

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE LOUISIANA STATE MUSEUM
3330 N. CAUSEWAY BLVD
METAIRIE, LA. 70002
MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2026
12:00 PM**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Benjamin Dupuy, Christen Losey Gregg, Courtney LeBlanc, Darryl Gissel, Florence Jumonville, Julio Guichard, Kaitlyn Palmer, Kevin Kelly, Kim Abramson, Matt Isch, Mary Coulon, Nick Mueller, Phillip Albert, R. Duncan Brown, Suzanne Perlis, Thelma French, Wendy Lodrig.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Lisa Ballay, Bunnie Cannon, Karl Connor, Malcolm Hodnett, Sandy Shilstone.

LSM/DCRT STAFF: Amanda Smith, Becky Mackie, Blaze D’Amico, Chris Cook, Cody Scallions, Greg Lambousy, Jennae Biddiscombe, Jeff Anding, Nicole Coleman, Cliff Melius

OTHERS PRESENT: Jason Strada, Kristin Shannon

A quorum was present.

1. **Call to Order** – Wendy Lodrig called the meeting to order at 12:02 p.m. She noted that the meeting was being recorded, reminded visitors to sign in, and confirmed that attendance was being taken. New members Kevin Kelly and Matt Isch were introduced.
2. **Adoption of the Agenda** – Darryl Gissel moved to adopt the agenda. The motion was seconded by Christen Gregg and passed unanimously.
3. **Adoption of Minutes from the December 15, 2025, Meeting** – Thelma French moved to adopt the minutes. The motion was seconded by Florence Jumonville and passed unanimously.
4. **Public Comments - None**
5. **Chairman’s Report** – Wendy Lodrig reported that she represented the State Museum Board at the groundbreaking/press conference for the New Orleans Jazz Museum’s construction project in December. She also attended the opening of the Young Men Illinois exhibit and the Galvez Gala, noting both events were well executed and well attended.

Becky Mackie provided an update that two paintings from Mexico City, delivery of which was delayed, are expected to arrive soon, with one being displayed in the United States for the first time.

Wendy thanked committee chairs and members for their continued work and participation. She also reminded board members to complete their annual financial disclosure statements by May 15.

6. **Director’s Report** – Becky Mackie reported on four key areas: capital projects, public programming, legislative updates, and reaccreditation.

Capital Projects:

Funding has been approved for a new roof at the Capitol Park Museum, with construction expected to begin later this year. Air handler installation at the Presbytère is complete, improving climate control, and fire suppression installation is set to begin. Construction continues at the Jazz Museum, with additional public comment opportunities being scheduled, though work has not been paused.

Public Programming:

Recent programming includes FOC Cinema Night tied to the Illinois Club exhibit, a Calas Café residency at the Cabildo highlighting historical food traditions, and a Black History Month art exhibit at the Civil Rights Museum in partnership with Jefferson Parish schools, all of which have seen strong attendance.

Becky Mackie introduced Chris Cook, Director of Education, who reported on the launch of the travel trunk program in partnership with the Louisiana America 250 Commission and the Office of State Libraries.

Attendance & Marketing Update:

Museum attendance through February reached approximately 142,000 visitors, up from 127,000 last year. The increase is partly due to improved tracking of visitors attending free programs and special events. Some locations saw temporary declines due to closures (Presbytère and Civil Rights Museum), while others experienced growth, including the Sports Hall of Fame and sites benefiting from special events. Marketing efforts tied to Christmas, Mardi Gras, and America 250 generated strong engagement, particularly on Facebook. The Illinois Club exhibit opening had record attendance, and promotion for the Galvez exhibit is ongoing. The museum ticket center continues to show strong engagement, serving as a key driver for visitor interaction and awareness, even when direct ticket purchases occur at other locations. She also noted continued public engagement with the Bourbon Street Terrorist Attack memorial exhibit at the Presbytère.

Legislative Update:

House Bill 1 maintains current staffing and budget levels. Capital outlay requests in HB2 include funding for the Louisiana Civil Rights Museum, Madam John's Legacy, systemwide security upgrades, major maintenance, Jazz Museum improvements, and Presbytère courtyard drainage. Additional legislation under review includes requirements for historic preservation approvals and potential broadcast requirements for public meetings.

Reaccreditation:

An update from the American Alliance of Museums is expected on March 20, 2026.

- 7. Governance Committee** - Duncan Brown opened by noting that the vote for Vice Chair had been tabled at the last meeting. He presented the two nominations received: Sandy Shilstone, nominated by Wendy Lodrig, and Christen Lucy Gregg, nominated by Kim Abramson.

Those nominating candidates were invited to briefly speak on behalf of their candidates.

The committee conducted a show-of-hands vote for Vice Chair. Sandy Shilstone received a majority of votes and was confirmed as Vice Chair. Julio Guichard abstained from voting. Nicole Coleman tallied the results.

The committee reviewed the proposed amendment to the bylaws, highlighted in the meeting materials. The amendment allows nominators discretion over what materials to submit for a candidate, avoiding overly prescriptive requirements such as resumes or bios. It provides for transparency while allowing the Governance Committee discretion. The amendment also establishes a minimum 14-day period for open nominations, while allowing flexibility to extend that

period if desired. Board members were invited to read the section and provide any questions or comments for discussion before moving forward.

It was announced that, following the meeting, nominations will open for two officer positions: Secretary (vacated by Sandy Shilstone) and Treasurer (currently held by Darryl Gissel, who is eligible for reelection). Notification will be sent to all board members, including those not in attendance, to ensure broad participation in the process.

Suzanne Perlis moved to adopt the amendment as to the Bylaws in article 6, section 10 as presented. The motion was seconded by Nick Mueller and passed unanimously.

8. **Irby Finance** – Darryl Gissel presented a signage request for the Crescent Collection for ratification, noting that the Irby Committee approved the proposal. It was confirmed that the signage complies with applicable guidelines.

Thelma French moved to approve the signage for Crescent Collection. The motion was seconded by Phillip Albert and passed unanimously.

Darryl Gissel presented a new lease for a third-floor vacancy at 807 Decatur. The original rental rate of \$2,500 per month was reduced to \$2,362 per month, as approved by the Irby Committee, due to the tenant accepting the unit as-is without requiring improvements.

It was also noted that the proposed tenant is a New Orleans police officer. A motion was requested to approve the adjusted rental rate of \$2,362 per month for the unit.

Phillip Albert moved to approve the lease for 807 Decatur at \$2,362 per month. The motion was seconded by Kaitlyn Palmer and passed unanimously.

The Irby Committee had initially proposed funding to evaluate potential elevator improvements; however, that request has been tabled pending further investigation and a review of return on investment. Additionally, the committee is exploring options noise reduction in units facing Decatur Street, as noise has been identified as a factor affecting rental demand. These items remain under review as part of ongoing property management efforts.

Financial Report:

Becky Mackie reviewed the Irby financial statements, noting total revenue of approximately \$1,039,000 against an annual budget of \$2,038,000, which is consistent with being just under halfway through the fiscal year. She explained that percentage rent typically lags until the spring and that some December percentage rents had not been reported yet.

Year-to-date repairs total approximately \$153,000, including apartment renovations, gallery upgrades, and maintenance projects. Management and consulting fees, including McEnergy's contract, are reflected. Additionally, about \$188,000 of the repair budget has been reallocated to Madam John's.

Becky noted that approximately \$200,000 will be transferred to the state for payroll reimbursement, which accounts for a variance in salaries and benefits. Overall, finances remain on track, and additional detailed reporting has been provided to improve transparency on how funds are allocated across properties and expense categories.

The Executive Committee approved a resolution to update banking privileges due to recent staff turnover. The board was asked to ratify the issuance of Irby credit cards to Noah Bennett, Facilities Manager, and Cody Scallions, Deputy Assistant Secretary, to facilitate maintenance-related purchases.

Duncan Brown moved to approve Irby credit cards for Noah Bennett and Cody Scallions. The motion was seconded by Thelma French and passed unanimously.

Becky Mackie recommended delaying the \$10,000, 3D Revit modeling expense until more accurate cost estimates and a clearer understanding of potential rental impacts are available, as well as considering broader building planning needs rather than focusing solely on elevator access.

- 9. Collections Committee** – Florence Jumonville summarized the Collections Committee meetings from January 6 and March 3. The January meeting approved eight gifts totaling 30 objects, including early Black Mardi Gras magazines, a 1966 Young Men Illinois Club ball program, music event posters, and Hurricane Camille archive photographs. The March meeting proposed deaccessions of 104 objects across multiple collections, following American Alliance of Museums guidelines.

Incoming loans support the Black Carnival and Galvez and Louisiana in the American Revolution exhibits, and updates to the collections manual are underway. Board members were invited to ask questions or provide comments.

Florence Jumonville moved that the prospective accessions outlined in her report be accepted and the proposed deaccessions be approved. The motion was seconded by Suzanne Perlis and passed unanimously.

- 10. Education Committee** - Suzanne Perlis highlighted the goals of the new Education Committee: promoting the Education Department's programs to the board and exploring funding to expand them. She noted that programs are consistently full but expanding offerings is limited by funding. She also praised staff for partnerships with libraries and the America 250 Commission and spotlighted the Traveling Trunks program and the "Beading with Big Chief" program as examples of successful initiatives in need of additional support.

The current Creative Aging fundraising campaign supports the "Beading with Big Chief" program through the LMF, allowing donors to contribute toward specific needs such as supplies for one participant or funding multiple sessions. All classes are free to the public, and materials are provided, giving donors a tangible way to see the impact of their contributions.

- 11. Friends of Madame John's Legacy Presentation**- Kevin Kelly presented on the Friends of Madame John's Legacy fundraising campaign. The group's goal is to create a culinary museum that highlights Louisiana's food heritage while remaining sustainable, hosting visiting chefs, wine dinners, and educational programming.

A question was asked about the board's involvement. Becky Mackie clarified that not all Cooperative Endeavor Agreements (CEAs) are the same. The CEA with the Friends of Madame John's was executed with the Department of Culture, Recreation & Tourism and the Louisiana State Museum, requiring approval from the Lieutenant Governor's office and the State Museum director. The Lieutenant Governor brought the CEA to the board for support and going forward, the board may again be asked for input or support on decisions.

12. **E.D. White** – Malcolm Hodnett was not present, and updates were provided during Jennae Biddiscombe’s report.
13. **Louisiana Civil Rights Museum Advisory Board** – Karl Connor was not present. Becky Mackie shared that the advisory board has held much discussion at recent meetings about location.
14. **Exhibits** – Becky Mackie provided an update on current and upcoming exhibits. The “We the People” immersive photography exhibition, curated by Pulitzer Prize winner Stephen Smith with support from a Carnegie grant, is scheduled to open in early June at the Capital Park museum. The exhibit will feature rotating images of America, with a focus on Louisiana photography.

For the Sportsman’s Paradise exhibit, the team is collaborating with the Louisiana Museum Foundation and other DCRT partners to celebrate the Year of Outdoors. The exhibit will highlight hunting and fishing, waterfowl, Audubon prints, and duck decoys.

The Galvez exhibition was also highlighted, with its focus on Louisiana’s role and its people who contributed to the American Revolution, including Acadian refugees, Canary Islanders, free Black militia, enslaved individuals, and Native Americans.

15. **New Orleans Jazz Museum** – Greg Lambousy provided updates on upcoming exhibits and projects. Two exhibits are scheduled to open in April: “First Piano Professors” on April 16, which explores pianists, composers, and the 19th-century sheet music industry, featuring John Davis, a master pianist and scholar who will perform some of the 400 pieces from the collection on April 18. The second exhibit, opening April 21, features the photography of Stephen Rappaport, showcasing his iconic work with Live 8 concerts and his recent New Orleans musician portraits, timed with Jazz Fest.

Additional events include Gallatin Fest on April 20, celebrating artists on the museum’s record label, followed by International Jazz Day on April 27 and the Jazz Foundation of America’s Progress program the next day.

Work is also progressing on current construction. The Economic Development Administration grant and the state museum match are funding a permanent outdoor stage, landscaping, a café white-box, and sculptures. Construction documents for the Education Center are being drafted, with construction anticipated toward the end of the year.

16. **Capitol Park and Regional Museums** – Jennae Biddiscombe provided updates on programming at museums outside New Orleans. Capitol Park hosted a screening of the Belizaire the Cajun with nearly 100 attendees and a Q&A with director Glen Pitre. The museum concluded its lunchtime “Explore Art Injustice” series and celebrated its 20th anniversary with strong attendance. Discovery Days programs, offering crafts and gallery activities for families, continue to grow in popularity, with other branches adopting the format.

At Wedell-Williams, new staff organized successful events including children’s book reading and Mardi Gras mask activities. E.D. White Historic Site hosted outdoor Discovery Day events with games, story time, and fishing for children. The Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame Museum held the “Echoes of Civil Rights” program honoring Dr. King and the inaugural Sphere Awards recognizing student-athlete excellence, attended by about 200 people. Additional programs included a painting restoration demonstration by NCPTT, Creole Origins exhibit with local artisans, and the National History Day contest with several students advancing to the state level. The Billy Cannon exhibit from Capitol Park will move to Natchitoches with an opening in April.

- 17. Louisiana Museum Foundation** – Kristin Shannon from the Louisiana Museum Foundation reported on recent and upcoming activities. The Foundation has become more versatile in supporting exhibition openings and fundraising. In January, they organized the Illinois Club opening, which attracted 400 attendees.

The Galvez Museum opening on March 7th included notable guests such as Antonia Garcia, Spanish embassy representatives, and the Consuls of Mexico and Uruguay.

Upcoming events include an artist talk with James Michalopoulos on April 14th, Staff Appreciation Week with a crawfish boil, and a Museum Night on July 2nd showcasing American Revolution-themed programming.

- 18. Friends of the Cabildo** – Jason Strada gave a brief update on recent and upcoming museum-related events. In January, the 10th Annual Rex showing allowed members and guests to preview floats before Mardi Gras parades. In early February, the sold-out Hidden Treasures event at the Louisiana State Museum showcased items acquired over the past year, with curator Wayne Phillips sharing stories and prompting donations from attendees.

Upcoming events include a George Duro documentary screening on March 26th and the Rum Rendezvous on May 13th at the Audubon Clubhouse.

- 19. Old Business** – there was no old business

- 20. New Business** – Wendy Lodrig noted that Chris Cook could bring an exhibit travel trunk to the next meeting to give board members a hands-on experience. Additionally, she mentioned that the Lieutenant Governor will host an opening reception for the inaugural New Orleans Opera Festival on March 24 at 5:30 p.m. at the Cabildo.

- 21. Adjourn** – The meeting was adjourned at 2:25 pm.

Minutes Accepted



Sandra Shilstone, Secretary