THE Discovery Museums
HANDS-ON • MINDS AT PLAY

177 Main Street (Route 27)
Acton, MA 01720
Tel 978.264.4200
Fax 978.264.0210
discoverymuseums.org f t

January 23, 2016

Mr. Peter Ashton
Acton Community Preservation Committee
472 Main Street
Acton, MA 01720

Dear Peter,

It is my pleasure to write the Community Preservation Committee, and all of our donors to the Campaign for The Discovery Museums, with an update on our progress and our project. We remain deeply grateful for the Committee's investment in the Campaign for The Discovery Museums.

I'm proud to report that in many ways, last year was The Discovery Museums' most successful in memory; I've enclosed a copy of my quarterly CEO Update—issued this week—which cites our many recent accomplishments. One was especially meaningful for the Museums and the Campaign: the completion—a year ahead of deadline—of the $3 million Manton Foundation challenge. Without this challenge, we'd never have imagined it possible to take on an $8.4 million campaign and the full scope of our campus-wide expansion and renovation project. As testimony to the many ways this challenge motivated and inspired our donors, we raised $1.8 million in new Campaign funds in 2015, making it the most successful fundraising year in The Discovery Museums' history!

Of course, we are not done yet. Two million dollars and twelve months stand between us and our ultimate goal, in order to keep our building expansion project on schedule for 2017. As always, your ideas, support, and connections mean a great deal to this organization, and make a huge difference for our campaign.

That said, for a $1.5 million organization whose last capital campaign was nearly 30 years ago, we are doing incredibly well. The demonstrable impact of our work with children and families, coupled with the widely recognized integrity of our educational philosophy, has proven compelling to individuals and foundations alike. Our story has found an audience in our community among individuals and organizations that believe in social service, educational access, the importance of play, the cultivation of STEM curiosity, and children's roles in the future stewardship of our natural environment.

We cannot thank you enough for your generous support of our campaign and of our mission. Our best wishes for this new year and I hope to see you when we celebrate the opening of Discovery Woods this summer!

Sincerely,

Neil H. Gordon
Chief Executive Officer

Enclosure: CEO Update January 21, 2016

THE Discovery Museums
HANDS-ON • MINDS AT PLAY

January 20, 2016

As we begin this new year, I'd like to take this opportunity reflect on 2015 and share with you some important benchmarks for strengthening our ability to support kids and families.

2015 was a year in which we focused on four main goals:

- Grow the museum to reach more families and ensure the sustainability of the museum.
- Improve access to ensure that the successful learning experiences we offer are available to all kids.
- Get kids back outdoors, moving, exploring, connecting to the natural world.
- Be a voice for play as the way kids learn, grow, and develop.

Our plans for growth took several major leaps forward in 2015. In October, we celebrated the groundbreaking for our first major physical expansion in 27 years, with work beginning on Discovery Woods, Phase I of a three-phase master plan for expansion and renovation. Discovery Woods will open mid-2016, almost a year ahead of schedule. This was made possible through support of the Campaign for The Discovery Museums.

In December, our Campaign reached an important milestone, completing a $3 million Manton Foundation leadership challenge---a full year earlier than anticipated. Now more than 75% complete, the Campaign is focused on securing the funding necessary to complete Phase II of our plan, the expansion and renovation of our indoor facilities. Toward that end, in 2015 we secured a $500,000 Sangreal Foundation grant; $150,000 from the Town of Acton Community Preservation Fund; $150,000 in state tourism funding, thanks to Senator Eldridge and Representatives Atkins and Benson; $100,000 from the Cummings Foundation; and our third competitive National Institute for Museum and Library Services grant of nearly $150,000. In new gifts and match secured, the community support for the Campaign was $3.6 million in 2015, by far the most we have raised in a single year in our 33-year history.

We grew in other ways in 2015 as well. Our Traveling Science Workshops reached a record 29,455 students in 1,417 classrooms, and we expanded the number of topics offered as we work to align the program with the state's Next Generation Science Standards. We grew in our outreach to parents as well, offering six events in the Discovery Museums Speaker Series. We had more than 1,200 registrants for our Speaker Series events, which were offered in four different communities in our area.

Sparking Discovery in the Classroom
TRAVELING SCIENCE WORKSHOPS

As we grow, we need to grow in ways that ensure we are available and welcoming to all. We are proud that for the sixth year in a row, our Open Door Connections efforts grew, providing free or almost free access to 44,308 kids and families---26% of our 2015 audience. This included nearly 6,400 students, teachers, and chaperones in school programs, and families attending one or more of our Especially for Me events for families with kids or family members on the autism spectrum or with hearing or vision loss. More than 8,000 people took advantage of our free Friday night admission; another 3,500 visited us for free on Highland Street Foundation's Free Fun Friday; and 3,483 made use of our $1 Anytime Admission for EBT card holders and their guests.

Access is a work in progress for us. We are pleased to have completed a year-long self-evaluation regarding accessibility as part of the Massachusetts Cultural Council's UP program, a state initiative aimed at helping cultural institutions become more inclusively accessible. This process has helped us create an agenda for our renovation and expansion efforts. Among the efforts we are starting sooner rather than later is a complete website overhaul focused on accessibility, thanks to a grant from the Sudbury Foundation.

Our efforts to get kids back outdoors were enhanced this year with the hiring of our first Outdoor and Environmental Educator, Rachel Danford. Her efforts, combined with support from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, created Backyard and Beyond, our initiative to reconnect families with the outdoors---starting with their own backyards. A year of outdoor programs has taught us much about how we will use Discovery Woods when it opens in mid-2016. We have set an ambitious goal that 50% of visitors will spend at least 25% of their visit outdoors.

Lastly, we have embraced what much of the research is telling us about the value of play in kids' growth and development. We created Play Matters as an initiative to communicate this messageto families. We launched our Play Matters blog to provide a forum for that conversation. Our social media efforts highlight ways in which play is critical. New staff vests and visuals throughout the museum reinforce our message. We have used the Speaker Series and our Annual Report to communicate this message as well. We want every parent to feel comfortable knowing that open-ended, fun discovery is one of the best things they can do for their kids.

PLAY Matters.

I want to thank the community and the Museums' many supporters, our Board, and our many advisors for making this all possible. Also, I want to thank our staff for their steadfast dedication to our mission. This dedication was exemplified when the New England Museum Association awarded their Excellence Award to Denise LeBlanc, our Director of Learning Experiences. Denise epitomizes the outstanding level of staff dedication I witness daily here at the museums.

I look forward to any feedback from you on our efforts, please email me atngordon@discoverymuseums.org. All the best in 2016.

Best,

Neil H. Gordon
Chief Executive Officer