Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Transcription of the External Affairs Committee Meeting

Tuesday, June 17, 2020, 9:00am

Video Conference

**Meeting called to order at 9:00am.**

Ken Johnson: On such a bright, sunny day, and we've got quite a few things to go through. This is a new way of doing business, but it's not a bad way of doing business. And I think most of us have adjusted and some of us are still learning. But it's a good process. What I'd like to do at this is take a motion, if I could for approval of the minutes.

Martha Glasser: Moved.

Meg Gottwald: Second.

Ken Johnson: All in favor?

Committee: Aye.

Ken Johnson: Wonderful. Next we have is a Communications Update, Jan if you don't mind, would you care to start us off with an update?

Jan Hatchette: Good morning everyone good to see you all even through virtual meetings we'll get started with the Communications Update so you can advance to the next slide. Please. And to the next alright, so COVID-19. Soon after the museum closed in early March, we began working on a communications plan to look at how we; how and what we should communicate to our different constituencies. So messages were sent out to members, to support members, to staff. We developed talking points, develop statements for the media and that sort of got us started into our development of what do we do now that we're in the pandemic. Next slide. So, one of the first things that we took a look at, was our website. As many of you know, when you went to our website, it was full of information around events and some programs that the museum was holding. A calendar with all of that became not necessary. Because the events and exhibitions were canceled, so we redid our website to feature content that we thought people could use while they were at home. So we focused on exploring the permanent collection. We put up everything that we had on our YouTube channels so that people could experience VMFA while at home. Next slide, please.

What you're seeing here is just an example of the web page. So, at the top of the main page, there was a bar that sort of introduced COVID-19 and talked about the closure. But then pushed you to this page to answer any questions that you may have about the museum. If you were wondering if an event was canceled or a program or if your child was ready to register for summer camps, then you could go to this page and find answers to those questions. Next slide, please. So, when we develop talking points and FAQs, we need to do that, one, for our members who had tons of questions, but also for our staff, and for other folks that were interested in the museum and what was going on. For the media, they also had tons of questions, and this was just a way for us to have that content readily available for everyone. Not only did we talk about the current situation of the museum, but then we also had to develop content. As you all know, we had one case of COVID on our staff.

We're very fortunate to only have one, but we needed to develop talking points and content for the media around that. We also had to furlough part-time staff during the pandemic. And so there was content and talking points needed with that. And then the last was content for what we would do next. Next slide, please.

So, in talking with folks, we knew that it was necessary to communicate with people often. So, Alex was in a series of meetings with other directors at other museums. And at the same time, we and communications were having conversations with the communications folks at other museums to talk about strategies and how we would deliver content. We have those conversations across the US at other major museums and we also had that conversation with folks here in town. And that was pretty much on an every other week basis. We were meeting about this and so we developed something called “Bringing the Art to You”. I hope you've had an opportunity to spend some time reviewing that content. And what we've been delivering to people is information about what's in our collection. We found that folks really were interested since kids were at home. So we developed at home activities that we could share. And we also shared links to blog posts. And then we evaluate it. So this newsletter was something that we sent out on a weekly basis to our members and to our opt-in subscribers. That's about one hundred and forty thousand people. And our open rates were tremendous, and we watched it week after week to really get analytics on what people were engaging with. What did they like? What were they spending time on? What did they enjoy actually experiencing and we just continue to serve that kind of material up to them on a weekly basis. Next slide, please.

One of our best performing pieces of information that we sent out was this video of Alex. Videos just do extremely well, and this was a very authentic message from Alex. People really engaged with that. People also enjoyed spending time watching it on our Facebook channel, our Instagram, and Twitter. They just found this content to be one that they liked spending time listening to. So, Alex we will get you to continue doing those videos because people are really taking the time to listen to them. Alright, so let's move to the next slide, please. We found that, you know, different folks from the media contacted us and there were stories out there. I don't know if any folks saw the Sunday Morning Fabrege story that was featured on Sunday Morning. We also were featured in the Wall Street Journal. Alex did a Bizsense online program and so media was, of course, taking the time to ask us questions about being closed. They wanted to know what could people do during this order to stay at home. Next slide, please. Social media. We've had some fun with social media. What you're seeing here are probably the things that folks really engaged with. We featured an at home activity with chalk art. We did a photo challenge. One of our team members has a dog, and she dressed her up like a painting and this was something that actually people enjoyed doing. They started sending in their photos of their dogs dressed up like a piece of art. Next slide.

And with the blog post, where we found people spent the most time, there were three blog posts that folks really enjoyed. There was one for lovers of reading and art that got a lot of engagement, one related to films for in home viewing, and then another for art for aspiring travelers. Those were our blog posts that have received the most viewership. One thing that I forgot to mention in the previous slide, our friends in education developed what's called Watercolor Wednesdays. That was another highlight regarding Instagram and Facebook engagement. Folks really spent a lot of time, and we reached over forty thousand between all of our different channels. Next slide, please. So *Working Together: Louis Draper and the Kamoinge Workshop*, as you all know, the exhibition began back in February, and we were able to get an extension on the exhibition. So, once we open back up in July, we will still have the exhibition running through October 18th, and we look forward to visitors coming in. We had about thirteen thousand people view the exhibition before we closed. So we're doing well and well on track to meet our projected attendance goals. Next slide, please.

This is just some of the reach that we received so far with *Working Together*. It's done pretty well. We've had, I believe, three mentions in the Washington Post, and we started getting interest in this exhibition very early on back in December, so two months before the exhibition even opened. It's continued to really receive attention media-wise, even while the exhibition and the museum have been closed. We’ve still been featuring a lot about the exhibition on our website. The curatorial and other folks in education developed an online tour of the exhibition, and that's also been performing extremely well. Next slide, please.

This is just the efforts that we have been doing on our website through our digital and social media channels, just paying close attention and trying to put out as much content about the exhibition. So that when folks can come back to the museum in July, they will have lots of good information and want to explore and spend more time actually onsite. We did stop all of our traditional marketing efforts while the museum was closed. It just didn't make sense to continue to spend money on traditional marketing like billboards and things like print ads. We stopped that, but we will be starting backup in July. Next slide.

*Sunken Cities*, as you all know, we're so excited. July 1st, we will be open. Not only will the museum open, but the exhibition will be open for our members. And then on July 4th, we will open up to the general public. We can advance to the next slide. So, we'll spend time with our PR plan. We've had to adjust when and what we were doing slightly. But because we are expecting the show to run longer than the original date that we had we'll be able to just do exactly what we were planning to do, but just a little later than what was planned, but we will go full force. In July, we've got all of our ads purchased and ready to hit the streets. One thing that we're really excited about is just telling the story, you know, that this is the only East Coast venue before this goes back to Egypt. So just really pushing out that we want folks to come and explore all the underwater discoveries from these two lost cities. Next slide and if you can play? Yes, thank you. I hope you can hear that.

***Sunken Cities* teaser video plays.**

Jan Hatchette: So, that's just our teaser video that we'll be sharing on our social channels to let people know that the exhibition is up and running. We need to make some tweaks to that. As you can see, it had our original start date. So we will be updating that. Another cool video that we are about to start on is the installation of *Hapy*. So *Hapy* is eighteen feet tall, I believe, and around eight tons, and it will be installed in the atrium in the coming weeks. And so our video team will be taking great videography of the actual installation. And so we think people will really engage. Behind the scenes videos are ones that do extremely well for us. And so we will be featuring that coming soon. Okay, next slide, please. This is just more about what we'll be doing as far as digital and social media. Of course, we have so much great content. We will be working with our education team members on what programs will be coming up. So, we'll be sharing all of this digitally and through social media. And I believe that is the end of the updates from Communications. Any questions?

Janet Geldzahler: In the marketing materials, are we going to say anything about COVID practices at the museum that we will be engaging in and somehow address it for people who might be nervous in attending?

Jan Hatchette: Yes, so when I talked about the talking points and FAQs, we have a whole page on our website that's devoted to COVID-19. It will tell folks exactly what they need to do as far as wearing masks. It talks about everything that we're doing from a cleaning standpoint. It addresses any and everything that you want to know about what we're doing at the museum to make it a safe place to visit. We will talk about special entrances. So, we will have one entrance in and one exit. We will be talking about how you can dine in Amuse and Best Cafe. All of that is going to be outlined. Hours aren't changing. We're gonna open up….

Janet Geldzahler: I meant specifically on the *Sunken Cities* material. Is there gonna be anything there that acknowledges that?

Jan Hatchette: That acknowledges? I'm sorry say again. I didn't hear you, Janet.

Janet Geldzahler: That the museum has a number of steps taken. I mean, if you're someone who sees it on a bus or in an ad or something, and is thinking about going. Is there anything that we would be adding? Because of that?

Jan Hatchette: So…

Alex Nyerges: It's a good question, you know, we might wanna think about, Jan, doing a banner or one of those strip things that says restricted access or limited access. But that's a great question to ask, Janet. We should look at that, but just to put it in perspective. The exhibition when it was planned before COVID-19, we were going to allow four hundred people per hour for ticketing. We're now limiting that at the beginning of the show, starting July 1st to one hundred tickets per hour. So getting that message across to your question is very important to us, because it ensures the safety of our visitors, ensures the safety our employees who are in this space. Getting that message across is gonna be important. So, we'll put our thinking caps on and try to figure that one out. But thank you.

Jan Hatchette: Yeah, thank you. Good suggestion.

Ken Johnson: Any other questions to Jan?

Alex Nyerges: Ken, I just want to. Jan, are we coming back around to talking about the Instagram challenge that we had?

Ken Johnson: Alex, I was gonna ask about the, what kind of communication do we have around Black Lives Matter, and if Jan was going to address it or if you were going to address it toward the end?

Alex Nyerges: Let’s save it to the end, Ken. I've met to compare notes with Jan on that issue, because I know we need to talk about it. It's certainly on the top of a lot of people's minds, but let's save that to the end.

Ken Johnson: Okay, that sounds good. I'll have to hop off at around 9:55 for another call.

Alex Nyerges: Okay. Well, we'll hopefully we will get through there with the other things we have to do. Tom’s got nothing but good news.

Ken Johnson: Good deal. Tom? Maybe unmute? Is Tom on the call at all?

Alex Nyerges: Tom, you need to unmute. Modern technology, Ken, we all love it.

Ken Johnson: Well, that's okay. Katie is available. We can just start with her.

Katie Payne: I'm here. Can you hear me, Ken?

Ken Johnson: I can.

Katie Payne: Okay wonderful. Hi, everyone. I was going to give a quick update on the session and the special session coming up and the budget. So, our normal, long, sixty day session adjourned on March 7th, which, as you'll recall, was just about forty-eight hours before all the COVID restrictions started taking place. On the last day of session, just the day the legislator passed the budget, several legislators stood up and argued for holding the budget for a few weeks to see what was coming with COVID. The governor's office pushed pretty hard to go ahead to pass a budget, so that the agencies and localities would have some degree of certainty of what was expected to happen, had this been a normal year. Then come back and re-forecast revenues later this summer. So, that is what they did. A budget was passed by the legislature that last day of session, and in that budget, we were successful in getting an additional four hundred thousand dollars a year in general funds to help cover increased IT services and leasing additional art storage space. So, we are very pleased with that.

We also had two major capital projects funded through that budget. The first was a new project, it was 2.75 million to make repairs to the sculpture garden and the hillside that's for the first year of this new biennium. And the second of course, was the capital funding to cover the state’s share of our expansion project. It's for both the planning and construction phases of the project. So, it's everything except the fixtures, furniture, and equipment, which is always funded at the back end of a major capital project like this. So, we were very pleased, but of course, everything quickly kind of went sideways with the COVID crisis. So when the legislature came back on April 22nd for their one day, reconvene session, the governor had made several proposals. One was to take every bit of new operational spending…

[digital feedback]

Katie Payne: …and to un-allot it. In other words, it remained in the budget as new discretionary spending, but there's now language attached to it that says that the agency or locality that's the recipient of that funding does not right now have the authority to spend it. So our new preparation for four hundred thousand dollars a year in general funding is still in the budget, but with this new language that temporarily suspends it. What happened on the capital side was most new projects that were introduced this year were completely taken out of the budget or were indefinitely suspended. We were very fortunate in that our sculpture garden project remained in the final budget that was signed by the governor and our capital for the expansion project, which as you'll recall was authorized and approved last session remained in the budget because it was already in the pipeline of existing projects. So we're very fortunate on those fronts.

The governor signed the final budget May 21st. We are expecting to have the revenues re-forecast at the end of this month or very beginning of July. And the governor's planning to call the legislature back into a special session, which will probably be our first ever remote session that we've had in Virginia. The governor is pushing for early August, very soon after the revenue report comes back. The legislature is pushing back a little bit and is asking for late August or right after Labor Day. The tension there is mostly around if it is earlier then the governor has more time to craft his proposals. If it's later then legislature has more time to look at the new report, and then they can kind of come up with their own suggestions.

So, I expect will at least be in late August when we have that new session planned. The legislature will not only be making these changes to the budget. They will be building the new revenue report, which Secretary Lane had been predicting the Commonwealth would lose about a billion dollars each year of the biennium. This new report on Monday he presented before the House Appropriations Committee and was slightly more optimistic and thought that that original projection was off by about four hundred million dollars so there's a little bit better picture than there was a few weeks ago. But we won't know for sure until that report comes out. But we do expect that many of the new discretionary general fund appropriations will be cut. We will be pushing very hard to retain ours of course, and it doesn't look at this time like they're thinking about making any significant changes to the capital projects that have been proposed. But of course, it's always the possibility.

And in addition to making those budget changes there is going to be a lot of legislation around the precautions that the governor has put in place around COVID 19. Things that he's done so far through executive order that need to be passed by the legislature if they're going to continue. So a lot coming at the end of the summer here. We do expect that we might also be asked to make some budget cuts just because of the situation around revenues. But we have not heard anything yet from the Secretary's office, asking us to go ahead and prepare for those at this time. Can I answer any questions about the legislative report?

Pam Reynolds: Katie, it's Pam Reynolds, and I couldn't hear the number. I thought you sort of went out after the sculpture garden. What was a dollar amount that you mentioned?

Katie Payne: For the expansion project?

Pam Reynolds: Yeah, I couldn't hear it.

Katie Payne: No, no problem but I actually didn't say a number. We asked for a hundred and twenty five million. When they fund these large projects they're part of a capital pool. Our pool has about thirteen other projects in it. So, we're not given an official number until the Department of Planning and Budget gets further through the process. But what we were told is that covers everything in our request, except for the furniture, fixtures, and equipment, which are funded at the back end of these projects. So, it's close to a hundred twenty five. We expect that it is around one hundred and twelve. But, again, we won't have final confirmation of that until we're a bit further down the planning process.

Ken Johnson: Any other questions for Katie?

Alex Nyerges: Ken, just on that note about the capital expansion, and Tom will talk more about The Campaign but we were withholding the RFP to go out for architectural services until after the general assembly meet again in August. One, to be absolutely sure that everything stays where it's supposed to stay that the funding are secure and we feel pretty good about it. Katie set up a special meeting with the secretary of finance, Aubrey Lane. He's reassured us that there should not be and would likely not be any changes. So, we're continuing on all The Campaign things, but Michael and the building committee have held off until we get an all clear signal from the governor's office, and particularly from Secretary Lane. And so everybody just cross your fingers that the economic things improve. The news yesterday was good, and Katie continues to monitor everything downtown keeping everybody informed on both sides of the equation in terms of the governor's office all the behind the scenes folks.

And then, as you all saw yesterday, one of the things that Katie has been working on, as well as Michael and Jan and others was the Artist Emergency Fund for COVID 19. That was something we took directly to the governor's office. We don't usually bypass the secretary of education or the secretary of finance on budget issues and things in this case are privately funded with endowment money, but I took directly to Clark Mercer and to say that Clark was excited about the idea of pumping a couple of hundred thousand dollars into the economy into the hands of artists who are not working would be an understatement. Unfortunately, it was right before the, all of the protests around the monuments and so that we have went silent for about three or four weeks, because they had already worked on putting together a press release, which we did put out yesterday, as I think everybody saw, but part of that was obviously we want to help artists. We have this excess money, but then at the same time, it was another way that the governor and the first lady in this case could step forward at doing something positive for Virginians. Forty families across Virginia. We expect an avalanche of applications for this. There are no strings attached to the money. It is money that is meant to support artists who are unemployed and in need. And so we see that this will be particularly out across Virginia, and we're gonna make sure that the members of the general assembly are paying attention to what we're doing using private endowment monies.

Ken Johnson: Thank you, Alex. Alex, while you have the floor, and if there's no additional questions for Katie…I do have one question for you, Katie. One thing in August that we should be mindful of or can we assist or help or just if we run into folks, is there anything that you want us to say?

Katie Payne: Yeah, that'd be great. It's a very unusual cycle right now, because of course people are not, legislators are not meeting in person. So normally I'd be downtown in all the committee meetings just to catch people. So, if you do have opportunities where you're talking to legislators beforehand, I think just a message of gratefulness that our projects are still in the budget and that we are ready to go if those are confirmed in August. That would be very helpful. So thank you for that

Jim Klaus: Katie is there any the verbiage around I mean, I've been watching for example, in New York state where they're talking about capital projects, and they're actually talking about accelerating capital projects because, you know, money is cheap.

Katie Payne: Right.

Jim Klaus: Is there any, I mean, in terms of our verbiage so I sort of feel nervous about us getting all this money but if you think of it as a New Deal Program or an economic development program. I know we're not allowed to spend because we have to have a balanced budget, but we can accelerate some of these capital projects. Is there any talk about it in that vein, which makes it a little more positive?

Katie Payne: We have certainly been talking about it that way. I've not heard that as forcefully from the legislators themselves yet, but in our conversations with staff, money committee, staff and the Department of Planning and Budget that has certainly come up. And this is a little behind the scenes, but when we came back for the one day reconvene session, the governor had actually proposed to suspend all capital projects and the legislature rejected that. So, I think there was the sense that just, as you said, that capital money is cheap right now, we would benefit from getting people to work on these projects. But it's a good note. And I think we can add it to our talking points for going forward.

Ken Johnson: Thank you, Jim. Thanks, Katie. Alex, I'd like to do at this point is, I'm gonna have you instead of waiting until the end, speak on the Black Lives Matter piece now? And then we're transitioning to Tom after that. If it's okay.

Alex Nyerges: Well, and I'm gonna get Jan in particular to assist here. As everybody knows, Monroe and I sent a message out widely. We went and sent it out, obviously, to all of the board members. We sent it to all of our members. We sent it to everybody on our hundred and forty thousand person email list. We also posted it on all of our social media channels, and then also sent it out to the media itself. Overwhelmingly, overwhelming, I mean, we're talking, thousands and thousands and thousands of responses have been hugely positive. It, the response was not completely positive as you can imagine, because we said very specifically black lives do matter, and that we support the protest, the peaceful protest. And if we left out a word, and where's Tom on this picture? Tom Gutenburger? But we attempted put that in there. And somehow it dropped out, which was unfortunate. But, you know, clearly, we only support peaceful protest and in doing so, we've had two waves of negative responses. One came through emails, the one hundred and forty thousand, and I would quantify those as very small in number to two camps. One camp was the people who are pro-keeping the monuments on Monument Avenue, and I won't repeat the rhetoric. But it's the same thing that we've seen in letters to the editor and comments in the papers in the media. The other were people that, you know, were less thrilled with Kehinde Wiley and the sculpture, and actually blaming us for the protests and the issues.

[digital feedback]

Alex Nyerges: I have to say, WebEx is not the best system in the world. How you get feedback is hard to imagine but you know, bizarrely being blamed for the protests and the marches. And the destruction of the monuments being laid at the feet of Kehinde Wiley is obviously as far out there as Mars is from, from Earth. The more troubling and disconcerting wave though came on Instagram, and I will tell you upfront. I don't do social media myself, at least not verbal kind. I post on Instagram, but only photographs. I don't read. People will say well, Alex, I sent you something on Facebook. I never look at Facebook. I never look at Instagram. We have people on staff in Jan’s department that look at everything. And make sure they're monitoring it and looking at how to respond. Instagram though was just a handful of people and they responded not so much about the Black Lives Matter statement. In fact, what they did was attack us on a couple of central issues. One, was that we don't pay our black housekeeping staff a living wage. The second was that we paid disparate rates of pay for black employees versus non-black employees. They also attacked us.

[background noise]

Alex Nyerges: I apologize for the background noise. One of the challenges of working from home. Wednesday mornings are the grass cutting day for our condo, so I wish I could control it. But hopefully y'all can hear me over the lawn people. So, we had an avalanche, and when I say an avalanche, we had two to three thousand positive comments on Instagram out of fifty thousand followers. We had about six hundred comments, both positive and negative on Instagram that I'd say about ninety percent were negative. Now, I will also say that the responses, those say, five hundred negative responses, a large number of them were cut and paste repeats of the same message by the same people or what we believe based on some of the experts that have weighed in to be responses that were created by the people who originated the message itself. In other words, they create multiple personalities and now I'm not Alex Nyerges, but I'm, you know, the Light Shines on America and they create these personalities, because it's repeat, repeat, repeat. Now, we did go back in and oh, there was one other one other theme. And that was a smaller thing that they thought that we, we're a little late on coming out with a public statement. And, of course, we were a little late on purpose because we took a lot of time. Just to give you a sense. We went through eleven versions of that message. Eleven, and I'm talking total rewrites. In doing it, we got people like Ken and Monroe and others to come to the picture and help us think through the messaging.

And of course, I will say upfront it wasn't perfect. We decided we had to press the send button and we were good, ninety eight percent of the way. And we still stand behind what it says. What it means black lives do matter. Black lives matter in the largest sense, not just for the museum. But for society, but particularly in the larger scheme of things, what we're doing is part of a larger social movement, and has been. Now in response to the negative comments. We did come back with a separate message that hit a couple of key points on the messaging about our housekeeping staff not being paid a living wage. Kimberly went in, and her folks, they went in to dig through all the data, and we pay our housekeeping staff on average ten percent better than all of the other state agencies in the Commonwealth of Virginia. You know, we are constricted by what the Commonwealth pays. The fact that we're doing better on average is good. I would say it's not great and we are coming up with a list of other things that we're working on concrete measures to address some of the larger issues.

In terms of the under representation, and under pay of particularly black employees, we came out with two facts. First of all forty percent of all of our managers and directors, these are department heads and education and finance across the entire institution. Forty percent of the some forty or fifty managers are people of color, and the wages and salaries that they're paid are way above any state averages. And then, of course, as I think, you all know, just by looking at the senior leadership team, fifty percent of our senior leadership team are people of color. They are all compensated, not just fairly but well. So, in a larger picture, you know, we're obviously doing well, we know we need to do better. There are things that we have to do better and Kimberly, all of the senior leadership team, and others are working on that agenda. So, we'll be coming back with some of the things that we're gonna be adding to the list of how we can be better. I will say this, and then ask Jan to close this with any additional comments, but the fact of the matter is Jan and her people did a brilliant job. We brought the Martin Agency in and consult to help us with some strategizing about how to go forward. But I will say this very happily. And I'm gonna knock on wood that, that avalanche, which was six hundred or less has pretty much stopped. They apparently realized they were not getting any followers, any traction and based on our metrics it is for all intents and purposes for the moment dead. Jan, what have I missed?

Jan Hatchette: Actually, Alex, I think you hit on all of the key points.

Ken Johnson: Any questions for Alex or additional thoughts.

Carol Ann Bischoff: Ken, I do it's just an observation. So I was reading on the web pages about Louis Draper, an interview that was conducted with his sister, and she said two or three times in that interview that he never went to the VMFA nor did she because they did not feel welcome. And I was surprised by that, given the history of the museum, but you know, there just could be some residual feelings out there by people in Richmond that this isn't a place for us to come to. I wouldn't think that was the case, but I really was surprise to learn that he never came to the VMFA, because he didn't feel it was a place where he was welcome.

Michael Taylor: Carol, this is Michael. I can answer that. So this came up quite a bit with Sarah Eckhardt’s research into Louis Draper. VMFA was segregated at that time. There were colored bathrooms. The Cheek Theater had been segregated, it had an African American seating area and a white seating area. I think it really, you know, it's part of what we're doing and gives us that sense of urgency that artists like Louis Draper were denied a place at VMFA. They did not feel welcome. We would give fellowships to African American artists, but ask them to go to a different entrance than white artists. So, Draper is in that period of massive resistance. And he, his work really is informed by that. Because he wanted to tell the story of black communities and black lives from his perspective. And certainly, I think he didn't feel welcome at the VMFA and so that really fires us up to make this museum friendly, welcoming and inclusive and diverse in all aspects I can.

Ken Johnson: Thank you, Michael.

Monroe Harris: Ken, can I just briefly say this? Amen. The history is what it is, and we realized what it is the fact of the matter is that many people in the community did not feel welcome at the museum. And in, particularly in that period of time. And the vestiges of that have continued up until recent time. Now, I will say this within the past several years that has begun to change. And I think that if anybody is honest about it and looks at that museum now it’s a far different museum than it was, at the time Louis Draper talked about not coming and not feeling welcome. And so, from that perspective, I think we're doing pretty good.

Ken Johnson: Monroe, I think you are a living embodiment of that.

Ken Johnson: The museum has made great strides, and I know probably six years ago, when we decided to focus in on what the strategic plan on aftermarket are, as well as our staff and all. And I was fortunate enough to be privy to the letter that Alex has sent out and I really with somewhat I shared with Alex. I don't think we need to do that, because we had done so much. But I agree with it. And we sent the letter out and with the response, I'll just have to say this, we've got to be smart and I've shared this with Monroe and Alex already. I really feel like those people were saying something that we probably missed and this Alex said a moment ago. We still have work to do and this is an, any organization and this is the easy miss for a lot of folks. If you're not paying attention, these folks are not being acknowledged by our patrons or ourselves. It's been invisible. And this is what probably this protests will be about, you know, you have security staff there, you have housekeeping folks to work within the museum. We don't see them and acknowledge them the same way we acknowledge and see docents and others in the museum. We need to make them a part of the family. And have them part of the conversations so they have minds they think they can communicate this as well as any of us. And we just have to work on how we do that how we include them in the process as well. How we can communicate to our patrons about how they need to be respected, because a lot of the feedback was about how the patrons treat them. So, I think there's a huge opportunity for us to, to bring them into the family and let them know how much we really appreciate the work that they do. And I'll leave it at that.

Charlie Whitaker: I have a question. Kimberly or Alex, the analysis you did of the wages of black employees. I understand they may be above other agencies. If you've done an analysis of comparing the pay of black employees to white employees within the VMFA, a pay equity study?

Kimberly Wilson: Actually that is what we're doing right now, because even prior to all of this, and I think Katie can also attest to this, as we were looking at bringing in more full time staff into VMFA. And what we sent in for our budget bill. We had a chief diversity officer that was outlined in that as well that wasn't initially approved, but, to answer your question, the state looks at it as non-white and white. And so some of the data, particularly with wage employees is very difficult to extrapolate a lot of that information from it. And we're trying to pick through that right now and get that percentage. I will tell you that we've grown our salaries over seven percent at VMFA in general and that's not including. So the state has been like, three percent increases or five percent increases, but we've actually grown ours a little bit more, and I also want to add that the Department of Human Resource Management, I worked very closely with them and they did a study on how the state is to market just in general and back in, I believe in 2018, we were at eleven percent off market too.

So, it's a little bit of a uphill climb, even for state employees, and they've been trying to make that up and a lot of their salary studies and salary adjustments that they've been doing over the last, I'm gonna say, three years particularly that included some merit pay and we actually went one more step further and actually gave salary increases to all our wage employees in addition to opportunities for merit for those people that have been with the state for more than three years. So, we've had an aggressive compensation and classification review within VMFA the last five years. And as Ken just noted, we can do a lot better. And that's what we're looking at. As far as we’ve created different tiered systems too, within our front line staff, just across the board, not just housekeeping or security, and we've been working with Hossein and his team to do that. So in my new role, this kind of adds in the HR plus the Operations piece in there too and I know you understand it very well, Charlie, having those two hats on, and trying to balance the, you know, the available budget versus, what the concerns are in holding ourselves accountable for keeping up with that.

Charlie Whitaker: Right. I'm coming at it from a different angle though. Even though the VMFA as a whole might be above market. If there's inequity within the four walls, are we monitoring that? Are we monitoring, for example, if non-white employees are only paid on average eighty five percent of white employees, even though the pool is above market.

Kimberly Wilson: Again, that's what we're currently working on to dissect that we have to work with DHRM because they hold a lot of the statistics that, you know, we unfortunately don't have on wage workers. They did not do a great job in keeping data on wage employees and so we've had to create our own and so that's an uphill climb that I've talked about for the last five years and thankfully we have great partners in DHRM with Emily Elliott and she recognizes this and last year, I think Alex can speak to this as well. They did a workforce and succession plan document that is required by each of the agencies, and it broke everything down. So it was a good first start. So I'm able to get this data that you're referring to. Right now I can't give you an actual number, which I'm not used to doing, and I'm used to having that number readily available. And so maybe this time next year.

Charlie Whitaker: Let me ask a follow-up question. If someone gets an entry level position in something they're paid the same? Everybody who does that is paid the same correct?

Kimberly Wilson: Correct. That's exactly right. Yes.

Alex Nyerges: Charlie, There's two other things that is…

Kimberly Wilson: As a housekeeper you're gonna come in whether it's at 9.00, 9.38, or 10.00 dollars an hour. Everyone comes in at that that number, correct.

Ken Johnson: Alex.

Alex Nyerges: Charlie, the two things I would add. One, because we review salaries and bring in outside compensation consultants to look at all the positions from top to bottom, housekeepers up to executive staff. And I look at all the numbers against the reports and what people are making. And this is anecdotal. But this is what Kimberly is gonna prove out for us when you look at how we pay our employees it is clearly equitable across the board and I base that on the fact that I know all these people. And I know who makes what, and it looks good. There's, no perceived inequity there. The other thing that we've done that we are very proud of is in the last five years, we have moved and this has been a complaint of staff for a long time. We moved fifty seven part time people to full time employment, with full benefits. And that's at about twenty one thousand dollars of benefits each average. So, about 1.2 million dollars of additional cost. Because we know that people that are paid as hourly workers without benefits that then go full time with the benefits. We're helping them enormously. And there again, it's anecdotal, but Kimberly will prove this out. If you look at that pool of fifty seven workers, and the majority of the workers have been people of color, because we've been mostly doing it at the middle and lower tiers of the wage hour people. And that's had a positive impact on that employee base.

Ken Johnson: Got it. So this has been a very robust conversation, and as I said, I think the thing for me is more so about how these folks are treated and the pay as a part of that as well as I think we can all do better. And Alex, I want to thank you and your leadership and the team for all that you've been doing over the past five years to address all the inequities around this. And I think the museum has, as Monroe pointed out, has come a long ways. And we have a little more work to do, but we've had a lot of other institutions that even though it's not our barometer we’re definitely ahead of many other institutions in-state and that are outside of state. So thank you for your leadership there. We are short on time this morning. Tom, I'm sorry, your equipment was not working appropriately. I understand that you're going to get a full report at the board meeting, which is great and unless we have any additional questions, I think it's probably best we try to adjourn on time because I know a couple of folks that had to pop off to another call. Are there any other thoughts or questions before we adjourn? Not hearing any, we're officially adjourned. Yeah. Okay. Thank you. All.

**Meeting adjourned at 9:58am.**

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| Transcribed by: | Stephanie Cooperstein  Administrative and Project Coordinator to the Director’s Office |  |