



*City of Arts & Innovation*

# City Council Memorandum

**TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL** **DATE: APRIL 24, 2018**  
**FROM: OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER** **WARDS: ALL**  
**SUBJECT: UPDATE ON RIVERSIDE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM ACTIVITY DURING TEMPORARY CLOSURE PERIOD**

## **ISSUE:**

An update on the Riverside Metropolitan Museum activity during the temporary closure period.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

That the City Council receive and file this update on the Museum's activity during the temporary closure period.

## **BACKGROUND:**

The Riverside Metropolitan Museum may arguably be the most significant municipal building in Riverside. Aside from being a historic government building, as the City's museum, it serves as the embodiment and reflection of Riverside's community, culture and history. And as a museum, its primary purpose is to collect, preserve, care for, exhibit, and make available for education and research, the artifacts and archives in its collection.

In 2016 the Riverside Metropolitan Museum (RMM) was reviewed by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) for re-accreditation as an AAM-accredited museum. AAM "tabled" their decision due to serious deficiencies they found in their evaluation, including some ongoing concerns from their prior review more than ten years ago.

The tabling of the re-accredited decision prompted the City to hire Museum Management Consultants, Inc. (MMC) for a broader and deeper assessment of the museum and its deficiencies. MMC's Assessment Report and Benchmark Report were completed in April 2017 and presented to the City Council on May 23, 2017. The two reports contain 29 recommendations and provide benchmarks against four other museums -- the Bowers Museum, the Longmont Museum, the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History, and the Whatcom Museum. These reports are available online at the RMM webpage.

Business-as-usual had resulted in the City having a museum that could not pass re-accreditation, had low visitor numbers, infrequent exhibition turnover, very old exhibitions,

substandard museum collections care practices, and hence, is in desperate need of reinvention.

In essence, the museum needed to stop business-as-usual in order to conduct a comprehensive reset -- to reorganize; re-tool; re-train staff; focus on the Harada House; begin a professional collections inventory which includes an upgrade to collections care; and to begin planning for the main museum building's renovation and possible expansion.

## **DISCUSSION:**

### **UPDATE FROM ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER ALEXANDER NGUYEN**

#### **Planned Activity During the Temporary Closure Period**

The Main Museum has been **closed to the public** since September 2017. During that time, the primary activity at the museum has focused on the following:

1. The **Museum Archives** were moved out of the museum basement and into the collections facility for safe and proper storage. Meanwhile, the following archive collections are available at the Main Library, which is open Monday-Wednesday 11am-7pm, Thursday 11am-9pm, Friday-Saturday 10am-6pm, and Sunday 12pm-5pm:
  - a) Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps
  - b) Frank Miller Collection
  - c) Jekel Collection
  - d) Clinton Marr Collection
  - e) Tax Assessors scrapbook from 1933
  - f) Historic Planning and Mapping Documents

Public Access: Staff will create a small archive viewing work space at the collections facility for public access, which will be provided on an appointment only basis. It will require an initial email request sent to [ArchivesRequest@riversideca.gov](mailto: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 as 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.

In November 2017, the City Council approved the creation of a new City Archive, to be housed in the new Main Library. The Museum's archives, in turn, will be housed in the City Archive upon completion of the Main Library.

2. The **Heritage House** has remained open. Staff continues to work closely with the Riverside Museum Associates (RMA) and supports their efforts to enhance programming at the Heritage House. This year, the *Annual Ice Cream Social* is scheduled for May 20, 2018.
3. The **RMA Museum Gift Shop** is closed during this period.
4. The **Sycamore Canyon Nature Center** remains open and is supervised by the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department.

5. Staff partnered with the Riverside Art Museum for the **Tlatilco Exhibition** at the Art Museum, which opened in February 2018.



*Tlatilco Exhibition in partnership with Riverside Art Museum*

6. The **Cultural Affairs Division** transitioned out of the Museum Department back into the Community and Economic Development Department.
7. The Museum is continuing outdoor events such as the **Insect Fair**, which is scheduled for April 28, 2018.
8. **Harada House** – staff is conducting, for the first time, a comprehensive structural engineering assessment to determine the requirements for saving Harada House. So far, the assessment has determined that there is substantial dry rot, water damage, and termite damage throughout the building, all of which compromises the structural integrity of the building. The consulting structural engineer is completing the assessment report now. We know that the project will require an architect of record to assess the structural engineer's report and develop plans to proceed. Staff will issue a request for qualifications for such an architect once we have the engineer's report.

Funds will have to be raised to pay for the architect of record. To help with fundraising, the Museum Board's Harada House Project Committee has successfully created the Harada House Foundation, a private non-profit organization dedicated to the Harada House.



*Harada House structural engineering assessment*

9. **Collections Inventory** – the museum does not have a proper inventory of its collections. This is not only a neglect of museum best practices, it prevents the museum from

organizing complete exhibitions, provides uncertainty for research, and it jeopardizes the city's ability to make proper insurance claims if needed. The new museum director will address this deficiency.

10. Staff have started fixing fundamental internal systems and processes, such as timely and accurate grant reporting and completion, proper procurement procedures, and formal written reports to the Museum Board for all discussion or action items, including annual review of the museum's budget, and the Board's roles and responsibility.
11. The **national search for a museum director** resulted in hiring Robyn Peterson in December 2017.
12. The monthly **Museum Board meetings** continue.

In the first several months of the temporary closure, other significant challenges were discovered, and they have been or are being addressed. These include:

1. The attempt to establish a Volunteer Docent Program to keep the Museum open on Saturdays was unsuccessful. To operate a Docent program, the following needed to occur:
  - a) A minimum of forty (40) potential volunteers needed to submit their interest by 5:00pm September 1, 2017 per the instructions in the Volunteer Docent Program Proposal (attached).
  - b) A minimum of forty (40) potential volunteers needed to successfully complete a volunteer interview.
  - c) A minimum of forty (40) potential volunteers needed to successfully complete the Live Scan background check.
  - d) A minimum of forty (40) potential volunteers needed to successfully complete volunteer docent training.

As of the 5:00pm deadline on December 1, 2017, only 30 interested candidates had cleared their Live Scan; therefore, the minimum number of 40 candidates required to operate the proposed Volunteer Docent Program was not met. Hence, the Museum is not open on Saturdays during the temporary shutter period. All 30 interested candidates were informed via email, and they were asked to consider volunteering at the Museum's Heritage House and/or to consider joining the Riverside Museum Associates to continue their support of the Museum.

2. During the move of collections items out of the museum basement, it was discovered that the entire natural history taxidermy collection is likely infested with pests. The collection is being cured in batches through the deep freezing process, with the aid of the University of California Riverside's Botany and Plant Sciences Department lending use of their freezer space.



*Taxidermy Collection*

3. During preparation of the collections facility, it was discovered that the building housed significant amounts of non-collections items, such as furniture or exhibition display cases, all of which had to be removed to make space for collections items.
4. It was also discovered that the collections facility itself was not up to the City's own building and fire safety codes. Staff is currently resolving these issues.
5. Staff discovered incomplete transactions, such as accessions, deaccessions, and grant acceptances, which require retroactive approval by City Council, and has and will continue to process those until they are all cleared.
6. Staff also discovered donations that went unacknowledged, including large monetary gifts for the purchase of Robinson House that were supposed to be recognized with a donor plaque, and staff will now complete this project.

## **UPDATE FROM MUSEUM DIRECTOR ROBYN PETERSON**

### *Summary of Final Report to the American Alliance of Museums for Reaccreditation*

The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) required the Museum to address in its final report several key issues listed in their communication of November 3, 2017. The Museum's response, summarized below, was submitted in March 2018. The AAM has since informed the Museum that the final decision regarding reaccreditation will be communicated to the Museum in July 2018.

1. **Closure:** The Main Museum located on Mission Inn Avenue closed on September 5, 2017, for a three-year period in order to renovate and expand the building, and remove permanent collections from compromised storage conditions in the basement. The closure period was also intended to facilitate overhaul of the Museum's exhibitions, programs, policies, branding, and personnel structure. These processes have all begun; they are and will continue to be informed by an inclusive community engagement process.
2. **Collections stewardship:** Tasks in process include:
  - a. relocate permanent collections from the Mission Inn Avenue location basement,
  - b. increase storage capacity at the offsite storage locations,
  - c. transfer archives to the library,
  - d. transition the collections database to more efficient and user-friendly software,
  - e. improve environmental monitoring, and
  - f. rewrite collections management policies.

A moratorium on new accessions to the permanent collection continues until full curatorial operations resume after reopening. Collection inventory will begin a rolling multi-year cycle upon hire of a Collections Registrar. Resolution of lingering Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) issues nears completion. The federal act known as NAGPRA was enacted on November 16, 1990, to address the rights of lineal descendants, Indian tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations to Native American cultural items, including human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony (National Park Service).

3. **Harada House:** A structural engineer's survey, conducted this past winter, was a significant step forward in understanding and stabilizing the house. The engineer's report is expected before the end of April. The newly formed nonprofit Harada House Foundation intends to undertake private fundraising for the eventual restoration of the house.
4. **Strategic plan:** The RMM's current Strategic Plan covers the years 2016-2021; it was developed prior to the organizational assessment that led to the closure. By the end of 2018, staff expect to complete a new plan that will take the Museum through its 100th anniversary in 2024.
5. **Fundraising, Grants, and Donor Relations:** Between now and reopening, the Museum will form a fundraising division—new in its history—that will ultimately pursue grants and donations, fundraising events, and exhibition and program marketing.
6. **Status of search for an Executive Director:** Completed with hire of Museum Director Robyn G. Peterson, who began her duties on December 20, 2017.
7. **Summarize the Museum's vision for itself upon reopening:** Inclusive and energetic, the new RMM will be a fully transformed institution. Its look, feel, and substance will change. The Museum's renovated and expanded downtown site will be the nexus of an exhibition program at least three times more active than had been true in the Museum's recent history. This exhibition program will serve as the foundation for a full array of school, family, and adult programs year-round. The renewed building itself will convey the message that we intend to embrace the diverse present and imagined future, and tell historic stories through the lens of contemporary concerns and passions. A refreshed, retrained, and professionally augmented staff will maintain a focus on visitor and stakeholder needs above all else. Two aspects of the RMM's operation will have advanced by the time the downtown site reopens, but will not be completed at that time. These include the large-scale and costly undertakings of:
  - a. restoration and interpretation of Harada House, and
  - b. assessing, culling, inventorying, and rehousing the permanent collections.

We will be pushing forward toward the larger goals, and after the task of reopening the main museum is completed, we will intensify efforts on these fronts.

### Renovation Plans and Community Engagement

Museum staff have developed preliminary functional and square-footage requirements and are in communication with General Services regarding the schedule and process for moving forward. Issuance of a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to architects is expected by the first quarter of

2019.

Museum Director Robyn Peterson and Assistant City Manager Alexander Nguyen are holding community engagement sessions with neighborhood and civic organizations. These meetings began in March. The Museum Director is also meeting with community leaders, university personnel, nonprofit colleagues, city staff, collectors, cultural advocates, and others to gather information about the city's aspirations for the Museum. She is forming ad hoc committees that will advise as the renovations are designed and the new programs are developed.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

Prepared by:	Alexander T. Nguyen, Assistant City Manager Robyn G. Peterson, Museum Director
Certified as to availability of funds:	Adam Raymond, Chief Financial Officer/City Treasurer
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Approved as to form:	Gary G. Geuss, City Attorney

Attachment:	Presentation
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