



Waynesboro City Council Agenda Briefing

Meeting Date:	September 26, 2022	Staff/Council Member(s): Michael G. Hamp, II City Manager; Gregory E. Hitchin, Director Economic Development and Tourism
Agenda Item #	7	
Resolution#		
Department:	City Manager / Economic Development	
Subject:	Support of Waynesboro Campus of the Virginia Museum of Natural History	

Background: Since 2011, the Waynesboro City Council, Economic Development Authority (EDA), the Center for Coldwater Restoration, and Staff have been working with the Virginia Museum of Natural History (VMNH) in Martinsville to locate a Waynesboro Campus in downtown. The City Council and EDA along with private contributions have helped fund a number of studies to determine the feasibility of such a center. Key findings of those studies include:

- It is financially feasible and the regional market could support a Virginia Museum of Natural History - Waynesboro Campus, conceived as a 25,000 square foot facility including exhibits focused on the natural history of the Shenandoah Valley and Blue Ridge region. Specific features of the facility would include:
 - Exciting, creative exhibits interpreting the local environment and natural history using some of the 10 million artifacts currently housed in Martinsville;
 - Environmental classrooms supporting Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education and providing an opportunity for some 63,000 K-12 students in the region to explore and learn;
 - A 'playscape' interactive area for early childhood learning;
 - Publicly viewable laboratories where curators and university partners will have an opportunity to work and learn;
 - A resource for partners in public programs and scientific research that will include the Wildlife Center of Virginia, James Madison University, and the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.
- It is estimated that the center would attract between 45,332 and 85,832 visitors a year that include both residents in the region, visitors to the Valley and tourists traveling on the Blue Ridge Parkway and Skyline Drive.
- The facility's total annual economic impact is estimated to be over \$2,000,000 and includes all direct, indirect, and induced impacts and 20 jobs.
- It is estimated that the Virginia Museum of Natural History - Waynesboro Campus will be an investment of approximately \$22,000,000 to construct and equip.
- It is estimated that a corporate and public philanthropic giving campaign will provide a minimum of \$2,000,000 towards the project with the remainder coming from State and local government funds.

It should also be noted that the VMNH is deemed an "institution of higher learning", and according to the Code of Virginia, one of its purposes is to "coordinate an efficient network in Virginia where

researchers and the public can readily use the natural history material of the Museum, its branches, Virginia's institutions of higher education and other museums."

The Virginia Museum of Natural History Board of Directors has determined that the VMNH Waynesboro Campus should be located in the open municipal lot at the intersection of Arch Avenue and West Main Street. The Downtown location, which is only 3.5 miles west of the South Entrance to the Shenandoah National Park with 300,000 travelers per year, will augment an already culturally rich area with the Moss Gallery, the Waynesboro Cultural Heritage Center, the Wayne Theatre, and the Shenandoah Art Center, plus the recreational attributes of newly renovated Constitution Park, Southern Preserve, and the South River.

In 2018, City Council passed a resolution indicating support of the project and an investment totaling \$1,000,000 in combined direct financial contribution, in-kind support, and real property.

Current Situation: Funds included in the Commonwealth of Virginia's FY23 budget will provide detailed design of the building, landscape, and exhibits expanding on the preliminary work from 2019. An architectural firm, along with a related team of experts, has been retained. The goal is to request construction funding in the FY 24 Commonwealth budget.

Council will receive a presentation from Dr. Joe Keiper, Executive Director of the Virginia Museum of Natural History on the current status of the project.

City Manager's Recommendation: The development of the Virginia Museum of Natural History - Waynesboro Campus would provide an incredible economic and cultural benefit to Waynesboro's Downtown, the community generally and the region.

Suggested Motion(s): no action is requested

Attachments: Project Briefing