**Board of Trustees Waynesboro Advocacy Committee**

**Virginia Museum of Natural History**

February 6, 2024, 1:00 PM

Waynesboro Economic Development Center

Meeting Minutes

Attendance: Tom Benzing, Faye Cooper, Maggie Van Huss, Joe Keiper, Mary Zell Galen, Bobbie Dillon

Virtual: LeAnn Binger, Greg Hitchin, Jonathan Martin, Ryan Barber, Len Poulin

Absent: Mark Buss,

1. Welcome
2. Approve of January 2024 meeting minutes

Tom Benzing:

* Approved the January 2024 minutes.

1. Detailed Design update

Joe Keiper:

* Received approval to move forward with preliminary design but does not know when VMNH will receive the remaining funding for detailed design.
* VMNH will work with Glavé & Holmes to modify the contract and schedule the preliminary design phase without exceeding the money in the bank.
  + In preliminary design, VMNH will be making serious decisions about the design.
* Faye Cooper: Where is preliminary design in the state’s construction sequence?
  + Joe Keiper: Detailed design is in two halves. VMNH finished the schematic design half, and preliminary design is the second half. As part of this phase, VMNH will make modifications to the building to cut back on more expensive features.
* Tom Benzing: When VMNH got approval, who did that come from?
  + Jonathan Martin: Mike Gray and Mike Copa, from DGS.
* Tom Benzing: Is VMNH still unsure when they will receive the funds?
  + Joe Keiper: State agencies do not automatically receive more cash for the new stage of design. VMNH is unsure when the money will arrive, but VMNH will be receiving a little less than $400,000.

1. General Assembly advocacy

Joe Keiper:

* VMNH team will be heading to Richmond tomorrow and will be joined by Tom Benzing and Urbie Nash. VMNH will distribute a handout about VMNH and have included information about bills in the House of Delegates and State Senate. Staff can advocate but cannot lobby.
* Faye Cooper: Have you set priorities for different legislators?
  + Joe Keiper: The city’s lobbyist is doing that work on VMNH’s behalf. VMNH will be handing out flyers and cookies to all 140 legislators.
* Greg Hitchin: Discussed email received from Preston Bryant, the city’s lobbyist.
  + Joe Keiper: Preston Bryant supplied with list of people in House and Senate who he’s met with, including members of the Capital Outlay staff. Mayor Williams has sent letters to the three Capital Outlay Committee members who work in close proximately to Waynesboro. This year’s is budget is tight, so there will be little general fund dollars available. VMNH was wise to put VPBA in case bonds are issued, but nothing is guaranteed.
  + Joe Keiper: Even if VMNH doesn’t receive funds this year, the advocacy this year has been money well spent.
  + Greg Hitchin: Preston Bryant is spending time with both the staff and legislators, making the necessary connections.
  + Tom Benzing: Has spent two days in Richmond advocating for conservation and water. Also talked about funding for VMNH. All his conservations were well-receieved.
  + Tom Benzing: VMNH has budget amendments on both the House and Senate side, but the amendments have not been considered yet. The Appropriations Committees is still at work, but more information will be available after Budget Sunday.
    - Jonathan Martin: Funds will be discussed on Budget Sunday, and more information to come after crossover.
  + Tom Benzing: Very excited to work with the General Assembly and need to education a lot of new legislators about the project.

1. Community Connections/ Events
   1. Updates on Mobile Outreach Trailer
      1. Joe Keiper:

* On track to finish next phase of work by Riverfest. VMNH will update some the exhibits and paint the interior but have more repairs to complete. Project will be approved for maintenance reserve funds this summer and can potentially use those funds to update the trailer.
* Mary Zell Galen is setting up a volunteer sign-up form and VMNH will be holding an open house on during Riverfest. Anyone who’s interested in being a volunteer locally can come to get to know the trailer. Mary Poulin is going to be asked to serve as the volunteer coordinator, and more information to come.
* Tom Benzing: Thinks that having the trailer open during the farmer’s market hours will be a good thing, to help build the connection between the farmer’s market and the museum.
* Could there be a way to modify the building’s design to support the farmer’s market?
  + Tom Benzing: If there’s an opportunity to create outdoor access to restrooms, that would help serve people at community.
* The pavilion is not on VMNH’s property but is happy to help the farmer’s market enhance their mission.
  + Tom Benzing: Maybe exhibits can help make the connection with the farmer’s market.
  1. Wayne Theatre Science Talks (2/13, others upcoming)
     1. Tom: Benzing:
* Last talk was well received, and all talks are saved to the museum’s YouTube page. Next talk is on stormwater and focused on local projects. Going to share premiere of a new video about the local watershed made by the South River Watershed Coalition at next lecture.
* Joe Keiper: Cannot attend next month’s talk. If anyone knows someone who’d be good fit for the next lecture series, let the committee know.
  1. Daughters of the American Revolution talk (3/14)
     1. Joe Keiper:
* Follow up talk will be given by Joe Keiper and Len Poulin and will be providing the DAR new information.
  1. Riverfest (4/27)
     1. Joe Keiper:
* Will have trailer open during the event.
  1. Mudlarking:
     1. Maggie Van Huss:
* When project is finished, is there a way VMNH can form a connection with riverfront property owners and create a mudlarking program at the museum?
* Tom Benzing: Two concerns about the idea: 1) Archaeologists who are concerned about non-professionals collecting items. 2) Recently learned about magnet fishing and is concerned about the need for an underwater exploration license/ permit.
  + Joe Keiper: From an archaeology perspective, if you’re pulling items out of a moving water environment, it’s less valued.
  + Tom Benzing: Mudlarking needs to be completed responsibly to limit environmental disturbance.

1. General Discussion

a. VMNH Foundation

Joe Keiper:

* The Foundation Board’s Nominating Committee met and decided to offer a position to Len Doran. They haven’t heard back from him.
  + Len Poulin: Last time he saw Len Dorian was taking him home from the hospital. Will follow up with him, and he doesn’t always answer emails right away. Will have Joe Keiper call him, and Len Poulin will also follow up with him.
* Tom Benzing: What is the Foundation committed to raising?
  + Len Poulin: Formal commitment is $2 million and is approved by the VMMH-Foundation Waynesboro subcommittee. Once new Foundation members begin, will re-initiate fundraising. First will need to make plan to restart fundraising.
* Ryan Barber: Next Foundation meeting is February 16, and will details discuss then.
* Len Poulin: Center for the Coldwaters Restoration links website to VMNH fundraising page.
  + Len Poulin: It would be helpful to track local donations through that link.
    - Ryan Barber: VMNH can track click-throughs from that site.
  + Joe Keiper: Any funds raised from the Waynesboro area from the annual fund are set aside for the project.
* Joe: Connecting back to discussion with Former-Delegate Landis, the funding supplied by the foundation is good. May need to increase the Foundation’s commitment, as costs have increased.
  + Len Poulin: Thinks the Foundation should set target of $5 million (or at least $4 million), so will have money even if fundraising goal falls short.
* Joe: Delage Runion and Senator Obenshain have highway infrastructure interests. VMNH can try to connect that the VMNH-Waynesboro project.

b. Other discussion

Len Poulin:

* Asked if budget amendments have come up in committee yet?
  + Tom Benzing: No, the budget is considered last and will not receive updates for a while.
  + Faye Cooper: How many amendments were eventually submitted?
    - Tom Benzing: Doesn’t know what the total is, but the General Assembly is moving quickly. Does not know if opportunities to speak about VMNH’s bills will come up.
    - Len Poulin: Decisions have been made ahead of voting meetings, so need to meet with the staff ahead of time.

Tom Benzing:

* VMNH has a board meeting on Saturday and will be reporting on behalf of the committee. Will do best to represent committee.

Joe Keiper:

* Shared schedule for upcoming activities, including BOT meeting week and Speakeasy on Starling.

1. Adjourn (Next meeting March 5, 2024)