



MANASSAS MUSEUM SYSTEM

2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Adopted September 1, 2020



Mayor

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Manassas City Council

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In Memoriam

Mae Merchant

Parks, Culture & Recreation Staff

Elizabeth Via-Gossman, FAICP

*Assistant City Manager; Director, Department of
Community Development*

Kisha Wilson-Sogunro

Parks, Culture and Recreation Manager

Mary Helen Dellinger, *Museum Curator*

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Christen Fox, *Operations & Maintenance Supervisor*

Rachel Goldberg, *Programs & Events Coordinator*

Jean Griffith, *Administrative Assistant II*

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Ellie Hill, *Visitor Services Aide*

Nikolai Karavodin, *Visitor Services Aide*

Danay Lewis, *Business Services Supervisor*

Nancy Mitchell, *Visitor Services Aide*

Letter from the Chairman and Director

All museums in this time are facing the same challenges: remaining relevant to the diverse communities they serve and finding the financial resources to meet the escalating costs of organizing and hosting exhibitions and programs. The Manassas Museum System is no different and has the added responsibility to develop innovative ways to serve its primary community: the citizens of Manassas. It is these citizens that fund the Manassas Museum System through their tax dollars and we must continue to seek ways to gain their input into what they would like to see while also remaining true to our mission to share the significant historic impact that Manassas has on our region through our historic sites, research and collections. In addition, the Manassas Museum System is an anchor for the City's robust tourism economy as visitors enjoy learning about area history through the museum and historic sites. While only a small percentage of the System's revenues come from visitors, the economic impact of those visitors in terms of dollars spent at restaurants and other retail is real and needs to be maintained.

This update to the System's strategic plan was initiated in 2019 and planned for adoption in Spring, 2020 but in March the Coronavirus Pandemic became real in the City of Manassas as offices and businesses shut down in order to stop the spread of the virus. Overnight, the business plan of the System, grounded in in-person programs and exhibit openings, went virtual as residents and visitors hunkered down under stay-at-home orders. Then, just as a rhythm was emerging for online events and programs,

the City confronted the racial unrest in the Country with protests and marches through the Historic Downtown. The Museum lawn stepped up its role as the "town green" and played host to a What's Next rally for Black Lives Matter advocates proving that the System had an immediate role to play in providing a safe space in which to engage in meaningful conversation. The pandemic and social justice events caused the Historic Resources Board to hold the publication of the 2025 Strategic Plan to allow a reconsideration of the goals and objectives contained in the plan.

This document sets out an updated vision for the System and five ambitious goals for achieving that vision. In particular, the Plan recognizes major opportunities such as the upcoming 150th anniversary of the founding of the Town of Manassas in 2023 and addresses the challenges of becoming a place of welcome, accessible to all of our community. The plan recognizes that the Manassas Museum System is more than a history museum and a collection of historic sites. It is a place of learning and engagement and our vision is that the System will stimulate conversation, develop understanding, and contribute to a better society through engagement and interactive experiences that are relevant, accessible and meaningful to everyone.

Mark Olsen, Chairman, Manassas Historic Resources Board

Elizabeth S. Via-Gossman, FAICP, Director



Black Lives Matter rally



I. Introduction

The Manassas Museum System is not just the Museum itself, but also the City's historic sites including Liberia Manor House, Mayfield Fort, Cannon Branch Fort, Manassas Industrial School/Jennie Dean Memorial, the Southern Railway Depot and the Hopkins Candy Factory. Many of these sites, such as the Manassas Museum and the Liberia Manor House, also provide additional green space to the community with adjacent parkland. Two of these sites, the Depot and the Candy Factory are leased to other non-profit organizations. The Manassas Museum serves as the City's headquarters for the Parks, Culture and Recreation department with staff offices and meeting rooms.

In early 2009, prior to budget and staff cuts due to the Great Recession, the Manassas Museum Staff, Historic Resources Board, Museum Associates and others proactively began to address the need for a clearer mission for the Manassas Museum System and reaffirmed the need for a system-wide strategic plan. The Historic Resources Board took the lead by considering the relevance of a history museum's core purpose – to preserve history. The Board asked each other, "How is preserving history vital to our community?" The Board responded with a profound belief that our history instills pride, promotes civic engagement, and leaves a legacy for future generations. Ten years later, the Board, through the strategic planning process took the opportunity to reaffirm the importance of preserving the history of the Manassas community and the mission of the Manassas Museum System to share the significant historic impact that Manassas has on our region through our historic sites, research and collections. In preparing this strategic plan, the Historic Resources

Board gathered input from a variety of places including the City's biannual Citizen Survey and in-person Community Conversations. In addition, the Museum Staff was successful in obtaining a grant from the American Association of Museums for a peer review assessment of the System's community engagement efforts. That report contained a number of suggestions that the Board considered as part of this planning effort. Lastly, the planning effort was tied to the City's Comprehensive Plan update which identified the acquisition of Annaburg Manor by the City as an additional Manassas Museum System historic site. Two other significant historic sites in the City, the Downtown Water Tower and Old Town Hall are also owned by the City but not included in the Manassas Museum System inventory.

"The Manassas Museum System is now taking the steps necessary to becoming a healthy organization. A new or revised strategic plan for the System should focus on the health of the system, effective and consistent programming across the system and growth of operational income from city appropriations and fundraising before tackling more lofty goals."

*---Norman O. Burns, II
AAM Peer Reviewer, August 2018*



Annie's Porch Exhibit

In reviewing the input from the community, staff and the AAM Community Engagement Assessment, the Historic Resources Board identified the following priority issues that needed to be addressed by the strategic planning process.

- Address space and storage needs by optimizing existing space and seeking funding for an addition to the Manassas Museum to support special exhibits and community engagement
- Focus on 2023 with new exhibits and programming – 150 years of the City, 50 years of the Museum
- Fix the Museum's façade/entrance/signage to be more accessible, welcoming and provide clearer direction for visitors
- Raise awareness and implement a more robust marketing campaign to increase admissions and participation in programs and events
- Maintain the balance between history/culture/arts under the new Parks, Culture and Recreation organization
- Finish capital projects currently underway (Liberia, Jennie Dean, Southside walking tour, Museum addition) before starting any new projects
- Enhance the System's programs with effective and consistent programming

II. What is the Manassas Museum System Experience? What do we want it to be?

The Manassas Museum was created in 1972 when a group of volunteers put together an exhibit created for the celebration of the Town of Manassas' centennial. This exhibit was so popular that a call was made to create a permanent museum. The current facility was opened to the public in 1991 and the System was created when multiple historic sites were acquired by the City. Today the System primarily offers exhibits, both from its permanent collection and special or loaned items, and programs. As part of the strategic planning process, Staff was asked to recount what they felt the current experience was at the Museum and sites and what they felt it should evolve to over the next five years.

Exhibitions

Today visitors to the Manassas Museum System have the ability to experience exhibits in a variety of ways. Within the Manassas Museum itself there are two primary spaces. The first is the "permanent" exhibition. This show has seen little change since opening in 1991 with the exception of Annie's Porch,



opened in 2018. The design is not user-friendly from a curatorial point of view so repeat visitors are not frequent. The updated rear section of the gallery demonstrates how modern graphics can enhance the look of the space and Annie's Porch has real potential as a section where the Staff can engage the community. The barrier to the Porch exhibit is lack of funding to update the audio stories and graphic images. The gallery also suffers from a lack of modern functionality – ways in which the visitors can engage with the exhibit instead of passively looking at them. The second experience for visitors at the Manassas Museum is through changing exhibits shown in the Museum's hallway. However, the linear nature of the space does not allow for much creativity though changing themes do encourage repeat visitors. Additional static exhibits can be found at the Candy Factory, the Train Station and at historic sites such as Liberia, Mayfield and Canon Branch.

The Museum's Curator is primarily responsible for staging exhibits and works to balance exhibits between modern and historic themes in order to reach out to a more diverse audience. In five years, exhibit spaces should be redesigned so that:

- Visitors to the System are engaged on different levels,

- Everyone is represented in the stories that are told,
- The System, and in particular the Museum, is the center of what to do in this community, and
- People are discussing the System based on the experience they had here.

Programs

The programs experience at the Manassas Museum System has been inconsistent in recent years and a new suite of programs is being piloted under new leadership that will:

- Engage the public with the museum and collections,
- Tell the story of all of the diverse people living in Manassas,
- Engage new audiences such as millennials, families, and young professionals, and
- Get people inside the museum building.

The Staff is also participating in a new American Alliance of Museums "Museums Assessment Program (MAP)" program that will help the Museum evaluate how well it is carrying out its educational role and meeting core standards for education and interpretation. This assessment takes into



Native Legacy Exhibit



Bridging Cultures Exhibit Dance Program

consideration the different ways in which museum programs engage the community and other audiences. Using the findings from surveys currently being implemented at pilot programs, and feedback from the MAP assessment, in 5 years, program priorities should consider:

- The large (and growing) Latino population in Manassas, programs and in-gallery interpretation should be accessible in both English and Spanish,
- Enabling Manassas residents to feel a sense of belonging at the museum because programs will help them to make personal connections to the collection and the city's history,
- Establishing anchor programs such as Front Porch Talks, Family workshops, and K-12 educational programs that will continue to broaden the museum's core audiences and ultimately lead to the perception of the museum as a key community resource, and
- Improving accessibility through a variety of pathways such as Facebook live, YouTube, Virtual Reality, distance learning/virtual field trips, etc.

Historic Sites

A benefit of consolidating the Manassas Museum System with Parks and Recreation has been the ability of the new Parks, Culture and Recreation department to strategically complete capital projects and consider the historic sites for their open space value as well as historic value. As a result, the experience at some of the historic sites has changed dramatically in the last five years to be more accessible and welcoming.

Mayfield and Cannon Branch Civil War Forts – the forts are great opportunities for telling the City's role in the Civil War and have the ability to attract a large number of out of state visitors interested in the War. The exhibit at Mayfield is currently being redone and Cannon Branch is slated for FY22. New signage and necessary landscape improvements are part of the upgrades. The sites retain their status as Civil War Trail sites in the state-wide system.



Mayfield Earthwork Fort



Liberia House Park

Liberia Manor House – Liberia has seen the most dramatic changes in the last five years with the adoption of a new master plan which deliberately identified restoration zones versus development zones to allow for strategic viewsheds open to the public. A considerable amount of vegetation has been cleared so that the house is fully visible from Portner Avenue and parking has been added. The garden for Randy Tuberville is in the process of being installed and site signage now tells a variety of stories of both the owners, the enslaved people and the soldiers from both sides of the Civil War. The exterior and first floor of the house have been restored to its Civil War period of significance while the second floor remains in such a state as to talk about the architecture of the period.

Annaburg Manor House – recently acquired, Annaburg will undergo a master plan process in FY21 and the exterior of the house is being stabilized with a new roof, cornice and gutters.

Norfolk Southern Railway Station – the railway station remains open to the public as a working station while also housing the City's Visitor Center and offices of Historic Manassas, Inc.

Hopkins Candy Factory – the building remains leased to the Center for the Arts which has been rebranded as the ARTS Factory!

Manassas Industrial School/Jennie Dean Memorial – another site that has seen dramatic improvements, the Memorial is being upgraded with the installation of a long-planned statue to Jennie Dean and accessible walkways from the parking lot to Wellington Road. Enhanced landscaping and a new exhibit will also improve this important historic site.



(above) Annaburg Park; (below) Jennie Dean Memorial under construction



III. 2020 – 2025 Strategic Plan

Vision

The vision of the Manassas Museum System is to stimulate conversation, develop understanding, and contribute to a better society through inclusive engagement and interactive experiences that are relevant, accessible and meaningful to everyone.

Mission

The mission of the Manassas Museum System is to share the significant historic impact that Manassas has on our region through our historic sites, research and collections.



Naylor Family Reunion at Liberia

IV. Goals

Goal 1

Collaborate with the entire Manassas community to celebrate the City's 150th and the Museum's 50th Anniversary with a year-long celebration and major event around April 2023.

Objective 1.1

Develop specialized programs and exhibitions that engage the entire community that kick-off in the fall of 2022 and continue throughout calendar year 2023.

Objective 1.2

Complete Capital Project C-006 Manassas Museum Addition by December 2022 with a rededication ceremony in April 2023.

Objective 1.3

Offer customized store products and a specialized license plate commemorating the anniversary.

Objective 1.4

Develop a comprehensive theme, marketing plan and communication strategy such as Curate My Community or Celebrate Manassas, increasing the amount of online and print media that features the Manassas Museum System and Manassas community before and after the anniversary.



Goal 2

Increase the impact the museum system has on the overall economic health of the City of Manassas.

Objective 2.1

Organize exhibitions that reach out to new audiences and attract tourists to the City of Manassas.

Objective 2.2

Increase store sales and program registration by 10% over 5 years.

Objective 2.3

Identify opportunities for innovation and deploy new methods of inclusive engagement including encouraging the community to actively use our various spaces.

Objective 2.4

Enhance internet, site and building signage by December 2022



(left) Rohr Car Show (right) interpretation on the lawn

Goal 3

Implement best practices as defined by American Alliance of Museums (AAM) core standards.

Objective 3.1

Prepare for AAM accreditation by submitting for additional peer review grants and implementing a majority of recommendations from those reports.

Objective 3.2

Increase access and diversify pathways to collections accessions by restructuring the Historic Resources Board Collections Committee to broaden community representation.

Objective 3.3

Implement facility and storage management standards for the museum and historic sites by December 2025.

Objective 3.4

Maintain and support a diverse, engaged, and empowered staff to foster an inclusive environment for staff, volunteers and visitors.





Goal 4

Increase citizen satisfaction, accessibility and engagement with Manassas Museum System programs and facilities.

Objective 4.1

Engage a broad representation of the Manassas community to identify a diverse offering of programs and exhibitions targeted to a variety of community interests.

Objective 4.2

Provide a welcoming atmosphere and exceptional visitor experience at the Manassas Museum and System sites.

Objective 4.3

Develop new walking and driving trails around under-represented stories and communities.

Objective 4.4

Partner with MCPS to install a museum quality exhibit on Jennie Dean in the lobby of the proposed new school that will replace the Jennie Dean Elementary School.



Museum Evening for Educators

Goal 5

Engage all community residents to better support diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion of every resident.

Objective 5.1

Convene community stakeholders as part of the 2023 event planning process to understand their perspectives on the different racial and social impacts the System's exhibits and programs have had and can have on residents.

Objective 5.2

Continue to reach out and collaborate with diverse partners on exhibits and programs that have the potential to engage new audiences that previously never or rarely saw themselves in the Systems exhibits and programs.

Objective 5.3

Identify data that can be easily collected and maintained to assist the System in establishing baselines and measuring progress towards developing a goal to better support diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion in all of the System's exhibits and programs.

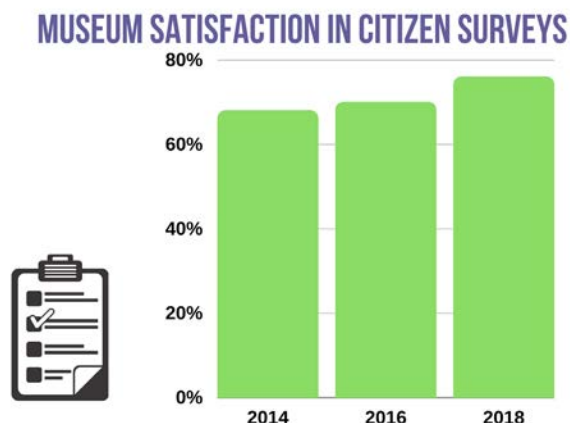
Objective 5.4

Ensure a diverse volunteer and docent representation within the Manassas Museum System and provide appropriate support and training to volunteers and docents as needed.



IV. Success Measures

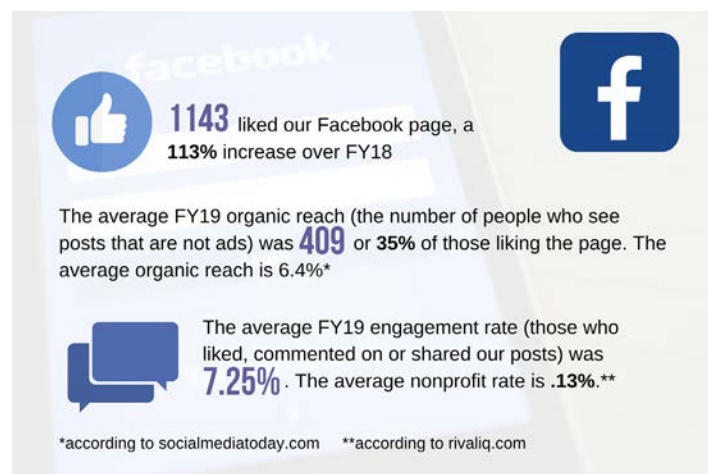
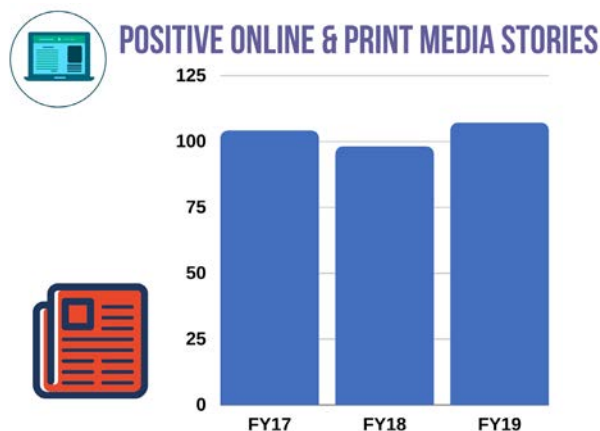
1. Citizen survey results indicating continued upward trend in resident satisfaction with Manassas Museum programs and facilities.



2. Increase in attendance trends compared to peer institutions.



3. Increase in online and print media stories and social media growth.



4. Increase in positive visitor online reviews.





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