

**Minutes of Public Meeting of
the Executive Committee of
the Board of Directors of the
Arizona Historical Society
Monday, November 16, 2020, at 12:00 p.m.**

1. **Call to Order** – President Linda Whitaker

Meeting called to order at 12:06 p.m.

2. **Roll Call** – Bruce Gwynn

Committee members present virtually: Linda, Whitaker, Bruce Gwynn, Jim Snitzer, Tom Foster, Robert Ballard, Kelly Corsette, Colleen Byron

Committee members missing - Voie Coy

Staff members present virtually - Kim Bittrich, Melba Davis, Bill Ponder, James Burns

3. **Minutes** - Discussion and action, if any, to approve the draft Minutes of the October 19, 2020, Executive Committee meeting.

Minutes were accepted as submitted.

4. **Call to the Public** – Consideration and discussion of comments from the public. Members of the public wishing to address the Committee should identify their interest at this time via the chat box. Those wishing to address an item on the agenda will be called upon when that item is being discussed and given up to five minutes. Those wishing to address an item not on the agenda will be allowed up to three minutes. Such items may not be discussed by the Committee but may be directed to Staff for study and consideration at a later date.

No members of the public present.

5. **Employee Satisfaction Survey 2020** – Discussion – Whitaker and Burns

Staff Productivity - a 10-day review: AAM, Annual Report, Journal “sneak preview”, Fighting for the Franchise

Whitaker noted a substantial improvement in employee satisfaction; it is now higher than the state average. Employee narrative feedback indicates that there is a role for the boards in employee satisfaction. Interesting to note how boards impact staff satisfaction and vice versa.

Snitzer identified three categories of comments about boards and support groups. Unfortunately, there were no positive comments about the Boards and Support Groups, only negative ones. Generally, the concerns fell into three areas: 1. Lack of respect for staff 2. Interference in operations 3. Not supporting the mission. Particularly acute in the south, somewhat in the north. Feedback about staff culture was mixed, but largely positive.

Foster – Quality, type and amount of communication is a concern. Surprised that there wasn't any positive feedback about the board.

Discussion ensued: Staff reacting to previous executive committee that rotated out in July. There were several times that committee came down on the side of the chapter boards in particular, and also support groups. This sent a clear message that the executive committee valued those groups more than the staff.

Gwynn – Was surprised to see this feedback. Burns assured him this is not happening in Yuma or Tempe.

Whitaker – This is a course correction. Respect and trust begins at the very top – with the boards. Not surprised by the findings.

Corsette – Surprised at the comments directed at the boards and support groups. Should we attempt to put together a summit of boards – state, chapter, support groups?

Ballard – Surprising to see in writing the effects of the impact boards have on staff. Focused on staff comments directly related to their jobs - communication, transparency, and clear goals and direction.

Byron – Hopeful problems can be minimized by the new direction the executive committee and the state board is taking.

Ponder – Don't lose all of the positive comments. The feedback, both quantitative and qualitative, was overwhelmingly positive. It's important to keep this in mind, resisting the temptation to focus on the negative

Burns – These comments are focused on the behavior of two of the chapter boards and three support groups – not so much the state board. Most striking was the number and consistency of the comments. Has personally experienced this behavior and would characterize the way he has been treated as consistent with the staff qualitative feedback.

Whitaker – Spoke about staff productivity, which she closely monitors. Particularly impressed with a 10-day period at the end of October when there were a lot of outputs, including the submission of all documents for reaccreditation. The annual report for FY2020 was released; Whitaker praised design, content, and presentation of the report. A Journal sneak preview interview with David Turpie about the "State of the Field" issue coming out in a few weeks was released to members. This interview elucidated Turpie's thoughts on the direction the Journal has taken, to maintain its position as a premiere publication of AZ history. Not enough AZ research gets done and published. Fighting for the Franchise was a very successful virtual program about the fight for Native American voting rights. All of this shows strengths and that all of the teams are pulling together.

Burns added that the reaccreditation visit will take place next Spring, that the annual report is a great template for next year, that the Journal will be in mailboxes right after Thanksgiving, and that virtual programming is becoming a new source of revenue for the organization.

6. **Annual report** – FY2020 – Whitaker

Foster complimented the design and presentation. Whitaker noted that it is engaging,

something you wanted to handle.

7. **AAM Reaccreditation** – Submission, mission statement, deaccessioning – Whitaker and Burns

Discussion ensued about the ongoing disconnect between some of AHS' stakeholders, and the expectations of AAM regarding what it takes to be a relevant modern museum. Staff is caught in between. Examples include AAM support for mission and deaccessioning policies and procedures. Much more education is needed.

8. **Sunset Review and Strategic Plan** – Update and discussion – Whitaker, Byron, Burns

Going to meet on November 17, 2020 to update the tracking document.

9. **Executive Director Update**

- a. Strategic Plan – In many cases, progress toward achieving strategic plan goals is ahead of schedule; progress has been slowed in a few areas due to COVID-19 (revenue goals in particular). Staff is caught up on tracking through the end of the third quarter 2020. Ponder added that each iteration of the staff just jumps right into their work. The current team has really bonded. They have established a new baseline for productivity. Ponder and Bittrich have watched the trend over the past 23-24 years. Demands never decrease as the size of the staff decreases. Demands only increase. The 45-50% of staff remaining (from the height of staffing around 2000) are producing double what each team member did 20 years ago. We do lose opportunities though. Whitaker was not surprised; she sees points of the strategic plan in almost everything AHS is doing.
- b. Auditor General's Communications – Reminder: presentation to the entire board on January 8, 2021 There will be an opportunity for board members to ask the AG's staff any questions they want following a brief presentation.
- c. COVID-19 Phased Plan – No changes at this time. Despite rising COVID-19 numbers, AHC and AHM will remain open unless the agency is directed otherwise.
- d. Fundraising – The annual appeal will go out within the next 10 days or so.
- e. Friends Board recruitment – Recruitment will begin again shortly, with the goal of adding another 10 or so members by the New Year.
- f. Partnerships – ASU History Department received a grant to partner with AHS to launch a digital and physical collecting project focused on the COVID-19 pandemic – titled Journal of the Plague year. Will conduct hybrid on-ground online programs at AHS sites around the state.

Discussion ensued about revenue generation to fill the gap created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Burns announced that a task force of 7 staff members had been appointed. He suggested that this be a joint staff/board task force, in the spirit of modeling the kind of partnership it takes to move the agency forward. Snitzer, Gwynn, and Ballard were invited to join the task force. Burns will schedule.

10. **Finance Committee**

- a. Report on financial view from 30,000 feet – Snitzer reviewed the financial overview report based on the October financials from Bittrich. The "burn rate" / budget gap has closed ever so slightly due to better than projected membership numbers and

more grant funding than anticipated. The organization is still far from out of the woods. Snitzer praised staff for outperforming the field by keeping the organization's membership steady during a tumultuous time. Further actions must be taken to generate revenue and cut costs where possible.

- b. Recommendations on 1107/revenue-sharing funds – Snitzer presented some draft recommendations that his committee has been working on relative to AHS revenue sharing with chapters, the fundraising role of chapters, and the current balance of revenue sharing accounts. Snitzer made a motion that the Executive Committee approve the following recommendation, which will be voted on by the Finance Committee at its November 17, 2020 meeting, assuming that the Finance Committee does not make substantive changes. Ballard seconded the motion.

Recommendation: Eliminate revenue sharing with the Chapters. Chapters should be formally absolved from the responsibility to fund raise for AHS. No additional 1107 moneys should be allocated. Any unspent 1107 moneys should be spent by June 30, 2021 on AHS-approved projects or reallocated within AHS.

Discussion ensued. Corsette asked if there were any recurring expenses paid from revenue sharing accounts that would be affected by this decision. Bittrich responded that the only thing she could recall is annual palm tree trimming in Yuma, which is a cost of approximately \$2,000. Whitaker noted that Michael Wade has spent a lot of time working on this issue and is invested in the discussion. He was invited to attend the meeting but was unable to make it. Wade will speak on the issue at the January board meeting. Voice vote followed: Ballard: Aye, Byron, Aye, Corsette, Aye, Snitzer, Aye, Whitaker, Aye, Gwynn, Aye, Foster, Aye. Motion passed unanimously.

- c. "Feel the Burn" – Snitzer presented a new one-pager addressing the annual "Burn Rate" of \$668,000, which was identified based on financial data through September 2020 (3 months into the fiscal year) and forecasts. It is the rate at which our limited financial resources are being used up. Reducing the Burn Rate to zero is our first priority. It is essential to our survival and we don't have much time to get it done. It won't be easy - we have already taken many cost reduction actions, so few are left that don't severely impact our mission. Opportunities for revenue are also limited. We have reopened our museums, but admissions are only slowly recovering. We need to identify and implement additional cost reductions and revenue opportunities. Snitzer asked for feedback; committee members thanked Snitzer for such a clear and concise explanation.
- d. Membership – Snitzer presented a new one-pager analyzing membership numbers, trends, revenues, and expenses. Discussion ensued about the cost of printing and mailing the Journal of Arizona History. The Journal is mandated by statute – but not the form that it takes. Committee members discussed the possibility of a new membership category where one could pay extra for a print version of the Journal if a switch to digital were to happen. Corsette advised proceeding with caution; we should survey the membership. There are many variables. Ballard agreed that a member survey should be conducted.

11. **Role of Chapters** – Discussion only – Whitaker

Whitaker referenced a 63-page PDF circulated to the committee prior to the meeting, a compilation of the work done on chapters issues between 2014 – 2020. Some of this work has never come to a board vote. Some of it was never circulated to the Board. Some of it is already outdated. Wade has provided Whitaker with input about how to move forward. Whitaker asked committee members for strategy suggestions.

Discussion ensued about the possibility of a summit meeting. Wade wants suggestions from the bottom up. Whitaker would support that with parameters – i.e. what is required of chapters, which are part of a state agency – the ‘running rules.’ To conduct business as part of a state agency, groups must follow the rules the staff is responsible for enforcing. The summit meeting could lay out those parameters. The sunset review findings urge action on this issue. A representative of each chapter must be willing to meet with the State Board of Directors. If they refuse to meet that is a clear signal that they don’t want to function as a chapter anymore.

What work done to date should we pay attention to? How should we move forward? Byron suggested this could be done online. Gwynn advocated for in-person. The consequences of failing to meet need to be made clear. There needs to be an educational component, much like the State Board of Directors orientation, which explains state requirements, and who is responsible for monitoring compliance. This should include information about the Open Meeting Law and compliance. A key element that needs to be covered is how accountability is going to be assessed and how compliance will be monitored. That will avoid future surprises. Failure to take state requirements seriously is not an option for groups that want to remain a part of AHS. Whitaker stated accountability is linked to viability. In the north, committees were eliminated due to lack of interest – or resources – to comply with Open Meeting Law requirements. Byron – do these chapters have enough people, time, or energy to meet the requirements? Corsette has been involved over the past few years in discussions about chapters. The role of the chapter boards, or the way they see themselves, differs from place-to-place. In some places they are tied to the support groups. In other places not. In some places the chapter boards don’t really do much.

Foster spoke with John Lacy about some ideas for the Eastern Chapter. There is no central location. Ponder urged the committee to make sure we keep the discussion about chapters and support groups separate. The process for dealing with relationships with separate 501(c)3 organizations is different from that of chapters. Secondly, what is left for the chapters to do? It is the advisory role, which was the initial vision for the chapters per their articles of incorporation/charters -not administration, not operations, not control. There is also an important advocacy role to be played on a local level that could be valuable.

Many of the chapter voices are replicated in the support groups. If those groups would communicate with the staff, there is still a role for them. Some groups have stepped away, and the staff has moved on out of necessity. We can’t conduct any business with folks who do not communicate. Finally, if the state board and chapter boards are the only ones at the summit, that is only two legs of three-legged stool; if staff doesn’t participate in the summit, in the end nothing would be solved as staff is responsible for enforcement of state guidelines/rules/regulations. Melba

Davis cited examples of being told to leave chapter and support group meetings – a first in her 20+ year career with the state. Committee members asked if the chapter and support group issues should be addressed at the same time. Staff – no, tackle the chapter issues first – fiscal and administrative. Snitzer stated that the end result is a recommendation from the executive committee to the board of directors for action, whenever the time comes. Committee discussed timeframe for moving forward – 6 months, beginning in January 2021. A decision will be reached by June 2021.

Whitaker asked Burns if he had anything to add to the conversation; he made three points. 1) Out of necessity, the staff moved on in the locations where support groups either are not communicating with staff at all, or not effectively working together. Much progress has happened over the past two years. Fears it will be difficult for groups wishing to reengage to catch up with the rest of the agency. AHS has never been as networked in its entire history as it is now. Dozens of new partnerships have been built with groups and organizations across the entire State – including universities, and community voices groups. The latter reflect the full spectrum of the demographics of the communities AHS serves. 2) The feedback from the qualitative portion of the staff satisfaction survey (regarding bullying, harassment, hostility, and abusive behavior) is about two of the chapters and three of the support groups. 3) Fears that if this is not addressed by the State Board AHS will begin losing the most credentialed staff it has ever had when the economy rebounds and opportunities become available again. That would be a tragic outcome.

12. Announcements and other matters for consideration in future board or committee meetings

None.

Executive Committee Schedule

January 18, 2021 - No meeting in December

AHS Board meeting dates and locations: January 8, 2021 (Virtual and Tempe)

Meeting adjourned at 2:32 p.m.

Dated this 16th day of November 2020.

Arizona Historical Society



Linda Whitaker, Board President

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