

## **Virginia Museum of History & Culture Announces Community-Centered, Comprehensive Museum Renovation**

Richmond, VA — This October, the Virginia Museum of History & Culture (VMHC) will begin a dramatic renovation and expansion project – the most extensive in its long history. Inspired by its vision to better represent and welcome all Virginians and advance its ability to thoughtfully and fully preserve and share the ever-evolving story of Virginia, the museum will invest nearly \$30 million in campus and programmatic improvements. In nearly 18 months of construction, the VMHC will be fundamentally reimaged as a more welcoming, guest- and community-centered cultural attraction.

The renewed museum complex of nearly 250,000 square feet will include multiple new exhibitions spaces for long-term and changing exhibitions; a new immersive orientation theater; a new interactive learning space for families; a new research library with a state-of-the-art rare book and manuscript suite, and multiple new education/meeting rooms; a new café, museum store and other amenities; and multiple new and renewed community and event spaces, including a new great hall, a second floor event terrace, an outdoor event lawn, an expanded parking lot, and an improved VMFA campus connector.

VMHC's upcoming construction will be a capstone of various expansions and improvements at the museum over the past two decades. It is also a culmination of the VMHC's focused efforts in recent years to become the state history museum Virginia needs and all Virginians deserve – work that has already resulted in record-setting growth in museum visitation and programmatic activity. Guided by the museum's ambitious strategic plan, which also called for the museum's successful rebranding in 2018 as the Virginia Museum of History & Culture, these changes are intended to boldly and meaningfully reinvent the museum as it looks ahead to its third century of operation and as the United States prepares to commemorate its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

"As the oldest cultural organization in the Commonwealth and one of the largest and finest history collections in the nation, we take pride in saving and sharing the complex and consequential history of Virginia. We believe in the unparalleled role history plays in creating a strong, healthy, and inspired society. History gives us perspective and empathy – something we all could use more of now and always. History matters," said VMHC President & CEO Jamie Bosket, "As we – as a nation, state, and community – reckon with our past, it is more important than ever that your state history museum is a community partner that adds great value. The VMHC is excited to embark on this important project on behalf of all Virginians and our shared future."

Originally planned for 2022, these extensive capital improvements were expedited as part of the VMHC's strategy to sustain through the current health and financial crisis. Overlapping the planned and subsidized disruption of renovation with the uncontrollable and unplanned challenge of COVID-19 will help the museum endure now and in the future. The VMHC is one of the few major museums in Virginia to survive its public closure and the ensuing months without any pandemic-related staff furloughs or layoffs. "Being nimble and moving quickly with the work ahead, we believe we can not only maintain our team and continue to grow our tremendous portfolio of digital history programming, one of the most robust of any like museum, but we will also be able to re-emerge from these challenging times with strength and stability," said Bosket. A recent national survey of the American Alliance of Museums suggested that as many as one in three American museums may be forced to shutter because of the impacts of COVID-19. "We also believe that making this investment now is one way that we can do our part to contribute to our collective recovery – providing a new project that will engage dozens of local and regional businesses, and even allow for modest job creation at the museum," commented Bosket.

### **Virginia Museum of History & Culture**

Owned and operated by the Virginia Historical Society

To complete these improvements, the VMHC has assembled a talented team, including Richmond architectural firm Glavé & Holmes and The Whiting-Turner Contracting Company. For programmatic work, the VMHC is partnering with Virginia-based PRD Group for exhibition planning and design. PRD is an award-winning firm whose work has been featured at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History & Culture, the United State Botanical Garden, the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, and several impressive state history museums. The VMHC will also work with Donna Lawrence Productions to produce new media experiences, including a feature film for its new immersive orientation theater. Donna Lawrence is the award-winning producer of film experiences at the National Constitution Center, Gettysburg National Military Park Museum, Museum of the American Revolution, New-York Historical Society, and Walt Disney World.

Construction will begin in early October and will be completed in early 2022, with a grand re-opening slated for spring 2022. Portions of the museum will remain open to guests throughout most of the 18-month renovation, and the VMHC's extensive digital outreach effects and select programming will continue without interruption.

#### **Support for VMHC's vision for the future and its plans for renovation:**

"Virginia history is American history, and that history is complex, contradictory, and too often untold—we must keep working to lift up the voices and stories of all those who have shaped it," said **Governor Ralph Northam**. "I am deeply grateful to the VMHC for taking on the critically important and much-needed work of connecting more people to the story of our Commonwealth, helping Virginians and visitors alike understand our past and draw connections to our present. This expansion will ensure that the VMHC continues to play a central role in Virginia's growth as we work together to build a more welcoming, equitable, and inclusive Commonwealth."

"The City of Richmond is proud to welcome this bold and ambitious renovation," said **Mayor Levar M. Stoney**. "The VMHC has taken an active role in our Richmond community and has committed to telling a more inclusive and complete history of our Commonwealth, where ALL Virginians can see themselves in the triumphs and tragedies, the glory and the pain, of our collective story. As America reckons with its past, present and future, I can't think of a more consequential time for the reinvention of this vital institution."

#### **Renderings of select renovated areas of the museum:**

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The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is owned and operated by the Virginia Historical Society – a private, non-profit organization established in 1831. The historical society is the oldest cultural organization in Virginia, and one of the oldest and most distinguished history organizations in the nation. For use in its state history museum and its renowned research library, the historical society cares for a collection of nearly nine million items representing the ever-evolving story of Virginia.

The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is located at 428 N Arthur Ashe Boulevard in Richmond's Museum District. Hours are Monday – Sunday 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for the galleries and museum shop, Monday – Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for the research library. For more information call 804.340.1800, visit VirginiaHistory.org, or connect on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

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