

**Virginia Museum of Natural History
Waynesboro Advocacy Committee Meeting
Waynesboro Office of Economic Development
October 6, 2025, 1 PM
Minutes**

Attending In-person: Dr. Tom Benzing (Chair)
Mr. Len Poulin
Dr. Maggie Van Huss
Mr. Rick Kane
Mr. Greg Hitchin
Dr. Joe Keiper (VMNH Executive Director)

Present On-Line: Ms. Faye Cooper
Ms. Jennifer Whitlow (Staff – Minutes)
Mr. Zach Ryder

Not Present: Dr. Carole Nash
Ms. Stephanie Duffy

Welcome

Dr. Benzing opened the meeting at 1 PM with a welcome to everyone in attendance both in-person and on-line and determined a quorum was present. The August minutes were approved with no corrections.

Detailed Design

- a. Dr. Keiper reported that the Value Engineering process was completed within the necessary timeframe with no significant changes to the design. The total building price differential remained within the 10% standard following the Value Engineering review.
- b. With the Value engineering phase concluded and the Secretary of Education's blessing the funding request for the project was sent to the Governor's office for approval. There are no indications at this point as to any decisions made about funding the project.
- c. Dr. Benzing noted this is likely a key time to continue the letter writing campaign in support of the project.

Trailer Maintenance

Dr. Keiper reported that the trailer is being thoroughly evaluated by a professional contractor specializing in mobile museums. The company provided some preliminary information about the condition and necessary steps to make the mobile museum operational. As the evaluation process continues, more information is expected about the cost of necessary repair work and suggested next steps.

Community Connections

Dr. Benzing noted the fall lecture series began in September and was well attended in person and was especially popular with remote participants. Dr. Keiper will be October's special guest. Ms. Cooper and others are busy securing a speaker for the November 11th date. There will be no special speaker for December.

The spring lecture series will kick off in January 2026 with the premier of a movie short featuring a rubber duck which travels from the South River Watershed to Hampton Roads.

Dr. Keiper reported VMNH will have 3-4 staffers on hand during the upcoming Fall Foliage Art Show.

Once hired the new exhibits designer will be tasked with producing additional interpretive signage to complement the Dominion signage project for the South River Nature Preserve.

Dr. Keiper shared that the temporary maze exhibit is unfortunately unavailable due to significant repairs and upgrades that need to be made before it can be used again. Mr. Poulin explained that the benefactor is especially interested in supporting an ongoing activity for children and adults. The point of the gift is to bring the museum continually to the forefront of mind in Waynesboro.

Dr. Keiper offered some suggested hands-on activities that could be purchased to augment the museum's presence at festivals.

Mr. Poulin mentioned Riverfest and Museum Rodeo as a good opportunity. Another thought is partnering with local businesses to produce a scavenger hunt or a geocaching event.

Other committee members noted the Kiwanis playground and Rotary bike lot for children as special places for interaction.

Open Discussion

Dr. Benzing mentioned the recent chocolate event held in Martinsville and thought it would be fun to host something similar in Waynesboro. There are several renowned wine producers in the valley to pursue for future events.

With no further business or discussion, Dr. Benzing adjourned the meeting at 1:48 PM.

Next meeting:

Monday, November 3rd

Waynesboro Office of Economic Development

1 PM – 2 PM