



Executive Board Meeting | Wednesday, January 11, 2023
4:30pm – 6:03pm | **MINUTES**

Members Present: Naiema Frieson, Chair. Members Marilyn Kline, Betsy Friedman, Jeff Meyer, Earnest Wilks, Melissa Dunlap, Tara Sall, Greg Vogel, Faculty Representative. A quorum is established.

Members Absent: Ron Johnson

Guests Attending:

Dr. Janjay Gehndyu, Principal.
Laura Randall & Michael Ayres, VMA Development.
Gloria (last name unknown), Unnamed Parent.
Faculty members D. Velasco, A. Willis, M. Lee, Mrs. Gehndyu, J. Hinds, L. Benton, Registrar.
Chair Frieson called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM

Mission Moment:

(Greg Vogel is introduced). Mr. Vogel spoke briefly about his reason to come to work at Visible Men Academy. Frustration with his current job and not knowing whether he wanted to continue teaching after 13 years in the public school system. Greg decided to interview for a position at VMA and recognized that it is a special environment populated by imaginative people who care. He wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

Chair Report:

Chair Frieson briefly discussed a number of "housekeeping" topics that arose since the last meeting of the board. See Attachment "Chair Highlights"

A chart describing the various committees & their members and the related tasks and oversight responsibilities assigned to each was presented. See Attachment "Committees"

Louis Parker Transition

Chair Frieson discussed the departure of Founder Louis Parker from his position as CEO. A slide (attached) was presented describing the transition and the ongoing tasks Mr. Parker is being asked to perform in his position of Emeritus Board Member (non-voting).

Ms. Frieson thanked Mr. Parker for his vision in founding VMA and his many years of stewardship he has provided to the organization. The Chair asked for discussion of the transition prior to voting to approve the transition as described. There were no comments. A motion was presented (M. Kline, seconded by B. Friedman) to approve the transition of Mr. Parker from CEO to Emeritus Board Member as described. The vote was unanimously in favor of the transition plan for Mr. Parker (Minute 26:29)

Field Of Dreams Discussion & Vote:

Chair Frieson opened the topic with thoughts on the history of the project to build a dedicated school facility in the vacant lot adjacent to VMA's current location. The following is the general consensus arrived at that contributed to the decision by the board to consider backing away from the project.

- Deadline to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy or an extension by September 2023 is approaching without a workable plan to begin the construction or a clear understanding of what the county will accept as a standard for granting the certificate.
- Funding the multi-million-dollar expense is problematic at this point in time.
- Insufficient preparation in the six years leading up to the current deadline is a seemingly insurmountable challenge to making the project viable in the time remaining.

Chair Frieson stressed that should the project to build a school be abandoned, that does not mean that we are ignorant of the need for Visible Men Academy to have a more appropriate physical environment than it currently inhabits.

She stressed that a changing our focus from building a facility to purchasing and renovating an existing space would be much less costly and will likely result in a physical move to an improved location far sooner.

Ms. Frieson made a motion to cease the efforts to develop the neighboring property, return it to the county, and begin to pursue other options for a permanent home for Visible Men Academy (minute 29:30).

Questions Raised By Members:

Q: Is the current lease arrangements in jeopardy (Kline)?

A: No. The current lease remains in effect for 18 more months and the relationship with the lessor is sound (Frieson)

Q: Have donors to the project been communicated with regarding the change? (Dunlap)

A: Because the decision is recent, donors have not been asked to weigh in, but once the decision is final by the board and we have are able to clearly articulate any potential plans, meaningful conversations with the donors will commence to discover their thoughts on the disposition of their donations (Frieson).

Q: Tara Sall asked if there was any interest in waiting until the deadline before making this decision in the event we can extend the deadline further. Dunlap followed up with asking if there is any cost to delaying the transition as long as possible.

A: (Frieson) Continuing costs will be professional fees (legal, etc.). Additionally, the pursuit of a plan that includes affordable housing on the property is a significant variance from the mission of the school. VMA is not a developer, nor a landlord and assuming these roles that are so far removed from our purposes may negatively impact the educational mission.

Comment: Friedman commented that we have a lot of work to do surrounding enrollment, finances, student achievement metrics and continuing the project doesn't seem to fit within our most pressing priorities.

M. Kline seconded the motion to cease development of the project.

A vote was conducted, and the motion passed with 2 abstentions. The Field of Dreams project is terminated. (Minute 39:04)

Chair Frieson thanked Tara Sall for all the pro bono work she has done in support of the project planning.

Comments after the vote:

D. Velasco: Disappointed in the vote and the feeling that we are giving up. The students & staff have been through so much and it seems to him that we are failing the students by abandoning the dream.

N. Frieson: states that she is sympathetic to his feelings, but there is far too much about the situation that is insurmountable this late in the process. Prior inaction to move the project forward and the impossible task of raising the millions of dollars needed for the project and the many years that it will require to complete the construction are hurdles that we are not able to overcome.

M. Dunlap: Important to craft an appropriate communications plan that stresses the benefits of the new plan and how it is incumbent upon the board to find the best options for the new physical space.

E. Wilks: Appreciates all the thought and work behind trying to make the project work and the hard decisions that had to be made to terminate the project. He looks forward to celebrating the new school whenever and wherever it happens.

Dr. Gehndyu: Says he is supportive of the change, but regrets the need to make this decision, but the most important thing is the future of the school and the boys.

Principal's Update on Achievement: The discussion moved to the monthly update on student achievement by Principal Gehndyu. He reports that there continue to be incremental improvements in reading, and math for grades K-2.

Discussion re auxiliary services for students who need occupational therapy interventions (speech therapy, OT, etc.) . Dunlap suggested a possible collaboration with Florida Ctr for Early Childhood on receiving/sharing services.

Progress is noticeable in Grades 3-5 as well, but much work still needs to be done before the end of year testing. The current focus is on students who are two grade levels behind by changing the intervention methodology and testing more frequently to monitor progress

He stressed the need to strengthen the Family Literacy Nights content and to increase attendance at the PAC (Parent Advisory Council) meetings. JG advised that new science curriculum is pending for the 24-25 school year, but content and direction is still unknown. Planning and professional development is the most important factor in advance.

Dr. Gehndyu asked the board to consider adopting a system to enhance professional development instruction for teachers. He recommended the board investigate the AVID system

<https://explore.avid.org/initiative/professional-growth/>

Upcoming Academic Events:

1. Honor Roll Ceremony - January 13, 2023
2. Family Literacy Night January 24.

Guests: Early learning Coalition, Literacy Council, Samaritan Counseling.

Development Report: Laura Randall

Brief rundown of current activities in development & fundraising:

Dream Lunch tickets are selling well.

Earnest Wilks (Treasurer) Report

As the new treasure Wilks has been reviewing documents and will work with finance people to discover the forms, methods and outcomes that are most informative and suitable to present to the board for review.

Wilks cited a revenue shortfall (report dated 1.3.2023) against budget of about \$120K but feels that the two fundraising events will help close the funding gap. He encouraged other members to reach out to professionals and friends to support VMA in whatever ways they can.

Closing Remarks & Adjournment

Naiema reminded the board that an art show benefitting VMA will be held at the Bayfront Community Center of Sarasota on the Tuesday & Wednesday following the Dream Lunch on January 30, 2023.

There being no additional business, a motion was made (Frieson) & seconded (Kline) to adjourn the meeting. The vote carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:03 PM



Chair Highlights

- Janjay and Laura serving as Executive Committee splitting duties and leading school.
 - bi weekly 1:1 with Board Chair
 - weekly Executive Committee meeting with Board Chair
 - meeting with Staff 1/13/23 at 3:30pm
 - monthly meeting with Finance Committee (Earnest serving as treasurer and chair of committee)
- Still awaiting Charter Renewal Approval: Concerns- Bus Driver Training, Finances, Enrollment
- Board should have access to board documents via google drive by 1/12/23
- 5 New Board Members: HR, Technology, PR & Marketing, Legal, Youth Serving Organizations
- Board Member Giving
- Board member social on evening of January 29th. In person board meeting on February 1st.
- Committee Activation: Report out beginning Feb 1st.



Committees:

- **Governance – Betsy*, Janet, Ron J, Naiema,**
 - * Succession Planning
 - * Board Recruitment
 - * Onboard New Board Members
- **Finance – Earnest*, Jeff, Louis**
 - * Review Monthly Financials
 - * Review & Monitor Consultant Contracts, Scope of Work, Deliverables
 - * Project Field of Dreams (VMA Property Development)
 - * Teacher and Staff Compensation Enhancements
- **Communication: Ron B, Janet*, Marilyn, Tara**
 - * Internal & External Communication Review
 - * Monthly Talking Points for Board
 - * Community Engagement
 - * Website Changes
 - * Dashboard (external)
- **Sustainability Task Force: Melissa*, Betsy, Tara, Naiema, Louis**
 - * Project Field of Dreams
 - * Charter Renewal
 - * Development/Fundraising
 - * Enrollment
- **Academic Success Task Force: Marilyn*, Ron J, Janet**
 - * Volunteer Recruitment & Retention
 - * Internal Dashboard
 - * Teacher, Staff & Volunteer Appreciation
 - * Parental Engagement

Please begin meeting and report out at February 2nd Board Meeting