

Minutes of Board of Trustees Meeting  
November 18, 2023

Attendees: President of the Board Steve Rotella, Vice President of the Board Tom Dyja, Executive Director Alison Ventura, Trustees Michael Simon, [EJ Camp, Donna Richardson, Katie Sonnenborn, Jeri Newman, Lydia Irving, Jennifer Valentino, Tina Silvestri, Catherine Chermayeff, Suzanne Gluck, Sarah Olmstead, Charles Dean, Ted Harris, and Honorary Trustee John Holzapfel], Lindsay Pollock

**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by President Steve Rotella at approximately 9:03 am.

**2. Approval of Minutes**

A motion to approve the minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting of September 30, 2023 was made by Catherine Chermayeff, duly seconded by Sarah Olmstead and Suzanne Gluck, and unanimously approved.

**3. President's Report**

Steve noted that this was his last Board meeting and that he felt the Society is in good shape. He referenced the strength of the Board, the Society's volunteers and the staff. He also noted the strength of the Society's finances, but acknowledged the upcoming challenges the Collections Center project will bring in this regard, both in terms of the finances and other resources it will require .

**4. Executive Director's Report**

Steve Rotella delivered the Executive Director's Report as Executive Director Alison Ventura's voice was impaired. He noted that the Society has received a \$20,000 grant thanks to Assemblyman Fred Thiele. This grant is designated for the Society's programming and exhibitions. It will be used to repurpose the Red Barn as an exhibition space. The augmented reality project for which the Society received a \$125,000 grant from the Gardiner Foundation is moving forward. The Society's North Fork Art and Artists exhibition was very successful, raising \$15,000 for local artists. Looking ahead to next year, Steve noted that a chair or co-chairs are needed for next year's Summer Benefit. He reminded the Board that next year will be the Society's 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary season. Steve offered thanks to outgoing Board members, Michael Simon, Howie Shinker and Jeri Newman for all of their efforts over the past few years.

**5. Financial Report**

Treasurer Michael Simon reported the following:

The Society undertook a full audit this year rather than the usual annual summary review. This was necessitated by law as a result of the substantial size of the Connie Tupper bequest. The balance sheet as of October 15, 2023 shows that the Society is breaking even. A preliminary budget for next year has been prepared and will be voted on at the January Board meeting. This budget is conservative in its revenue projections

and projects a small loss. Michael noted that it is difficult to make accurate projections for Buildings and Grounds expenditures as the Society's buildings are very old and issues are challenging to predict and must be addressed when they arise. Such unanticipated costs cannot be budgeted for as they are typically not known at the time the budget is prepared. He reminded the Board that Webb House has a separate fund from which to draw for its maintenance expenses. In prior years, the Society has authorized a 5% draw from the Stein account. He noted that a 6% draw would be well within norms for not-for-profit organizations. The preliminary budget for next year increases the draw of Stein funds to 6% in order to help bridge the gap between anticipated revenues and expenses. This will help enable the Board to address buildings and grounds expenses as they arise rather than having to defer them and risk cost increases. Michael observed that the budget for the Collections project will be separate from the Society's normal operating budget.

## **6. Development Report**

Steve Rotella reported that revenue in 2023 was significantly ahead of 2022. This was attributable in large part to memorial gifts that the Society had received and to the success of the Summer Benefit, notwithstanding that revenues from the live auction component of the Summer Benefit were significantly less than in 2022 due to fewer high-end offerings. The Griffin Giving program's receipts were down slightly compared to 2022. This program should be refreshed in order to maximize its efficacy. Steve noted that he has agreed to continue to oversee the Griffin Giving program next year even though he will no longer be on the Board. Looking ahead to next year, there is potential to equal or exceed the revenue from this year's Summer Benefit by focusing on sponsorship opportunities, building on the success of this year's online auction and seeking one or two headline items for the live auction.

## **7. Buildings and Grounds**

Steve reported on behalf of Chairperson Jennifer Valentino that bids are currently being reviewed to address Village House's leaking gutters. This work needs to be done as soon as possible in order to avoid more costly issues. In addition to grounds keeping expenses there are other projects that will need to be addressed such as the painting of Village House, which hasn't been painted in ten years. Going forward, the Board will need to consider whether it needs to draw on the Society's capital to address certain buildings and grounds needs/issues or if fundraising for the particular project may make sense.

## **8. Community Engagement Report**

Steve reported on behalf of Chairperson Leslie Cohen, that the Halloween event was successful; the holiday house tour was put on hold this year; and the annual treelighting and holiday caroling is planned for early December.

## **9. Collections Report**

Chairperson Charles Dean reported that the Collection Committee, with input from curator Bill McNaught and historian Amy Folk, had determined that certain items should be deaccessioned: a 19<sup>th</sup> century bed, chair and sofa (of which the Society has better examples and would never anticipate exhibiting). Charles also described certain items, about eight bowls, that were emanated from the graves of the local indigenous peoples. George Latham had given items to the Society. The Collection Committee voted to repatriate these to the Shinnecock Nation, subject to Board approval. John Holzapfel suggested that consideration be given to asking the Shinnecoaks if the Society could retain one of the bowls on a loan basis for exhibition with their input. Discussion ensued regarding this idea and its feasibility. Suzanne Gluck made a motion to approve the deaccessioning of the aforementioned items; Catherine Chermayoff seconded the motion, following which it was unanimously approved by the Board.

## **10. Nominating Committee Report**

Chairperson Suzanne Gluck reviewed the proposed slate of officers, including Tom Dyja as President, Tina Silvestri as Vice President, Ted Harris as Secretary, and PJ Deschenes as Treasurer. She went on to describe the five new proposed Board Members, including in addition to PJ, Emily Bellos, George Cavagnaro, Mimi Fahs and Craig Young. Steve Rotella, after thanking Suzanne for her work chairing the Nominating Committee, requested a vote with respect to the proposed slate of officers. The slate was approved unanimously.

## **11. Collections Center Project Discussion**

Steve, on behalf of Alison, gave an update on the Collections Center project. Concept development has progressed over the course of several meetings. Attorney Mark Finnegan has been retained to help with the Town and County, in connection with zoning and other permitting issues. Meetings have also taken place to discuss grant possibilities to help finance the project. Any Board Member who would like to help in the grant writing process or has ideas related to it should speak to Alison. Mark was referred by Collection Committee member Ann ffolliott.

## **11. Adjournment**

President-elect Tom Dyja thanked Steve Rotella for his leadership of the Society through a difficult period and for his efforts in setting up the Society for future success as it enters into its 80th year. Steve expressed his appreciation for Tom's kind words and noted that he looked forward to continuing to help out in the future. The meeting was then adjourned at approximately 9:53am