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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Expansion proposal approved for Cook Museum of Natural Science

The Decatur City Council voted 4-1 to approve an expansion proposal of the Cook Museum of Natural Science's downtown campus during a special session on Monday, August 11.

Museum President and Board Chairman Brian Cook presented renderings of the proposed expansion, including large scale economic development plans to support the growing attraction and further enhance Decatur's downtown district.

The Cook Museum has greatly contributed to promoting tourism in Decatur with visitor attendance increasing from year to year with over 85,000 visitors annually. Since opening in June of 2019, the Museum has welcomed over 512,000 people.

The Museum's immersive exhibit experience and educational programs have already attracted over 77,000 students on field trips since opening, with over 7,700 students participating in add-on STEM classes and camps in 2024 alone. Over 19,000 students are expected to visit the Museum by the end of the 2025 calendar year.

Decatur engineering firm Pugh Wright McAnally has been helping Museum leadership develop their plans for Phase II and beyond.

As the new North Alabama STEM Center, the Museum's expansion will focus on doubling existing classroom space and include a multi-purpose presentation space to accommodate the increasing number of field trips, utilizing the investment of \$9.5 million from the state for that portion of the project.

An additional \$20 million in private donations will fund the necessary infrastructure and expanded exhibit space.

In addition to more educational space, the proposed expansion includes a new parking deck across 4th Avenue from the Museum and a neighboring hotel. Both are to be built on property currently owned by Cook's Properties LLC.

The expansion project is expected to generate revenue for the City of Decatur and local businesses through increased tourism, as well as increase public access to educational

resources for the growing population of students in North Alabama.

“The City of Decatur’s investment along with the state’s means that this project is well on its way to becoming a reality,” Cook said. “We will still need much support from the north Alabama community in the days ahead as we pull together to enhance our area’s education and tourism opportunities. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve our community and region in this increased capacity.”