



**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF THE RESEARCH AND COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE
May 17, 2025, 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. Carole Nash, Dr. Joe Keiper, Ryan Barber, Jonathan Martin, Dr. Collin VanBuren, Lauren Coleman, and Ben Williams. Attending the meeting via Zoom were Dr. Tom Benzing, Dr. David Furth, and Zach Ryder. No committee members were absent and a quorum was provided.

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

Dr. Collin VanBuren introduced himself as the museum's new Visiting Scholar and a vertebrate biologist working out of Dr. Nancy Moncrief's former office. The committee welcomed Dr. VanBuren to the museum.

Dr. Art Evans brought up the May 5 virtual joint meeting of the Research and Collections Committee and the Facilities Committee. The goal of the meeting was get the two committees on the same page regarding the museum's Douglas Avenue facility and the collections that are to eventually be moved there. Dr. Evans said that a map was presented at the meeting that had flagged several of the rooms for different collections materials. With the architectural firm in the process of reviewing the Douglas Avenue rehabilitation project to present the museum the scope of the work, now is the time to put ideas on paper, Dr. Evans said. Dr. Tom Benzing added that money used for Douglas Avenue from the maintenance reserve fund can only be used to restore the facility to its condition in 2008, which means add-ons like apartments for visiting researchers could not be paid for with maintenance reserve funds. Dr. Benzing added that staff should receive an update on cost of asbestos and lead abatement at Douglas Avenue in the coming weeks, and that the two committees should have another joint meeting in about two months when the 60% working drawings from the architectural firm are completed. Dr. Art Evans thanked the museum's curatorial staff for their detailed reports on which collections can be moved to Douglas Avenue and when. Dr. Carole Nash added that it was clear museum staff had put a lot of thought into how Douglas Avenue would be used, which was reassuring.

Dr. Art Evans asked if the committee had any thoughts about its approach to the Museum Without Walls strategic plan, such as recommending the hiring of another employee for Research and Collections. Dr. Joe Keiper said that Research and Collections has greatly increased its staff in the last decade. Discussion has taken place about asking the Commonwealth to fund the hiring of a full-time fabricator, which would potentially be an easier sell since the fabricator would work with multiple departments, including not only Research and Collections but also Exhibits and Education. Dr. Evans said that Research and Collections is the wellspring from which everything else flows at the museum, and he's pleased with the progress that has been made over the last decade. He mentioned that Research Technician Marshall Boyd is a great example of a Research and Collections staffer who works closely with other departments.

Dr. Carole Nash asked if a permanent curator would be hired to replace Curator Emerita Dr. Nancy Moncrief. Dr. Joe Keiper said that the museum will begin advertising for a curator to replace Dr. Moncrief in August 2026.

Dr. Art Evans asked if there were any thoughts about naming the Douglas Avenue facility. Dr. Tom Benzing said a naming opportunity could potentially be tied to upgrades outside the scope of maintenance reserve funding, with the hope that a benefactor might be interested in naming the facility.

Discussion took place regarding the next strategic plan and the topics it should include, such as climate change and invasive species. Dr. Collin VanBuren was directed to work with Ben Williams to compile relevant documents which could potentially be folded into strategic plan after review by the committee.

Dr. Tom Benzing asked when the model *Pelagornis* was scheduled to be installed in the new pavilion. Dr. Joe Keiper said it would be installed during the last week in May.

Dr. Joe Keiper said that Dr. Adam Pritchard was recently promoted to the position of Associate Curator. Additionally, he said, the museum will begin advertising for a new curator of Herpetology in August.

Dr. Art Evans adjourned the meeting.