

**Virginia Museum of Natural History  
Waynesboro Advocacy Committee Meeting  
Waynesboro Office of Economic Development  
August 4, 2025, 1 PM  
Minutes**



**Attending In-person:** Mr. Rick Kane  
Dr. Tom Benzing  
Ms. Faye Cooper  
Dr. Maggie Van Huss  
Mr. Len Poulin  
Mr. Greg Hitchin  
Dr. Joe Keiper (Ex Officio, Executive Director)  
Mr. Jonathan Martin (Staff)

**Attending Remotely:** Ms. Jennifer Whitlow (Staff)  
Mr. Ryan Barber (Staff)  
Mr. Zach Ryder (Staff)

## **Welcome**

Dr. Tom Benzing called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM and welcomed everyone in-person and remotely. It was determined there was a quorum in attendance.

The June 2025 minutes were approved with no corrections.

## **Detailed Design**

Mr. Martin reported that Glave Holmes delivered preliminary design work at the end of June. The cost estimates for the project are currently being determined. All should be completed in 4-6 weeks, which is comfortably within the timeframe for an October deadline. Preliminary work and schematics must be completed by mid-October to be considered for the Governor's budget.

Mr. Martin reported that Secretary of Education, Guiderra approved our request to ask for inclusion in the Governor's budget. The Governor's budget will be unveiled in December.

Mr. Poulin mentioned a newspaper article that referenced future bond issuance as funding for the project. Dr. Keiper referenced economic impact numbers that staff quickly completed at the request of Senator Head to address bond interest payments. Based on staff calculations, 22 million dollars will be generated over twenty years which will cover the 17 million expected in bond interest payments.

If we are included in the Governor's budget, the next step is approval by the House and Senate then we can matriculate to the Capital construction budget. The expected timeline is May 2026 or beyond based on the new Governor and delegates.

Letter writing campaign proved successful. A follow-up letter for the next phase may also be beneficial. Staff will provide a suggested draft follow-up letter based on the timeline and what is known of the status of the project.

### **Trailer Maintenance**

The contractor hasn't picked up the trailer yet. Electric hookup remains a concern. Mr. Poulin reported that the farmers market has electricity, but the vendors typically use all the available outlets. Following repair work, the trailer will be repositioned in the parking lot with better access to an existing power pole.

### **Community Connections**

#### *Lecture Series*

Ms. Cooper reported that speakers are being contacted and booked for the coming season. Renowned author and botanist Chris Woodly and scientist Gary Fleming will be speaking in February 2026.

Marshall Boyd from the museum will host a talk in September 2025.

The committee offered other lecture series suggestions such as:

- A behind the scenes look at how to create an exhibit.
- What are some of the species repopulating VA – such as fishers, porcupines, or armadillos.
- How to control invasive pests and plants.

Dr. Benzing reminded the group to let him know of any lecture topic ideas.

#### *Waynesboro educator*

Ms. Rosemary Wagoner will be ready to engage with schools in the area on behalf of VMNH this fall.

#### *Maze Initiative*

Mr. Poulin indicated there is a donor interested in hosting our traveling maze exhibit in Waynesboro. The exhibit likely needs some upgrades including technology. It is about 1000 square feet. Mr. Hitchin explained for zoning purposes this type of experience would be considered an "assembly" usage and may require a rezoning or temporary zoning permit. Mr. Hitchin noted the Willow Shopping Center may be an option. Dr. Benzing noted a "ribbon cutting" type of event to engage the community and delegates around the time the General Assembly will be considering the budget. After discussion, the committee determined the Holiday season may be an optimal time for exposure. Dr. Keiper noted that the maze will take several days to assemble and offered mid-December as a possible target delivery date. Mr. Barber will send a picture of the assembled maze to Mr. Hitchin to use as he speaks to the property owner.

### *South River Preserve Ribbon Cutting*

Scheduled for Thursday, August 21 at 1:30 or 2:00. Dr. Keiper noted the project came in under budget, leaving funds to create another series of interpretive signs to be placed between Main Street and Broad Street.

Mr. Hitchin also reminded the committee of the Southern Corridor Road ribbon cutting taking place on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> at 10:30.

### **Open Discussion**

Mr. Barber reported that we should receive notification this week from the \$100,000 Central Shenandoah Watershed Wellness Grant. Mr. Poulin reminded the committee that grant funds (if received) must be spent by March 2026. If approved, this grant would bring back elements that were cut due to funding to the VMNH-Waynesboro building project in support of a healthy watershed.

Dr. Benzing shared details of an exhibit by Maya Lin found on his travels in Kansas City. The committee may want to look at her work for innovative ideas.

Dr. Benzing also shared about a movie short made with the support of The South River Watershed Coalition where a rubber duck begins at the headwaters of the South River and floats to the Chesapeake Bay. The video is 18 minutes long. It was noted that this may be a good topic or resource for the lecture series or perhaps for PBS.

### **Adjourn**

Having no further business, Dr. Benzing adjourned the meeting at 2:05 PM.

### **Next Meeting**

Monday, October 6, 2025

1 PM – 2 PM

Waynesboro Office of Economic Development