



City of Arts & Innovation

Metropolitan Museum Board

TO: METROPOLITAN MUSEUM BOARD **DATE: SEPTEMBER 13, 2017**
FROM: MUSEUM & CULTURAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON RIVERSIDE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM ARCHIVES

ISSUE:

Receive update on Riverside Metropolitan Museum Archives.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board receive an update on the Riverside Metropolitan Museum Archives.

BACKGROUND:

In 2016, the Riverside Metropolitan Museum (Museum) was reviewed by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) for re-accreditation as an AAM-accredited museum. According to AAM, "accreditation offers high-profile, peer-based validation of your museum's operations and impact. Accreditation increases your museum's credibility and value to funders, policy makers, insurers, community and peers. Accreditation is a powerful tool to leverage change and facilitates loans between institutions".

Accreditation is based on core standards for museums: the Characteristics of Excellence. The extensive reaccreditation process included a self-study by the Museum, review of supporting documents, site visit and interviews. After conducting this process, AAM elected to table its decision for accrediting the Museum, and notified the Museum on November 1, 2016.

When a museum's re-accreditation decision is tabled, it has the opportunity to improve on the issues that resulted in the tabling decision. The Museum is working to address these issues and submits reports to AAM to communicate the Museum's action plans and progress toward resolving these issues. The Museum's progress report was due April 21, 2017 and the Museum's Final Report is due December 18, 2017.

One of the three (3) major issues cited as reasons for tabling the re-accreditation decision was the storage conditions in the basement of the Main Museum for museum collections.

"The storage conditions of collections in the basement of the main museum remain substandard, despite having been identified as an issue in the last accreditation review and with some progress made in the interim. The museum needs to determine whether more culling of its collections is necessary, whether more resources need to be devoted to rehousing, or both. While this may not

be fully accomplished within the tabling period, we need to see a plan for, and initial steps taken, to improve basement storage conditions.” (AAM Re-accreditation Decision Letter, page 1)

“As the museum staff are fully aware, the collection storage at the main museum building leaves much to be desired. The basement lacks any fine control of temperature and no humidity controls. There is no fire suppression and a lack of seismic protection. Both basement storage areas at the museum are over full; there are overhead pipes and hence a water damage risk. Additionally, there are pest problems of the sort typically seen in older structures present in the museum building. Hence, the collections are being damaged in place, primarily due to swings in temperature and humidity caused by seasonal change, by weather patterns, and by occupancy of the space by staff during the day via respiration of humidity. The pests are a less likely source of damage, but nonetheless are not desirable in the collections areas. The Archive and Natural History collections need to be moved offsite, out of these basement areas...It is imperative to get all storage out of the main building immediately...” (Re-accreditation Site Visit Report, page 3).

DISCUSSION:

AAM has told the RMM, repeatedly, to get collections out of the museum’s basement which is unacceptable for museum storage. Staff believes getting this done is critical in the re-accreditation effort, and that submitting another “plan” to do so would be insufficient. We need to actually move the collections out of the basement.

While the logistics and cost of moving the archives are challenging enough, we are confronted with two other significant challenges:

1. The disorganized condition of the museum archive
2. The need to bring the collection facility up to building and safety code compliance

The museum archive is disorganized. Not only is it disorganized physically, it is disorganized systemically – it is not professionally archived.

Because a comprehensive collections list does not exist, every box has to be inventoried, meaning they have to be opened to be physically inspected. The lack of a comprehensive collections list also means boxes have to be counted and box labels have to be carefully read to determine what collections they belong to.

This process is made more difficult for two reasons: one, the basement space includes several collections that were not properly accessioned into the overall archives and that are either unprocessed or under-processed, and two, many of the boxes have several labels on them including multiple collection titles, box numbers, and multiple accession/collection numbers. In many cases the collection numbers and titles were from previous projects or they were old boxes that were reused for new collections without removing the old labels. This makes the job of determining what constitutes a collection extremely more difficult in the absence of a comprehensive collections list that would ideally tell us the collection title and the number of boxes in it, at the very least.

Some of the collections are in the Argus software program, but because Argus is a museum content management system mainly built to describe single objects, and not an archival collections management system that can represent a collection of items, it is impossible to truly understand the real extent or content of the archival collections in the basement.

In addition, the collections are not processed to a professional standard, and the inadequate finding aids (for approximately 35 – 40 collections only) merely list some of the collections contents. On top of this, most of the finding aids only exist on paper and there are not digital copies. All of this adds to a maze of confusion one has to wade through in order to make sense of the archival collections.

There are several loose boxes, large format objects, picture frames, and other artifacts that aren't clearly related to any particular collection. There are also entire file cabinets that are unlabeled. It will take time to determine where those materials belong and how to connect them back with collections. We will also have to create new collections for these materials or simply label and describe them well enough so that when they are relocated in the collections facility we will have a good starting point for processing them.

Like the rest of the museum's collections, the museum archives have not been properly cared for, do not meet professional standards, and as such violate the museum's own policies as well as its overall duty of stewardship and public trust.

It is not acceptable to rationalize and excuse past practice by stating that “all museums and archives struggle with inventory”. The RMM has not struggled with inventory. We have allowed it to linger. We will now struggle with it and begin the process of proper, professional collections management, to process the collection routinely, and to follow our own policies consistently.

To move the Archives out of the Museum basement, we have to do the following:

PREP THE ARCHIVE IN THE MUSEUM BASEMENT: August – October 2017.

1. Create an overview of the Archival Collection – determine how many collections the Museum has and how many boxes are in each collection. As of this report's publication, we have surveyed one quarter of the archives in the basement and have identified 100 collections.
2. Move high-demand collections to Main Library. Occurring and expect completion by end of September 2017.

PREP THE COLLECTIONS FACILITY TO ABSORB THE ARCHIVES: July 2017 - TBD

1. Rearrange and create space at collections facility.
2. Procure appropriate collections shelving.
3. Bring collections storage facility into compliance with Building and Safety Code.

MAKE THE MOVE (Schedule TBD)

1. Move of Archival Collections out of Museum basement.
2. Review policies and procedures for Museum Archival Collection access and use.

To alleviate the demand for space, Riverside Public Utilities will relocate its collection to a safe storage facility by the end of September 2017. They will keep it until the city develops a proper, professional archives program.

Create an overview of Archival Collection: University of California - Riverside Archivist and Museum Board Member Bergis Jules is advising and training staff to identify how many different collections are in the archives, how many boxes are in each collection, and to label each box appropriately. This process will assist with placement of the archive collections when it is moved to the museum storage facility, so all boxes of a particular collection can be located together. This will facilitate inventory of entire collections. Having the collections more organized will also facilitate research, as it may make it easier to find materials when requested by researchers.

Move high-demand collections to Main Library: As approved by the City Council on July 11, 2017, the following collections will be moved to the Local History Section of the Main Library, where the public will have regular access to them.

1. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps
2. Frank Miller Collection
3. Jekel Collection
4. Clinton Marr Collection
5. Tax Assessors scrapbook from 1933
6. Historic Planning and Mapping Documents

The Main Library is open Monday-Wednesday 11am-7pm, Thursday 11am-9pm, Friday-Saturday 10am-6pm, Sunday 12pm-5pm.

Create space at collections storage facility for Archival collections that are not being moved to Main Library: Non-collections items are being removed from the collections storage facility to make space for collections items currently stored in the Main Museum basement, including, but not limited to the Archival collection.

Procure appropriate collections shelving: Staff is currently working with a vendor to develop quotes for museum-quality shelving and layout of the collections storage facility.

Bring collections storage facility into compliance with Building & Safety and Fire Code: Staff is currently working with Building & Safety and the Fire Department to ensure the collections storage facility meets code requirements.

Plan move of Archival Collections from Main Museum basement to collections storage facility: The physical move of Archival collections from the Main Museum basement to the collections storage facility will involve contracting with movers. Staff will work closely with the movers, and be involved with the move on both ends.

Review policies and procedures for Museum Archival collection access and use: The policies and procedures are being reviewed and revised as necessary to ensure proper permissions and recordkeeping for use of the materials in the archive collection. This will provide information about what collections are used most frequently and how collections are being used, which will inform inventory and digitization priorities.

Public Access: We will create a small archive viewing work space at the collections facility for public access. Once the archival collections are moved there, public access to the materials will be provided on an appointment only basis. It will require an initial email request sent to ArchivesRequest@riversideca.gov that includes a brief description of what is being requested. The request will be assigned to a staff member who will determine, as best possible, if the materials are known to be in the archival collection. If the requested materials are searchable and retrievable from the archival collection, the staff member will schedule the appointment with the requestor to view the materials.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact to the General Fund associated with this report. Moving the archives out of the basement will cost money. The budget will be provided in the next archives update, after we get the vendor quotes and negotiate the contracts.

Approved by: Alexander T. Nguyen, Assistant City Manager/Acting Museum Director