



*With its combination of history, Pluto, Mars, dark skies, and cutting-edge research, Lowell Observatory with its new Astronomy Discovery Center will be unique in all the world.*

*- David J. Eicher, Editor-in-Chief, Astronomy Magazine*

### **Our Vision**

Lowell Observatory will be the premier public astronomy destination in the world. Our dark skies, professional astronomers, and unique history already set us apart. Once we accomplish the ambitious plan outlined in this document, we will fully realize our vision.

### **The Value of Science Centers**

A growing body of evidence indicates “free-choice” learning experiences at private science centers contribute more significantly to the public’s scientific literacy than science coursework in high school or college. For children, experiences gained in science centers are major predictors for future science inquiry skills and academic achievement.

### **Demand for Astronomy Education at Lowell**

At Lowell Observatory, we provide daily tours covering our astronomical history and current research, and nightly telescope viewing for local, national, and international visitors ranging in age from 2 to 92. The demand for our programming has exploded in recent years. In the last few years, annual visitors have exceeded the capacity of our Steele Visitor Center which opened in 1994 to serve 60,000 guests per year.

In 2015, the year NASA’s New Horizons spacecraft flew past Pluto, Lowell welcomed 96,978 visitors, creating uncomfortable crowding, overflowing parking lots, and hour-long waits to view through telescopes. This visitation peak was sustained in 2016 and 2017, and in 2018 we received over 104,000 visitors. It is possible that some visitors who encounter our crowded parking lots leave Mars Hill, never making it through our doors.

### **An Extraordinary Opportunity**

In April 2016, we began working with Ian McLennan Consulting, of Vancouver, BC, to envision a new Astronomy Discovery Center for Lowell Observatory. McLennan Consulting is internationally renowned for science center design and planning, particularly for astronomy-themed destinations. The McLennan team’s customized planning approach is well suited to our unique institution. Since partnering with them, they have gotten to know Lowell and performed in-depth analyses of the Northern Arizona economy. Their findings indicate a capacity to increase our visitor numbers by at least 50% in the short-term, and 100% in the next 10 – 12 years.

Our consultants have worked closely with our staff and the Flagstaff community to help us select elements for a new Astronomy Discovery Center that are unique to our capabilities while addressing future visitor needs and interests. The new 40,000-square-foot Center will include key destination features:

- **Universe Theater** – This core design feature will be an attraction in its own right, employing features of a planetarium, but customized to continue our emphasis on live presenters. The space will seat 180 guests and include a stage and demonstration equipment. The two-story, 165-degree curved LED screen will wrap around the audience for an immersive experience.
- **Richard F. Caris Dark Sky Planetarium** – Situated on the roof of the ADC, this open-air, circular structure will showcase Arizona’s dark skies as Lowell educators take guests on a live ‘journey’ through the visible stars, constellations, and planets from the comfort of slanted, heated seats. Educators will enhance the familiar laser pointer presentation with built-in audio-visual components for an experience unlike any other in the world.
- **Youth and Family Exhibits** – The new Astronomy Discovery Center will reveal visitors’ connection to the Universe. Two main exhibit spaces will open with the ADC: the Astronomy Exhibit Gallery 1 and the children’s Curiosity Zone. Both will include interactive exhibits such as a rocket building and launching station or tracing atoms in our bodies back to the Big Bang.

Additional new amenities will include a café, expanded gift shop, additional bathrooms, and ample parking to make our guests’ visits more enjoyable. The Astronomy Discovery Center is also expected to provide significant net revenue annually, much of which will underwrite astronomical research at Lowell.

### **Budget and Timeline**

The construction cost for the Astronomy Discovery Center is \$53.6 million and we will raise an additional \$7 million for endowment to support maintenance and future programming. We broke ground on June 26, 2021 and anticipate opening in fall 2024.