

Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia  
Board of Trustees Draft Minutes  
9 a.m. on April 17, 2026 – Lower level Octagonal Barn

Members Attending: John Avoli, Carolyn Bragg, Nadarius Clark, Milton Franklin, Ashleigh Howell, Mona Huffer, Joan Hughes, Steve Landes, Peter Lipsett, Mike Lawson, Rob Orrison, Ned Ruby, Chris Runion, Peggy Sheets, Emmett Toms, Paul Vames, Stephen Wilson

Members Absent: John Bowers, Katrina Callsen, Chris Head, Amy Lauffer, Russett Perry, Tim Simmons, Scott Surovell, Michael Webert,

Guests Attending: Senator Emmett W. Hanger. Jr., Karen Becker,

Staff Attending: Butch Smiley, Lydia Volskis, Cluff Edwards, Andrew Richardson, Chase Chandler, Eric Bryan, Dorette Sobolewski, David Pukett, Paige Hildebrand, Tiffany Fisk, Rachel Sites, Angela Lehman, Mary Kate Claytor,

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| I. Call to Order and Welcome | Mrs. Peggy Sheets |
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Board Chair Peggy Sheets called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.

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| II. Approval of Minutes – October 2025 meeting | Mrs. Sheets |
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The minutes of the October 10, 2025 meeting were approved as distributed.

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| III. Ratifications                   | Mrs. Sheets       |
| A. Virtual/Electronic Meeting Policy | Mrs. Sheets       |
| B. Deaccessioning Items              | Mr. David Puckett |

Mrs. Sheets introduced the electronic meeting policy, which Members had received in their preliminary packet and noted that approving the policy will allow for a Trustee to participate in a meeting virtually if certain conditions are met. Mr. Avoli made a motion that the Board adopt the policy, the motion was seconded by Ms. Howell, there was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

Curator David Puckett presented a list of items which will be deaccessioned from the collection as he prepares to move the collection into the new building. The items are either unrelated to the Museum's mission, are duplicates or damaged. Some items will be offered to other local museums or auctioned and the funds saved for use to conserve current collections or purchase other items. After some discussion, Mr. Avoli made a motion that the Board accept the deaccession list. The motion was seconded by Mr. Landes, there was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

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| IV. Closed Session           | Mrs. Sheets |
| A. Executive Director Search |             |
| B. Miscellaneous             |             |

At 9:10 a.m., Mrs. Sheets said:

*I move that the Board of Trustees of the Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia enter closed session for:*

- 1. Discussion concerning a prospective business or industry or the expansion of an existing business or industry where no previous announcement has been made of the business' or industry's interest in locating or expanding its facilities in the community, pursuant to the exemption in Virginia Code § 2.2-3711(A)(5), and related to the potential sale or lease of real property conveyed by the Museum to the American Frontier Culture Foundation.*
- 2. Discussion of the assignment, appointment, performance, salary, or resignation of a specific employee pursuant to the exemption in Virginia Code § 2.2-3711(A)(1), specifically related to the Executive Director. ~~Personnel Matters~~*
- 3. Consultation with legal counsel regarding the matters identified in this motion pursuant to the exemption in Virginia Code § 2.2-3711(A)(8).*

The motion was seconded by Mr. Landes, there was no discussion, and staff left the room. Senator Hanger, Dr. Maxlow and Ms. Chiffriller were invited to stay.

At 9:25 a.m. Mr. Avoli said:

*I move that the Board enter open session*

The motion was seconded by Mr. Landes, there was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

At 9:25 Mrs. Sheets said:

*Whereas, the Board of Trustees of the Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia convened in closed meeting on April 17, 2026 pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act;*

*NOW BE IT RESOLVED, in accordance with Virginia Code § 2.2-3712, that the Board of Trustees of the Frontier Culture Museum 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 Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia.*

The motion was seconded by Mr. Landes, and each Member certified verbally that no other matters had been discussed.

Mr. Avoli made a motion that the Board authorize the Executive Committee to complete the hiring process and notify the Board when the process is complete. The motion was seconded by Mr. Landes, there was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Smiley reported that the construction of the gallery and other projects is progressing well – on time and on budget. He complimented Kjellstrom and Lee as an excellent partner in completing the project and thanked Mr. Fulton Sensabaugh, principle for K&L for all of his assistance.

He continued that attendance is down approximately 9% during the construction project, but noted that this was expected and planned for, and is better than had been forecasted. He said that even with the construction disruption, the Museum has had success with a variety of events such as Irish Road Bowling, Home School Days and Fiberfest which brought in nearly 2,000 guests. The Museum has also seen an increase in Annual Pass sales. He also noted that the Museum hopes to recruit more bus tours as well.

Mr. Smiley continued that while the Museum's capital budget requests (salary alignment, new positions, and additional security funds) may not have passed this time, Trustee Senator Scott Surovell was able to secure \$250,000 in general fund money for the Museum.

He complimented Standout Arts, the marketing company the Museum has contracted with for a variety of marketing tasks and support.

Finance Director Chase Chandler reported on the Museum's revenue. He also noted the decline during the construction period but emphasized that this had been anticipated and discussed with the Board previously. He also said that as the Visitor's Center is located in a temporary space, there is not as much room to display merchandise, thereby affecting sales totals. He also mentioned the temporary reduction in available rental space.

Mr. Chandler also discussed expenditures and said that the Museum is operating normally and comparable to the last couple of years. Mr. Lipsett asked if the Museum will return to base level operations once construction is done, and Mr. Chandler said that he believes this to be the case and will be awaiting the new budget when passed by the Legislature to make longer term plans. Mr. Smiley noted that the Museum has good rapport with the Department of Planning and Budget.

Chief Operating Officer Andrew Richardson reported on overall visitation including school groups and displayed a chart detailing where visitors come from. He showed a slide of the temporary Visitors Center space; the Visitors Center will move into the front of the new gallery space once completed. He noted that Visitors Center staff made just under \$5000 on fudge sales by attending the Highland Maple Festival weekends in March, and is busy preparing gift bags for schoolchildren who may not be able to shop based on space limitations.

He continued that through the end of March, the Museum has hosted 13, 283 schoolchildren and is working to fill and plan for summer camps. He explained the Foundations Trailblazer program, which funds field trips and transportation for schools who might not otherwise be able to come on a field trip.

Mr. Richardson said that the Museum's Teacher Advisory Committee has been active during the past year and will play a key role in developing programs for the new gallery space. He described other initiatives including the Museum's participation in the Virginia 250<sup>th</sup> celebrations.

Mr. Richardson reported that the John Lewis Society, a youth volunteer program, has been active during the past year, contributing 1,127 work hours. He also mentioned the successful Toddler Time and Girl Scout initiatives.

He said that during the Winter, the costumed interpretive staff have participated in training sessions and led workshops for one another and the public.

Curator David Puckett, with the help of some other staff, has completed the removal of the majority of collections items from the Visitor's Center basement to a climate controlled temporary storage unit nearby, until they can be placed in the new gallery collections storage. He has made deaccessioning recommendations, in-processed objects from the Gordon Barlow collection and assessed collections items still stored in Dairy Barn 2.

#### VIII. Capital Project Update

Mr. Cliff Edwards

Mr. Cliff Edwards, Deputy Director, reminded the attendees of the differences between capital projects and maintenance reserve. He said that he and other staff are currently reviewing proposals for the next A&E term contract for smaller maintenance reserve projects around the site. This will cover anticipated projects such as site-wide lighting improvements, Old World loop waterline work, Octagonal Barn roof and restroom work, Museum-wide WIFI and New ADA pathways on the new World side of the Museum.

Mr. Avoli asked the status of the Mill project; Mr. Edwards said that the project is moving forward, with many components being made in the millwrights shop in North Carolina. He estimated completion in late summer or early fall. Mr. Edwards pointed out that for all the buildings under construction, there is a difference between completion and occupancy.

Mr. Edwards also reviewed slides depicting the Capital Outlay request for FY2026 which includes funds for completing the West African and Native American sites, the Settlement cabin upgrades, the early American still site, the loop road extension, and construction timelines and completion dates for the Interpreters suite completion, maintenance building completion, and main gallery building completion.

#### IX. Gallery Project Report

Ms. Dorette Sobolewski

Director of Research Ms. Dorette Sobolewski gave an overview of the new gallery exhibit, parts of which are already in fabrication in Boston. She reviewed a series of slides depicting recent Museum surveys asking visitors why they visit the Museum, how museums can best engage their audiences and what could improve their museum experience. One slide depicted statistics that show that people 10% of what they hear, 30% of what they read, 50 percent of what they see and 90% of what they do.

She presented the "big idea" for the exhibit, and explained the key elements in the indoor exhibit, and showed the floor plan. She highlighted some new maps created for the exhibit which show early Virginia settlements. She reviewed some of the exhibit information panels, media elements, and emphasis on early people's personal stories. She also presented a slide depicting the scholarly panel which has supported the creation of the exhibit as well as a list of additional advisors and collaborators. Delegate Clark offered his help if needed in making contact with Native American groups in the Tidewater area. Ms. Hughes asked if we have reached out to local and regional tribes as well; Ms. Sobolewski said that we have. Ms. Bragg asked if there will eventually be an audio tour available in other languages as well as English, and Mrs. Sheets said that we are not at that point yet but felt that this is a good idea.

Ms. Sobolewski thanked other staff and Board Members for their help in preparing the content and gallery plans.

X. Foundation Report

Senator Hanger

American Frontier Culture Foundation President Senator Emmett W. Hanger, Jr. reported that the Foundation had assisted the Museum with funding for the contract to begin construction and also provides operational support to the Museum for staffing and the field trip Trailblazers program.

He reported that the Annual Fund is progressing with a couple of months to go before it wraps up at the end of June.

He continued that the Foundation staff are teleworking and that Kelly works at the Museum about one day a week.

There will be a Foundation Board of Directors meeting later this afternoon at which the capital fund for the gallery content will be discussed. He said that the Foundations investment accounts are in a strong position.

Senator Hanger continued that there will soon be a contract on the DeJarnette property and that the Foundation does have some additional property for sale.

Mrs. Sheets thanked Senator Hanger and the Foundation for their support for and partnership with the Museum.

XI. Old Business

Mrs. Sheets

A. Resolutions Dr. Fox and Dr. Bond

Mrs. Sheets said that the Museum will prepare and present a resolution to both Dr. Pamela Fox and Dr. Eric Bond who both recently concluded their service on the Board.

XII. New Business

Mrs. Sheet

No items of new business were brought forward.

XIII. Public Comment

Mrs. Sheets

There was no public comment.

XIV. Next Meeting Date (October 2, 2026)

Mrs. Sheets

The next meeting of the Board of Trustees will be Friday October 2 at 9 a.m./

XV. Adjournment

Mrs. Sheets

The meeting was adjourned at 11 a.m.