

**Virginia Museum of Natural History  
Strategic Planning Committee Meeting  
Tuesday, April 14, 2026, 3 PM  
All-virtual**



## MINUTES

**Present:**

Dr. Melany Clark (Chair)	Ms. Lisa Carter
Ms. Cathy H Manion	Dr. Steve Powers (Foundation Liaison)
Dr. Joe Keiper	Mr. Jonathan Martin
Mr. Tim King	Mr. Ryan Barber
Mr. Zach Ryder	Ms. Jennifer Whitlow

**Absent:**

## WELCOME

Dr. Melany Clark called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM and welcomed all in attendance. It was determined that a quorum was present to conduct business.

## APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Carter made a motion to approve the minutes of the 11.5.25 Strategic Planning Committee meeting. Ms. Manion seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

## REVIEW OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Young Explorers Center – Progress is being made to transform the current temporary exhibit space into the Mariels Young Explorers Center. Ideation sessions, visits to other children’s science centers, and live demos with technology companies are occurring to generate ideas for the over-all theme. The project is still on track for an early 2027 opening.
- Douglas Avenue - The first step in renovation is asbestos removal. The contractor visited the site last week and confirmed that work should begin soon. HVAC installation will begin following the asbestos abatement with fall 2026 as a target timeframe. The committee was encouraged to think about using the renovation (once completed) as a naming/sponsorship opportunity.
- Building Strategic Plan –
  - With the Starling Avenue facility approaching the 20-year mark, Board member Dick Bratcher used his facilities management experience to put together a building maintenance strategic plan. This plan allows facility maintenance to be preventative rather than reactionary. Mr. King is currently working with Mr. Bratcher to fine-tune

components of the plan. Additional full board discussion is planned to occur at next year's strategic retreat.

- VMNH – Waynesboro – The Waynesboro mobile trailer gifted to us by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts has been renovated and will be delivered and set in its permanent Waynesboro location this week. Exhibits from our current collection will be installed for opening to the public at the Riverfest event on May 2<sup>nd</sup>.

- Connecting R&C to Contemporary needs -

- Currently, VMNH researchers are studying beaver habitats in SW Virginia and the connection to forest fire mitigation.
- Cultural heritage sites jeopardized by natural disasters and military conflicts are continually evaluated by the CHML team. The team reports their findings through peer-reviewed, open-source publications.

- VA250 exhibit and event –

VMNH continues the year-long celebration of America's semiquincentennial. We are pleased to have received a \$10,000 grant from Virginia Tourism which will allow us to include VA 250 elements at this year's three festivals. The grant was also used to publish the VA 250 edition of the Virginia Explorer magazine. Foundation member Randy Rollins generously contributed a cash gift which enabled us to buy a rare first English edition copy of *Notes on the State of Virginia*. The final celebration event will occur in October when Southwest Virginia author and artist, Suzanne Stryke presents her book and artwork based on *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

- Staffing and Professional Development –

It is expected the Foundation will include funds for staff professional development in the next budget. This extra money is often leveraged by our scientists to supplement their own research grants.

- Appropriation request –

Mr. Martin gave a brief report about the 3.78 million dollar appropriation request this year. With the state biennial budget currently in limbo, we do not know the final outcome of our 2026-2027 operating budget. What we do know is that our operating expenses have increased 5-10% in the last several years. Mr. Martin presented a market comparison table of similar state agencies which demonstrated the current inadequacy of state support. Mr. Martin plans to expand the results quantitatively and qualitatively and present them to the BOT Finance Committee and Executive Committee in the coming weeks. We also plan to engage and inform the General Assembly representatives for this region, Senator Stanley and Delegate Phillips of the funding disparity. Additionally, Mr. Martin shared a price escalation table from 2022-present. The museum pays significantly more for all mandated services with prices continuing to rise.

## **UPDATE ON VMNH-F SUPPORT**

The VMNH Foundation revenue continues to be strong with positive momentum. Mr. Barber reported that as of March 31<sup>st</sup> the endowment is over 6 million dollars.

## **OPEN DISCUSSION**

- Due to current drought conditions, Ms. Carter asked about fire mitigation and impact on ecosystems. Dr. Keiper will work with Ben and share more information at the next full Board meeting about maintaining healthy ecosystems through drought conditions.
- A current project initially funded by a grant and continued with museum funding for the next month involves the tedious process of using scans of a Tanytrachelos fossil to create the only known 3-D model of the ancient reptile. Paleontologist Dr. Pritchard is spearheading this substantial modeling effort and will author various articles and publications based on the work.
- Homeschool sections were doubled this year and are still completely full.
- The Starlington event held in March of this year was a success.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business or discussion Ms. Carter made the motion to adjourn with Ms. Manion seconding. The motion passed unanimously. Dr. Clark adjourned the meeting at 3:58 PM.