

Council Clears Path for Discovery

Ordinance Approval Allows Museum to Build New Facility in City Park

By **STEPHANIE M. MANGINO**
The Winchester Star

The Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum will be able to make a new home in Winchester's Jim Barnett Park.

City Council did not approve a lease Tuesday night, and it didn't see any plans detailing physical museum specifics, but it backed only an ordinance giving the downtown museum permission to build a new facility of about 20,000 square feet on 3½ acres of land.

Construction is expected to start no

later than Jan. 1, 2006, and end before Sept. 30, 2007.

The museum hopes to build the new facility on the hill adjacent to Christianson Familyland, said its executive director, Peggy McKee.

No price tag has yet been placed on the project, but she said the museum will use a \$1.2 million federal grant and a \$375,000 private grant for the building.

There's also no date to start a fundraising campaign, but McKee said it will need to start soon.

While the vote may seem like a simple one, it came after some debate cen-

tering around the process that brought the issue before council.

The Winchester Parks and Recreation Board did not have an opportunity to reflect on and learn more about the project prior to its Tuesday appearance before council, board Chairman Mark Pennypacker said to council during Tuesday night's public hearing on the ordinance.

The concept first appeared publicly at a November 2003 meeting of council's Community Safety and Services Committee. McKee said then that the existing 7,500-square-foot Discovery Museum at 54 S. Loudoun St. had hosted 43,000

visitors the previous year.

Council President Charles T. Gaynor said he understood how board members may have felt left out of the process, but he thinks council made the right decision in bringing the matter forward for a vote.

Councilman Timothy S. Coyne also had some concerns about the process and the museum.

Council accepted Coyne's ordinance amendments calling on the museum to cooperate with the city and the parks board in museum development and ex-

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plaining that council must approve a lease and a conditional-use permit before the new facility is built.

Coyne said he wants council, the museum, and the parks board to be in full communication "So we're all truly partners in this."

Despite his concerns, Coyne said, "I'm in favor of this proposal."

McKee emphasized the museum is excited to partner with the park on the project, which she said is a win-win for the city, the museum, and the children who will visit the new facility.

Present at the meeting in Roush City Hall were Gaynor, Coyne, Mayor Larry T. Omps, Elizabeth A. Minor, Carolyn T. Griffin, Philip E. Pate, Glen P. Burke, Michael E. Noel, Theodora L. Rezba, John B. Schroth, J. Stephen Bauserman, Jeffrey B. Buettner, and Michael L. Butler.