

**Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan
Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, June 17, 2025**

Our mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit authentic articles and artifacts of art, history, and science to inspire curiosity for all ages, foster community pride, and cultivate personal legacy.

Board Members:

Present: **President**, Mike Beaulac, **Vice President**, Ashley Peterson, **Secretary**, Jim Johnson, **Treasurer**, Sue Stender, Gary Goren, Claudia Chapman, Janet Young, Dan Florip, and Jon Gougeon.

Absent: Brian Bartosh, Tuffy Cross, Michelle Miller, Sarah Winter, all excused. Julie Austin not excused.

Staff present: Executive Director Chris Witulski.

1) Call To Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:53 pm.

2) Review May 20, 2025, Board Meeting Minutes for approval (action item)

The motion to accept the minutes as written was made by Janet Young and seconded by Claudia Chapman. All in favor. Motion carried.

3) TREASURER'S REPORT:

- a) May report: See report filed on website by Sue Stender. Some major costs were the newly installed Alpena Flier reader rails. May 2025 had a loss of \$25k versus a net loss of \$17k in 2024. The difference is mainly due to the large legal and accounting costs for this year because of 2 yearly audits. plus, increased payroll. Also, because some schools have not yet paid for their spring 2025 class visits.
- b) Year to date: For the 11 months of this FY our admissions are down 25% because of the closure last winter, and no Season of Lights. Donor restricted funds increased. Memberships are down 17% and store sales down 25%, also largely because of closure and no Season of Lights. Expense highlights are: increased costs of exhibit items as Discover project was built out; payroll increased, and audit costs were up. Overall, other costs were near budget.

4) Reports to the Board:

- a) **DIRECTOR'S REPORT:** Full report can be found on the Museum's website. Some highlights of the report were:
 - 1. Reader rail has been installed.
 - 2. Attendance last month (May) rose more than 40% over May of 2024. In addition, Besser hosted 19 school groups totaling 932 students, an increase from last spring's 820 students.
 - 3. The Board membership was addressed at the annual meeting immediately prior to the June meeting. We could still use some new members.
 - 4. Facility maintenance: Matt Klimczak has his hands full with no assistant this year:
 - a. The Spratt Church needs a new roof, window repair and painting. Matt received a quote for the roof.

- b. Matt is working with Lakeshore Plumbing to replace a failed boiler pump and continues to work with TRC Roofing on a plan to redirect water on the roof over the Trelfa Gallery.
 - c. The parking lots need patching.
 - d. The increasing number of students and number of other visitors is taxing Matt's ability to keep up with cleaning and routine repairs.
 - e. There is a need for more volunteers to help with landscaping and other chores.
 - f. Matt just installed the new reader rails for the Alpena Flier.
5. The Alpena Public Schools Summer Enrichment Program will stage four events at Besser; the Museum will receive \$2,520 for these services. There will also be two 4-H programs this summer.
 6. Lower-level exhibit renovation (Phase II):
 - a. Split Rock Studios submitted a contract for phase 1 schematic design. This Schematic Design contract is \$45,000. The SD work will produce the graphic design images needed for the fundraising campaign.
 - b. Unfortunately, Besser's proposal to the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity Community Museum Grant program was not funded.
 - c. An interpretative concept for the lower level was drafted.
 - d. The Executive Director has recruited input from community leaders and local experts.
 7. The planetarium is still operating with just one of its two projectors.
 - a. Norbert Vance from Eastern Michigan University visited the Besser Museum on May 30 and was able to share some ideas with Mike Beaulac, John Heath, and the ED about our current situation in the planetarium.
 - b. Eastern Michigan University recently installed a Digitalis Education Solutions "Digitarium Lambda" which comes in at around \$100,000 versus \$300,000 or more for other systems. This is the same system used at Bay City's planetarium, which the Fishery Heritage Trail annual meeting experienced a few years ago with positive reviews.
 - c. We are planning to host the company and have them give us a demo, perhaps invite potential donors as well as the Board and any other interested parties.
 8. Gary Goren continues to work hard on the Planet Walk project. He applied to the Youth and Recreation Grant program for \$34,479 and is working with staff on the signs.
 9. Sarah Honeycutt and Angela Addington are creating a special exhibit that dovetails with Dinasour Gardens and their celebrating 90 years of business. The exhibit will be on display June 28th through October 30th, 2025. Besser has 3 original paintings by Paul Domke that will be part of the display.
 10. Log Cabin Day is June 28th.

5) AD HOC COMMITTEES:

- a. **GOVERNANCE REPORT:** (Dan Florip) The committee selected the slate of board members. Dan moved that Jim Johnson's term on the Board be extended one year, seconded by Jon Gougeon. Motion carried.
- b. **GREAT LAKES FISHERIES HERITAGE EXHIBIT:**
 1. **Chinook Project:** (Jim Johnson report)
 - i. Good Design Group is continuing to refine the schematic design and secure bids from subcontractors for the fabrication and installation. They have projected that the installation will occur by August/September.

- ii. Jim Johnson has almost completed research for the interpretation of the exhibit. The resulting content has been conveyed to Good Design to incorporate in their media.
 - iii. Hosted student groups to the Fishery Heritage Exhibit.
 - 2. ***Katherine V***: Tuffy Cross:
 - i. Began hosting student groups.
 - ii. Mike Orr has been volunteering, so far so good, but finding volunteers and staff for these field trips needs to be addressed, as the number of students increase and as Jim and Tuffy get older.
- c. **DISCOVER NORTHEAST MICHIGAN HISTORY:** (Mike Beaulac)
 - 1. Phase II grant application was NOT funded.
 - 2. The draft contract for schematic design is being crafted. A version is available to the Board.
 - 3. Meanwhile we are working on an outline of the stories to be told based on resources and artifacts we have or could obtain. Jim Schmit with Alpena Montmorency Conservation District, Brad Jenson, Director of Huron Pines (and Maddie Khuri); and Tim Kent are advising on early settler stories and supporting artifacts we have or need; plus, other advisory/planning sources are being recruited.
 - 4. This will be about the same size in area (3,000 sq ft) as the Discover project.
 - 5. An “Economic Generator” grant application for \$15,000 has also been submitted and is pending.

Janet Young moved, and Ashley Peterson seconded a motion that we accept the draft strategic plan agreement with Split Rock. Motion carried.

6. COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE: (Claudia Chapman and Sarah Honeycutt):

- a. Committee did not meet, No committee report.
- b. Sarah reports that the total number of items in permanent collection is 36,529
- c. Staff and volunteers cataloged 926 artifacts and inventoried 792 this month.
- d. Many public inquiries have been fielded.
- e. Also, Collections staff assisted with field trips as needed.

6) Old Business: On June 23, Gary meets with Youth and Recreation Committee regarding funding the Planet Walk.

7) New Business: The agreement with Split Rock was approved (see above).

8) Adjourn:

Janet Young moved, and Gary Goren seconded, that the meeting be adjourned. The meeting was adjourned at 5:44 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Johnson, Secretary