**WAYNESBORO ADVOCACY COMMITTEE**

**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY**

5 September 2023

Waynesboro Office of Economic Development

**Attendance:** Len Poulin, Mark Buss, Greg Hitchin, Joe Keiper, Jonathan Martin, Mary Zell Galen

**Virtual:** LeAnn Binger

**Absent:** Tom Benzing, Carole Nash, Faye Cooper, Maggie Van Huss

1. Welcome
2. Approval of past meeting minutes

Mark Buss:

* Motion made to approve minutes was made by Mark Buss, seconded by Len Poulin, and passed by a voice vote.

1. Status of Detailed Design
   1. Exhibit meetings

Joe Keiper:

* Met with Riggs Ward Design last Friday with content experts as part of exhibit planning process. This meeting focused on geology, hydrology, archaeology, and paleontology.

1. Funding Update
   1. Status of current Commonwealth FY budget

Jonathan Martin:

* The Commonwealth’s budget has not been approved yet. VMNH is still waiting on funding for preliminary design.
  + Len Poulin: Requested clarification about funding status. Jonathan Martin: Project is approved, but not funded.
  + Greg Hitchin: Where is project funding? Joe Keiper: VMNH received (and spent) a portion and are waiting for the funding for the next stage. Budget is in progress for negotiating by state government.
  + Len Poulin: What funding is being debated? Joe Keiper: While funding being debated does not impact VMNH, VMNH will not receive funding until full budget is passed.
  + Len Poulin: How long will it take to start construction? Joe: While the earliest it could have started was July 1, VMNH still has design work to complete.

Greg Hitchin:

* Need to specifically request funding for the first half of the budget in FY 2025.
  + Joe Keiper: Sooner VMNH receives funding the better and will then start a capital campaign. VMNH is also working with federal funding with Waynesboro’s congressional representatives.
  + Len Poulin: Suggested waiting to request federal funding until state legislature provides funding.

1. Strategy for 7 September 2023 meetings
   1. Chmura Report results

Joe Keiper:

* Shared report with the committee developed for meeting with the governor, which display growth of VMNH’s economic impact.
  + Len Poulin: Requested the context for the meeting. Greg Hitchin: McGuireWoods, hired by the City of Waynesboro, requested that Del. Avoli, Del. Campbell, and Sen. Hanger write letters to the governor. Governor’s office accepted Del. Campbell’s office request for a meeting, and will meet with officials from VMNH, Waynesboro, and governor’s office.
  + Len Poulin: Were there any resistance from local legislators? Greg Hitchin: All got behind the project immediately.
  + Joe Keiper: Explained that Secretary of Education and Deputy Secretary will also be in attendance and are part of the project.
  1. Talking points

Joe Keiper:

* Key takeaways:
  + Economic development will be the first thing that catches eye of the administration. Looking to push continuing economic impact message, as project already has city and public support.
  + Project will also provide a higher education presence in the city and K-12 educational benefits.
  + Will help museum achieve its mission, including reaching and impacting new audiences.
* Will provide substantial leave behind, including the 2023 VMNH Waynesboro Project Briefing, Chmura Economic Impact Report, Arts and Architectural Review Board Presentation, Waynesboro City Resolutions, and the Division of Engineering and Buildings Budget Report.
  + Greg Hitchin: Will include set of six business cards in each packet.
  + Len Poulin: Are you asking the governor to make exception to no new building policy? Joe Keiper: Would not phrase request that way and are looking at long term education benefit of the project.
  + Len Poulin: Two approaches to take: 1) economic impact and 2) operational side of it, using terms like “leveraging the investment the state’s made through the research, collections, etc. and share that with the commonwealth.” By leveraging these things, VMNH can potentially gain additional funds from the state and justify future branches.
    - Joe Keiper: While not a state agency, the Children’s Museum of Richmond have used this model successfully.
  + Len Poulin: Museums can also be a bad word to an investor-type, who push to buy up other companies instead of developing what they have.
    - Explain value with a commercial real estate investment example, calculating showing how much positive income you can generate against your initial investment.
  1. Attendees, order of elements

Joe Keiper:

* Suggested Mike Hamp and Greg Hitchin to introduce the community, with Tom serving as a primary voice about the museum and show how state agency can create impact.
  + Len Poulin: VMNH needs to consider how Gov. Youngkin thinks and will approach the meeting. Joe Keiper: When meeting with Gov. Youngkin, regardless of when project is funded, VMNH will make a big deal about the work done during his administration. This project can provide added positive press coverage for him.
  + Jonathan Martin: Suggested mentioning additional investments made in the city.
  + Greg Hitchin: City will be asking buy question at the end and will also work to use the word accelerate.
    - Len Poulin: Want to approach the need for this project based on evolving technology.
    - LeAnn Binger: Need to approach the project how you can generate private money so won’t need the state money.
  + Greg Hitchin: Plan to meet in McGuireWoods lobby at 12:15 and walk over together.
  + Joe Keiper: To wrap up the conversation, want to formally ask if VMNH can be moved up from 6-year capital outlay to the construction pool.
    - Greg Hitchin: Looking for connection with America250 celebration and make connection with that celebration for the Youngkin Administration.

1. Community Connections

Joe Keiper:

* Reviewed upcoming talks and activities:
  + Waynesboro Public Library monthly office hours.
  + Charlottesville Newcomers luncheon on October 16.
  + Chamber of Commerce activities.
  + Daughters of the American Revolution in 2024.
  + Re-addressing Waynesboro City Council.
    - Greg Hitchin: Advises waiting for now.
  + Fall Foliage Festival on October 14-15. City will assist museum with setting up booth.

1. Open Discussion

* Len Poulin: Commented on Waynesboro Campus Project Briefing, including identifying several typos. VMNH needs to include the Crozet Tunnel and emphasize the numbers indicating their success.
* Greg Hitchin: Chmura report does not substantiate a sustainable operation, and those statistics were removed to not include the expenses and revenues.
  + Joe Keiper: Del. Avoli suggested making a small additional ask in the budget, to ensure state support if the budget gets tight.
* Len Poulin: Asked why the project was expected to generate revenue a decade ago and not now? Joe Keiper: Because of adjustments for inflation, expenses now outpace revenue.
  + Len Poulin: Need to identify a clear breakeven point that is backed by all reports that were shared. Joe Keiper: Explained that briefing is already printed and will work to incorporate those changes in the meeting.
  + Len Poulin: Need to work hard to cultivate the relationship with Del. Campbell, as VMNH had spent years building relationships with other delegates.
* Len Poulin: Can VMNH update museum sign to include new drawings? Joe Keiper: The City and VMNH can develop a budget for those updates.
* Mark Buss: Next WAC meeting is Tuesday, October 3rd.

1. Adjourn