**Executive Director’s Board Report**



**12 November 2022**

**J. B. Keiper**

* VMNH started FY 2022-2023 well due to two successful family science festivals (Dinosaur Festival in July, Bonz & Booz in October. Next festival is January with Bug Fest.
* Overall, numbers and activity (attendance and revenues) are strong.
* Grant funded projects are abundant through the Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab, the STEM Lab, Wyoming Dinosaur did, and near future submissions to a variety of organizations to support mission-based projects.
* The Museum’s for All program, sponsored by Hooker Furnishings, continues to be successful. EBT card holders can visit the museum or attend festivals free of charge, and Dinosaur Fest and Bonz & Booz accounted for over 2000 attendees.

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

* The new Assistant Curator of Herpetology, Dr. Arianna Kuhn, started October 2022. A search is underway for an additional biological sciences research technician.

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, was completed in July. The final inspection is complete.
* Staff will begin assessing other needs to assure a collections-quality environment, such as HVAC upgrades and plumbing upgrades. All projects will be paid for through maintenance reserve funds.

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.

* The Board of Trustees has been informed, and an *ad hoc* Reaccreditation Committee will be formed in early 2023. Staff preparing initial work.
* Staff have worked for the past decade to counter the concerns of the last re-accreditation. In 2010, it was noted that only a small portion of the building accessible to public – since then we’ve added *Hahn Hall of Biodiversity*, *Hooker Furniture Discovery Reef*, *Wild Watersheds*, *Fossil Overlook*, *Ants: Farmers, Warriors, and Builders*. In addition, many more specimens and artifacts on display.
* The 2010 report by the visiting committee noted a major challenge for VMNH being its relatively small square footage available to the paying visitor. In addition to the exhibit galleries listed above, staff have:
  + Increased the density of items on exhibit throughout the museum
  + Added online content
  + Opened the behind-the-scenes areas during key festivals
  + Began work to install a pavilion at the rear of the building
* The visiting committee also noted that a diversity of revenues will be needed to reduce reliance on the annual appropriation for operations. Festivals and the upcoming VMNH-Waynesboro branch campus are solutions for revenue diversification.

***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.

* The museum’s funding request passed the Senate but not the House. Staff is resubmitting our request to fund this space.
* Staff are prepping the space to become a new exhibit area.
* In December 2022, staff from House Appropriations are visiting VMNH as there is interest in seeing this project become successful.

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.

* We received and submitted all documents from the architect. DGS has greenlighted the hiring of a test lab which will assure quality of materials, soil compaction, and other considerations.
* The current stairs do not meet VA code requirements, and will be replaced through Maintenance Reserve Funds.
* We expect to put the project to bid Nov/Dec 2022.

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.

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.

* The state’s Pre-Planning process for VMNH-Waynesboro was completed in 2019. VMNH has received funds for Detailed Design, and currently a Request for Proposals is active. Review of proposals will start 3 March 2022. James Madison University will serve as Construction Manager (MOU signed) through Detailed Design and the eventual build of the museum building.

The VMNH-Foundation currently has 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.

Detailed Design has begun, primarily working with Glave Holmes Architecture, Vernor Johnson Architects, and Riggs Ward Design. A final general conceptual design for the building was generated, and a preliminary review of the design will be conducted by Department of Engineering and Building on 7 November 2022.

During the second half of calendar year 2022, numerous presentations have been made to small groups and at presentation booths at festivals in the greater Waynesboro area, generating hundreds of new contacts. A periodic newsletter is issued to all contacts.

Other Opportunities

1. 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.

* A press event will be hosted at VMNH on 11 November 2022 to mark the completion of the project.

1. VMNH continues to be a community cornerstone. In addition to its normal operations:
   * 1. Supporting the *Move to Martinsville* initiative.
     2. Hosted a concert with the local non-profit *Music in the Box*.
     3. Supporting Martinsville’s Bee City USA status.
2. VMNH Research and Collections successes
   * 1. New species of millipedes and beetles have been collected in western VA. Molecular sequences are being generated from materials prepared in the new molecular lab.
     2. Preparation work of *Petra* the cave cat continues.
     3. Archaeology will lend support to the VMNH-Waynesboro site analysis by organizing ground penetrating radar work on the property to assist the archaeological survey.
3. We are hiring new staff:
   * 1. A new Buildings and Grounds technician who will receive special training that aligns with the new energy savings project.
     2. A new exhibits manager, renamed the Museum Experiences Manager.