September 1, 2017

Chairman Woody White
230 Government Center Drive, Suite 175
Wilmington, NC 28403

Dear Chairman White:

The Advisory and Associates Boards of the Cape Fear Museum of History and Science are writing in support of the Museum’s relocation as part of the Project Grace development proposal. After careful consideration, we feel that this move would be in the best interest of the Museum and improve access to the citizens and visitors of New Hanover County.

The Museum’s current location leaves it outside the Central Business District, separating it from the restaurants, businesses, Riverwalk, and other tourist attractions located in the central part of downtown. Relocation to a busier part of the district would increase foot traffic and visibility of the museum. The relocation proposal also lends itself to greater collaboration with the library. The two facilities share many of the same visitors and students, and could create new crossover patrons once they are in close proximity.

The current museum facility at 814 Market Street is aging and will need significant renovations to keep up with the demands of this growing institution. Flooding and wet conditions continue to threaten the Museum’s collection housed in the basement. There are additional challenges to the physical structure including a deteriorating HVAC system. A new facility could correct these issues, improving the visitor experience and preservation of the collection. Furthermore, a new facility would allow the Museum to host larger-scale exhibits, which the current building configuration prohibits.

While we are in full support of a relocation, we want to ensure that the amenities and services offered at the current facility would be available in a relocation project. These needs include:

- Safe bus loading zones for visiting students and groups
- Free parking for museum patrons & staff
- Safe and secure collection storage
- A fabrication workshop
- A freight elevator and loading dock
- Outdoor teaching space
- Adequate resources for exhibit development and fabrication
Although relocation presents tremendous opportunities for the Museum, we are also mindful of the building and neighborhood that the museum would be leaving behind. While the building would likely transition to a new use, we feel it is important to retain the Museum Park. The park is two years old and features the only open green space dedicated to teaching about our region’s unique cultural heritage and environment in downtown Wilmington.

The role of museums has never been more significant as it is today, especially those that teach science and history to the public. We are fortunate to have a museum that is consistently recognized at the state and national levels for its innovative educational programming and exceptional exhibition work. By relocating the Cape Fear Museum, the New Hanover County Commissioners will demonstrate that they are committed to the continued growth of this facility, public education and preservation of the history of the Cape Fear Region.

We acknowledge and appreciate the County’s on-going financial support for the Museum and its mission. While we enthusiastically support relocation, we understand that this option is one of several potential plans for the downtown block. If relocation is not chosen, we look forward to working with the County to renovate and improve the current facility and its exhibits to enhance this cultural gem.

Sincerely,

David Ball, Chair
On behalf of Cape Fear Museum
Advisory Board

Samantha Dooies, President
On behalf of Cape Fear Museum
Associates Board