

**ILLINOIS STATE MUSEUM
BOARD MEETING**

February 17, 2026, 3:00 p.m.

**Illinois State Museum
502 South Spring Street, Springfield IL**

Attending: Officers: Chair Jonah Rice and Vice Chair Sara Phalen (via Webex); Board Members: Leverne Backstrom, John Barker, Wanza Davis (via Webex), Ashish Sharma, and Director Natalie Phelps Finnie; Illinois State Museum Staff: Jenn Edginton, Meghan Lindstrom, Meredith Mahoney (via Webex), and Wes Stoerger; Department of Natural Resources Staff: Jeff Nevins and George Sisk; Illinois State Museum Society Staff: Jamila Wicks; members of the public: Dalina Concepcion, Bryan Islas, Yasmin Lopez, Gabriela Montoya, Azul Saldivar, and Dario Santos.

I. Welcome

Chair Jonah Rice called the meeting to order at 3:02 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Meghan Lindstrom called the roll and a quorum was present.

III. Approval of the Minutes of November 17

The Minutes from the November 17 meeting were presented for approval. Natalie Phelps Finnie moved to approve the Minutes, Leverne Backstrom seconded, and the Minutes were approved unanimously.

IV. New Business

Director's Report

Illinois State Museum (ISM) Updates

Jenn Edginton announced the Beardstown High School Spanish Club collaboration partners and invited them to introduce themselves to the Board.

Jenn provided a copy of the Museum's current organizational chart. She highlighted key vacancies in the fiscal office as well as the positions of Director of Collections and Research, Director of Interpretation, Historic Sites registrar, and exhibits design assistant. She stated that a new Site Tech had been hired

for Dickson Mounds Museum with a start date of March 2. She also shared that in the future the Museum would be searching for another educator and a guard.

Strategic Plan

Jenn shared an excel file containing the Implementation Plan for the Museum's Strategic Plan. She explained how the file allowed staff to track the progress of benchmarks identified to meet the goals outlined in the Strategic Plans. Quarterly meetings are held to evaluate the progress. Jonah thanked Jenn and the staff for their dedication.

Jenn stated that the Museum had continued to hold On the Road programming offsite and had recently held an event at the Lewistown Public Library.

Ashish Sharma asked if the Museum's Strategic Plan was available on the Museum's website. Jenn stated that the Plan was not on the website yet but there were plans to after improving the current design and adding relevant photographs.

Ashish asked if there were plans to increase the Museum's social media presence. Jenn explained that she was responsible for the Museum's social media posting but there had been discussions about hiring for a new position that focused on social media. Sara Phalen stated that she had seen more engagement and posts on social media and encouraged the Board share the Museum's posts.

Key Dates for ISM

Jenn shared a list of events and exhibition changeovers planned for the next few months:

March 28—Women in STEM

April 26—Indigenous exhibits on the second floor close and Día del Niño

April 27—Illinois History Day Contest—Seniors

May 4—Illinois History Day Contest—Juniors

May 23—Route 66 opens

May 25—ISM's 149th birthday

June 12—NOIR 6 opens at Old State Capitol

June 13—in the park celebration

June 13-18—National History Day

June 26—250 exhibits open

August 12-23—Illinois State Fair

September 15—Hecho en Illinois

250-The Land of Stories

Jenn provided a short list of future exhibition themes that will be developed for the commemoration of the United States' 250th anniversary.

Beardstown Project

Jenn shared a slideshow of photographs from the Beardstown project and provided a summary of the work done in collaboration with the Beardstown High School Spanish Club students. Biweekly meetings were started in January 2023 for Museum staff and students and those meetings expanded to field trips to Museum and DNR sites, the Beardstown Spanish Club fair, and the Illinois State Fair. Throughout that time students and staff planned and developed exhibits that showcased their stories as immigrant and first-generation Latino families in rural Illinois. At the students' request, the created exhibits are presented in Spanish first.

Gabriela Montoya briefly explained how the students spearheaded the exhibit design and worked to ensure their voices and perspectives were properly represented. She thanked Wes Stoerger for his assistance in creating the exhibit to reflect the students' vision.

The Spanish Club students were invited to share their experiences of the project. They shared stories including a fierce debate over developing a color palette, working to ensure the exhibits represent all students, and the experience of having their stories shared in a museum. They also shared stories of work outside of the exhibits such as collecting oral histories and filming cooking videos at Lincoln Land Community College with assistance from the DNR Communications team.

The floor was opened for questions about the Beardstown project.

Leverne asked if this project would be a prototype for other museums. Jenn stated that she hoped it would become a prototype for the ISM and that staff could continue to collaborate with communities to tell their stories in meaningful and authentic ways. She shared that the project had received national attention at the American Alliance of Museums' Annual Conference last May, internationally at a conference held in Amsterdam, and that Museum

staff and the students plan to attend a Latino Heritage conference in Chicago over the summer. Jenn stated that she hoped to find more ways to work together in the future.

DNR Report

Director Finnie provided the DNR report. She informed the Board that the department had been preparing for the next Fiscal Year's budget. She acknowledged that it will be difficult budget year for the State but DNR had requested an increase in head count. She stated that the department had plans in place in case of funding cuts but have prioritized protecting existing staff.

Director Finnie also provided a short update on Illinois State Historic Sites. A public-private partnership at Pullman would be officially announced on February 24. She also shared that the Cahokia Mounds visitor center would be reopening potentially as early as May. Jenn stated that artifacts at the visitor center had been removed to the Research and Collections Center due to the renovations going on at the site. Jeff Nevins stated that a few outstanding issues needed to be addressed at the site before an opening date could be announced.

ISMS Report

Jamila Wicks provided the Society report. She stated that since the last Board meeting the Society held its annual membership meeting at the Old State Capitol. Three Board members stepped down and one was appointed. A presentation was given about the Society's new strategic plan and the consultant hired for the project had prepared all the deliverables by the end of December including the strategic plan, empathy implementation plan, work stream, executive summary, and revised mission and vision.

Jamila stated that the Society Board had revised its meeting schedule and would meet the first Monday of every other month. At the March meeting the Society Board would adopt the new strategic plan and work on implementation of it with the consultant over the next six months.

Jamila reminded the Board that the Society holds the grant for the 1908 exhibit but the Museum is responsible for the project management. Museum staff had chosen Display Dynamics as the exhibit designer and may choose them as the fabricator and installer as well. Display Dynamics staff would be in Springfield the following week to tour the exhibit space and view artifacts. An

exhibit writer still needs to be chosen for the project and the Society is collecting Requests for Proposals.

Jamila reminded the Board that the Society holds the grant for 1908 exhibit being planned for display at the HUB. The custom exhibit company Display Dynamics would be in town the next week to view the site. An exhibit writer still needs to be chosen for the project.

Jamila shared that the Society had commissioned a black ash basket to be created for the Museum, following the Museum's new Collections Policy. which will take some time as the wood was being harvested.

Jonah thanked Jamila for the Society report.

V. Old Business

Jonah asked for old business.

VI. Public Comment

None given.

VII. Adjournment

Jonah thanked the Beardstown guests for joining the Board meeting. He encouraged all Board members to join him on a tour of the Beardstown exhibits after the meeting.

Jonah asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. John Barker moved to adjourn, Director Finnie seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 4:12 p.m.