Waynesboro Advocacy Committee
Virginia Museum of Natural History
Tuesday, December 1, 2026, 1 PM
Waynesboro Office of Economic Development

Virginia Museum of NATURAL HISTORY
IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

AGENDA

Welcome	Dr. Tom Benzing
Approval of Minutes • October 6, 2026	Dr. Benzing
Community Connections	

• Advocacy
  ○ Department of Education
  ○ Board of Trustees Letter
	Dr. Joe Keiper

• Trailer ○ Schedule for 2027	Dr. Keiper

• Events
  ○ Fall science lecture series concluded
  ○ Spring lecture series to resume January 12, 2027
	Dr. Benzing

• Open Discussion
  ○ New chair for WAC
  ○ Next meeting, January 5, 2027	

• Adjournment	Dr. Benzing

Board of Trustees
Waynesboro Advocacy Committee
Tuesday, October 6, 2026
Virginia Museum of Natural History

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MINUTES

The Waynesboro Advocacy Committee of the Virginia Museum of Natural History Board of Trustees held their monthly meeting at 1:00 PM at the Waynesboro Office of Economic Development on October 6, 2026.

Members Present:	Dr. Tom Benzing (Chair)	Dick Bratcher
	Faye Cooper	Len Poulin
	Dr. Joe Keiper (ex officio)	Urbie Nash
	Mr. Greg Hitchin	Ann Peltier
	Mr. Rick Kane	
Present Remote:	Ryan Barber (Staff)	Jennifer Whitlow (Staff)
Members Absent:	Dr. Carole Nash	Dr. Steve Powers
	Stephanie Duffy	Bill Alexander

WELCOME

Dr. Tom Benzing called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM with a welcome to all in attendance. It was determined that a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Having no corrections to the September 2026 minutes, Dr. Benzing declared it approved.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Advocacy – Dr. Keiper mentioned ongoing advocacy work to move the project to the next step of funding with the Department of Education and auxiliary staffers.

- Mr. Poulin shared some recent conversations with legislative officials and implored the committee and citizenry to passionately advocate for the project using consistent messaging.
- It was suggested that a QR code linking to the VMNH-Waynesboro donation page be projected in the auditorium before the monthly science lecture series.

Trailer - It was noted that visits by school groups are a challenge. Ideas to overcome this challenge include dividing classes into smaller groups and rotating them through activities both outside and inside the trailer. Science trailer visitors include many educators who would benefit from having access to the 2026-2027 education program guide.

DRAFT

- Science trailer volunteers reported a very successful season and were treated to an appreciation luncheon earlier today.
- Volunteers provided additional feedback for next season.
    - Incorporate an additional visitor activity table outside the trailer.
    - Continue to coordinate science trailer openings with the farmers market schedule.
    - Publish hours of operation in advance.
    - Include science trailer publicity in official Waynesboro City tourism efforts.
- Electric hook-up conversations with Dominion Power are ongoing.
- Several actions are forthcoming to close the science trailer for the season; including removal of the skirt and solar panels.

EVENTS

Various volunteers and VMNH staff are expected at the upcoming Virginia Fall Foliage Festival Art Show in Waynesboro.

The science lecture series continues later in October with a talk about South American birds and their relationship with the Shenandoah Valley. November's talk will be conducted by Jackson Roberts, VMNH Curator of Herpetology.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Due to Election Day, there will be no November WAC meeting.

Dr. Benzing reminded the committee that he will be rotating off the Board in the spring therefore a new chair will need to be selected.

Dr. Keiper provided the committee with a list of donors with the hope of bolstering committee membership.

There was a brief discussion about communication to local government officials.

ADJOURNMENT

Dr. Benzing adjourned the meeting at 2:00 PM and reminded the committee the regular meeting schedule will resume in December.

DRAFT

Subject: Support for Virginia Museum of Natural History–Waynesboro

Dear [Delegate/Senator Last Name],

As a member of the Virginia Museum of Natural History (VMNH) Board of Trustees, I am writing to share an update on the proposed VMNH-Waynesboro campus and ask for your continued support as we approach the 2027 General Assembly session.

VMNH-Waynesboro remains one of the Board's highest strategic priorities. This expansion will extend the museum's ability to coordinate an efficient network in Virginia where researchers and the public can readily use the natural history material of the Museum, and its branches, as stated in the code of Virginia.

The project has made significant progress. Detailed planning is complete, preliminary design has been approved, and the museum is ready to advance to the working drawings phase once funding is secured. Although capital funding was not approved by the past administration or during the 2026 General Assembly session, the museum has submitted a renewed request for full capital construction pool funding with an immediate need for $2.90 million to complete working drawings as part of the Capital Outlay process, as defined by the Department of Planning and Budget Instructions.

The proposed 28,000-square-foot facility will provide engaging exhibits, educational spaces, and opportunities for scientific research and learning. Beyond its educational value, the campus is expected to support tourism, economic development, and continued revitalization of downtown Waynesboro.

As a trustee, I believe this project represents an important investment in the museum's future and its ability to serve more Virginians.

I respectfully ask for your support of the museum's $2.90 million funding request during the 2027 General Assembly session. Securing these resources will allow the project to advance through working drawings and move closer to construction.

Thank you for your service to the Commonwealth and your consideration of this important project. I appreciate your continued support of the Virginia Museum of Natural History and its mission.

Sincerely,

[Trustee Name]
Board of Trustees
Virginia Museum of Natural History