

Registered Volunteer Private Meeting Notes
1/4/24
held in the Erie Maritime Museum Theater Room

These notes are in the order they were recorded during the meeting. Notes taken by Ginny Sivak.

Conducting the meeting: Chuck Johnson

Chuck opened the meeting and announced the Forster Society members (volunteers with a certain amount of volunteer hours). He stated that there had been 10,200 volunteer hours recorded for the past year.

Jim Hall addressed the group for over 45 minutes.

Operational changes - Jim emphasized that Linda Bolla had been handing out copies of PHMC press release and everyone should read it. As of New Year's Eve, the contract with FNL ended but it doesn't mean PHMC has severed ties with FNL. PHMC is continuing discussions with FNL leadership. Jim stated "Were fooling ourselves and everyone else" if we think we're not going to be working together. He said in this meeting we're not going back over the past. They will be returning to the "original model" of PHMC assuming responsibility for sailing the ship. That model ended in 2009 due to economic reality and budget changes, so they "wanted to try a different model". Anything you may have heard, like Niagara being sold, going up on blocks, or becoming a restaurant is not true. He said that anyone who believes these rumors "has not been in touch with FNL or PHMC".

PHMC is committed to sailing Niagara. She will go to shipyard this spring for a short haul out to get the ship into shape for a longer shipyard period. More money has been made available for repairs. Jim has worked on this for the past 3 years. Money is coming from the governor's office - "multiples of millions of dollars - not 2 or 3".

On January 9, Bill, a marine surveyor, is coming for a week to survey above the water line for the interior, exterior, electric, plumbing, and props. This is phase 1 of a survey. He will write a report. In the spring, when Niagara goes to Cleveland shipyard, Bill will return and do the second part of the survey and write another report. The League and Adam have been tracking the work needed. Adam has been helping Jim out and shedding light on maintenance. PHMC will develop a maintenance plan. He claimed a schedule for maintenance had never really been completely developed. The plan will be adhered to for maintenance. They will also have parts on hand and work will be funded. It will be easier to make repairs that are needed. The conditions on the ship are really serious.

PHMC will be hiring their own staff. Jim will be hiring a captain, shipwright, first mate, and another position that might be an engineer or a bosun. He said positions already exist in PHMC's HR system. The captain will hire the crew.

PHMC's goal is to inculcate the ship as part of the whole museum experience. They will make tax money far more accountable than in the past. The ship and the museum will be a unified entity.

Future sailing programs - there will still be some sail training, but it won't be the main focus. There will be experiential learning, Niagara will be an ambassador for the Commonwealth. She will be much more available to people here. There will be more day sails. Jim stated that the time Niagara has not been available in the past is substantial.

Tall ships events: Most of Niagara's sailing will be on Lake Erie to ports such as Toledo, Ashtabula, Fairport Harbor, Buffalo. There will be some overnight experiences but Niagara will be staying close to home. "PHMC will not be using the ship to create revenue but to create memories."

Contract for services - Jim stated that FNL chose to not be an associates group, even though PHMC pressured them to do so. A contract for services may happen in the future.

When asked if Jim will be taking any questions from the audience, he said no and recommended that volunteers contact the two people listed on the press release if they have questions.

Investment in the museum and ship - There will be an upgrade to the exhibits. A capital expenditure will be used to completely redo exhibits. There will be \$750,000 from Harrisburg for Niagara staffing, maintenance and operations. PHMC will have a better understanding of repairs and needs. There is no timeline for the repairs. There will be no sailing this summer and maybe longer. PHMC may have to take Niagara to a different shipyard than Cleveland for some repairs. The governor's office has a deadline for Niagara to be in tip-top shape for the 250th anniversary celebration in Philadelphia in 2026. PHMC will spend the money but it will take time. Jim is praying to God to get it done.

Jim claimed that having PHMC directly manage Niagara will reduce the cost to Pennsylvania tax payers. He is also in need of a non-profit to work with for marketing, public relations, and fundraising. He stated that FNL hasn't been and won't be in that role. He then stated that he need to create a non-profit. And then he stated that PHMC needs to talk to FNL about that role.

FNL - Jim stated that FNL is undergoing strategic planning and that he (PHMC) have taken part in that. He said to contact FNL for more information. He described the relationship with FNL as a great one and that it has gone really well. There is free communication and they are working together every day. The nature of the relationship has changed.

Chuck, Jeff, and Jim have spent time with the crew and have been instructed on how to do Niagara's brig and maintenance checks. He said that for ship volunteers there is no greater time for you to stay engaged with the ship. He asked volunteers to sign up to do brig checks. Winter maintenance and safety on the plaza (snow removal) is also something he has taken on and would like help with that. He's looking to contract with former crew and is encouraging them to apply for jobs as they become available.

Work that has been done - Security - there are now 16 cameras around the museum premises. Flood-proof doors have been installed at a cost of \$300,000. "The next flood should be a non-event." Jim had the dockside electrical boxes redone so that the "hand-rigged and jimmied set ups are resolved". There were improvements to the HVAC system and they are starting a capital project to renew the entire HVAC system. A masonry project to fix the exterior brick wall and provide more signage is planned. There will be a new NOAA exhibit in the museum.

At this point, Gary D. asked Jim to give some time for questions since we had all listened politely to his 45 minutes of comments. Jim did not agree but Gary asked, "How will a qualified crew be hired by PHMC", considering the licenses required, tall ship experience. Gary was not sure he could continue as a volunteer. Jim was not able to answer. He said the meeting time was limited. Another volunteer suggested extending the meeting. Jim said that was not possible because PHMC employees could not do any more overtime.

Jeff Seymour (sp?) was introduced as the new curator. He said that the Commonwealth is making tremendous efforts to improve things here. He shared his background at the National Civil War Museum in Georgia. There were 2 warships there and he has worked with wooden and iron ships. He has a background in maritime collections care and is looking to volunteers for help. He mentioned a 5-year capital funds plan but gave no details.

Chuck spoke again at the end of the meeting. He mentioned winter training classes and open houses.

Jim R commented that he was glad the meeting was held but not happy with how it was held. Questions were not being answered. Ginny S pointed out the need for a public forum with PHMC to answer volunteer and community questions. Jim Hall said no. He can't speak to the future. PHMC has run things just fine before. Gary D added that FNL was supporting PHMC during that time. Another volunteer brought up Niagara going to Philadelphia in 2026 and he and Jim got into a heated discussion about that. Jim Hall stated that Niagara is going to be in Erie in 2026. In the midst of their discussion, Jim Hall called the meeting done. It lasted just a little over an hour.