

WHRO Public Media Williamsburg Advisory Council (WAC) Meeting

Minutes

Date: Monday, August 4, 2025, 12 pm – 1 pm

Chair: Judy Knudson

Location: Williamsburg WHRO Office

In attendance: Judy Knudson, Leslie Bowie, Sylvia Payne, Sean Driscoll, Leslie Coe, Jane Frazier, Megan Rhyne, Patricia Rublein, John Shulson, Jim White

Staff in attendance: Bert Schmidt, Kate Pringle, Kelsey Backe, Todd Holcomb

I. Welcome – Judy Knudson

- Judy welcomed the group. Staff and Williamsburg Advisory Council (WAC) introductions were made.

II. President's Report – Bert Schmidt

Staff Recruitment

- Two new positions are open in Williamsburg.
 - A Donor Relations Officer to engage donors and leverage local wealth in Williamsburg, the Peninsula, and surrounding areas. Todd holds this same position in Norfolk. This position will report to Kate Pringle.
 - A Community Relations Officer to represent WHRO in the community. This position will report to Kelsey Backe
 - These new employees will work out of the Williamsburg office.
 - Bert requested assistance from WAC members in identifying strong local candidates.
 - The committee raised the question about how these two hires square with the current budget and loss of federal funding. The expectation is that both hires will generate revenue, which is why WHRO is still hiring for these positions in spite of the loss of federal funding.

Federal Funding Update

- Overview was given of the federal funding loss with mentioned of local representatives Jen Kiggans and Rob Wittman who voted in favor of the rescission.
- WHRO's response includes a fundraising campaign, use of endowment, and budget cuts, all of which was approved by the WHRO Board of Directors.
- Goal to raise \$2M immediately, continue to fundraise to maintain future programming, and reduce overhead overtime.
 - The Champions Campaign is a \$1M matching gift that will net \$2M if successful. This will cover the gap in the budget for this fiscal year and provide WHRO

leadership with time to make thoughtful decisions regarding revenue, expenses, and programming

- Bert reported that at the time we were about \$450k toward matching the \$1M and he feels we are in good shape with the campaign.
- Kate added that many additional and increased gifts have been coming in. These are gifts outside of the primary prospects of the campaign.
- Bert predicts a 9% increase in membership (approx. \$500K) this year. However, this will likely taper off over the next few years.
- Bert further explained that the \$2M loss in funding must be reconciled against \$5M in our budget that is not restricted or fixed. The overall budget is approximately \$20M.
- Discussed the closed of the CPB
 - Many reporters reached out over the weekend for his statement on the closure.
 - Work in DC is underway to get federal funding back in the budget. However, Bert believes that this rescission has broken the process. Even if the funding is approved, it will be rescinded in a later process.

III. Development Report – Kate Pringle

- Events are under budget review but not canceled.
 - Example: Downton Abbey screening to become a pledge item.
 - Yearly events such as the Holiday Receptions in Norfolk and at W&M Alumni House remain on the schedule.

IV. Community Engagement – Kelsey Backe

- Six interviews will be held this week for the Community Relations Officer.
 - Kelsey noted there was a strong candidate pool due to nonprofit and federal employee job losses.
- A demonstration of WHRO+ app was given.
 - This will allow WHRO to carefully curate content for our community and members. The user experience will be directed by and go directly through WHRO rather than PBS.
 - Members will have full access to PBS Passport through the WHRO+ app.
 - Upcoming member training sessions for WHRO+ will be led by Kelsey and Nicole Cleveland. There is a concierge service in the works to help members set up WHRO+ in their homes.

V. Content Report – Kate Pringle

TV Programming

- Mystery series were featured
- Nick McNamara's interview with Ken Burns to air win the fall around *The American Revolution* documentary premiere.

Radio Programming

- Highlights: *En Voyage* schedule, *Midday Classical Pop-Up Exhibit*, Leonard Bernstein Birthday Tribute on August 25.
- Doug Boynton retirement noted; *Education Matters* to feature Dr. Keever, WJCC Superintendent on September 17
 - *All Things Considered* will now feature local hosting by Connor Worley, Jordan Christie, and Barry Graham.
 - *Weekly Edition*, our Friday news roundup, will move to a two-host format beginning in September.

Local Programming

- *Revolution 250: Stores from the First Shore* podcast, *Buried History*, 10th season of *Curate*.

Events

- *We the People: A Yorktown Battlefield Event* on Sept 20, 2025.
 - **Festival from 3–7 pm** with Artillery Demonstrations
 - Ranger Programs, Live Colonial Music, Living History Encampments, Join the Colonial Militia Drill Station, Revolutionary Spy Games, Colonial Kids Games
 - **VIP Event at Hornsby House Inn from 5–6:30 pm** with special guest David Schmidt, co-director of *The American Revolution* Ken Burns documentary. All WAC members are invited.
 - **Screening of *The American Revolution* documentary on the Yorktown Battlefield at 7 pm.** Remarks to proceed the screening at 7:30 pm. The screening is 45-minutes. It's a preview focused on the Siege of Yorktown.

VI. Community Discussion – Nick McNamara

- Doug Boynton's retirement acknowledged
- Working on local election coverage events
 - What are the things that you are concerned about and our community?
 - Williamsburg event was by far the best one
 - Upcoming events in Poquoson and Hampton
- Nick opened the discussion to the room, inviting WAC members to share what topics or issues they would like to see WHRO cover.
- Megan Rhyne noted the lack of substantive local news in the *Virginia Gazette*. As a board member supporting the Williamsburg and James City County libraries, she brought up two separate library development plans currently underway. Although developed and funded independently, the plans are being carried out simultaneously. She suggested that WHRO produce an explainer piece comparing the two plans to help the community understand the differences.
 - Nick asked if there were any updates on the approval of those plans. Megan confirmed that both are essentially approved at this point.

- Nick shared that he is also exploring a story related to rental registration around the College of William & Mary. There have been reports of landlord abuse, and he has been referred to a student organization for more information. Members of WAC also noted that dorms were not ready at the start of the academic year, resulting in around 800 students temporarily housed in local hotels and paying out of pocket.
- Leslie Bowie recommended the Neighborhood Council in James City County as a valuable resource for rental issues. She noted that this group, coordinated by Jim Joseph, has been actively discussing the rental situation in the area.
- Jim White inquired about homelessness in Williamsburg. Nick responded that he has not received many direct reports specific to Williamsburg; most of the information so far pertains to the broader Peninsula region. He referenced a recent study forecasting a 5% annual increase in homelessness and said that WHRO is working on follow-up coverage related to that study's recommendations.
- Pat Rublein informed the group that the City of Williamsburg has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the development of an African American Historical Trail within the city.

VII. Other Business

- None

VIII. Adjournment

- Adjourned at 1:00 PM.

Next Meeting

- Monday, November 3, 2025 at 12:00 PM

Upcoming Events

- WHRO Pledge Drive
 - TV Drive: August 9–17, 2025
 - FM Drive: September 6–12, 2025
- Election Listening Sessions
 - August 12: 10 AM–4 PM – Smithfield & Suffolk
 - August 26: 10 AM–4 PM – Hampton & Poquoson
- 4th Annual Play Your Heart Out
 - Sunday, August 17 at 2 PM – Chrysler Museum of Art
- *Downton Abbey: The Grand Finale* Screenings
 - September 10 at 5 PM – Cinema Café, Kemps River (VB)
 - September 11 at 3:30 PM – Movie Tavern, Williamsburg
- *We the People: A Yorktown Battlefield Event*
 - September 20, 2025
 - 3–7 PM: Revolutionary Festival
 - 5–6:30 PM: VIP Event at Hornsby House Inn
 - 7–9 PM: Screening of Ken Burns's *The American Revolution*