



STRATEGIC PLAN



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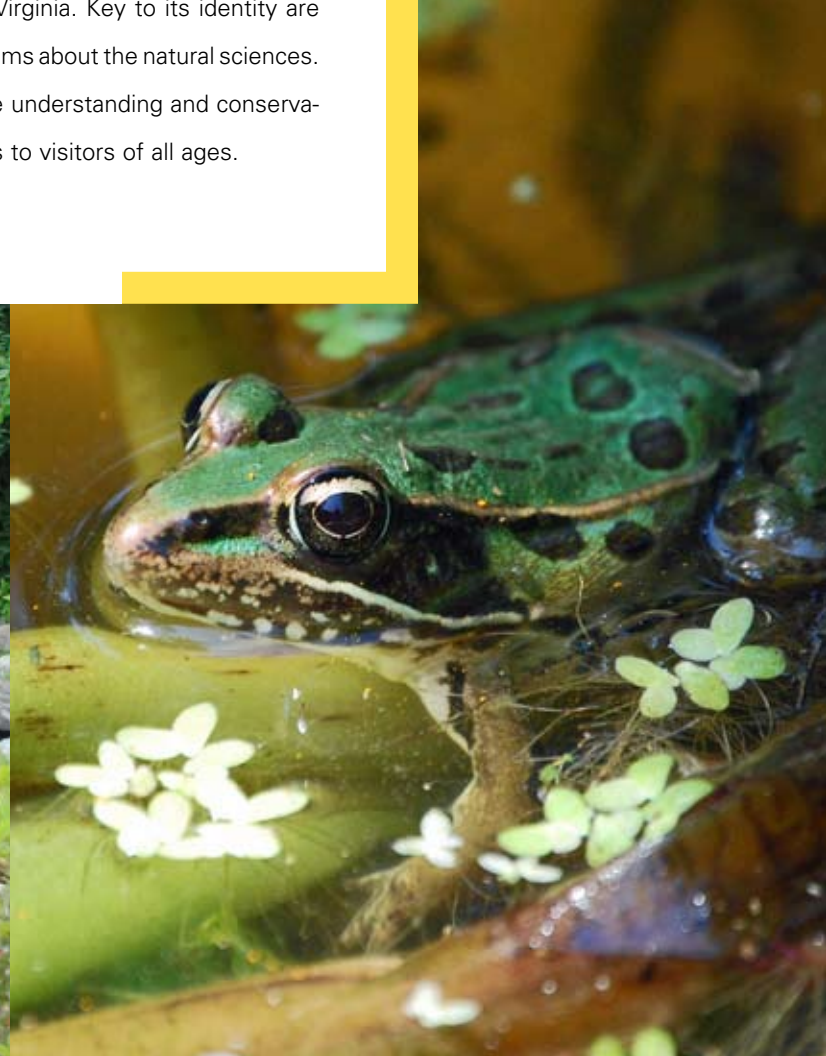
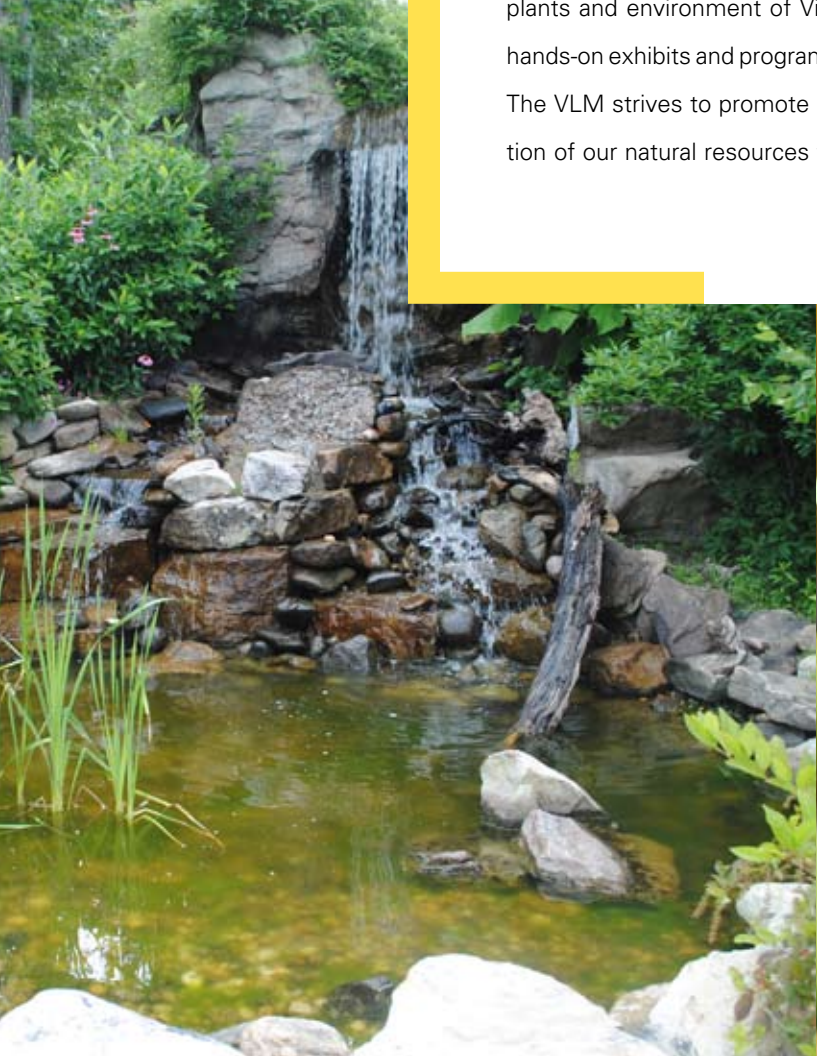


2012-2015  
ADOPTED 6/20/12



## INTRODUCTION

The Virginia Living Museum is dedicated to the understanding and conservation of our natural resources through educational exhibits and programs about the animals, plants and environment of Virginia. Key to its identity are hands-on exhibits and programs about the natural sciences. The VLM strives to promote understanding and conservation of our natural resources to visitors of all ages.



## Strengths

The Virginia Living Museum (VLM) has an outstanding and well-maintained facility and grounds, a dedicated corps of volunteers and a staff who are leaders in science education and the museum field. The Museum has just completed a debt elimination campaign for its facility with strong support from the community and area businesses. The Museum's native animal collection is one of the largest and most diverse in the country. The VLM is one of only 13 institutions in the country accredited by both the Association of American Museums (AAM) and the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), exhibiting the highest standards of both Museums and Zoos in the nation.

The Museum's SOL and grade-level correlated educational programs have been endorsed by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and both the U.S. and Virginia Departments of Education for excellence. With diverse hands-on programs from space science to field biology, the Museum serves K-12, college and home school students as well as graduate level teacher training programs. An outside study confirmed that students who experienced hands-on programs at the VLM were more likely to retain information than those studying the same material in a traditional classroom.

The Museum enjoys a broad membership base with 6,000 member households as well as a strong annual giving program. The Museum has a committed and experienced Board of Trustees. In addition, many Museum founders and long-term supporters serve on the Board of Advisors. With annual visitation of 240,000 the VLM is the most visited attraction in Newport News and outreach programs expand the Museum's reach throughout the state. Each year, the Museum has a local economic impact of more than \$9 million. Results of the Museum's recent branding campaign verified the Museum's place as a valued community asset, especially among families with young children.

## Challenges

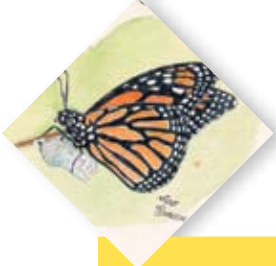
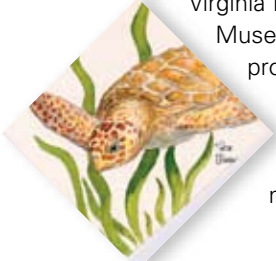
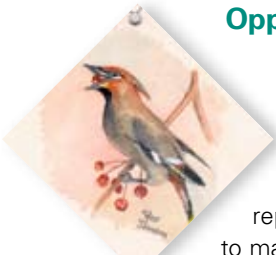
Since the Museum was constructed on city property in 1966, Newport News has continued its partnership with the Museum through both capital and annual funding. Newport News last gave capital funding in 2004 and has reduced annual grants the last three years. Because the facility is built on city property it is a lease-hold improvement that cannot be used as collateral or for future development. In the current year, the city provides 13% of the operating budget with the balance raised or earned by the Museum. Funding from the state, Hampton and York County has been eliminated.

The current recession has impacted Museum revenue through reduced charitable donations, fewer school groups and reduced tourist admissions income. The Museum's primary audience is families with young children and the Museum must compete in the region with city funded institutions such as the Virginia Zoo, Virginia Aquarium and the Children's Museum of Virginia, each having major expansions in the last three years. These museums receive cash and in-kind support from their municipalities, up to 50% of total expenses.

The Museum must reward the excellence of its staff and improve its human resources support and training in order to retain staff, as well as continue to grow and excel. In addition the Museum must maintain sufficient contingency funding for facility equipment repair and replacement, increasingly critical as the facility ages.



## Opportunities



Since the Museum has many long term supporters, there is an opportunity to attract Endowment Funding, the ultimate solution to replacing public funds. With proximity to major hospital systems and Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS), the Museum has a new opportunity to promote science careers in the growing health services field as well as becoming a major provider of health education for the community. By adding human health

exhibits and programs, the Museum has an opportunity to diversify its audience, attracting older school children and the growing retirement community. Adding health related programs and exhibits may also increase the Museum's ability to access new grant funding. The Museum also has an opportunity to strengthen its relationship with the city in expanded services and tourism promotion. Through AZA, the Museum has additional opportunities to be involved in conservation and research partnerships; taking advantage of AZA's national resources for promotion, grants and purchasing.

## SUMMARY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Museum's branding of "Protect what's Precious" is central to our strategic planning goals for the next three to five years.

- First, the Museum's financial health is threatened, so to protect the institution, we must ensure sustainable funding with increased city support, increased endowment support and increased revenue and savings. In the short run, our reliance on the city will increase, but over time we look to increase endowment to sufficient levels to reduce our dependency on the city and increase access to a more diverse audience.
- Second, the Museum must protect its staff and better serve its members and visitors. We must restore cuts made to staff benefits, increase salaries and provide new opportunities for training and human resources support. We must learn more about our current members and visitors and increase our interaction with them through additional exhibits, programs, tours and events to better serve them.
- Third, we must protect Virginia's natural resources by increasing conservation programming, grants for citizen science programs and support for student conservation projects, while showcasing our conservation initiatives to the public.
- Lastly, we have an opportunity to expand our programming to include human health initiatives – a natural link to our mission. This will attract a broader audience, educate and prepare students for the growing field of medical careers and enable the Museum to have an impact on wellness education in the community.

## I EDUCATION, OUTREACH & VISITOR SERVICES

**VISION:** *To connect people to wildlife and natural resources and promote conservation through exhibits, communications and educational programs*

### **ACTION ITEMS:**

#### **Make more connections with visitors and members to better serve them**

- Implement computer resource improvements to improve museum-wide connectivity
- Increase surveys and marketing research
- Create donor newsletter
- Add endowment information to website
- Explore adding kiosk in lobby for info and e-sign ups
- Enhance wayfinding with improved maps and signage

#### **Add blogs to provide “insider” information**

- Add educator-only events for teachers to promote school programs
- Explore the development of electronic field trips, potentially with Discovery Box usage

#### **Serve broader community**

- Develop gifted, special needs and demographically targeted programs through grant opportunities
- Increase and improve military promotions and communication through adding a military representative to the Board
- Add senior and student discounts
- Add scholarship program for at-risk students to attend after school and summer programs
- Research discounts for Newport News residents for selected programs/exhibits

#### **Expand hands-on experiences**

- Add themed weekends based on national calendar events
- Add new, staff directed discovery center programs with changing hands-on items and animal shows
- Expand tours and behind-the-scenes programs with volunteers and front desk staff
- Create changing scavenger hunt exhibit games for children
- Develop programs that increase utilization of the Museum’s extensive natural history collections
- Seek grant funding to ensure the quality and care of natural history collections to the highest standard
- Develop craft workshops

#### **Add human health programs**

- Add national changing exhibits on human health issues
- Incorporate human health/wellness topics into school programming
- Educate about and promote emerging healthcare career opportunities
- Engage children with programs about obesity prevention and healthy lifestyles
- Provide adult lectures in partnership with the regional health professionals
- Incorporate community service, such as health screenings, into related exhibits
- Explore permanent health-related exhibits



## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES (continued)

### II ANIMAL CARE & CONSERVATION

**VISION:** *To provide the highest quality animal care and exhibits to ensure the health and vitality of our animal ambassadors and to promote wildlife and environmental conservation.*

#### **ACTION ITEMS:**

##### **Increase conservation messaging and promotions**

- Expand Earth Day and Endangered Species Day events
- Add citizen science opportunities
- Promote current conservation projects in exhibits, tours and volunteer training

##### **Add conservation programming**

- Incorporate conservation information into the animal playground programs
- Research conservation programs with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
- Add annual monarch tagging and conservation programs

##### **Continue to improve animal care equipment and coordination**

- Prepare for Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) reaccreditation in 2013
- Evaluate options for AZA-acceptable computer compilation of all animal records



Watercolor images courtesy of Tede Johnson

### III FACILITIES & EXHIBITS

**VISION:** *To operate state-of-the-art facilities which provide outstanding environments for animals, and inspirational and repeatable experiences for visitors.*

#### **ACTION ITEMS:**

##### **Add Children's Garden and Native Plant Display Garden**

- Kick off human health initiatives with Children's Garden opening/dedication in Fall 2012

##### **Add preschool area/exhibits**

- Add play elements in Children's Garden
- Assess options for adding indoor pre-school area with play elements
- Develop a planning document for an expanded outdoor nature play/fitness area

##### **Existing exhibit enhancement**

- Add more video and sound interactive stations for visitors
- Add live feed/video from observatory telescope to promote visitation
- Present exhibit improvement plan for the World of Darkness gallery
- Evaluate the addition of porcupine exhibit to the outdoor trail
- Establish a plan for adding permanent human health exhibit elements
- Research permanent outdoor dinosaur exhibit options

##### **Green the Museum**

- Reduce electric/natural gas expenses through energy efficiency initiatives
- Go paperless where possible (bills and ticketing)
- Promote recycling
- Evaluate incorporation of solar panels and/or solar water heaters

## IV HUMAN RESOURCES

**VISION:** *To align our workforce and volunteer support with our institutional vision.*

### ACTION ITEMS:

#### Improve human resources support

- Increase HR resources
- Restore benefits and raises
- Develop ways to better meet HR needs through additional staffing / training

#### Increase number of highly trained volunteers

- Add mentor program with junior volunteers
- Initiate more targeted volunteer recruitment
- Add online component to volunteer training
- Explore adding internships



Photos courtesy of Karlton Rebenstorf

## V FINANCIAL RESOURCES

**VISION:** *To ensure the long-term financial health of the Museum using best business practices and a climate of entrepreneurship.*

### ACTION ITEMS:

#### Increase City Funding for FY 2013-14

- Develop a communication plan to advocate for City Funding
- Increase communications with Council and city administration from Board, business community members/visitors

#### Grow and promote endowment

- Increase communications with prospects and donors
- Add regular cultivation events
- Increase Board involvement in Endowment fund-raising

#### Create scholarship program to improve access

- Apply for NAP credits to attract donors

#### Increase grant funding for strategic programs and exhibits

- Seek partner institutions to strengthen applications
- Identify critical needs that align with grant opportunities

#### Diversify donor base

- Create young professionals group to assist with fundraising events and develop a channel for leadership
- Increase Board involvement to recruit new donors and members, exploring service mentorships

#### Re-commitments from Opportunity Fund donors

- Seek extended pledges for operating funding from current Opportunity Fund donors

