



City of Arts & Innovation

City Council Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL **DATE: MARCH 7, 2023**

FROM: MUSEUM DEPARTMENT **WARD: 1**

SUBJECT: APPROVE THE DONATION OF A DINOSAUR SKELETON AND CAST TO THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE, EARTH & PLANETARY SCIENCES MUSEUM

ISSUE:

Approve the donation of a dinosaur skeleton and cast to the University of California, Riverside, Earth & Planetary Sciences Museum.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council approve the donation of a dinosaur skeleton and cast to the University of California, Riverside, Earth & Planetary Sciences Museum.

BACKGROUND:

A cast of a complete composite skeleton of the theropod dinosaur *Allosaurus fragilis* collected from the Jurassic period Cleveland-Lloyd Quarry in Utah was purchased for the then Riverside Municipal Museum, today the Museum of Riverside (Museum), in 1978 for \$6,200 (formerly City Asset #21407). It was one of at least fifty such casts produced by the Utah Museum of Natural History and the private company DinoLab. The skeleton contains no genuine fossils, rather is a steel armature with casts of the bones made in fiberglass and plaster.

Records indicate that the entire articulated model skeleton was never publicly exhibited at the Museum, although portions of it were between 1987 and 1997. During that time, elements of the skeleton were broken and stolen by members of the public. The skeleton was removed from exhibit, then partially restored and exhibited in its entirety in November 1997 at the now-defunct Kid Zone (Riverside County Youth Museum) where it suffered significant additional damage and was removed from exhibition in 2001 due to breach of the terms of the loan agreement. In 2015, the skeleton was loaned to the Jurupa Mountains Discovery Center where it was completely mounted for a few years but then disassembled and suffered further damage. The Museum recalled this loan in 2022. By this time, the asset had long since been fully depreciated. Because it was not an authentic fossil skeleton, it had never been accessioned into the permanent collection but was, instead, part of the Museum's inventory of exhibition props.

In addition, the Museum possesses a single large fiberglass cast of the giant ammonite *Parapuzosia seppenradensis*. The Museum has been unable to locate records indicating when or

how this cast came into the Museum's possession. It too is not part of the City's asset inventory and, because not an authentic fossil, was never accessioned into the permanent collection of the Museum. This cast exhibits very minor damage but is in generally good condition. While some small ammonites have been found in the Santa Ana Mountains, this type of ammonite does not occur in Southern California.

DISCUSSION:

The mission of the Museum of Riverside is, "As a center for learning, the Museum of Riverside interacts with the community to collect, preserve, explore, and interpret the cultural and natural history of Riverside and its region."

Neither this type of dinosaur (*Allosaurus fragilis*) nor ammonites as large as *Parapuzosia seppenradensis* are found in the Riverside region. Thus, these casts do not reflect the mission or programmatic scope of the Museum of Riverside and are not envisioned to have a role in future Museum exhibitions or programs. Owing to their lack of relevance to the Museum's collections and programs, the high cost of fully refurbishing the skeleton, the amount of space required to store the skeleton and ammonite, and the amount of space that would be required to exhibit them within the eventually re-opened Museum, the Museum's Collections Committee concluded that the *Allosaurus* skeleton cast and the giant ammonite cast should be donated to an institution that would have a mission-relevant ability to use them.

Staff of the University of California, Riverside, Earth & Planetary Sciences Museum (EPSM) have made a physical inspection of these casts and concluded that they could use both. This institution's mission has a broader paleontological scope than the Museum of Riverside's and can envision use of the *Allosaurus* skeleton cast either in its present fragmentary state or as an educational exercise in fossil skeleton rearticulation.

The Museum proposes donation of the *Allosaurus fragilis* skeleton cast, as is, and the *Parapuzosia seppenradensis* cast, as is, to the EPSM for their own educational purposes. Museum staff will work with the staff of the EPSM to document the transfer and facilitate packing and transport upon approval of the donation.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

The activities of the Museum of Riverside align with the Strategic Priority, "Arts, Culture and Recreation." Making this donation supports goal 1.1 (strengthening Riverside's portfolio of arts, culture, recreation, senior, and lifelong learning programs and amenities) by making available the *Allosaurus fragilis* skeleton cast and the *Parapuzosia seppenradensis* cast to an institution that can use them for educational programs.

Museum activities further support the Strategic Priority, "Community Well-Being." Specific goals supported by Museum programs and partnerships include goal 2.5, which points to fostering relationships between community members and partner organizations.

1. **Community Trust** – Community trust grows when physical educational assets are used as intended and shared with the widest possible number of community members. The Museum works collaboratively with regional museum partners to ensure the relevant and

engaging programming can be offered by all, for all.

2. **Equity** – Expansion of education programs that are offered to all of Riverside’s diverse communities acknowledge the right of everyone to access the results of regional research.
3. **Fiscal Responsibility** – The Museum strives to use its funding responsibly by honing its focus on mission-based collecting activities and on exhibitions and programs consistent with its public programming goals and education policy.
4. **Innovation** – Distribution of physical educational assets to those who can maximize their use is not innovative except insofar as it does not occur as often as it might. The Museum seeks to realize its own potential more fully in part through efficient use of its storage space, collection assets, educational tools, and available human resources to develop programs.
5. **Sustainability & Resiliency** – Responsible use of physical items through appropriate transfer of ownership ensures their continued use, prevents diversion of objects to landfills, and models inter-institutional cooperation.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report. Upon transfer of the educational items noted in this report to another institution, City responsibility for the costs of storage and recordkeeping will end.

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