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Discovery Museum looks to city to continue project

Plans submitted for new building at Jim Barnett Park

By Suzanne E. Wilder
The Winchester Star

Winchester — The Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum is seeking the city's approval for its new building, planned for Jim Barnett Park.

Peggy McKee, the museum's executive director, said site plans have been submitted to the city's Planning and Zoning Department. They must be approved by the Planning Commission and City Council.

The museum is in the design and development phases for its building, McKee said. It will be an environmentally friendly "green" structure.

The \$8 million, 21,000-square-foot building will include recycled materials, a sod roof, energy-efficient heating and cooling, and water-efficient landscaping, among other technologies.

A local builder and architect are heading the project. The museum selected the architectural firm of Reader Swartz Architects PC and Howard Shockey and Sons Inc. for the construction.



This architect's drawing shows the planned Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum building on a site at Jim Barnett Park in Winchester. The design was created by the architectural firm Reader Swartz Architects PC. Site plans have been submitted to the city requesting approval on the building project. (Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum)

The building will triple the floor space of the museum, now housed in 7,500 square feet at 54 S. Loudoun St.

On a recent morning, a group of students from Gainesboro Elementary School ran amok in the building, playing on the exhibits. Another group of children participated in program about Native Americans in a separate room.

As of Monday, about 38,000 people had visited the museum this year, McKee said, noting that the heavy traffic is putting a strain on the facility.

And the workers there were bracing for more: “November’s our biggest month,” she said.

Work on the new museum was first slated for early this year, but the City Council gave the facility an 18-month extension for construction. McKee said construction should begin by next summer.

The city contributes \$25,000 a year to the museum and has offered a \$1 per year lease for the 3.5-acre site north of Jim Barnett Park’s Christianson Familyland Playground.

Museum officials are waiting to hear about several foundation grants, McKee said. And they are looking for donors to the building project.

On Friday, the museum will hold its 10th anniversary gala. The event, with an estimated 400-plus people attending, will feature silent and live auctions and music from Right On at historic Selma on Amherst Street. It will generate money for the museum’s general fund, McKee said. (For a related story, see Page D7.)