



**Virginia Museum of Natural History
Waynesboro Advocacy Committee Meeting
Tuesday, May 5, 2026, 1 PM
Waynesboro Office of Economic Development**

MINUTES

Present In-person:

Dr. Tom Benzing (Chair)
Dr. Maggie Van Huss
Mr. Greg Hitchin
Ms. Anne Peltier

Mr. Dick Bratcher
Ms. Faye Cooper
Mr. Urbie Nash
Mr. Rick Kane

Staff Present In-person:

Dr. Joe Keiper

Mr. Jonathan Martin

Staff Present Remote:

Mr. Ryan Barber

Ms. Christy Deatherage

Absent:

Dr. Carole Nash
Mr. Len Poulin
Mr. Bill Alexander

Dr. Steve Powers
Ms. Stephanie Duffy

WELCOME

Dr. Tom Benzing opened the meeting with a welcome to those in attendance in-person and remotely at 1:00 PM. It was determined that a quorum was present to conduct business.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes from the April 7, 2026, meeting were approved with no corrections.

CENTRAL VA OUTREACH EDUCATOR

Following an introduction by Ms. Christy Deatherage, Educator Rosemary Wagoner spoke to the committee about her public-school experience which led to joining the VMNH Education team as an outreach educator. As this was Mrs. Wagoner's first year in the position, she shared the titles of some of the most popular SOL-based lessons as well as the locations where those outreach programs were delivered. Ms. Wagoner noted the summer will also be busy as VMNH educators will provide a paleontology program to supplement the Virginia library summer reading program. The committee thanked Ms. Wagoner for her efforts to support education in Central Virginia and for sharing with the committee.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

- Advocacy – Dr. Keiper reported that he and other key staff recently attended a group workshop with the Secretary of Education and was encouraged by the tone set during the meeting for new capital expenditures. The secretary's plan includes a three-tier approach with the final tier including the development of infrastructure for large scale community impact.

The Secretary's special advisor to museums is interested in visiting VMNH and learning more about our work. This new relationship will hopefully lead to senior level advocacy for the Waynesboro project.

Mr. Martin confirmed that the biennial budget is still being negotiated in the General Assembly. The deadline for budget adoption is mid to late June.

- Library Display – The Waynesboro Library display has been refreshed in the recent months with a bit more exhibit interpretation to be added.
- Trailer – A press release for the opening of the Waynesboro Mobile Science Center was distributed to all local media outlets on Friday, May 1.

Riverfest held on May 2nd was a huge success with 775 individuals visiting the trailer. As popularity of the trailer grows, volunteer recruitment will be extremely important. The collection of visitor zip code data should also be prioritized. Ms. Cooper mentioned a handout used on Saturday pointing visitors to the Governor's Office using a QR code, which easily allowed visitors to express support for the Waynesboro campus project.

Sourcing power to the trailer using traditional methods has proved to be unreliable and/or expensive. A new solar panel typically used on RVs was purchased and will be installed on the roof of the trailer within the next few weeks. VMNH staff will continue to work with board members to investigate an electric power source.

- Events – The spring lecture series finished with an informative talk by Chris Bolgiano entitled "Forest Forensics". For anyone interested, the talks are video archived. The fall lecture series will begin in September.

The Museum Rodeo is on Saturday, May 16th. Volunteers are needed to open the trailer and greet guests.

The "Dino Dimensions" live puppet show educational paradigm was evaluated by science educators and VMNH staff. It was determined that while likely entertaining, the show would not merit a \$5000.00 investment. Dr. Keiper proposed VMNH bringing a day-long dino day to the Wayne Theatre in March of 2027. This would be a small-scale festival, similar to those hosted at VMNH. The committee was generally agreeable, asking Dr. Keiper to continue pursuing avenues of cooperation with the Director of the Wayne Theatre.

OPEN DISCUSSION

- Dr. Benzing reported that JMU donated another micro aquarium to the museum. With this latest donation, we have several aquariums that can be utilized for future exhibits.

ADJOURNMENT

Having no further business, Dr. Benzing adjourned the meeting at 1:49 PM.