

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
Minutes of the External Affairs Committee
Thursday, September 17, 2020, 9:00am
Video Conference

There were present:

Ken Johnson, Chair
Carol Ann Bischoff
Cindy Conner
Kenneth Dye
Janet Geldzahler
Martha Glasser
Meg Gottwald
Sara O'Keefe
Michele Petersen
Pam Royal
Charlie Whitaker
Monroe Harris, Ex-Officio
Jim Klaus, Foundation Co-President
Ukay Jackson, Foundation Liaison

Absent:

Gil Bland
Marland Buckner
Ankit Desai
Pam Reynolds
Lilo Ukrop, Foundation Co-President

By Invitation:

Alex Nyerges, Director
Kay Baker
Candy Banks
Caprice Bragg
Cammy Carleton
Stephanie Cooperstein
Kristine Craig
Maya Erhardt
Katie Payne
Hubert Phipps
Tom Gutenberger, Liaison
Jan Hatchette, Liaison
Cindy Norwood, Office of the Attorney General
Suzy Palmer
Hossein Sadid
Michael Taylor
Kimberly Wilson

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Ken Johnson called the meeting to order at 9:00am and welcomed the committee.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Mr. Johnson acknowledged that there were no public comments.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: proposed by Ms. Pam Royal and seconded by Ms. Michelle Peterson to approve the minutes of the June 17, 2020 meeting of the External Affairs Committee as distributed. Motion carried.

IV. ADVANCEMENT & MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Mr. Tom Gutenberger, Chief Development Officer and Deputy Director for Advancement, presented Campaign highlights from FY20. He reminded the committee that the museum is currently in the second year of the silent phase of the Campaign. During that time \$42 million has been raised and 40 Campaign Committee members have been recruited. He thanked those board members that have made gifts whether they be monetary or of time. He stated that during the temporary museum closure there were some seven figure gifts made.

Mr. Gutenberger moved on to discuss some fundraising highlights. He said that at the onset of the pandemic he and his team projected a 15% decline in giving. This was not the case. The department saw an increase of 40% in overall fundraising, an increase of 9% in unrestricted giving, and a 2% increase in membership. He said this was due to the tireless efforts of the gift officers and the unique fundraising opportunities during the *Rumors of War* installation and the VMFA COVID-19 Relief Efforts.

Mr. Gutenberger ended his report by reviewing the virtual member programs that his department has hosted. He focused his attention on the Cocktails with a Curator program that was well received by audiences. He said that it was important to make sure that members still feel the benefits of their memberships even when social distancing prevents in-person programming. He thanked Michael Taylor and the rest of the curatorial team for their time in making these programs possible.

V. GOVERNMENT RELATIONS UPDATE

Ms. Katie Payne, Director of Government Relations, gave an update on the legislative special session and the status of the budget. She noted that a budget was passed by the legislature on March 7, 2020. It included general fund support for VMFA, however, budgeted monies are temporarily suspended for state agencies. At the beginning of the special session, the Governor presented his proposed budget which includes the requested funds for capital projects. Ms. Payne noted that the requested additional \$400,000 in operational funds would likely be removed, but that has been expected to occur. Finances for the capital expansion project are going to be approved since the

project was approved in 2019. Ms. Payne said that she was optimistic after speaking with Secretary Layne, but that nothing will be concrete until the end of the special session which could continue on for another 2-3 weeks. For the time being, she will be working with finance to draft budget requests for January.

At this point, Ms. Carol Ann Bischoff asked Ms. Payne if Secretary Layne or the Governor were aware of VMFA's great work in education and if that knowledge could persuade them to fund VMFA's information technology needs. Ms. Payne answered that she submits a monthly education report to Secretary Qarni, and that the Governor and his team are impressed with the work. That there is generally bi-partisan support for VMFA's efforts.

Mr. Alex Nyerges then weighed in saying that he was pleased with this General Assembly support. He said that given the circumstances the museum is very lucky to not be facing any budget cuts and to only have a request for new funds cut. He said that thanks to Ms. Payne's work with the state and Mr. Sadid's work applying for federal funds VMFA is in great shape. He then congratulated and thanked Mr. Gutenberger for his report and the team's successes.

VI. COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

Ms. Jan Hachette, Deputy Director for Communications, reported on public relations highlights since the last committee meeting. She said that the museum was gaining attention locally and nation-wide for the COVID Artist Relief Fellowship and *Rumors of War*. She noted the development of a partnership with CHASE. She said that this agreement has led to the company underwriting major programming like VMFA Fridays after Five. She said that their generosity allowed VMFA's Education Division to create and distribute 3,000 art supply kits to school-age children throughout the city. She discussed the continued success of "Bringing the Art to You", an online weekly newsletter that features virtual tours, collection information, videos, and member art and photo challenges. She said that the newsletter currently has a 40% open rate.

Ms. Hachette continued with an update on the success of the *Working Together: Louis Draper and the Kamoinge Workshop* exhibition, and the excitement surrounding the opening of *Treasures of Ancient Egypt: Sunken Cities* exhibition. She noted the public relations reach of both exhibitions highlighting the national coverage of Kamoinge member, Ming Smith and the social media excitement for *Sunken Cities* posts. She said that during the temporary closure, her team scaled back on advertising. Now that the museum has reopened, they have increased advertising but with an accentuated focus on online as opposed to print or billboards.

Mr. Nyerges thanked Jan and her team for their keen observations and timing. He noted that the museum is currently at 35% attendance for this time of year. This is on the higher end of average when compared to colleagues. He is appreciative of the Communications Division's careful judgement on when to spend on advertising and how to do so. He said that that he is still waiting to hear back from the Egyptian government on whether or not they will approve an extension for *Sunken Cities*.

VII. OTHER BUSINESS/ADJOURNMENT

Before the conclusion of the meeting, Mr. Nyerges wanted to address the concerns of some members of the Board in relation to the reform group. He stated that VMFA's representative from the Office of the Attorney General has sent a letter to Instagram asking for the removal of certain posts encouraging violence and theft, and that other actions have been taken. The communications team has reached out to Moses Foster of the West Cary Group to assist VMFA in telling the story of our endeavors and successes.

At this point a discussion occurred about diversity, equity, and inclusion training for board members. There was also some discussion on the amount of visitors to the sculpture garden and ways to encourage them to come inside the museum to view exhibits. Ms. Suzy Palmer suggested a tasteful banner being placed near the door to the Best Café.

There being no other business, Mr. Johnson adjourned the meeting at 9:55am.

Recorded by: Stephanie Cooperstein
Administrative and Project Coordinator to the Director's Office