



Approved Minutes  
Quarterly Board of Trustees Meeting  
2500 West Broad Street

January 22, 2026  
3 p.m.

**Present:** Patricia Nicoson, Gina Burgin, Thomas Gottwald, Ram Venkatachalam, Dr. Robert Winn, Elsa Falls, John Ivins, Dr. Nisha Patel, Jeff Bentley, Dr. Denise Walters, Dr. Irma Becerra (virtual)

**Absent:** Kate Hight, Amishi Amin, Karey Malyszko, Fran Bradford

**Staff:** Rich Conti, Courtney Moyer, Ash Harris, Martha Quinn, Maggie Gercken, and Ada Sue Siler.

**Other Attendees:** J.C. La Riviere, Office of the Attorney General; Cindy Norwood-Marquez

### **Welcome and Approval of Minutes**

Dr. Winn welcomed everyone to the meeting and reviewed the agenda.

Dr. Winn presented three sets of meeting minutes for Board review and approval. October 16, 2025 Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, October 16, 2025 Lunch Presentation Meeting Minutes, October 29, 2025 Special Joint Meeting Minutes

The minutes from the October 16, 2025 Board of Trustees meeting were reviewed. Dr. Walters noted one edit to the minutes.

Ms. Nicoson made a motion to approve the minutes with the noted edit. The motion was seconded by Dr. Walters. Dr. Winn called for a vote by verbal affirmation. All members voted in favor, with none opposed. The motion carried.

The Lunch Presentation meeting minutes from October 16, 2025 were presented for approval.

Mr. Bentley made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Ms. Falls. Dr. Winn called for a vote. All members voted in favor, with none opposed. The motion carried.

The minutes from the October 29, 2025 Special Joint Meeting were presented for review. Ms. Burgin made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Ms. Falls. Dr. Winn called for a vote. All members voted in favor, with none opposed. The motion carried.

## **Director's Report**

Mr. Conti provided a recap of earlier meetings and the lunch tour. He presented an overview of organizational performance, capital projects, branding initiatives, and long-term planning.

- Attendance continues to increase steadily. Revenues are on track.
- Multiple building projects are currently underway.
- Northern Virginia operations planning is in progress.
- Brand architecture development is underway, with a target completion this summer and a rollout in January 2027 to position the organization for its 50th anniversary year.
- A comprehensive fundraising campaign will support upcoming capital and programmatic projects. Fundraising events are planned to advance campaign goals.
- Northern Virginia Science Center construction progress is approximately two weeks off the original schedule, which remains within acceptable variance. A soft opening period of five to six weeks is planned for friends and family testing and operational controls. The grand opening is anticipated in summer 2027.

Mr. Conti invited questions from the Board.

Dr. Winn noted that the project is approximately two weeks behind schedule and asked whether upcoming weather could cause further delays. Mr. Conti responded that weather contingency days are built into the construction schedule and expressed confidence in the contractor team.

Ms. Burgin asked about logistics for loading large exhibit items. Mr. Conti explained that a temporary access space will be available during construction to accommodate large installations. Upon project completion, access will be limited to a rolling door and freight elevator.

## **East Green Project**

Mr. Conti provided an update on the East Green project.

- The final design contract has been signed.
- The interpretive plan is being finalized to determine placement and scope.
- The project will move to the bidding phase once additional funding is secured.
- A flythrough of the East Green project was presented.
- The East Green project is part of the \$40 million Foundation campaign.

Mr. Bentley commented that the design was beautiful.

Ms. Elsa Falls asked about the new structure seen in the East Green flythrough. Mr. Conti stated that the Thalheimer Pavilion will eventually be converted into a glass structure. Ms. Falls also inquired about parking. Mr. Conti confirmed that Midtown Green parking will be available for guests.

Dr. Winn asked about naming opportunities. Mr. Conti confirmed that donor naming opportunities will be available at many points of the project.

### **Operation's Report**

Mr. Harris provided an overview of operations performance, enterprise revenue, café updates, and special events activity.

- Gift shop revenues are up 26% year-over-year (\$364,060), driven by apparel and adult/teen merchandise trends. The team plans to grow merchandise from local artisans and vendors.
- Café revenues are down 30% year-over-year (\$64,980) and operations were limited to weekends only from September through mid-November.
- Concessions revenues are up 42% year-over-year (\$115,567). Café selections were relocated to concessions, with expanded adult offerings available during Laser Shows.
- Overall special event revenues are up 6% from the prior year, with total events exceeding 100.
- Project updates for the Bean Sprouts café, *Orbit*, windows and doors renovation, Avian Sundial and switchgear replacement projects were offered.

Dr. Robert Winn asked whether books are offered in the gift shop. Ms. Harris responded that themed books are offered as part of the retail mix.

### **Finance Committee Report**

Ms. Gina Burgin reviewed the Trustee Summary. She reported that the Science Museum continues to demonstrate strong financial performance during the current fiscal year.

- Overall earned revenue is tracking 2.5% ahead of budget. Admissions revenue is 10.5% ahead of budget. Membership revenue is 18.9% ahead of budget.
- Gift shop, facility rentals, concessions, and Foundation revenues are currently behind budget; however, these areas remain under the agency's control.
- Gift shop equity has not been pulled, as this revenue will remain in the separate Enterprise revenue account.
- A Foundation draw will be made in January to cover portions of Education staff salaries from earlier in the fiscal year.
- Rental income is behind budget, but is expected to recover once the lease payment for the rear property is received.

- Salaries, wages, and benefits continue to balance each other, with personal services coming in slightly under budget.
- Utilities expenses are above budget due to increased costs and higher fall and winter usage. Usage is expected to level out in the spring, although costs are anticipated to remain above budget.
- Remaining expense categories reflect timing-related fluctuations.
- Overall expenses are tracking 1.9% ahead of budget.
- A new line item was added to reflect the Enterprise bank account balance, which currently stands at just over \$1.5 million.
- Enterprise revenue is used first to support Enterprise operations, but is available for other agency needs if required.
- The Finance team continues to finalize the setup of the new Enterprise revenue account and is working to provide more detailed Enterprise reporting at the April Board meeting.

Ms. Burgin presented a Trustee Discretionary Fund (TDF) resolution, noting that it is recommended for approval by the Finance and Business Operations Committee.

Resolution Summary: Return \$100,000 in unused funds from the wayfinding project. Allocate \$150,000 to support marketing for the summer touring exhibition.

Dr. Winn called for a motion to approve the Trustee Discretionary Fund resolution. Dr. Patel made a motion to approve. The motion was seconded by Dr. Walters. Dr. Winn called for a vote. All members voted in favor, with none opposed. The motion carried.

## Attendance and Exhibitions Report

Ms. Moyer provided an overview of attendance trends, group visitation, recent event performance, and upcoming exhibitions and films.

- Total visitation: 299,051, representing a 7.58% year-over-year increase.
- Group visitation: 22,240, representing a 20% year-over-year decrease. Group visitation was unusually high during summer 2024 due to the *BODY WORLDS* exhibition, and December group visitation was impacted by weather-related cancellations. Another 35,902 group visits are currently booked through June 30.
- Model Railroad Show visitation was 12,406, up 10.6% year-over-year. Revenue was \$112,814, up 5% year-over-year. Despite the café closure, gift shop and concessions revenue increased.

Upcoming exhibitions and film schedule

- Garner Gallery:
  - *Power of Poison*: October 4, 2025 – April 19, 2026
  - *Science Unplugged*: May 29 – June 30, 2026
  - *Rescue*: July 13, 2026 – January 17, 2027

- Dewey Gottwald Center:
  - *Survival of the Slowest*: May 23 – September 7, 2026
  - *Food: Science, Culture, Cuisine*: May 22 – September 6, 2027
- Current and Upcoming Films:
  - *Encounters in the Milky Way*: Opened October 1, 2025
  - *Arctic: Our Frozen Planet*: Opened November 1, 2025
  - *Horse Power*: Opening in spring 2026

Ms. Moyer called for questions.

Mr. Ivins asked for additional details regarding the *Food: Science, Culture, Cuisine* exhibition. Ms. Moyer explained that the exhibition is interactive and explores the science behind sight, taste, and smell. She noted that the Science Museum will supplement the exhibition with its own content and that there are significant opportunities for local partnerships.

Dr. Winn asked whether there would be space within the exhibition to focus on food as medicine. Ms. Moyer responded that food as medicine is an on-brand focus area and confirmed that this theme will be incorporated.

Ms. Falls asked about the *Rescue* exhibition. Ms. Moyer clarified and reviewed the exhibition content.

Dr. Winn commented on the importance of identifying and securing local partnerships as early as possible.

## **Education Committee Report**

Mr. Venkatchalam reported on Education Committee activities and programmatic highlights, noting a busy and successful fall season at the Science Museum. He stated that the second quarter reflected strong engagement across education programs, events, and partnerships.

- The Science Museum hosted a busy second quarter, including Science After Dark events with more than 1,500 guests and the 48th Model Railroad Show, which welcomed 12,406 guests.
- Community outreach efforts were reviewed, including Minds of All Kinds, a sensory-friendly Science Within Reach program that engaged 11 unique community partners.
- The Science Museum completed its third year as a member of the LEGO Learning Through Play Community of Practice and continued to deepen its partnership with the Department of Blind and Low Vision through co-created accessible programming and educator training.
- Ongoing collaborations with VCU Theatre students and Virginia Repertory Theatre activated spaces with unique performances and expanded early childhood programming.

- The Teen Leadership Program entered its third semester and continues to grow.
- Several exhibit upgrades are underway, including installation of a new Hockeybot robot in *Speed*, which is currently in the testing phase.
- Advanced planning and installation work for *Orbit* is underway, with construction anticipated in early 2026.
- The Science Museum secured a \$75,000 grant to support restoration of trains in the collection.
- An evaluation was developed and implemented during the Model Railroad Show in support of the Broad Street Station interpretation project, and the Science Museum launched an oral history initiative in tandem with the Model Railroad Show.

He further reported that the Committee reviewed the Science Museum's evaluation and data analysis efforts, including:

- Summative evaluation data related to the audio stories in *The Green*.
- A formative evaluation project focused on tactile images for guests who are blind or have low vision, which will be incorporated into *Orbit*.
- Survey and evaluation data used to guide continuous improvement of school lessons and field trip experiences.

#### **Upcoming Events:**

- January 23 – Science After Darrrrrk
- January 27 – Senior Science: Slump Molds (Part 2 – Glazing)
- January 29 – Sunrise Science: Landscape Urbanism
- February 7 – GLOW
- February 7 – Science on Tap: Neon Night
- February 10 – Senior Science: Dome Night
- February 12 – Laser Show: Prince
- February 14 – Teacher Open House
- February 27 – Minds of All Kinds
- March 2 – Science Museum open seven days a week
- March 7 – Curiosity Camp-In
- March 11 – Senior Science: Mosaic Coasters
- March 12 – Laser Show: Queen
- March 14 – Private Camp-In
- March 20 – Science After Dark: Storm Chaser
- April 7 – Senior Science: Beetle Pinning
- April 9 – Laser Show (artist to be determined)
- April 15 – Up+Atom
- April 18 – Earth Day Festival

Mr. Venkatchalam called for questions. No questions were raised.

## **Foundation Update**

Ms. Quinn provided an update on Foundation leadership, campaign planning, financial oversight, and fundraising performance.

- The Foundation has issued a Request for Information (RFI) for an Investment Manager as part of an evaluation of the Foundation's investment strategy and overall management approach. This evaluation process is currently underway, with a goal of providing a recommendation to the Foundation Board by this summer.
- Additional operational initiatives include: a membership audit, a Giving Society audit, policy development and updates to support future growth
- A multi-year, comprehensive campaign is being developed with a target goal of \$40–\$50 million. The campaign is tied to the Science Museum's 50th anniversary milestone, with a celebration planned for October 2027.
- Campaign planning is being conducted with careful consideration of the current economic landscape. The campaign will encompass capital projects, endowment growth, and ongoing operational needs to meet increasing demand, particularly for individuals facing barriers to access to science.
- The Foundation has secured a \$2 million commitment from NewMarket as a sponsorship for the *Orbit* project.
- More than \$4 million has been raised this year, representing an increase of over 65% compared to the prior year.

Upcoming Foundation Fundraising and Cultivation Events:

- January 29 – Sunrise Science, followed by donor coffee
- February 4 – Up+Atom Community Building Happy Hour
- March 11 – Coffee with Rich
- April 15 – Up+Atom
- May 14 – John Russell Pope Luncheon

Ms. Nicoson asked about the balance between individual and corporate giving. Ms. Quinn responded that the Foundation actively pursues both, with a goal of approximately 60% of gifts coming from individuals and 40% from corporate partners.

## **New Business**

Dr. Winn called for new business. No new business was brought forward.

## **Adjournment**

Dr. Winn made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was made by Mr. Venkatchalam and seconded by Ms. Burgin. Dr. Winn called for a vote. All members voted in favor, with none opposed. The motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at **3:56 p.m.**

The next Board of Trustees meeting will be held April 16, 2026.