**Executive Director’s Board Report, final quarter FY 2023**



**12 August 2023**

**J. B. Keiper**

* VMNH finished FY 2022-2023 in the black, and the carryover was used to start payroll for the current FY.
* We see a continued trend of increased visitation occurring, with a sustained increase in spending per visitor compared to historic numbers. Education numbers are dominated by outreach (compared to at-the-museum programming), and festival attendance and revenues were records.
* The VMNH-Foundation excelled, with an increase in the Discovery fund to twice the VMNH-F received 10 years ago, growth of memberships to pre-pandemic levels, and support of Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab grants.
* The Endowment continued to grow with a new gift and productive investments.
* The *Museum’s for All* program, sponsored by Hooker Furnishings and Carter Bank & Trust, continues to grow, and is now a significant source of visitors during regular operation as well as festivals.
* Major projects saw excellent progress:
	+ The energy savings project has been closed out.
	+ VMNH-Waynesboro Detailed Design is progressing well.
	+ A contractor for the Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion has been obtained.
	+ The Douglas Avenue roof and drainage was completed.
	+ We hired an Assistant Curator of Herpetology and a Research Technician.
	+ The new labs (CHML, STEM, Microscopy, and Molecular Systematics) have been actively used by curatorial and educational staff.
	+ We hired a new manager of visitor experiences.

Report on *Museum Without Walls 2020-2025*, and other initiatives of the Virginia Museum of Natural History.

***Enhancing our impact as Virginia’s only state institution mandated to investigate, preserve, and exhibit elements of natural history, as well as educate all citizens***

1. Establish three VMNH Research Centers

OVERVIEW: Develop labs that become research centers where Curatorial Staff collaborate, and work with Education for outreach in multidisciplinary ways.

* The R&C staffing levels are now robust, and they are utilizing the assets of the four new collaborative labs.
* With the future work on Douglas Avenue, needed space for collections growth will be realized.
* Active multidisciplinary labs include:
	+ Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab (with Archaeology)
	+ Molecular Systematics Lab (upgrades completed)
	+ STEM Lab (3D printing, macrophotography, specialized computers)
	+ Microscopy and Student Training Lab (IMLS-funded)
1. Rehab the Douglas Avenue building to support collections growth

OVERVIEW: The original museum building will receive a new roof and upgrades to electric, plumbing, and HVAC through Maintenance Reserve funds. The internal environment will be suitable for long-term storage needs of the curatorial staff.

* The new roof installation on Douglas Avenue, including new drainage spouts, has been closed out.
* Staff are coordinating an effort to improve the building’s envelope using Maintenance Reserve funds. This will include windows and doors primarily.
1. Obtain reaccreditation from the American Alliance of Museums

OVERVIEW: VMNH is due to apply for reaccreditation with AAM, which is the gold standard for best practices in collections care, service, and financial responsibility in 2025.

* An *ad hoc* Reaccreditation Committee has been formed.
* Meetings to coordinate work on the reaccreditation process will begin early in the new FY.
* The reaccreditation materials are due November 2024.

***Sustaining VMNH by enhancing draw and impact through expanded facilities that will impart high quality scientific information and nature-based experiences for all***

1. Create an early childhood activity and learning center

OVERVIEW: The Library space is an underutilized facility at VMNH, and with upgrades to Douglas Avenue it will be suitable for long-term storage of the library materials. An exhibit and activity space will be created that focuses on pre-K through 5th grade to support our youngest visitors.

* Staff are preparing to once again ask for funds to support the conversation of the Library space during the 2024 General Assembly session.
* Staff are prepping the space to become a new exhibit area.
* Interest in purchasing of the compacting shelves is high.
1. Build the Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion

OVERVIEW: A pavilion will be established behind the museum to connect visitors to the nearby J. Frank Wilson Park, and will support durable outdoor exhibits featuring lessons in forest ecology.

* A contractor has been obtained. The final review by the Art and Architectural Review Board will occur on 4 August 2023. Following approval, a calendar of work will be developed.
* The current stairs do not meet VA code requirements, and will be replaced through Maintenance Reserve Funds. This will be done concurrently with the construction of the Pavilion.
1. Explore the Treetop Canopy Walk concept

OVERVIEW: The concept of connecting the future Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion to J. Frank Wilson Park via a treetop canopy trail is being explored.

* Staff and trustees have communicated with two separate architects to learn about the process and challenges of building a Canopy Walkway.
* Any significant steps in planning and preparation will await completion of the Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion.
1. Establish the first permanent branch campus of VMNH near the confluence of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Skyline Drive, and the Appalachian Trail

OVERVIEW: A Feasibility Study, Master Plan, and Capital Campaign Plan were all completed in 2015 to explore the concept of building a dedicated museum building next to Constitution Park in Waynesboro, VA. The City has committed $1 million in support of the project. This branch campus will draw from Shenandoah National Park and surrounding cities, giving VMNH access to new audiences and new revenue sources.

* A draft 100% Schematic Design document has been compiled. Staff and colleagues from Glave Holmes will present the design before the state’s Art and Architecture Review Board on 4 August 2023.
* Ongoing discussions about exhibit content are ongoing in advance of Preliminaries. University, government, and other partners have been engaged in developing a compendium of exhibit topics relevant to the campus’ galleries.
* Staff and board members have continued to engage the public along a number of avenues, including public hours for input, lectures, and public exhibits.

Other Opportunities

1. The Energy Savings project has been closed. A new exhibit in the lobby highlighting our solar array has been installed.
2. The *Museums for All* program where EBT card holders gain access to galleries and festivals free of charge has been a success. With ongoing support from Hooker Furnishings, and new support from Carter Bank & Trust, the museum has seen thousands of local guests who may not otherwise visit the museum.
3. VMNH has consciously identified ways to improve its diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusiveness efforts. Cumulatively, they include:
	* 1. Being fully ADA accessible.
		2. Embracing bilingual presentations with in-house exhibits.
		3. Supporting local citizens with special needs non-profits.
		4. Creating its first sensory-friendly hour at a major festival.
		5. Purchasing above state goals from SWaM vendors (small, women, and minority owned businesses).
		6. Advertising on job sites that target minority populations.
4. VMNH Research and Collections successes
	* 1. The Great Wyoming Dinosaur Dig occurred in July 2023. More material of the sauropod at the dig site has been removed. Prospecting of new sites occurred. Funded through active NSF grant.
		2. VMNH continues its long legacy of describing new species to science (Myriopodology).
		3. A large archived archaeology collection has been fully curated thanks to volunteer Elisha Lantz.
		4. The CHML has continued to expand its efforts, now including the conflict in Sudan.