**Executive Director’s Board Report**



**25 January 2023**

**J. B. Keiper**

* VMNH’s first half of the FY is slow with general visitation, but strong in festival attendance, school outreach programming, homeschool programming, and revenues & grants. If the current observed trend of annual increasing visitation from 2020-2022 continues, we’ll be back to 2019 levels in January 2025.
* With the establishment of four unique multidisciplinary labs, VMNH staff are exploring the fit of these labs into the Virginia Laboratory Schools program.
* The Herpetology program has been established by Dr. Arianna Kuhn and the hiring of a new research technician. Research and Collections is at its strongest personnel-wise with 14 full time staff.
* The post-pandemic trend of reduced school visits to VMNH, coupled with strong homeschool programming and outreach into classrooms (plus visits from some private schools) continues. However, revenues from programs and admissions are strong.
* The Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion has gone out to contractors for bid.
* VMNH-Waynesboro did not move to the Capital Pool for construction in the Governor’s budget, but it is in the state’s capital projects list as a priority.

Report on *Museum Without Walls 2020-2025*, and other initiatives of the Virginia Museum of Natural History.

***Enhancing our impact as Virginia’s only state institution mandated to investigate, preserve, and exhibit elements of natural history, as well as educate all citizens***

1. Establish VMNH Research Centers

OVERVIEW: Combine labs to conceptually develop research centers to help market the high impact science conducted by VMNH curatorial staff.

* The new Assistant Curator of Herpetology, Dr. Arianna Kuhn, started October 2022. New Research Tech (Herpetology and Mammalogy) Marshall Boyd, started January 2023
* Four Centers active:
  + Molecular Lab
  + STEM Lab
  + Microscopy & Trailing Lab
  + Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab
* Currently investigating fit of these labs into the Virginia Laboratory Schools concept.

1. Rehab the Douglas Avenue building to support collections growth

OVERVIEW: The original museum building will receive a new roof and upgrades to electric, plumbing, and HVAC through Maintenance Reserve funds. The internal environment will be suitable for long-term storage needs of the curatorial staff.

* The new roof installation on Douglas Avenue, including new drainage spouts, was completed in July. The final inspection is complete.
* NEXT ITEM. Maintenance Reserve 2023-2024, improvement of windows, doors, and general envelope of building.

1. Obtain reaccreditation from the American Alliance of Museums

OVERVIEW: VMNH is due to apply for reaccreditation with AAM, which is the gold standard for best practices in collections care, service, and financial responsibility in 2025.

* The Board of Trustees has been informed, and an *ad hoc* Reaccreditation Committee will be formed in early 2023. Staff preparing initial work.
* Staff have worked for the past decade to counter the concerns of the last re-accreditation. In 2010, it was noted that only a small portion of the building accessible to public – since then we’ve added *Hahn Hall of Biodiversity*, *Hooker Furniture Discovery Reef*, *Wild Watersheds*, *Fossil Overlook*, *Ants: Farmers, Warriors, and Builders*. In addition, many more specimens and artifacts on display.
* The 2010 report by the visiting committee noted a major challenge for VMNH being its relatively small square footage available to the paying visitor. In addition to the exhibit galleries listed above, staff have:
  + Increased the density of items on exhibit throughout the museum
  + Added online content
  + Opened the behind-the-scenes areas during key festivals
  + Began work to install a pavilion at the rear of the building
* The visiting committee also noted that a diversity of revenues will be needed to reduce reliance on the annual appropriation for operations. Festivals and the upcoming VMNH-Waynesboro branch campus are solutions for revenue diversification.

***Sustaining VMNH by enhancing draw and impact through expanded facilities that will impart high quality scientific information and nature-based experiences for all***

1. Create an early childhood activity and learning center

OVERVIEW: The Library space is an underutilized facility at VMNH, and with upgrades to Douglas Avenue it will be suitable for long-term storage of the library materials. An exhibit and activity space will be created that focuses on pre-K through 5th grade to support our youngest visitors.

* The museum’s funding request passed the Senate but not the House. Staff resubmitted our request to fund this space, but it was not listed in the Governor’s budget.
* Staff are prepping the space to become a new exhibit area.
* In December 2022, staff from House Appropriations visited VMNH to familiarize themselves with museum operations and projects.

1. Build the Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion

OVERVIEW: A pavilion will be established behind the museum to connect visitors to the nearby J. Frank Wilson Park, and will support durable outdoor exhibits featuring lessons in forest ecology.

* The project is out to bid for contractors.
* Total budget and timeline to be determined early in 2023.

1. Explore the Treetop Canopy Walk concept

OVERVIEW: The concept of connecting the future Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion to J. Frank Wilson Park via a treetop canopy trail is being explored.

* Staff and trustees have communicated with two separate architects to learn about the process and challenges of building a Canopy Walkway.

1. Establish the first permanent branch campus of VMNH near the confluence of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Skyline Drive, and the Appalachian Trail

OVERVIEW: A Feasibility Study, Master Plan, and Capital Campaign Plan were all completed in 2015 to explore the concept of building a dedicated museum building next to Constitution Park in Waynesboro, VA. The City has committed $1 million in support of the project. This branch campus will draw from Shenandoah National Park and surrounding cities, giving VMNH access to new audiences and new revenue sources.

* The state’s Pre-Planning process for VMNH-Waynesboro was completed in 2019. VMNH has received funds for Detailed Design, and currently a Request for Proposals is active. Review of proposals will start 3 March 2022. James Madison University will serve as Construction Manager (MOU signed) through Detailed Design and the eventual build of the museum building.

The VMNH-Foundation currently has one member who lives in the area of Waynesboro/Augusta County. A future *ad hoc* committee dedicated to drawing community support for the VMNH-W campus will be established for the Foundation.

Detailed Design has begun, primarily working with Glave Holmes Architecture, Vernor Johnson Architects, and Riggs Ward Design. A final general conceptual design for the building was generated, and a preliminary review of the design was conducted by Department of Engineering and Building on 7 November 2022. The input was useful and the architects are taking the input into account.

To date, the archaeological and geotechnical surveys have gone well and indicate no problems. The flood plain analysis underscored our predictions of a need to level the building with the high point of the lot (the northwest corner).

During the second half of calendar year 2022, numerous presentations have been made to small groups and at presentation booths at festivals in the greater Waynesboro area, generating hundreds of new contacts. A periodic newsletter is issued to all contacts.

Schematics will be completed within a few weeks of the January 2023 Board Meeting. Design teams, architects, and exhibit designers will move to Preliminaries immediately after.

VMNH-W did not move into the Capital Pool in the second year of the current biennium, but is listed as a priority project in the state’s capital outlay report.

Other Opportunities

1. Updating our Starling Avenue facility using a federal grant offered through the VA Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy to enhance our energy use efficiency, and install renewable energy sources.

* Project is mostly completed.
* Remaining are some specialized LED bulb installations and the final hookup of the EV chargers.

1. VMNH continues to be a community cornerstone. In addition to its normal operations:
   * 1. Supporting the *Move to Martinsville* initiative.
     2. Supporting Martinsville’s Bee City USA status.
     3. Held a free Christmas/Santa event in December for the community that was well-received.
2. VMNH Research and Collections successes
   * 1. Preparation work of *Petra* the cave cat continues.
     2. Archaeology supported the VMNH-Waynesboro site analysis by organizing ground penetrating radar work on the property assisted the archaeological survey.
     3. The Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab continues refining and improving the processes it employees to monitor the Ukrainian conflict.
3. We are hiring new staff:
   * 1. A new Buildings and Grounds technician who will receive special training that aligns with the new energy savings project. Pending.
     2. A new exhibits manager, renamed the Museum Experiences Manager. February 2023
     3. A new collections technician. January 2023