

**Virginia Museum of Natural History  
Waynesboro Advocacy Committee Meeting  
Tuesday, March 3, 2026, 1 PM  
Waynesboro Office of Economic Development**



**MINUTES**

**Present In-person:**

Dr. Tom Benzing	Ms. Faye Cooper
Mr. Rick Kane	Mr. Dick Bratcher
Mr. Len Poulin	Mr. Greg Hitchen

**Present Remote:**

Dr. Carole Nash	Mr. Urbie Nash
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**Absent:**

Dr. Maggie Van Huss	Dr. Steven Powers
Ms. Stephanie Duffy	Ms. Ann Peltier
Mr. Bill Alexander	

**Others Present:**

Ms. Lila Dougherty	Dr. Joe Keiper (ex officio)
Mr. Jonathan Martin	

**Others Present Remote:**

Ms. Jennifer Whitlow	Mr. Zach Ryder
Mr. Ryan Barber	

**WELCOME**

Dr. Tom Benzing called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM with a welcome to all attending the meeting in person and online. It was determined that a quorum was present to conduct business.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes from the February 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting was approved with no corrections.

**INTRODUCTIONS**

Dr. Steven Powers was unable to attend today's meeting and will therefore introduce himself at the next meeting.

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

- Advocacy – The committee discussed the lack of wide-spread General Assembly support to push the Waynesboro project to the next phase. The contracted lobbyist firm continues to advocate for the project for the next month as the biennial budget is negotiated through the General Assembly.

The committee expressed appreciation for the community letter writing campaign. Mr. Poulin commented on the misinformation in the local media. He suggested the museum develop a clearer statement regarding funding efforts noting the current Virginia priorities of expanded Medicaid coverage and K-12 re-benchmarking. Dr. Keiper will compose a statement to be circulated through the committee that better communicates the museum's position and future funding needs. It was suggested the press release be coordinated with the end of this General Assembly session, around mid-March. It was noted that the museum's opportunity to impact school enrichment in Waynesboro and Augusta County should perhaps be noted in the publicity materials.

From the committee discussion, several suggestions emerged.

- Submit a request for the full funding amount again in August.
  - Solicit the support of the new Secretary of Education by informing him of the project timeline and needs.
  - Seek to have the project included in the next bond referendum.
  - Build additional enthusiasm and advocacy through hosting a benefit event.
  - Strategically time events and other outreach materials to garner continued community support.
  - Find an influential benefactor to support the project.
  - Conduct exit interviews with the two delegates that proposed supportive amendments to find out why the project funding didn't proceed out of committee.
- Waynesboro Library – The display was recently refreshed, with additional material planned to enhance the exhibit. This summer the statewide theme is "Unearth a Story", which provides an opportunity to showcase the museum's contribution to the study of paleontology.
    - The addition of a QR code to the display which leads to a dedicated webpage for project information and contributions was suggested.
  - Trailer – Renovation timing and is going as planned. There are no changes to report.
  - Events – The lecture series has been successful with growing attendance and support from the community. Speakers are covered for the remainder of the spring with several possibilities for the fall season. Dr. Nash suggested renowned editor and geologist Chuck Bailey as a possible speaker in the fall.
  - Science Social – Ms. Cooper received information from the Elizabeth River Project Coordinator about the logistics of the Science Social held twice a year. The format of the event consists of four speakers who present for 10 or 15 minutes on various topics and then allow for Q&A time at a local brewery. It was suggested to host this type of event in Harrisonburg and/or Charlottesville due to a larger population of interested parties thereby increasing the scope and

geographic location of supporters. There was a general discussion of the ideal location and timing for a dinner or social event with the primary goal of friend raising. Dr. Keiper mentioned Dr. Boaz's research into Jefferson's mastodon and the connection to Charlottesville. This research was suggested as a topic for an event to be held at a Charlottesville winery with the goal of widening the footprint of support for the Waynesboro project.

- Riverfest – Several VMNH staff members will travel to Waynesboro to provide educational materials for the festival.
- Museum Rodeo – The VA 250 mobile museum will be in Waynesboro. Waynesboro will also celebrate the completion of several city murals that weekend.

### **OPEN DISCUSSION**

- The film *Hidden Rivers* will be shown at the Wayne Theatre on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Perhaps this will be the first in a series of nature documentaries.
- This summer, an independent film maker from Martinsville will present a biography film in Waynesboro and Charlottesville. More information will be shared as it becomes available.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Having no further business Dr. Benzing adjourned the meeting at 2:00 PM.

### **NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday, April 7, 2026

1:00 PM

Waynesboro Office of Economic Development