

Executive Director's Board Report
20 November 2021
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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

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.

- Staff request that one of the three centers is the *Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab*, spearheaded by Dr. Hayden Bassett. A search committee has been formed to hire an Assistant Curator of Herpetology, which will join the Biodiversity Center with Recent Invertebrates and Mammalogy.

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.

- A contractor has been selected, and work will begin when the proper weight roofing membrane is available for shipment.

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. Staff preparing preparatory 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.

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. VMNH-Foundation alerted to future fundraising needs for this project.

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. Contractor walk-through occurred on 28 October, with bids due 18 November, and reviews beginning 19 November 2021.

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. VMNH is due ~\$1 million for Detailed Planning, for which we are waiting for the Department of Planning and Budget to green-light. A good meeting on 1 November 2021 with DPB created our roadmap for future movement to the Capital Pool for construction.

The VMNH-Foundation, as of 1 July 2021, 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.

A full-time, 3-year position is planned beginning winter 2022 to create a permanent presence in Waynesboro and surrounding areas. This staffer will be a PR/Marketing person who will help to keep relationships growing, and will work closely with VMNH Advancement and the Executive Director.

Other 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. Siemens is beginning upgrades November 2021
 - ii. Upgrades will include:
 - A solar array to generate 30% of the museum's electric needs
 - Replace about 1000 bulbs to ensure all lighting is LED
 - Upgrade the HVAC and chiller system to enhance efficiency
 - Installation of two EV chargers
 - ~\$100,000 annual savings
 - 15 year pay back, but our electric costs will be fixed for that time period.
- II. VMNH open full time to the public & engaging audiences
 - i. Dragonfest 15-16 October, with 1300 in attendance
 - ii. No known covid outbreaks

- III. VMNH continues to be a community cornerstone. In addition to its normal operations:
 - i. Supporting the *Move to Martinsville* initiative.

- IV. VMNH Research and Collections successes
 - i. Began search for Assistant Curator of Herpetology.
 - ii. *Petra* skeleton extraction completed, conservation work ongoing.
 - iii. Media coverage of the Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab.
 - iv. Good coverage of armadillo work illustrating the growing population in Virginia.
 - v. Resubmission of a research and student training grant proposal to IMLS will occur Fall 2021.