**Executive Director’s Board Report, first quarter FY 2024**



**18 November 2023**

**J. B. Keiper**

* VMNH saw success with its Dinosaur Festival in July 2023, and prepped for its Bonz and Booz family science festival for October 2023.
* Admission numbers and revenues kept pace with last FY. Admission numbers are on par for the years prior to substantive growth prior to the 2020 pandemic, however revenues continue to set records.
* The VMNH-Foundation excelled, with an uptick in the total number of membership sales, and continued steady growth of the endowment.
* The *Museum’s for All* program, sponsored by Hooker Furnishings and Carter Bank & Trust, continues to grow, and continues to be a significant source of visitors during regular operation as well as festivals.
* Major projects saw excellent progress:
  + VMNH-Waynesboro was the focus of an ask of the Governor’s office for movement to the capital pool.
  + A contractor for the Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion has been obtained. The contractor estimates a November start date.
  + Work on the Douglas Ave facility will be expedited thanks to VMNH receiving permission to secure one firm on a term contract.

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)
    - Invertebrates, Mammals, Amphibians/Reptiles
  + STEM Lab (3D printing, macrophotography, specialized computers)
  + Microscopy and Student Training Lab (IMLS-funded)
    - Well used by education, Master Naturalists, et alia.
    - Asset to R&C

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.

* VMNH has received approval to hire a A&E firm under a term contract who will do all the work and bid the remaining improvements as one project. This will include building envelope, HVAC, plumbing, and electric. This will increase project efficiency.

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.
  + First Committee meeting (planning) held in October, 2023.
* 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. Preliminary work setting up the job site will occur Nov/Dec. Goal will be to install the pilings. If there are no weather-related delays, the rest of the work should proceed quickly.

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. Approval from DEB is sought
* 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.
* A trailer for temporary exhibits at the museum lot has been obtained. The first event with exhibits will be a LL Bean Pop-up event December 9th and 10th, 2023.

Other Opportunities

1. The *Museums for All* program where EBT card holders gain access to galleries and festivals free of charge continues to be a success. Bonz and Booz, which saw over 2,500 visitors, had ~950 EBT card users. New funding from the Blue Ridge Community Foundation has been obtained.
2. 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.
     7. Completing our first minority internship.
3. Bethany Fisher oversaw a relocation effort involving the museum’s Stegosaurus mount. It now has a long-term home greeting guests in the Lobby.
4. VMNH Research and Collections successes
   * 1. VMNH hosted the Virginia Herpetological Society’s annual meeting, spearheaded by Dr. Arianna Kuhn and Marshall Boyd.
     2. R&C is collaborating with Lynchburg University during the Academic Year to host and guide college interns, engaging in museum work funded through the Wyoming Dinosaur Dig grant from NSF.