

**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
MINUTES OF THE JOINT RESEARCH AND COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE/FACILITIES  
COMMITTEE MEETING  
May 5, 2025, 2 PM  
Virtual meeting**

Present at the meeting were Dr. Art Evans, Dr. Melany Clark, Dr. Tom Benzing, Dr. David Furth, Dr. Carole Nash, Jennifer Burnett, Dr. Adam Pritchard, Marshall Boyd, Ryan Barber, Jonathan Martin, Jennifer Whitlow, Zach Ryder, and Ben Williams.

Committee chair Dr. Art Evans called the meeting to order at 2 PM. The purpose of the meeting, he said, was to open a channel of dialogue between museum staff and members of the Research and Collections and Facilities committees to set a timeline for moving items in collections from the VMNH Starling Avenue site to the museum's work-in-progress storage facility site on Douglas Avenue. The goal, he said, is ultimately to come up with a multi-tiered approach to addressing collections space needs and to free up space at Starling Avenue.

In response to questions from Dr. Art Evans, Dr. Tom Benzing, Dr. David Furth, and Dr. Carole Nash, Jonathan Martin said that no HVAC work has been done at Douglas Avenue yet as the contractor must first address the lead and asbestos in the roughly 35,000 square foot building. Once that work is done, he said, HVAC updates will proceed. All of the work is funded with maintenance reserve funds that have already been allocated to the museum. When Furth asked if there were still plans to include the construction of apartments for visiting researchers, Martin said that while space could be left for apartments, they could not be constructed with maintenance reserve funds since maintenance reserve can only be used to return the building to its prior state.

Dr. Art Evans asked if heavy collections could be placed on the first floor of Douglas or if they would need to be moved to the basement, and additionally, if it would be possible to begin moving collections to Douglas immediately. Jonathan Martin said that the first part of the renovation project is a discovery phase which will include determining load weights for the first floor. However, given that every room will need maintenance, Martin advised against moving more collections to Douglas prior to the completion of renovations since museum staff will already need to move many heavy specimens that are currently being stored at Douglas.

Dr. Carole Nash asked if Douglas will have a fire suppression. Jonathan Martin said that the contractor has ideas for fire suppression but is also reaching out to the Smithsonian for advice and recommendations.

Dr. Tom Benzing asked if it would be possible to install a freight elevator in Douglas. Jonathan said that anything is possible, but it could not be funded with maintenance reserve funds since the building never had an elevator. Dr. Adam Pritchard added that since collections can simply be loaded into a vehicle on the first floor and driven around the building to the basement-level access doors, an elevator isn't critical.

Dr. Art Evans asked if museum staff had the infrastructure needed to move specimens to Douglas Avenue when the time comes. Dr. Adam Pritchard said that thanks in large part to Marshall Boyd, staff has sourced shelves that could easily be used to store collections that do not need as many environmental controls, which would increase space capabilities for the next several years.

Dr. Art Evans asked if there was a floor plan in place for how space at Douglas Avenue would be allocated. Marshall Boyd said that staff have made rough plans for which collections would go into which rooms with collections generally going to the basement and the first floor being marked for library storage, buildings and grounds equipment, and taxidermy. Evans asked that a key be developed to more easily show committee members which rooms had been marked for which collections.

Dr. David Furth asked if there had been any discussion of compactors in the basement. Marshall Boyd said that there is potential, but it would come with added complexity. Dr. Carole Nash asked if there were special environmental controls being discussed for books and archival documents. Boyd said that the library had already been moved to two rooms on the first floor of Douglas Avenue, and Ben Williams added that a small collection of rare books are in climate-controlled storage at Starling Avenue and the HVAC bubble at Douglas (once completed) should be sufficient for everything else.

Dr. Tom Benzing asked if Douglas Avenue originally had a backup generator. Jonathan Martin said that it did not. Ben Williams added that the -80 degree freezers used for tissue storage — the main reason for a backup generator — would likely stay on-site at Starling Avenue, which Marshall Boyd confirmed.

Dr. David Furth asked if it would be possible to use the Douglas Avenue annex for potential apartments or other purposes. Jonathan Martin said it would not be, since the annex is currently full of uranium core samples.

Dr. Carole Nash asked if the AAM reaccreditation team that recently visited the museum had any insight into how Douglas Avenue could be utilized. Ben Williams said that he joined the team on their tour of Douglas and they were incredibly impressed with the potential of the space, but if they had any specific recommendations, those would likely be in their full reaccreditation report which will not be provided to VMNH until later in the summer.

Dr. Tom Benzing said that it would make sense for the joint committee to meet again after the asbestos and lead abatement work has been completed at Douglas Avenue and the contractor has provided more information. Dr. Art Evans agreed and added that having a floor plan of space utilization provided to the committee prior to the next joint meeting would be very useful.

Dr. Art Evans adjourned the meeting at 2:55 PM.