

Draft Minutes
Frontier Culture Museum Board of Trustees Meeting
April 13, 2012 9:00 a.m. - Lecture Hall

Members Attending:

T.E. Beck Jr., , Richard Bell, Emmett Hanger Jr., John Higgs, Gabrielle Lanier, Scott MacMillan, Frank McDonough, , Rhodes Ritenour, William Sibert, Peggy Sheets, Cheryl Talley, Emmett Toms, Paul Vames

Members Absent:

Nwachukwu Anakwenze, William Card, Benjamin Cline, Pamela Fox, Ophie Kier, Steve Landes, Lynn Mitchell, Beverly Sherwood

Guests Attending:

Judy Wyatt (for Delegate Steve Landes), Greer Saunders (Office of the Attorney General), Bill Garrett, Jay Russell (American Frontier Culture Foundation), John Dod (American Frontier Culture Foundation), Johanna Bromberg-Craig, Bill Bowman (American Frontier Culture Foundation)

Staff Attending:

John Avoli, Executive Director, Eric Bryan, Deputy Director, Lydia Volskis, Museum Operations Manager, Merritt Schoonover, Fiscal Officer, Mike Sutton, Marketing Director, Mark Gatewood, General Administration Manager, Cliff Edwards, Facilities Manager, Anne McPherson (American Frontier Culture Foundation, Fran Carrington (American Frontier Culture Foundation)

CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Board Chair Paul Vames called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. He welcomed all attendees, and attendees introduced themselves. Mr. MacMillan made a motion, seconded by Mr. Beck that the minutes of the September 2011 meeting be approved as submitted. There was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Executive Director John Avoli thanked the Museum staff for their continued hard work and dedication, and also thanked the Museum's large volunteer corps for their work and contributions as well. He expressed his gratitude to the American Frontier Culture Foundation (AFCF) for its unwavering support of the Museum, especially during lean budget times. He especially noted their grant and event-sponsored support of Museum field trips for disadvantaged schoolchildren. Mr. Sibert noted that the many positive reports of recent Museum activity are due to the hard work and dedication of the staff and volunteers, even in difficult times. He reminded the Board that even though extra funding will help, the Museum has only about 30 full time staff at present, down nearly half from a number of years ago. Mr. Beck and Mr. Vames agreed.

In a summary of detailed reports due later in the meeting, Mr. Avoli highlighted the following:

Recent administrative reorganization resulted in two staff layoffs; the job tasks have been reassigned to remaining staff positions.

Marketing plans for the upcoming year will show creative use of funds, necessitated by the small amount of available money.

The 1850's farm tobacco barn is currently being reconstructed and will be followed by a bake oven for the Bowman House and, hopefully, the Mt. Tabor Church reconstruction project.

The General Assembly has tentatively granted the Museum planning funds for the Mill project divided over the next two budget years, funds for part-time wage staffing for the farmsites (which may provide up to a dozen interpretive staff and one maintenance position), and a correction of the inappropriately levied budget adjustment for IT charges. The Assembly will vote on April 17 to confirm the budget.

The Museum has also submitted a request to the AFCF for other funds to support agency needs; the funds have been tentatively approved. Foundation sponsored trips netted good profits last year; there is one fundraising trip to Italy planned this year. The real estate committee composed of Foundation and state Board Members is actively working on plans for the development of the DeJarnette property.

Many challenges exist at the Museum relating to the aging physical plant, such as replacement of HVAC systems. Some of these expenses may be covered by the state's Maintenance Reserve funds.

Budget and Finance

Fiscal Officer Merritt Schoonover reviewed the expenditure report which covers operating, payroll, capital projects and cash with the Treasury. She also reviewed the revenue comparison chart from fiscal years 2012 and 2012 (to date) including total visitation revenue and various other sources of income. She presented a revenue and visitation comparison for fiscal years 2011 and 2012. Mr. Vames asked about the line item entitled "facilities rental"; Ms. Schoonover replied that this is the rent paid by the AFCF for their offices.

Information Technology

Deputy Director Eric Bryan reported that the Museum has reduced the number of Virginia Information Technology Agency (VITA) managed computers to a minimum of two, with total monthly cost of \$288, down from \$6,200 a month previously. He also reported that \$75,000 has been restored to the Museum's budget after a mistake by our Department of Planning and Budget (DPB) analyst. DPB had recently attempted to remove \$75,000 from the Museum's budget which supposedly had been granted several years ago for IT expenses. The Museum successfully pointed out that as the funds had never actually been given, they could not, therefore, be rescinded by DPB.

The Museum currently has internet access via Comcast high speed internet provided by the AFCF, which has also provided 10 PC's for anyone to access as needed scattered around the Museum. The IT plan for the near future includes restoring the Visitor's Center online admissions and point of sale (POS) systems without becoming entangled in another expensive VITA management arrangement. The Visitors Center is currently using cash registers and manual credit card processing.

Capital Projects

General Administration Manager Mark Gatewood reported that the funds from last year's Budget Amendment 19 have been completely expended. He showed slides of the major purchases which include a new dump truck, new golf cart shuttles, a remote restroom, the large interstate sign, scaffolding, an all-terrain forklift and other smaller equipment purchases. Upcoming projects are the completion of the 1850's tobacco barn and planning for the historic mill.

Education and Interpretation

Deputy Director Eric Bryan reported that to date in Fiscal Year 2012 the Museum has hosted nearly 2,000 more schoolchildren than last year at this time. About 6,500 have reserved spaces for the Spring season, and a large crowd is expected for Home School day on May 25. In 2011, Home School Day hosted nearly 1,600 students. During Fiscal year 2012 the AFCF's Charles Fund for disadvantaged schools and students has brought nearly 6,000 students from 84 schools to the Museum and expended nearly \$70,000.

Summer Camps this year have been rearranged to accommodate more students - 25 per session - and will feature simultaneous camps for younger and older children. Camps will run for six weeks and younger children may choose to attend for a half or whole day. There is potential for strong income from the camps, some of which will cover the cost of extra summer camp staffers.

The John Lewis Society, the Museum's volunteer group for 12-16 year olds, has its largest class ever, with 45 young people participating. In 2010, the 35 member group gave the Museum 2,024 hours of service and in 2011 the 40 member group donated about 2,136 hours of service.

The Museum has two interns this Spring who will work about 160 hours each. Both are James Madison University students, one is working with the historic buildings crew while the other is working as a greeter on the historic farmsites. In the summer we expect two interns, one from Western Carolina University will work for 400 hours to assist in planning and managing the summer camps, and the other from Western Kentucky University will work on the West African Site.

Mr. Bryan introduced Dr. Johanna Bromberg-Craig, who recently completed her doctorate at the University of Virginia using a study she completed at our Museum concerning family visits to a living history museum. She briefly outlined her findings, noting that she followed six families throughout their visit to the Museum as well as initiated follow-up contact a month or two later. She found that well-trained and skilled interpreters are essential to a successful visit for both educational and entertainment reasons.

Mr. Bryan reported that this Spring there are 10 full time costumed interpreters, 6 part-time, 3 other staff who may function as interpreters when needed, and about 13 enthusiastic historic site volunteers. They must staff and take care of 10 outdoor exhibits from March – December, and provide educational programs for numerous school groups and special events. The General Assembly has provided funds in the upcoming budget to allow for more part-time staff to assist in this mission. Museum staff may renovate the space in the Visitor's Center lobby to allow for some interactive displays and activities for younger children whose parents also may want to view the orientation film. Farmsite staff will increase efforts to provide hands-on experiences at the outdoor exhibits.

This year a garden renewal project is planned all around the Museum, as in recent years the gardens have suffered a bit due to lack of staffing. Volunteer have been recruited to assist and the AFCC and private donors have provided supplies such as top soil and seeds, as well as trees for a new orchard on the 1850's site.

The Museum is on the verge of acquiring the Mt. Tabor United Methodist Church, a historic African-American church located near New Hope in Augusta County. The church is dated – via oral history and some tangent evidence - to the 1860's. The church Trustees approached the Museum in 2011, as they currently worship in the "new" church, constructed in 1912 and have used the old log structure as a fellowship hall. They hope to build a new hall and rather than tear down the old building, hope it can be reconstructed as a part of the Museum. The Museum asked the Trustees to contact the Department of Historic Resources (DHR) in Richmond and the Methodist District for permission to continue. The Museum's Executive Committee authorized Museum staff to do preliminary studies of the Church, pending approval from DHR. DHR has given provisional permission for the move, after archaeological studies by James Madison University are complete – hopefully in a timely manner. Museum staff will extend the New World loop road beyond the schoolhouse to prepare a site for the Church, and a preliminary fundraising plan is in place. The hoped-for move of the historic church may coincide with the sesquicentennial of the Civil War and the Commemoration of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Mr. Bryan reviewed the recent Winter Lecture Series program and attendance totals, The theme this year was historic music. He also highlighted upcoming events for 2012, especially the Holiday Lantern Tours, which will feature horse-drawn wagons for transporting guests to and from the New World farmsites.

Visitor Experience and Satisfaction

In Fiscal Year 2012, the Museum has received about 640 report cards, 637 of which rate the Museum as good or excellent. However, this represents only about 2.5% of visitors; Museum staff will strategize as to how to increase the number of responses. Dr. Talley asked Mr. Bryan to describe the characteristics of a good interpreter. He responded that while their best (or worst) traits may not become apparent until they are actually working, in general extroverts who “never met a stranger”, and have a background in speaking to or working with people are most likely to achieve proficiency in interpretation. He noted that, as required by the state, all staff are given a position description outlining duties and expectations and undergo a review annually (or more often if needed). Dr. Talley suggested that it is often good to use exceptional staff to train and mentor others; Mr. Bryan noted that this is often the case at the Museum, especially in the winter when a variety of trainings are scheduled.

Marketing

Marketing Director Mike Sutton reviewed the monthly attendance chart; general visitation has increased by 6% over the same time period last year. The Museum’s “Virtual Rabbit” online tour has hosted over 36,000 visitors since its launch in September 2010 and our website has hosted nearly 3 million hits with about 72,000 unique visitors. About 80% of these accessed the site via Google; he will work to redirect some marketing resources to advertising on Google. The Museum has 1, 321 Facebook fans.

He recounted recent recommendations by the Jim Doyle Associates Marketing Group that the Museum concentrate on broadcast television advertising, and reduce the number of outlets but increase the frequency of the ads on radio. Older means of advertising such as brochures and print are in decline, and we will adjust our marketing budget allocation accordingly. He showed the Museum’s current general television commercial; the consultants suggested that we not only create television ads for special events, but also use a general informational ad to create familiarity of the Museum in regional markets. Mr. Sibert asked if there was any data on whether the funds from Budget Amendment 19 have been effective in marketing Museum programs; Mr. Sutton replied that this was not clear at present as the Visitors Center’s visitor tracking programs have been disabled since the computer system crisis. We are looking at a variety of options to correct the situation. Mr. Sibert also noted that the John Lewis Society student volunteers would be very effective in any filmed commercials.

Mr. Sutton said that the AFCF has funded an Apple Mobile Learning Lab for use in various locations featuring Museum video clips, and that he is working on plans to provide the video’s to schoolteachers and school systems. Mr. Higgs asked if the Museum is able to advertise in the northern Virginia area; Mr. Sutton responded that with the slim budget we have it is virtually impossible at this time due to high costs. He will set up some mobile telephone advertising plans with smaller local presses and groups in the broader northern Virginia area as he is able. He reported on several group and cooperative ads and noted the problem with communities outside of the Shenandoah Valley proper using the name in their advertising (the name “Shenandoah Valley” is a powerful advertising brand) but not wanting to participate in cooperative advertising for the actual Valley area.

The Virginia Tourism Commission will do a photo shoot at the Museum for their website, and the Museum will be featured in Virginia Living magazine as one of the top three museums in the state as voted by their readers. We are also listed as one of the top three large music venues (Dod amphitheater) in the state as well. Dr. Talley asked who markets the Museum’s facilities for rent; Mr. Sutton responded that the rentals are managed by the AFCF and that there is not a need at present to market the spaces as they are reserved well in advance and market themselves by “word of mouth”.

REPORT FROM THE FOUNDATION

AFCF President John Dod reported on the various fundraising efforts of the Foundation. The annual fund raised \$59,000 or 77% of its goal, unrestricted fundraising was at 800% of its goal (mainly due to the

Gateway road project pledge fulfillment), special events raised 150% of goal or \$150,000 and the annual pass program has raised 55% of goal or \$12,125. The fiscal year ends on June 30.

Mr. Dod also reminded the Board of the upcoming big Foundation fundraiser on June 1 at Sugarloaf Farms in Middlebrook, VA. The evening costs \$75 per person and will feature cocktails and bluegrass, a catered dinner and Texas swing music on the historic local farm. He especially thanked Mr. Bill Bowman of the Foundation for his work to secure sponsorships for the event. He reviewed details of current and upcoming program support for the Museum such as the Apple Mobile Learning Lab, the Fourth of July programs, the proposed move of the Mt. Tabor Church and winter outreach program needs for 2012-13.

Mrs. Peggy Sheets offered expanded details about the Sugarloaf Farms event and urged the Trustees to financially support the Museum through the Foundation, so that when preparing grant forms the Foundation may correctly claim that they have 100% support from the Museum's Trustees Board.

OLD BUSINESS

No items of old business were brought forward.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Bill Garrett, a local citizen attending the meeting, asked what plans were in place for the development of the DeJarnette property. Mr. Avoli answered that no firm plans are currently in place but that the Museum is reviewing its options.

Mrs. Sheets made a motion that the Board enter Closed Session for the purpose of discussing real estate matters. The motion was seconded by Mr. Toms, there was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously. All non-Board Members left the room at 11:20 a.m.

At 11:40 Mr. Sibert made a motion, seconded by Mr. Toms, that the Board end Closed Session, There was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next Board of Trustees meeting is set for Friday September 7 at 9 a.m. in the Lecture Hall of the Dairy Barn.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 11:42 a.m.