

Board of Trustees Quarterly Meeting
Friday, February 6, 2026, 3:30 PM
Virginia Museum of Natural History
All-Virtual Meeting



MINUTES

The Virginia Museum of Natural History Board of Trustees held their quarterly meeting at 3:30 PM in an all-virtual format on Friday, February 6, 2026.

TRUSTEES PRESENT:

Dr. Melany Clark (Chair)	Dr. Tom Benzing
Dr. Art Evans	Ms. Lauren Hall
Mr. Dick Bratcher	Dr. Carole Nash
Ms. Sarah Bowman	Dr. David Furth
Ms. Cathy Hincker	Mr. Will Clements
Mr. Nathan Sanford	Ms. Lisa Carter
Ms. Katherine McGuire	Dr. Mindy Vandevelder

TRUSTEES ABSENT:

Ms. Emma Ito

STAFF PRESENT:

Mr. Ryan Barber	Ms. Christy Deatherage
Dr. Joe Keiper	Mr. Zach Ryder
Ms. Lila Dougherty	Mr. Jonathan Martin
Mr. Ben Williams	

OTHERS PRESENT:

Ms. Ambria Wood (Office of Attorney General)
Ms. Elizabeth Carter Bailey (Foundation Liaison)

WELCOME

Dr. Melany Clark opened the meeting at 3:29 with a welcome to all in attendance. A roll call vote was taken to establish quorum. A quorum was found to be present.

Dr. Art Evans made a motion which was seconded by Dr. Tom Benzing to approve the August 22, 2025 and the November 15, 2025 minutes. The motion was approved unanimously by voice vote.

CHAIR'S REPORT

Dr. Clark introduced and welcomed the newly appointed trustees, Mr. Richard Bratcher and Ms. Katherine McGuire to the board.

Dr. Clark read the slate of officers for upcoming year (26-27) and noted the vacant secretary position. Dr. Clark will be recruiting for this position in the coming weeks.

Dr. Melany Clark - Chair
Ms. Lauren Hall - Vice Chair
Vacant - Secretary
Mr. Will Clements - Treasurer

The museum's new Exhibits Manager, Ms. Lila Dougherty introduced herself to the board with a brief history of her education and experience.

Ms. Christy Deatherage, Education Manager, provided the Deep Dive topic, "Is it real?" which was recently presented by VMNH educators at the Virginia Association of Science Teachers conference. The talk consisted of the benefits of using "real" science specimens for hands-on engagement and deeper learning in the classroom.

CONSENT AGENDA

Dr. Clark removed the Adoption of Bylaws item from the Consent Agenda. Dr. Joe Keiper corrected the Quarterly Budget Report ending balance (ending 12.31.25) as shown on the Operational Report to \$4,676,000.00.

Dr. Carole Nash made a motion to approve items 1-4 of the consent agenda with the added amendment to correct the budget ending balance to \$4,676,000.00. Mr. Dick Bratcher seconded the motion. With no further discussion the motion passed unanimously.

Bylaws Adoption

Ms. Ambria Wood explained the clarifications to the museum's bylaws regarding quorum. Clarification was added to provide further explanation and examples of the "then serving" language. Mr. Nathan Sanford made a motion to approve the clarification as presented and Ms. Sarah Bowman seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Dr. Benzing made a motion with Ms. Lauren Hall seconding a motion to approve the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. The motion passed unanimously.

RESEARCH AND COLLECTIONS

Mr. Ben Williams reported that Dr. Jackson Roberts has been hired for the herpetologist position. He will be moving his family to the Martinsville area and beginning work at the museum in June. Among a variety of interests Dr. Roberts is excited to study venomous snakes in the region. Dr. Art Evans expressed his thanks to staff for the work done to successfully recruit Dr. Roberts. He also reminded everyone that he will be transitioning off the Board of Trustees in June. With his departure from the Board, Dr. Carole Nash has agreed to chair the Research and Collections Committee for the coming year. Dr. Evans plans to continue to be involved at the museum as a Research Associate.

EDUCATION

Mr. Nathan Sanford thanked the education team for their dedicated work to deliver programs to students in the region. He also praised the team for their VaST conference presentation which has yielded some additional contacts and opportunities to further reach students.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Dr. Keiper reported that the Virginia House of Delegates member representing Waynesboro and the Virginia senator representing the Waynesboro area have both submitted budget amendments to fund the Waynesboro project. Dr. Benzing reported he most recently attended Conservation Lobby Day at the General Assembly in support of the Waynesboro project. All Board members are encouraged to note budget amendments in each of the legislative bodies on February 22nd. This day known as “Budget Sunday” and is the earliest indicator of the amended budget. To further support the ongoing effort, Dr. Keiper and Mr. Martin will distribute a one-page support flyer to General Assembly members on February 17th.

Dr. Keiper shared that he is pleased that the museum is now fully staffed and has a full Board of Trustees.

Dr. Keiper reported that the endowment funds are just below six (6) million dollars with interest revenue continuing to grow with current strategies approved by the Foundation Board. Using the interest income to develop and implement a Young Explorers Center is still a primary priority. As plans are developed, beginning the final quarter of FY 2026, members of the Education Committee will be asked to act as independent reviewers of the choices made for the Center.

Advancement Report

Dr. Keiper was pleased to report that effective 1.31.26 the museum has seen a 24% increase in giving. The Board of Trustees can help by sharing the Young Explorer mission and the opportunity to contribute through planned gifts or naming opportunities with associates and potential corporate sponsors.

Mr. Barber continued by sharing that museum revenue has increased by 12% and visitation by statewide visitors continues to grow. 70% of visitors are from a zip code not in Martinsville or Henry County.

Upcoming Events

- 2/17 Science Lecture Series in Waynesboro 7 PM. These lectures are live streamed and archived.
- 2/19 Clash of Giants VA250 Members and Friends Event. VMNH-Martinsville
- 2/7 Science Saturday – Bug Day. VMNH-Martinsville
- 3/21 Starlington – Gala Event. VMNH-Martinsville

2026-2027 First Reading Budget

Mr. Martin corrected the operating funds total as distributed to the Board to \$4,831,000. The museum expects to receive funding for a 3% increase to salaries and level funding for the remainder of line items. We expect a modest expansion of revenue from admissions, visitation and education program usage. Adoption of the budget occurs at the Board meeting in May.

CLOSED SESSION

Ms. Lauren Hall offered the following motion:

I move that the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History enter closed session for consultation with legal counsel pertaining to actual or probable litigation pursuant to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act §2.2-3711 (A) (7) and consultation with legal counsel pursuant to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act Code § 2.2-3711(A)(8).

The motion was seconded by Dr. Art Evans.

A roll call vote was taken leading to the approval of the motion. Results of the vote are in the table below.

Board of Trustee Name	Vote to Enter Closed Session
Dr. Tom Benzing	YES
Ms. Sarah Bowman	YES
Mr. Richard Bratcher	YES
Ms. Lisa Carter	YES
Dr. Melany Clark	YES
Mr. Will Clements	YES
Dr. Art Evans	YES
Dr. David Furth	YES
Ms. Lauren Hall	YES
Ms. Cathy Hincker	YES
Ms. Emma Ito	ABSENT
Ms. Katherine McGuire	YES
Dr. Carole Nash	YES
Mr. Nathan Sanford	YES
Dr. Mindy VanDevelder	YES

CERTIFICATION OF CLOSED SESSION

Closed session was certified by the following statement, read by Ms. Hall after which a roll call vote was taken.

Whereas the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History convened in closed meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; and

Whereas Virginia code §2.2-3712 requires a certification by this Board that such closed meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia law;

NOW, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History hereby certifies that, to the best of each member's knowledge: (1) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements under Virginia law and (2) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion by which the closed meeting was convened were heard, discussed, or considered in the closed meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Virginia Museum of Natural History.

Board of Trustee Name	Vote to Certify Closed Session
Dr. Tom Benzing	YES
Ms. Sarah Bowman	YES
Mr. Richard Bratcher	YES
Ms. Lisa Carter	YES
Dr. Melany Clark	YES
Mr. Will Clements	YES
Dr. Art Evans	YES
Dr. David Furth	YES
Ms. Lauren Hall	YES
Ms. Cathy Hincker	YES
Ms. Emma Ito	ABSENT
Ms. Katherine McGuire	YES
Dr. Carole Nash	YES
Mr. Nathan Sanford	YES
Dr. Mindy VanDevelder	YES

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND OPEN DISCUSSION

Dr. Clark reiterated upcoming events and encouraged all board members to participate as they are able. She also reminded board members to follow the museum on social media for updates.

Dr. Benzing thanked Dr. Evans for his service to the Board and a decade long commitment as chair of the Research and Collections Committee.

Ms. Lisa Carter made a motion to adjourn the meeting with a second by Lauren Hall. The motion carried unanimously.

NEXT MEETING

Saturday, May 16, 2026, 10 AM Virginia Museum of Natural History