



**Virginia Commission for the Arts  
Commission Board Meeting  
Staunton Augusta Arts Center  
March 13, 2025**

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## **Board Meeting Minutes**

### **I. Attendees**

Commissioners: Barbara Parker, Frazier Millner Armstrong, Lou Flowers, Jan Monroe, Debbie Garrett, Amanda Pillion, Alex Grabiec, Dr. Vanessa Thaxton-Ward, Tim Zhao

Staff: Colleen Dugan Messick, Casey Polczynski, Shauna Friend, Cathy Welborn, Dawn LeHuray

Attorney General's Office: Abigail Gump, Attorney

### **II. Call to Order**

Chair Parker called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m., commending the exceptional quality of the American Shakespeare Center's production of *Little Women* and expressing sincere appreciation to the Staunton Augusta Arts Center and its Executive Director, Angus Carter, for graciously hosting the VCA Commission Board and staff.

Chair Parker called for a motion to approve the amended agenda:

Motion: Commissioner Monroe

Second: Commissioner Pillion

All approved, motion passed.

Chair Parker welcomed new Commissioner Debbie Garrett (Region 5) and acknowledged her early contributions by serving on the Budget & Policy Committee and attending Poetry Out Loud events.

Chair Parker then thanked everyone for attending the Region 5 VCA Grantees and Artist Meet and Greet and noted the importance of hosting regional gatherings before Board meetings.

### **III. Approval of Minutes - December 2024 Commission Board Meeting**

Chair Parker called for a motion to approve the December 2024 Board Meeting minutes:

Motion: Commissioner Flowers

Second: Commissioner Armstrong

All approved; motion passed. Commissioners Garrett and Thaxton-Ward abstained.

### **IV. Chair and Executive Committee Update – Barbara Parker**

#### **Strategic Plan 2025–2028**

- Adopted at the December 2024 Board meeting.
- Staff incorporated changes and printed final copies.
- Commissioner Armstrong and staff distributed copies to General Assembly members with handwritten thank you notes and VCA-branded M&Ms.
- Went public via website and social media in February.

## **NEA Update**

Chair Parker shared that staff attended a NASAA Zoom on February 21, 2025, with NEA Senior Advisor and former NEA Chair Mary Ann Carter. Ms. Carter emphasized that while promoting diversity and inclusion is essential, care should be taken to ensure broad accessibility and avoid unintended exclusion. VCA staff distributed an NEA update on February 25 to grantees.

## **Advisory Panels/Screening Sessions**

Chair Parker outlined the requirement for Commissioners to observe Advisory Panel screening sessions as silent observers. A training session slide deck will be provided for Commissioners. Commissioner Armstrong emphasized the need for clear expectations and training in the onboarding process for Advisory Panelists.

## **VI. Virginia Repertory Theatre Update – Commissioner Armstrong**

- Immediate funding crisis alleviated with foundation support.
- No offers yet for the Scottish Rite Temple (Education Center).
- Programming continues with smaller productions; commitment to education programming emphasized.

## **VII. Budget and Policy Committee Update – Commissioner Pillion**

HB1600 Conference Report includes a \$2M one-time budget amendment. Funds expected to be announced in early May if retained.

## **Special Funding Task Force Creation**

The Budget and Policy committee moves to assign the Chair to create and appoint a “Special Funding Committee” for the purpose of recommending to the Commission how to spend projected unallocated income pursuant to Code of Virginia 22.1- 3223. Motion authorizes Chair to appoint Special Funding Task Force members.

No second required (committee motion).

All Commissioners voted in favor; motion passed.

## **Additional Task Force Discussion Points**

Commissioner Grabiec inquired about allocation specificity.

- Potential uses include capacity building, VA Arts Fund planning, and interest earnings maximization. Up to \$66K from the Arts Fund may be accessible this fiscal year.
- Special Committee meetings (more than three members) require public notice but are not full Board meetings.

## **VCA Code Update in September**

- Plans to amend §23.1-3227 Paragraph C to allow access to principal of the Virginia Arts Fund, not just interest.
- Remove duties currently listed outside of VCA’s purview.
- Policy adoption needed before any fund withdrawals.
- Code update to be reviewed by OAG and submitted during the 2026 General Assembly session.

## **VIII. Executive Director Update – Colleen Messick**

### **Grants Overview**

Director Messick provided a comparative overview of FY25 vs FY26 GOS and OSS applications.

## **Every Counties**

Staff conducted targeted outreach to county entities—such as libraries, parks and recreation, correctional facilities, schools, and local governments—to promote grant opportunities. Commissioners Monroe and Grabiec supported these efforts, with additional outreach to nearby VCA Roster Artists. The FY25 Touring Grant deadline was extended to May 1 for select counties. Six counties remain unfunded.

## **State Partnerships**

- Passport Program: 37 active participants through VA Dept. of Health/WIC; 5 more under evaluation.
- Partnerships: Collaborating with Parks and Recreation on the K-12 Environmental Literacy Plan; presenting at DCR's June teacher session.
- Agency Outreach: Engaged with Dept. of Corrections and DARS to expand arts access through corrections and aging services; hosting a grant webinar for VDH's faith-based network.
- Artist Promotion: Partnering with state and federal agencies to share artist opportunities; more collaborations planned for FY26.

## **IX. Deputy Director Update - Casey Polczynski**

### **Poetry Out Loud**

- 3,500 students participated.
- Virginia's Champion: Nadia Shalaby from Fredericksburg Academy.
- Nationals: May 5–7 in Washington, DC.

### **NEA Updates**

- Federal Descriptive Report submitted in December 2025.
- FY26 Grant Award anticipated May 2025.
- Accessibility Report due in spring.

### **Operations & IT**

- RAMP review and IT audit completed. Full compliance expected FY26.
- Administrative manual and employee work plans updated.

## **X. Communications Update - Dawn LeHuray**

Dawn LeHuray gave an overview of communications efforts including: "Meet Your Commissioner" initiative, social media relaunch, website updates.

## **XI. Strategic Plan Implementation**

- Staff is launching a Constituent Feedback Survey in May to assess needs beyond operating support.
- The feedback will be vital for Special Funding Task Force planning over the summer.
- Board Book Reference: Poll questions included.
- Chair Parker and Director Messick gathered commissioner feedback to inform the development and outreach strategy for the upcoming survey.
- Catherine Welborn presented an update on recent LAA Meet and Greet and website resources improvements.
- LAA challenges include financial instability and communication limitations.
- Many LAAs host professional development workshops; VCA aims to amplify these efforts via social media and direct communication with constituents.

## **XII. Public Comment**

None.

## **XIII. Next Board Meetings**

- June 10–11, 2025 – Richmond, VA
- September 24–25, 2025 – Lynchburg, VA
- December 10, 2025 – Virtual
- March 11–12, 2026 – Norfolk, VA
- June 10–11, 2026 – Richmond, VA

## **XIV. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.