

Executive Director's Board Report
15 May 2021
J. B. Keiper



This report represents the conclusion of the first full year of the Strategic Plan A *Museum Without Walls 2020-2025*. Progress on the seven points of main focus of the plan is outlined below, as well as information on upcoming plans and the status of our pandemic response.

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

I. Establish three VMNH Research Centers

OVERVIEW: Combine labs to conceptually develop research centers to help market the high impact science conducted by VMNH curatorial staff.

Due to staff turnover, we have placed this on hold. Senior researchers are represented by Curator Dr. Nancy Moncrief and Associate Curator Dr. Kaloyan Ivanov, and relatively new hires are represented by Assistant Curators Dr. Adam Pritchard and Dr. Hayden Bassett. A search for a new curator will begin in Fall 2021. With new staff comes new skill sets and research avenues. We will restart discussions of the Research Center concept after hiring the next curator.

II. 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.

Currently, we have an architect under contract, who has submitted the final documentation to the VA Department of General Services to install a new roof. We anticipate work to replace the existing roof will begin summer 2021.

III. 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.

The Board of Trustees has been informed, and an *ad hoc* Reaccreditation Committee will be formed in early 2023.

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

IV. 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.

The process of selling the existing compactor storage system has been identified. This will occur when we are certain that Douglas Avenue supports a temperature and humidity environment suitable for the Library materials.

V. 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.

To date, VMNH-Foundation has raised ample funding to design and construct the Pavilion (~\$220,000). VMNH has worked with the architectural firm Carter & Burton, who have submitted designs for final approval. This approval, followed by the hiring of a construction contractor, should come at any time.

VI. 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.

The City of Martinsville is receptive to the concept. A survey of the species of tree communities in the park has been completed. Next steps will include preliminary discussions with architects who have built similar structures, and with VA Department of General Services to establish relationship and identify challenges that will be faced to ensure such a structure meets regulation standards.

VII. 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.

The state's Pre-Planning process for VMNH-Waynesboro was completed in 2019. The pandemic delayed further funding, but that has been re-established so that VMNH will receive ~\$1 Million beginning 1 July 2021 to conduct the 18 month Detailed Planning process. An RFP for design firms has been written, and will be released once funds are available. With the conclusion of Detailed Planning in December 2022, final documents will be developed shortly after and a construction contractor hired.

The VMNH-Foundation, starting 1 July 2021, will have two members who live in the area of Waynesboro/Augusta County. They will form the core of a future *ad hoc* committee dedicated to drawing community support for the VMNH-W campus.

VMNH Pandemic Response

The pandemic altered operations beginning with closure in March 2020, reopening with limited hours during summer 2020, and a proposed return to normal operation hours (if conditions permit) in July 2021.

Operational Response – Masks mandatory, and social distancing at all times. Staff spread out, and telecommuting as much as possible, including using Zoom and similar platforms. Enhanced sanitation.

Open hours – Slated for Friday-Sunday after Memorial Day Weekend. Will transition to public hours Tuesday – Sunday after June 30th.

Social media – This has been a primary focus to look outwards to our community. VMNH recently was provided a Certificate of Appreciation from MHC Tourism for the continued development of online content, including science programming, lessons and activities, and, and nature highlights. “We will continually look outwards towards our community, rather than inwards to ourselves during this pandemic.”

Drive Through Shows – VMNH undertook these logistically challenging events and held them in Martinsville and Waynesboro. The first was so popular we were overwhelmed. Adjustments were made (timed tickets). This was a safe way to turn our collections inside-out and bring them to the people.

New Opportunities

- I. Updating our Starling Avenue facility using a federal grant offered through the VA Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy to enhance our energy use efficiency, and install renewable energy sources.
 - i. The \$500,000 grant will ensure that VMNH incurs no costs operationally.
 - ii. A contractor has been selected.
 - iii. A roadmap is being developed, and execution of the plan should begin later in 2021.

- II. VMNH was nominated, and became a finalist, for the National Museum Medal through the Institute for Museum and Library Services, with decisions to be made in spring 2021.

- III. On March 18th, VMNH honored individuals with the Thomas Jefferson Awards Ceremony. It was conducted virtually and was well-attended online. Former Martinsville Mayor and VMNH board member Dr. Mark Crabtree gave the keynote address.