



History Nebraska Board of Trustees Retreat

Thursday, January 16, 2020

Dr. Don R. Gerlach Capitol View Room – Headquarters Building, Lincoln

**Meeting Notes compiled by Trevor Jones**

Board members attending: Lance Bristol, Ann Bruntz, Kim Elder, Richard Herink, Tom Kraus, Marilyn Moore, John Nelson, Vickie Schaepler, Chuck Schroeder, Connie Spellman, Eileen Wirth, Bryan Zimmer, David Levy, Bob Bartee

Invited Participants: Trevor Jones, History Nebraska Director and CEO, Katherine Endacott, Trustee Emeritus

Guests: Cindy Drake, History Nebraska Librarian, Diane Laffin, History Nebraska Architectural Historian, John Risetto, History Nebraska Archeology Section 106 Review and Compliance Coordinator (from 5-6 PM and occasionally other times).

President Bristol called the meeting to order at 1:16 PM, noted the press had been notified; the Open Meetings Act was posted, and reminded everyone of History Nebraska's mission.

**Chimney Rock Donor Wall – Bryan Zimmer**

Bryan Zimmer discussed efforts to complete donor recognition elements of the Chimney Rock project. He detailed work that had gone into this process, the parameters set by the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation, the timeline, and the need to make a decision about how to proceed. He explained that several concepts had already been advanced, and shared those with the board. The board reviewed these proposals and after discussion supported adopting "Plan 4." After further discussion members decided that it would be best if the Governance Committee brought a resolution to the board meeting for the board to vote on so that staff could proceed with the project.

**Weese Farm Settlement – Bryan Zimmer, David Levy**

The board discussed the terms of the 2000 settlement agreement and the need to honor the Weese-Langeschulte sisters' wishes in a timely manner. The board discussed the planning work already completed for an agricultural exhibit and the need to have resources in hand going forward. The settlement agreement specifies that it is the Board of Trustees' responsibility to honor the donor's wishes, and that the State of Nebraska cannot take on debt. The board discussed formally asking that the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation transfer the funds to History Nebraska's Weese Farm Trust Fund. The Trust Fund has already been established and the settlement agreement is part of the establishment language for the Trust Fund to ensure they can only be used for the approved purposes. The board members agreed that

spending money on the project without having the funds transferred was problematic as ethically the 2000 settlement agreement makes carrying out this project their responsibility, and legally the state cannot incur debt on capital projects. They then agreed that asking for the transfer of the Weese funds from the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation was the next logical step and asked the officers to move forward with that process.

The board then discussed exhibit concepts, other agricultural exhibits in the state, costs, and resources. After a robust discussion, board members agreed that because an agricultural exhibit was the donor's primary focus, the majority (if not all) of the available funds should be spent on the exhibit project to best honor the donors' intent.

### **What is our vision for the future? -- Katherine Endacott**

Katherine Endacott led the group in a discussion of their individual visions and goals for History Nebraska. The discussion was wide ranging -- and included discussion of the successes and shortcomings of the current strategic plan, fundraising needs, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, attendance, digital projects, infrastructure, and staffing.

### **History Nebraska Leadership – Trevor Jones**

Trevor Jones discussed the recent retirement of Deputy Director Lynne Ireland, and how the organization was working to address that vacancy. The board discussed ways to capture knowledge from departing staff members, and how to best develop procedures that are not dependent on one person's memory. There was also discussion of training current staff to use 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, how to hire skillsets needed for the future, investing in staff development, and how to better involve emeritus trustees.

### **Future Infrastructure Needs -- Trevor Jones**

The board discussed future needs and bold visions for the organization tied to the strategic plan. Trevor Jones discussed four "big visions" he has been thinking about based on the strategic plan and conversations with the board. The board discussed:

- A vision for improved use of the Kennard House
- A vision for digital access
- A vision for statewide outreach education
- A vision for future infrastructure needs

The group discussed all of these ideas at length. There was strong agreement that History Nebraska needs to take risks and work to raise money for big projects, but also awareness that

the total cost of these projects could be in the neighborhood of \$200 million. Several board members expressed that digital access to collections was of key importance and that none of the other visions could be fully realized without more attention to digital access now. Several members expressed that History Nebraska needs to be a statewide organization and reach out to allied groups statewide. There was discussion on how to meet this goal – from mobile exhibits to distance education initiatives.

There was broad consensus that now was the time for History Nebraska to push forward, take risks, and realize its vision to become the most relevant and engaging state historical society in the nation.

Katherine Endacott pledged to type up her notes and share the individual visions with the board in the future so that the discussion and prioritization of projects could continue.

Lance Bristol adjourned the meeting at 6:01 PM.