

June 21, 2017

Dear Williamsburg/Virginia Residents,

The three signers of this letter have served or are serving on The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Board of Trustees. We are also members of the Rockefeller Family but do not speak for the Family, only as former or current Trustees. We would like to thank the very supportive residents of the Williamsburg community, the waves of visitors who come to Williamsburg to experience its wonderful story, the donors who have made certain the dream of Colonial Williamsburg endures, and the scores of devoted employees who ensure that this historic treasure remains relevant and meaningful today.

As the Foundation and its Board have announced a restructuring of operations, we believe it is useful to put these actions into some historical and current perspective. The current CEO, Mitchell Reiss, and his staff have worked hard for the past two-and-a-half years to find ways to deal with difficult financial issues confronting the Foundation; after much deliberation, they have determined the best plan for the future of Colonial Williamsburg. Any reorganization, which in this case will involve outsourcing in areas such as maintenance, technology and operations, is always undertaken with a great deal of evaluation, forethought, and review. As evidenced by the recent Forbes rating of Colonial Williamsburg as one of “America’s Best Midsize Employers,” the Foundation holds the welfare of its employees as a central concern. And, like any organization or business, Colonial Williamsburg must evolve with changing times, times which include a waning focus on history and civics in our schools; a greater emphasis on technology; attention spans affected by rapid imaging and messaging; and less time for vacations, while more vacation options are available.

Through the years, Colonial Williamsburg has had to adapt—its very survival depends on this. Would our grandfather and great-grandfather John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (JDR, Jr.) have endorsed the current change? Yes. Because his primary goal was that Colonial Williamsburg would continue to tell the story of our Nation’s founding for generations to come. As an example, his business side allowed the sale of alcoholic beverages at Colonial Williamsburg hotels, even though he was a teetotaling prohibitionist. With the initial goal of making Colonial Williamsburg a self-sustaining operation, JDR, Jr.’s intent was that operating profits would support future restoration needs, maintenance and enrichment. This model in the earlier years generally proved successful. However, in the 1980s, the Foundation expanded its relatively modest commercial offering by creating the Colonial Williamsburg Company, which launched an ambitious, for-profit enterprise that changed the financial structure of the Foundation. The Company now manages stores, hotels, golf courses and restaurants. This ambitious and good-faith effort has not reaped its intended benefits, and pressures on financial resources were aggravated by the recession. The financial issues also became a distraction from the Foundation’s mission of historic preservation and civic education.

As JDR, Jr. said on June 13, 1946 – seventy-one years ago – while speaking to the General Assembly of Virginia meeting in The House of Burgesses, “Ever will the thought of this reconstructed Capitol move us profoundly, for here as Councilor or Burgess sat nearly every great Virginian of the 18th century; here were spoken words that will never die; here plans were laid and actions taken of untold moment in the building of this nation. That a temptation to sit in silence and let the past speak to us of those great patriots whose voices once resounded in these halls and whose farseeing wisdom, high courage, and unselfish devotion to the common good will ever be an inspiration to noble living. To their memory the rebirth of this building is forever dedicated.” The importance of Colonial Williamsburg over the years has not diminished. We respect the dedication, courage and wisdom of the current leadership for its willingness to address the financial crisis confronting the Foundation today. It is essential that action is taken to ensure a sustainable pathway forward, thereby allowing Colonial Williamsburg to preserve, and even enhance, its core educational mission.

Sincerely,

Catharine Broderick

Catharine Broderick



Steven C. Rockefeller



John D. Rockefeller IV