased. A seating area will serve as a barrier between the sidewalk and the green space and offer protection to those enjoying the park from the street.

Dr. Groover asked about school bus parking. Ms. Voelkel responded that pre-COVID the Museum began testing the strategy of parking busses along Leigh St. and the current plan is to continue to do so.

Ms. Jackson asked if the plan still encompasses adding a restaurant. Mr. Conti said that current plans are still amenable to constructing an al fresco style restaurant in the plaza area between the parking deck and the Dome entrance, but a lot will depend on the market conditions for local restaurants over the next few years.

Ms. Laufer complimented the beauty of the Green Space plans and also asked about the Richmond City Council's involvement. Mr. Conti shared that the newly appointed City Councilman has visited the Museum and seen the plans. Richmond City is supportive and has contributed funds to the trail path. Ms. Laufer also asked about prioritizing Virginia artists for the bid to sculpt the avian sundial. Mr. Conti said that the current plan is to have a rotating exhibit space in the park corner near DMV Drive that would feature different works by Virginia artists.

Mr. Davison called upon the Board to continue to assist with the fundraising efforts of the Foundation and to suggest potential donors to the Foundation to aid with the many large scale projects underway and planned for the near future. Ms. Peeler asked the Board members to consider contributing to the Annual Fund and stay in contact with the Foundation. Mr. Conti added that the Foundation has undertaken a \$1M challenge to raise funds.

Ms. Jackson asked for clarification regarding the 400 parking spaces for the Parking Deck and whether a point of sale system will be installed at the entry and exit. Mr. Conti responded that the deck will be free for guests, but the technology will be in place to charge a fee for use in the future if the decision is made to require a paid ticket during non-operating hours.

Mr. Conti discussed the updates on the Northern Virginia Science Center Project.

- The state is committed to paying for the hard and soft building costs
- Loudoun County has contributed \$15M
- Efforts are underway to continue raising private funds
- Currently there are enough funds to construct the building and grounds, further raised funds will bolster the endowment to operate
- The Marketing Team has taken great care to develop cohesive branding for The Northern Virginia Science Center.
- Preliminary renderings of entry gallery, *Flow*, help set the tone
- The *Cosmos* gallery generates an immersive feel
- The *Habitat* gallery highlights natural and man-made designs and their harmony
- Exterior designs will integrate with the surroundings
- The entryway features an animated Cloud rendering via architectural sculpture
- The rear of the building borders a 250 acre nature conservatory
- The Loudoun County board approved the rezoning of the site on April 20th, 2021
- When the donation agreement is presented to the developer and executed, the project will move to the preliminary design stage
- Gallery design and development is well underway, with two gallery designs complete
- The state should take possession of the land by the end of 2021
- Possible opening date is in early 2024

Mr. Davidson asked about significant monetary contributions to this project. Mr. Conti shared that NorthWest Federal Credit Union has pledged \$10M, and Dominion has contributed \$1M. Another \$100K-\$150K has been contributed by smaller tech companies and families from Northern Virginia.

Ms. Falls commented that the incorporation of ocean trash/plastics into the design of the gallery floor is ingenious. Mr. Conti responded that the design team at Roto takes great pride in the aesthetic and the thoughtful comprehensive design.

Ms. Nicoson mentioned that May 20th, 2021 is the planned “Launch the Future” fundraiser. The event will double as a fundraiser and a public release of the NoVASci project and other strategic plan details. The event will feature 30 minute watch parties hosted by supporters and Board members. After the watch parties,

a larger 30 minute presentation will occur featuring Governor Northam and the First Lady.

- The VCU School of Education partnership continues to take shape
- VCU has expressed some concerns over the amount of funds needed to renovate the Workers Compensation building
- VCU has countered the Museum by requesting ownership for 30 years, as opposed to the original proposal of 15 years
- A 30 year term agreement may not be in the best interests of the Museum
- Inquiries are underway to determine if the Bon Secours building may better meet the needs of VCU for the potential partnership
- The Museum and VCU are committed to the partnership, which will move forward, but the exact details are to be determined
- The Virginia Senate's use of the Dewey Gottwald Center was a huge success
- The Museum was able to work with the Senate and gain another capital project of \$5M to upgrade the Broad Street Station HVAC System, as well as some additional operating funds.

Dr. Berry asked about the possibility of the casino construction in the area and its potential negative impact. Mr. Conti stated that a lot of discussion is underway regarding the project in the area, but the Museum is maintaining a neutral stance on the issue. Scott's Addition residents are not in favor of the project. Dr. Hoffman, SMV Chief Scientist, is on the Board of the Scott's Addition Boulevard Association. Ms. Jackson asked if the Museum has any avenues to lobby against the casino. Mr. Conti replied that the Board members are able to lobby and advocate against the casino, but the Museum administration is aiming to remain neutral. Ms. Laufer asked if it would be appropriate for the Board to make a public statement regarding the casino. Mr. Davison asked for advice from Ms. Norwood regarding the possibility of a Board statement and its appropriateness and legality. Ms. Norwood clarified that it would not be appropriate for the Board to make a statement, but as individuals Board members are able to make statements and lobby. Ms. Norwood advised taking concerns to the Secretary of Education. Mr. Conti added that In early June, the city will narrow down the casino proposals from two to one. The winning bid will begin their PR campaign. The constituency will vote for final approval in November.

Strategic Planning

Mr. Conti discussed the following:

- The strategic planning process continues to make great progress
- Ms. Voelkel has developed milestones for the NOVASci project
- Ms. Purdum has taken great strides in developments for Education
- There is a proposal for a special meeting in September 2021, possibly including the Foundation Board as well

- The special meeting will allow for status update presentations from each of the four groups and give a month to react and plan prior to October Board meeting

Finance and Business Operations Committee Report

Dr. Groover provided a brief overview of the Finance meeting:

- During the COVID transition period and resuming of operations, the Museum Administration has provided exemplary management of finances

Mr. Conti added some additional brief details:

- Earned revenues remain down as expected.
- Year over year revenues for the FY to date are \$520K versus \$3.3M pre-COVID
- Cost controls are really beginning to show on the financial statements, cut backs included reducing payroll by \$1.35M and contracted services by \$1.1M
- Robust one time revenues from hosting the Virginia Senate and Virginia Film Office have helped
- Reserves are still in great shape: working capital is at \$1.9M, TDF at \$1.1M, other cash on hand at \$600K
- The Museum has applied for a Shuttered Venue Operator Grant, which based on earned revenue lost could grant up to \$1.4M
- The attendance ceiling is capped at a lower number than is strictly necessary out of an abundance of caution
- A slow and steady increase in attendance and earned revenues over coming months is anticipated.

Ms. Nicoson asked if the Museum qualified for Payroll Protection Plan funds. Mr. Conti clarified that the Museum was not eligible, but the Foundation was eligible. The Foundation was granted two rounds of PPP funds, \$127K and \$131K respectively.

Foundation Focus

Ms. Peeler provided highlights of the Foundation operations:

- Currently the Foundation holds \$27M in assets
- On track to give \$2M in support to the Museum
- Efforts to fundraise for the Green Space are ongoing
- The Foundation Board of Directors have been challenged to give \$1M by June 30th, 2021
- Advisory Council member Virginia Ellett passed away recently at age 93
- Ms. Ellett left the Museum a bequest of \$1.5M, and left the Foundation two annuities valued at just under \$1M
- Total bequest stands at \$2.4M
- The asset liquidity will aid in the funding and progress of the Museum Green Space

Education Report

Ms. Purdum briefly provided highlights from the Education Team

- Digital programming continues to be a focus, and the team is developing new content constantly
- Synchronous and asynchronous programming is currently being offered.
- Science content is being distributed as far as California via digital demos
- The Girls in Medicine event was converted from an overnight camp in to a day program, and went very well
- A new generation of rats is being trained to resume Rat Basketball
- Summer Camps sold out within 30 minutes of going live on the website
- The MiX teen only maker space is starting back up as well,
- The astronomy team continues to host live astronomy programming available via Facebook Live
- Volunteers are starting to come back on board and are scheduled in regular rotations to allow for safe social distancing
- The Lunch Break Science lecture series is thriving in the virtual format
- The Education Team is continuing to build relationships with Richmond community organizations

Marketing Update

Ms. Moyer discussed key points on Marketing

- Data analysis looks different, year to year and month to month comparisons are difficult given COVID adjustments
- Attendance is down 87% compared to last year
- Consistently selling out on weekend days for general admission
- Regularly hitting attendance max for ticket sales and member reservations
- The Wednesday reduced price admission promotion will stay in place until summer exhibit opens
- Currently the the Museum is working and building up member base, about half of member households were lost during COVID
- *Tyrannosaurus: Meet the Family* opens in June, tickets will be a \$5 upcharge for general admission and free for members
- A social media campaign to boost membership is planned to kick off next week
- Another campaign push to urge lapsed members to rejoin is also planned
- The Museum is continuing to improve the user experience on the new website, which went live in January of 2021
- Danville Science Center's new website will go live next week
- Northern Virginia Science Center's website will premiere on May 18th, 2021
- The new sites feature new navigation and design consistent across all entities: SMV, DSC, and NVSC
- *Mental Health: Mind Matters* exhibit has been well received and is garnering great feedback from the community
- *Dinosaurs Alive!*, a new Dome show, is arriving this June
- The *HotWheels: Race to Win* exhibit will arrive this fall

- A contract with the with Science Museum of Minnesota for an exhibit called *Skin:Living Armor, Evolving Identity*, with a potential run from April 2022 to January 2023
- The exhibit explores all aspects of skin and the science behind it
- The exhibit will also include content which discusses skin color, social constructs, and redlining

Ms. Laufer asked about the vaccination process for the Staff. Ms. Moyer mentioned that per HIPAA guidelines, the Museum cannot disclose if staff members have been vaccinated or not.

Mr. Davidson commented that it is very important that the Board and Museum can talk about climate change, mental health and race.

New Business

Mr. Davidson asked for any new business.

Ms. Falls shared that as the official representative from the Virginia Academy of Science, the VAS will have its 100th Anniversary celebration in 2022-2023. Ms. Falls also discussed the late Ms. Virginia Ellett and her numerous accomplishments and contributions.

Adjournment

Mr. Davidson entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Walters made the motion, which was seconded by Ms. Falls. Mr. Davidson called for a vote, which passed unanimously without objection. The meeting was adjourned at 4:14 p.m.

The next meeting will be on June 17, 2021