

Virginia Museum of Natural History
Waynesboro Office of Economic Development
Monday, January 5, 2026, 1 PM
Minutes



Present in Person: Dr. Tom Benzing Mr. Greg Hitchen
Mr. Len Poulin Mr. Rick Kane
Ms. Faye Cooper Dr. Maggie Van Huss
Mr. Urbie Nash

Present Remote: Dr. Carole Nash

Staff Present: Dr. Joe Keiper Mr. Jonathan Martin

Staff Present Remote: Mr. Ryan Barber Mr. Zach Ryder
Ms. Jennifer Whitlow

Absent: Ms. Stephanie Duffy

Welcome

Following a short technical delay, Dr. Benzing opened the meeting at 1:07 PM with a welcome to those attending online and in-person. It was determined that a quorum was present.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from December 1, 2025, were presented and approved with no corrections.

Community Connections

Lecture Series - Dr. Benzing is hosting the next lecture series event on January 20th featuring a film short of the South River from its headwaters to Chesapeake Bay. Admission is free.

Trailer Update – The trailer repair company has been directed to begin renovation work. Delivery of the trailer including a skirt is expected in the spring.

Interpretive Signage – There is no change in production of the signage.

Events – Two large events planned in Waynesboro occur in May 2026, Riverfest and the Museum Rodeo.

Meetings with Legislators - Dr. Benzing reported that he attended a pre-legislative brunch sponsored by the Harrisonburg/Rockingham Chamber of Commerce and was able to speak with numerous delegates about funding for the Waynesboro facility. He encouraged others to attend these events as

it is worthwhile to build a personal connection with delegates before they begin their session in Richmond.

Status of State Budget

Dr. Keiper reported that VMNH was funded in the outgoing Governor's budget with modest increases but with none of the additional fund requests. A new Secretary of Education has not been announced by Governor Elect Spanberger. The effort to re-benchmark and provide for Medicaid expansion are budget priorities that will make fund distribution challenging.

VMNH Waynesboro documents were sent to Preston Bryant, SVP Government Relations-State from the firm McGuire-Woods. There has been no correspondence about a strategic kickoff meeting.

There was general discussion of the committee's responsibility in working with various outside groups while McGuire Woods, namely Mr. Bryant, focuses on the legislative body.

Open Discussion

The committee engaged in a general discussion about strategy to move the Waynesboro project into the capital construction pool. One idea is to redesign the messaging specifically for the General Assembly with a clearer explanation of why the project is important.

Some suggested next steps included meeting directly with Mr. Bryant, engaging strategic supporters, developing a consistent elevator pitch, including STEM education as a primary focus (why) the project is important, conduct advocacy activities in Richmond while the General Assembly is in session.

Dr. Keiper will reach out to select supporters on the Committee's behalf to determine if they can help push the message that:

- VMNH-W is ready for construction working drawings;
- and therefore, can be moved to the Capital Construction Pool;
- with working drawings costing less than \$4 million of the total \$36 million project completion.

Adjournment

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 1:57 PM by Dr. Benzing.

Next Meeting

All – virtual, Tuesday, February 3, 2026, at 1 PM.