

**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF THE RESEARCH AND COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE
Feb. 1, 2024, 9 A.M.
Virginia Museum of Natural History, Room 237 Conference Room A**

Present at the meeting were Dr. Art Evans, Dr. Melany Clark, Dr. Tom Benzing, Dr. David Furth, Dr. Kal Ivanov, Lisa Carter, Dr. Joe Keiper, Abigail Gump, Lauren Coleman, and Ben Williams. Committee members Mark Buss and Dr. Carole Nash were absent. Dr. Art Evans, Dr. Melany Clark, and Dr. Tom Benzing provided a quorum.

Committee chair Dr. Art Evans called the meeting to order. The committee unanimously approved the minutes from the previous meeting. The committee circulated the acquisitions sign-off sheet and approved it unanimously.

Dr. Art Evans informed the board that VMNH Assistant Curator of Herpetology Dr. Arianna Kuhn had accepted a position with the Illinois Natural History Survey. In order to maintain her relationship with the VMNH, the committee had been asked to consider whether or not to recommend Dr. Kuhn as a Research Associate. Evans motioned to recommend her Research Associate status to the full board, which Dr. Melany Clark seconded. The motion was approved.

Dr. Art Evans said that we wanted to devote as much of the meeting as possible to the detailed collections space assessment provided by Research and Collections. The assessment had been requested at the previous meeting. Evans said that it was no surprise that archaeology and paleontology collections were nearing capacity, and the dry insect collections are nearing capacity as well. He said that the idea of expanding the Martinsville branch's footprint to include more room for collections storage appears in the museum's new strategic plan and that he believes the museum should pursue that goal with the same vigor and passion as the Waynesboro branch campus, although he harbors no illusions that it will happen immediately. He added that the Douglas Avenue storage facility, once renovated, will be useful for assisting in short-term collections storage needs, although he views it as a stopgap solution.

Dr. Art Evans introduced Dr. David Furth, a new member of the Board of Trustees who hails from the Smithsonian and has extensive knowledge of museum practices.

Dr. Joe Keiper said that the state maintenance reserve funds will bring back the Douglas Avenue site back to its standards when it was the former Virginia Museum of Natural History, not the standards of when it was a school, meaning it should be suitable for collections storage.

Dr. Art Evans said that he had heard the Douglas Avenue site had a historical designation, but he could not find any reference online. He had been concerned that a historical designation would limit the kinds of renovations that could be done to the facility. Dr. Joe Keiper said that at a Board of

Trustees meeting some years ago, the question came up of whether to rehab the Douglas Avenue site or demolish it. The board decided to keep the site and refurbish it. Once the interior envelope is completed and the HVAC system is running, it will certainly be possible to move some of the collections, such as geology and bryozoans, into Douglas.

Dr. Tom Benzing suggested that the Facilities committee and Research and Collections committee should meet jointly prior to the May board meeting to discuss Douglas Avenue in more detail.

Dr. Kal Ivanov said that archaeology and paleontology are the two departments facing the most struggles when it comes to collections space. Dr. Art Evans said that relatively inert specimens would be the logical first choices to move to Douglas, followed by specimen collections once the building is in a suitable state to house them.

Lisa Carter asked if it was still on the table to include an apartment or some form of housing at Douglas for visiting researchers. Dr. Joe Keiper said it wasn't possible using maintenance reserve funds, since those funds only allow the building to be rehabilitated to the point at which it last served as a museum. However, once maintenance reserve funds have been used to refurbish the building to its previous standards, the museum could use other funds to add housing or other features.

Dr. Tom Benzing asked if it was possible to forecast collections growth over time. Dr. Kal Ivanov said such a thing wasn't really possible, since the museum cannot predict when a large collection will be donated. Benzing said he was hesitant to expand the museum's collections storage and not use the space, but Ivanov insisted that wouldn't be an issue since so many collections are donated and collections are constantly growing.

Lisa Carter asked if VMNH was still prioritizing digitization. Dr. Kal Ivanov said the museum is prioritizing targeted digitization, but that digitization takes a great deal of time and funding. Dr. Art Evans said that a full-time preparator would be a useful addition to museum staff.

Dr. Joe Keiper said that VMNH's site visit for American Alliance of Museums (AAM) reaccreditation will take place between mid-March and the end of April and invited trustees to attend and speak to the reviewers about the challenges the museum faces and the board's dedication to refurbishing Douglas Avenue.

Dr. Art Evans asked that by the end of April, curators provide the Research and Collections committee with a prioritized list of which parts of collections should be moved to Douglas Avenue in advance of the Research and Collections committee and Facilities committee meeting online in May to discuss Douglas Avenue. Dr. Joe Keiper said that the deadline for the list should be April 25, 2025 and that the online meeting should be targeted for the week of May 5, 2025.

Dr. Art Evans adjourned the meeting.