

**Board of Trustees  
Virginia Museum of Natural History  
Quarterly Meeting  
Saturday, May 16, 2026, 10:00 AM  
In person with remote option  
VMNH - Distance Learning Classroom**



## **MINUTES**

The Virginia Museum of Natural History Board of Trustees held their quarterly meeting in person with a remote attendance option on Saturday, May 16, 2026.

**Trustees Present In-Person:**

Dr. Melany Clark (Chair)	Ms. Lauren Hall
Mr. Will Clements	Dr. Art Evans
Dr. Mindy Vandevelder	Ms. Cathy Manion
Mr. Nathan Sanford	Ms. Katherine McGuire

**Trustees Present Remote:**

- Ms. Lisa Carter (attending to a family medical issue)
- Ms. Sarah Bowman (travel exceeds 50 miles)
- Dr. Tom Benzing (travel exceeds 50 miles)
- Dr. David Furth (travel exceeds 50 miles)
- Mr. Dick Bratcher (travel exceeds 50 miles)

**Trustees Absent:**

Ms. Emma Ito	Dr. Carole Nash
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**Others Present:**

Dr. Joe Keiper (Exec. Director)	Mr. Ryan Barber
Ms. Ambria Wood (OAG Rep)	Ms. Jennifer Whitlow
Mr. Jonathan Martin	Mr. Zach Ryder
Ms. Christy Deatherage	Mr. Ben Williams
Ms. Elizabeth Carter Bailey (Foundation liaison)	

## **WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER**

Dr. Melany Clark opened the meeting at 10:00 AM with a welcome to all in attendance. Trustees attending remotely provided their locations and rationale. A quorum was found to be physically present.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Dr. Art Evans made a motion to approve the February 6, 2026, minutes with one correction to the spelling of a name. Ms. Lauren Hall seconded the motion. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

## **CHAIR'S REPORT**

Dr. Melany Clark noted the 2026 – 2027 General Assembly budget remains under consideration. Staff are closely monitoring the situation and are ready to adjust based on approval of the final budget.

Staff Spotlight – Mr. Tim King was unexpectedly unable to attend the meeting.

Deep Dive – Mr. Zach Ryder provided a talk about the museum's current social media strategies. Staff primarily use Facebook and Instagram to target our core audience, for (1) storytelling and (2) sales, sponsorship, individual and corporation. Social media allows the museum to expand stories in innovative ways as well as promote festivals and other social events. Our results have been very successful, even breaking through some previously held geographic barriers.

The YouTube platform, particularly video shorts was noted as a popular option for some demographic groups. Mr. Ryder assured the Board that sponsors receive social media posts for their commitment to festivals and other museum activities.

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

Dr. Clark removed the 2026-2027 budget proposal from the consent agenda for further discussion. Following brief remarks, Mr. Nathan Sanford made a motion to approve the 2026-2027 budget as presented. Mr. Clements seconded. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

Dr. Keiper offered a few remarks related to the facilities report. Utilizing Mr. Bratcher's expertise, the facilities committee recommends that an additional line item be added to the strategic plan to proactively handle building maintenance and special projects. It was noted that as the Starling Avenue building ages, more systems will begin to fail and having a proactive maintenance mindset will be important. After brief discussion there was consensus among board members to add an addendum to the Strategic Plan in May 2027 that addresses ongoing building maintenance. In the meantime, maintenance schedules and other proactive measures are being implemented.

Mr. Sanford made a motion to approve the remaining items from the consent agenda, the Treasurer's Report, Facilities Report and Waynesboro Advocacy Report. Ms. Hall seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

## **NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

The 2026-2027 Slate of Officers was announced.

Chair – Melany Clark

Vice-Chair – Lauren Hall

Secretary – Sarah Bowman

Treasurer – Will Clements

Dr. Evans made a motion to approve the entire slate of officers as presented. Ms. Manion seconded. The motion was carried by unanimous voice vote.

## **RESEARCH AND COLLECTIONS**

Mr. Ben Williams gave a brief report from the Research and Collections Committee meeting. The museum Archeology staff have been evaluating a property owned by Carter Bank and Trust that includes a historic kitchen structure believed to have been built in the 1830's. It was determined that the site was beyond the scope of the museum, but staff are happy to assist with any grants and provide technical support as the situation warrants.

Mr. Sanford made a motion to appoint trustee, Dr. Art Evans to the prestigious and rare Senior Fellow position at the museum. Ms. Hall seconded the motion. Dr. Evans graciously accepted the nomination. The motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

## **EDUCATION AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

Mr. Sanford gave a brief report for the Education Committee. He noted the number of programs and individuals served continues to outpace the same quarter in 2025. The Education department will be extremely busy this summer as they will provide 45 programs at 17 different libraries in the Commonwealth as well as provide four, week-long day camps at the museum. Exhibit work continues with the largest ongoing project to include the renovation of the former library space and the temporary exhibits gallery.

## **BREAK**

Dr. Clark recessed the meeting for a short break.

Following the short break, Dr. Clark called the meeting back into session.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Mr. Jonathan Martin spoke about the stagnant budget appropriation the museum has experienced over the past fifteen years. Mr. Martin created a comparison sheet to be shared with the full board to demonstrate how VMNH funding falls short when compared to similar agencies. Mr. Martin also noted required contract costs and the increase in general day-to-day operations makes our current appropriation unsustainable. Mr. Martin urged the Board to support the full funding request which will go through the Secretary of Education in August. The Board engaged in discussion regarding seeking funding through other Virginia agencies to compensate for the work of specimen processing and collection.

Mr. Martin will investigate cost sharing with other partner agencies and will report the findings to the Board.

Dr. Keiper reported the meeting with the Department of Education Secretary, Dr. Jeffery Smith, went well. The department staff were knowledgeable and spoke favorably about the Waynesboro project. The Secretary's Senior Advisor, Kate Maxlow, will visit the Martinsville Museum on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. Any interested Board member is welcome to attend.

CHML was awarded a grant from the Department of Historic and Cultural Resources to support and expand work being done on Virginia Indian sites.

Dr. Evans shared the success of his collection trip to Florida with Dr. Ivanov. Together the pair collected three to four thousand specimens to be categorized.

Dr. Keiper reported that myriapodologist, Dr. Jackson Means, is doing groundbreaking research with the genes of a cave dwelling cryptic milliped species.

Senior Fellow, Dr. Noel Boaz and paleontologist Dr. Adam Pritchard, are working to determine if the mastodon teeth in our collection are the missing teeth of Jefferson's mastodon on display at Monticello.

The museum received a series of cold-water aquariums by interagency transfer from James Madison University. The intention is to install the aquariums across from the education classrooms to exhibit non-game fish in our local rivers.

Ms. Deatherage noted running two sessions of the Homeschool Science Academy was extremely successful this year and allowed more participants for age groups age 6 – High School.

Mr. Ryan Barber reported 17% revenue growth for the Foundation. The museum continues to experience steady growth in all areas. Planning for festivals and other initiatives is ongoing as staff collaborates across departments to submit appropriate grants and recruit sponsors. Of note, visitation in April 2026 was the highest April since the museum opened in 2007. VMNH will host the local Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours event at the end of the month.

## **RESOLUTIONS**

Dr. Clark read resolutions of appreciation to honor Ms. Lisa Carter, Dr. Art Evans, and Ms. Emma Ito who are finishing their terms on the Board of Trustees. Mr. Nathan Sanford made a motion to approve all three resolutions with Mr. Clements providing a second. The motion carried unanimously.

## **OPEN DISCUSSION**

The Board briefly discussed requirements for a sanctioned Virginia license plate to bring awareness to the museum.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Dr. Evans made a motion with a second by Mr. Sanford to adjourn the meeting at 11:55 AM. Motion carried unanimously.

The next meeting of the Virginia Museum of Natural History Board of Trustees will be held on:

Saturday, August 15, 2026  
Virginia Museum of Natural History  
10 AM – 12 PM