

Report to the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations

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In accordance with S.L. 2010-142 of the General Statute of North Carolina, I am writing as Chairman of the North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences' Advisory Commission to present to you our annual report with recommendations for our educational and scientific institution.

First and foremost, I want to thank the General Assembly for support of the Museum. Legislative help in funding the now 12-year-old Museum facility and the 5 month old Nature Research Center (NRC) has led to our ranking among the top 10 natural history museums in North America. With more than 650,000 visitors annually, the Museum of Natural Sciences continues to be the most-visited museum in the state and the #1 field trip destination for school groups in North Carolina. The Museum's economic impact is more than \$6 million annually. All of these statistics are projected to increase substantially with the opening of the Museum's new wing, the Nature Research Center. The 24-Hour Grand Opening of the NRC was a huge success, with more than 70,000 visitors attending. In addition, the Museum is attracting major international conferences to North Carolina in 2012, 2013 and 2014.

Annual Update on Museum Activities and Priorities:

The NRC opened to the public with a 24-hour opening on April 20, 2012. The new wing is a major—and innovative— addition to the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. An estimated 45,000 people toured the new facility while another 25,000 participated in festivities outdoors. The Museum is anticipating a **million visitors this year** with the opening of the Nature Research Center. In just four months since the grand opening events in April, more than 540,000 visitors have streamed through the NRC.

This groundbreaking new project is already having a dramatic impact on science and technology education throughout North Carolina and nationally. Combining a focus on research and technology with new science communications strategies, the Nature Research Center engages members of the public in understanding the science that affects their daily lives. In just a few short months since the opening, thousands of schoolchildren have streamed into the new wing and found themselves on an adventure that integrates innovative, real-time science into the Museum experience. Whether engaging the tourist, the school child or the science and technology entrepreneur, this new wing is a nexus for inquiry. Without a doubt, the Nature Research Center and the entire Green Square Project have launched a new era in the role of the Museum as a vital leader in connecting the citizen scientist to *How We Know* and in inspiring future generations.

The Museum of Natural Sciences is continually looking for ways to improve the effectiveness of the Museum. Some of the Museum's long-standing goals are to: 1) Continue to improve programming by providing new and engaging public programs and school programs for students and teachers; 2) Increase public awareness of the Museum through collaboration, increased marketing, special events, traveling exhibits, 3-D productions, new programs and revenue-generating activities; 3) Enhance the public's understanding of the scientific research that affects their daily lives by successfully operating the Nature Research Center; and

4) Improve financial sustainability by increasing membership, major gifts, annual giving, funds from revenue centers, grant funding, funding of special projects and endowment.

The Museum is continually working to improve its financial sustainability. The Museum's auditorium transformed to become the WRAL 3-D theater in late October 2011. The 3-D theater is a successful revenue-generator, playing 3-D movies such as "Tornado Alley," "Space Junk" and "Dinosaurs Alive." The Museum also continues to bring in popular revenue-generating traveling exhibits. The Museum's next traveling exhibit, *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition*, will open on Sept. 29, 2012. The Museum has successfully hosted this exhibit in the past and with the 100-year anniversary coinciding with the return of *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition*, the Museum is expecting this exhibit to be a strong revenue source. Both the Acro Café and the Daily Planet Café are doing well under the new management of Rocky Top Hospitality. The Daily Planet Café has been very successful with lunch and complements what we offer at the Acro Café in the main Museum. Both the Museum Store and the new Center Store in the Nature Research Center are very popular with museum visitors and are great revenue generators.

Museum Needs and Recommendations:

In order for the Museum of Natural Sciences to remain a world-class institution that adds to the economic welfare and quality of life of North Carolina, while preparing students for North Carolina's science and technology jobs of the future, operating support for the Museum must be sustainable. The Museum has initiatives to increase financial support as stated in this report and this must be complemented with stable operating support from the state.

RECOMMENDATION #1: Continue to provide the necessary state support to enable the Museum of Natural Sciences to carry out its mission. This includes an annual increase of \$250,000 over the current budget for 2013-2015 Biennial budget for critical operational support that includes security, informational technology (IT) expenses and multimedia expenses. Additional evening security is necessary to protect the investment of the Nature Research Center. The IT costs have increased above the projected expectations and it is essential to maintain the daily activities of Museum exhibits and communications and Museum staff. Additional multimedia support is required to operate the exhibits and the SECU Daily Planet successfully, which includes broadcasting daily science and technology information to schools across North Carolina and to the visiting public.

The Advisory Commission makes this recommendation for the 2013-2015 Biennial budget to continue the success of the Museum and its new wing, the Nature Research Center. With your support, we can 1) protect the state's capital investment; 2) improve services at the Museum and across the state; 3) provide improved learning opportunities to meet future challenges by educating students and citizens about our unique North Carolina natural environment; and 4) cultivate interest in science and technology and provide support for students seeking careers in science for future economic development.

The Advisory Commission and many others are working hard to ensure that your investment in the Museum and the Nature Research Center continues to provide world-class exhibits, research and education and outreach programs that educate people about our environment and vital concepts in science and stewardship.

The Advisory Commission wants to thank you for supporting the mission of the Museum of Natural Sciences and the Nature Research Center. I and members of the Advisory Commission are available, at your convenience, to address any questions you may have.

Sincerely Yours,



George W. House
Chairman, Museum Advisory Commission
October 1, 2012