**Waynesboro Advocacy Committee Minutes
March 7th, 2023 – 1:00PM, all-virtual meeting**

 **Attendance**

WAC Committee: Tom Benzing, Carole Nash, Faye Cooper, Len Poulin, Maggie Van Hess, Greg Hitchin

VMNH Staff: Joe Keiper, Jonathan Martin, Ryan Barber, Mary Zell Galen

1. Welcome Joe Keiper/ Tom Benzing

Joe Keiper:

* Provided updates about the Value Engineering process for the facility:
	+ Costs were high for latest round of drawings (aiming for $650 per square foot, but actual costs were closer to $989 per square foot)
	+ Len Poulin/ Faye Cooper: asked why cost was so high for the project.
		- Joe Keiper: Suggests costs were high because many architects shoot costs high, and then work backward to make adjustments. Jonathan Martin spoke with DEB and said that these cost challenges were typical.
	+ Cautioned about Value Engineering adjustments and updated that there is a follow up meeting with the architecture firm at 4:00 PM today.

Jonathan Martin:

* Working through the process with the JMU construction managers (Rick Miller and Nancy Cornwell), they also stated that the costs were too high. Walked through Value Engineering process and additions for cost escalations.
* Len Poulin: asked where the cost requirements came from, and Jonathan Martin explained all information comes from the state.
* Joe Keiper: State would not approve current costs. High budgets have also caused construction delays on the Frontier Culture Museum project.
1. Chair’s Report Tom Benzing

Tom Benzing:

* Provided update about the 2022 General Assembly session:
	+ Completed strong advocacy efforts but need to be more proactive in Fall 2023 to ensure VMNH is in the proposed governor’s budget.
	+ Many changes upcoming for the legislator, including redistricting and elections. Need to educate new elected officials about VMNH-Waynesboro.
* Len Poulin: Provided updated that John Avoli will not run again (instead Ellen Campbell will run). Tom Benzing: Was not sure on Emmit Hanger’s status but explained that Mark Obenshain will be running again. Creigh Deeds will be running in Charlottesville.
* Carole Nash: Reminded that Board members cannot promote a particular candidate, but still can get to know the local candidates. Potentially hold some sort of event (and invite all candidates) in the late summer.
* Joe Keiper: Board can advocate for issues, just not candidates. It’s just as important to build relationships and work closely with the permanent state staff to push the construction process along. Event will need to give candidates exposure and could potentially partner with the City of Waynesboro.
	+ Greg Hitchin: Will work to identify a potential event.
	+ Tom Benzing: Potentially exhibit images of the exhibits gallery during Fall Foliage Festival. Other dates/ locations were also discussed.
	+ Ryan Barber: Suggested working directly with individual legislature’s offices.
1. VA Budget overview Joe Keiper / Jonathan Martin

Joe Keiper:

* No final budget from State of Virginia:
	+ Delay in receiving allocated funds (originally provided $750,000 of VMNH’s Detailed Design budget, but still owed $390,000). Do not have an indication when funds will be transferred.
	+ Wrapping up Schematic Design and heading into Preliminary Design. Do not want to pause mid-way through Preliminary Design, so staff is recommending completing Schematic Design, and then placing a pause on payments and services.
		- During this time, VMNH will work in-house to develop exhibit plan.
	+ Len Poulin: Asked why money has not been received yet. Joe Keiper: explains many financial delays, potentially relating to the $250 million shortfall in the Department of Education.
	+ Universities typically handle these challenges through their foundation, but VMNH’s foundation does not have the ability to do so.
	+ Museum has level funding, but the state’s budgets are often delayed.
	+ Tom Benzing: Museum is not singled out, but the capital outlay is delayed because of other ballooning construction costs for other projects.
1. Detailed Design progress and upcoming Joe Keiper

Joe Keiper:

* Shared latest iteration of design from the architect, which will be discussed in the 4:00 PM meeting. Minutes from the upcoming meeting will also be shared.
	+ Building
		- Shared before and after images following Value Engineering, including the shortened profile of the building and reduced roof curvature. Will be challenging architects on elements that do not meet mission. These images now match the $650 cost per square foot target.
		- Square footage of lobby and store will be slightly reduced but will not impact exhibition space.
		- Shared spreadsheet of Value Engineering reductions and will ask specific questions about priorities (example: decreasing size of planters vs. eliminating outdoor exhibits).
		- Greg Hitchin: asked about reduced parking. Joe Keiper: explained requesting parking variance from the state.
	+ Exhibits
		- Nothing new to share, have shared generalized exhibit narrative from curators. Working on reply to Riggs Ward. Need to develop this to get estimate cost per square foot.
		- Mixed feelings about the technical interactives and are working to update them.
	+ Conclusion of Schematic Design phase (cost est.)
		- Johnathan Martin: Property transfer is in progress, and meeting will occur in mid-April with the City of Waynesboro. Also working on submitting Environmental Impact Report (EIR).
		- Tom Benzing: Asked about evidence of trenching in the parking lot. Joe Keiper: Spoke to architects about how situation was handled. Additionally, apologized to Dwayne Jones, and feels bad about it.
1. Continued Community Connections Tom Benzing

Tom Benzing:

* Lecture series 14 March, Wayne Theatre
	+ When Green is Not Good: Algae Blooms in the Shenandoah River, co-hosted by the Friends of the Middle River Organization
* Board Open Hours and discussion (Third Friday, 4:00-5:00 PM)
	+ Scheduling
		- Tom Benzing will host in March, but as upcoming conflicts
		- Len Poulin will host in April (4/21), and Faye Cooper will host in May (5/19)
	+ Content
		- Conference is reserved in the library, with an average of 12-15 people attending
		- Main questions are about the floodplain and parking. Tom Benzing created slides about parking gained and lost.
		- Hopes that the architecture firm will eventually participate, but no interest yet.
		- Concerns shared about the farmer’s market in Constitution Park. It may benefit to engage with that conversation and support the farmer’s market.
* Waynesboro RiverFest, 29 April
	+ Joe Keiper: VMNH will have full team and updated drawings and artifacts.
* Grottos, National Cave Week, 10 June
	+ Joe Keiper: VMNH will have a booth, similar to RiverFest.
* Len Poulin: Asked if architect/ exhibit design firm will be willing to have tour of local geographic features, led by Urbie Nash. Joe Keiper suggested inviting additional experts, and will mention the opportunity to Riggs Ward.
	+ Joe Keiper: Sees local field trips as key part of museum experience.
1. Open Discussion/ Information Shared Before & After Meeting

Carole Nash:

* Shared updates about the Rachel Carson Center in Bethesda, MD, which could potentially serve as a strong connection for the museum

Ryan Barber:

* Shared Danville Science Center is a good example of a museum sharing a parking lot with a very large community/farmer’s market.
1. Adjourn