

**Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan
Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, October 21, 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 Beulac, **Vice President**, Ashley Peterson, **Secretary**, Jim Johnson, Ann Diamond, Gary Goren, Brian Bartosh, Linda Baker, Beach Hall, and Dan Florip.

Absent: **Treasurer** Sara Winter, Sue Stender, Jon Gougeon, all excused.

Staff present: Executive Director Chris Witulski, Sarah Honeycutt, Collections.

1) Call To Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:32 pm. A quorum was noted.

2) Review September 16, 2025, Board Meeting Minutes for approval (action item)

The motion to accept the minutes as written was made by Brian Bartosh and seconded by Ashley Peterson. All in favor, motion carried.

3) TREASURER'S REPORT:

a) *September monthly report.* See report on website. September posted a loss of \$11,000, but \$8,000 was from a Fisheries Exhibit billing that will be reimbursable. Since switching to the accrual system, reports will now be on a quarterly basis.

b) *Year to date:* See report on website.

These two reports were filed as reported.

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:

Facility

1. Control Solutions will begin replacement of the faulty valves and actuators on the HVAC system soon.
2. This has been a busy period for pest control, from ants in the Log Cabin to wasps in the Fishery Exhibit building.
3. The computer and one projector for the planetarium have failed. Consequently, John Heath has been operating the Spitz ball for planetarium shows on Fridays and Saturdays. The computer may be repairable.

Cherie Honeycutt has volunteered to host a children's story and craft time program at the Museum. The programs will take place one Saturday a month.

Planet/History Walk: This was an item from the Directors Report that we did not discuss during the October meeting – Sorry, Gary. And congratulations!

1. Besser Museum was awarded the Youth and Recreation Grant application for the Planet/History Walk.

2. Angela Addington will work with Gary on graphic design for the signs. One side will be planetarium information, and the other side of each sign will be Alpena history information. Sarah will be able to provide photos and information from our archives.

Season of Lights planning: The Members-Only Gala is scheduled for Sunday, November 16, 6:00 to 8:00 pm.

- Applied for Raffle License
- JJs will cater
- We will charge \$10 per member
- Marketing will begin November 1
- Museum will be closed while decorating October 31 through November 16.

b) AD HOC COMMITTEES:

Governance Report: (Dan Florip) No report. Julie Austin has resigned from Board.

Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage Exhibit: Jim Johnson

- Good Design Group completed designs and submitted them to the printers, including a mural for the outside of the *Chinook* building. The exhibit panels will take six weeks to produce. Mural will be installed later this month.
- Matt Klimczak hung several LCD screens up in the *Chinook* exhibit and ordered video loop players.
- Matt has secured bids for rain gutters, electrical, and plumbing/water hook-up work.
- For Fall Festival, five videos were playing, and we hosted lots of visitors. Unsure of what percentage of visitors came to the Fisheries Exhibition.
- American Cruise Lines may begin visiting Alpena next year. Representatives toured the Museum and ACL could become regular Fishery Exhibit visitors. This could be in addition to Viking, who visited in September and seemed very interested.
- The Board discussed getting transportation from NOAA, where the ferries land, to Besser – Thunder Bay Transportation?

- c) DISCOVER NORTHEAST MICHIGAN HISTORY:** (Mike Beaulac) A virtual meeting was proposed by Split Rock for Nov 17, where a draft of the conceptual plan will be presented.

d) COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE: (Sarah Honeycutt):

The Collections Committee recommended the Museum's Board of Trustees accept the following items into the permanent collection:

- a) White, woolen winter snowsuit that belonged to Wilma Mainville, the 1941 Alpena Snow Queen. Donor also provided photographs and newspaper articles about Wilma. Donated by Janet Dault of Bay City, Michigan.
- b) Collection of political ephemera related to Maxine Coombs of Ossineke who was invited to the 1985 Inaugural Ball in Washington D.C. Item found in collection, donor unknown. Brian Bartosh proposed, Ann Diamond supported, a motion to accept these to the Besser Collection. Motion carried.

Other activities:

- Finished processing Tim Kent's collection with Isabel and Nicole (measuring, labeling, photographing, and prep for storage).
- Inventoried the historic photograph collection with Isabel and volunteers. Many photographs were without proper archival sleeves, more will be ordered, and volunteers will go through and replace them.
- Besser Museum hosted the Michigan History Conference. About 120 participants came to Besser. Many favorable comments were received, especially about the Discover Exhibit.

5) Old Business:

Planetarium: On September 13th, Mike Beulac and the Exec. Dir. traveled to Eastern Michigan University to meet with Norbert Vance and see how their Digitalis Education equipment works and if it will be a good fit for the Besser Museum Planetarium. With our equipment down, we are back to the Spitz ball; the need to upgrade our projector system is urgent. The Digitalis system is very user friendly and costs (\$180,000) about half of other similar options. Mike and Chris were very impressed.

Finance Committee report:

- Members of the Finance Committee met on Tuesday, October 14 when Mike Beulac, Gary Goren, Brian Bartosh, and Chris Witulski discussed several options for admission rate increases starting with \$7.50 upwards of \$15 for adults.
- Angela Addington and the Exec. Dir. crafted a proposed new Membership Brochure for review.
- Besser is faced with a unique financial challenge compared with other museums that have more financial support from government, millages, large endowments, etc. This is especially felt in the operational budget, which is largely supported by foundation funds and admissions.
- Our admissions account for only 8% of the museum's income and fees have not been raised in about 20 years.
- Membership and admission rates:
 - Chris conferred with a number of people representing our constituencies; they were almost unanimous in opposition to a near tripling of entrance fees or memberships. The finance committee had been considering such a steep increase.
 - Doubling fees to say, \$10 for adult/\$5.00 child admissions, might be acceptable to visitors.
 - A new membership fee structure was proposed: Individual = \$40.00; Plus One = \$60.00; Family = \$100.00. Also, Friend (\$200); Patron (\$500); and Leader (\$1,000). Ann suggested Friend should be \$250.
 - The Finance committee recommends dropping senior rates altogether.
 - Ashley pointed out that 60% of Alpena area is classed as financially challenged. We need to be sensitive to that as we review our fees. Gary and Ann suggested finding ways to help visitors that cannot afford, say, paying for a large family visit.
 - Dan expressed the need to address fees more frequently to keep ahead of inflation effects. (The last increase was about 20 years ago.) We should consider a new family "cap" rate so that no family has to pay more than, say, \$30 to visit.
 - Brian Bartosh moved to set daily admission fees to \$10.00 adult; \$5.00 children, with a family maximum rate of \$30.00; to eliminate the senior rates, and change age structure so that "adult" means 15-years-old and older, Beach Hall seconded the motion. All in favor, motion carried. There was no decision about Friend, Patron, or Leader costs.
 - During the October 21 meeting the starting date for the new fee structure was not discussed; therefore, the Board was queried by e-mail the following week and the decision was made to initiate the new structure January 1, 2026.
- Because we are budgeting a deficit for this year, Chris recommended withdrawing from the Besser Museum For NE Michigan Endowment fund up to \$95,000. Will withdraw quarterly as needed. Dan moved, Brian seconded that we do so. Motion carried. Besser just received an unrestricted donation of \$50,000 so we may not need to withdraw the entire amount.
- Chris talked about how to capitalize time spent on special projects to better cover payroll with special project funds. Presently, we are not using project funds for staff time.

6) New Business: No new business.

7) Adjourn:

Meeting adjourned at 5:56 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Johnson, Secretary