



Museum of Riverside Board Memorandum

City of Arts & Innovation

TO: MUSEUM OF RIVERSIDE BOARD **DATE: OCTOBER 24, 2025**

FROM: MUSEUM DEPARTMENT **WARDS: ALL**

SUBJECT: DIRECTOR'S UPDATE REGARDING THE MAIN MUSEUM RENOVATION, HISTORIC HOUSES, COLLECTIONS, EXHIBITIONS AND PROGRAMS, BUDGET, STAFFING, ADVISORY TEAMS, VOLUNTEER AND SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES, AND MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

ISSUE:

Receive and file the Director's Update regarding the main museum renovation, historic houses, collections, exhibitions and programs, budget, staffing, advisory teams, volunteer and support opportunities, and marketing and communications.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Museum of Riverside Board receives and files the Director's Update regarding the main museum renovation, historic houses, collections, exhibitions and programs, budget, staffing, advisory teams, volunteer and support opportunities, and marketing and communications.

DISCUSSION:

Main Museum Renovation

Work on site continues. Salvage and preliminary demolition continue, as well as underground work, hazardous materials removal, and preparation for next steps. Other matters that have occupied recent weeks include securing permits not already in hand. Weekly meetings that include City staff, contractors, and architects continue. Some historic salvage has been removed from the site. When that process is completed, staff will formally request City Council approval to make donations to the Old Riverside Foundation and the Riverside Arts Council.

Historic Houses

The architectural and engineering design team for the Harada project, K+R Design, continues to work at a brisk pace through the design process. The initial set of drawings looks good. The preliminary plans include path layouts and plant lists, among other items, which staff members are reviewing in detail. The final costs that the Museum was permitted to apply to the federal Save America's Treasures grant were incurred through September 12, 2025. That grant has now expired. The Museum was able to draw \$333,871.48 of the \$500,000 award. Before the winter rains, we will replace the tarp currently protecting the Harada House roof.

Heritage House reopened on Friday, September 5, 2025. While the site is in excellent condition and has benefitted from a number of significant upgrades in recent years, its demands are continual. Staff are reviewing a long list of small projects and will work through as many of those in the next few months as time, budget, and visitor convenience allow. Staff are identifying ways to fund fabrication and installation of the wayfinding signage in phases, as an allocation to cover all costs does not currently exist.

Collections

Collections work continues on the long-term projects. Notable upgrades in the functionality of several small sections of collections storage have occurred. Staff were pleased to welcome new Archivist Steve Mandeville-Gamble, as a number of collections management projects will make quantum leaps forward with that increase in staff support.

Exhibitions and Programs

Quackery & Cures in the Victorian Age opened to praise and delight on September 5, 2025. The theme relates well to *Black Veil*, which is now also installed. The exhibition is supported by several fascinating special programs, one of which took place successfully on opening weekend. Please be sure to stop by to see this exhibition. While many pitched in, the charm of this exhibition and its mode of presentation are due to Katie Grim, Collections Registrar; Jennifer Dickerson, Curatorial Services Manager; Ian Wright, Curator of Natural History; Teresa Woodard, Museum Educator; and Kim Cobb, Associate Educator.

Work also continues with our contract exhibition designer, Riggs Ward Design, to develop the exhibitions that will reopen the main museum. The four exhibitions under development are not all progressing at the same pace, but at this point we remain on schedule for the anticipated grand reopening in mid-2027 (or so). The best-developed exhibitions are the new Nature Lab and The Wall (with a working exhibition title *Unpacking Our Story*). Exhibition elements that are not within the contract exhibition designer's scope are the "jewel cases" in the historic lobby, any elements we install in the central lobby, and interpretation that will accompany the plantings on the roof terrace.

The professional services agreement for Holden Films to produce the Harada documentary has been executed. Staff will schedule a project kick-off meeting, likely in early November. The initial stages of the project will involve the documentarians reviewing the archival material, preparing the first draft of a script, and scheduling interviews.

Please save the date of **Saturday, December 6, 2025** (2:00 – 4:00 p.m.) for a special program the Museum has coordinated. A conversation between Riverside natives and local celebrities Susan Straight (author and distinguished UCR Professor of Creative Writing) and Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson will take place at RCC's Digital Library Auditorium. Both of them will reflect on their experiences with the Museum, museums in general, and other cultural influences that enriched their early years in Riverside. This ticketed event is priced at \$50 (in-person) and \$35 (digital), which includes an autographed copy of Susan Straight's most recent novel.

The Museum concluded its "quiet" summer season, and programming has ramped up. Staff recently made revisions to the Nights with the Museum program. Going forward, it will take place on the fourth Thursdays from February through October, that is, going dark during the winter months when Festival of Lights and holiday activities have been challenging for this program series.

Date	Program	Location	Volunteer opportunity?
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October 3 – November 2, 2025	Behind the Black Veil themed tours through November 2, 2024	Heritage House	Yes – consider becoming a docent!
October 24, 2025	“All That Creeps and Crawls,” evening family event (with plinko!), 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.	Heritage House	Yes
October 25, 2025	Statewide historic preservation event: Doors Open. We will open the gates at Harada House, 1:00 – 5:00 p.m.	3356 Lemon Street	Yes – contact Robyn
November 1-2, 2025	Find us at the big downtown Dia de los Muertos event, which will take the place of First Sundays this month.	Market Street	Yes!
November 6, 2025	Artswalk, 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. The activity will be advent calendars.	Main Street	Yes
November 15, 2025	Quackery-themed concert in the gardens, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m.	Heritage House	No
November 21, 2025	Movies on the Lawn features <i>Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i> (1941), screening starts at 6:30 p.m.	Heritage House	No
November 22, 2025	Nature hike with Curator of Natural History Ian Wright, 9:00 a.m.	Castlevue Park	No
November 23, 2025	Last day to see <i>Quackery & Cures in the Victorian Era</i>	Heritage House	No
December 4, 2025	Artswalk, 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. Set your table with conifers.	Main Street	Yes
December 6, 2025	“Home and Story,” a conversation program with Susan Straight and Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson, 2:00 – 4:00. Event is ticketed.	RCC Digital Library Auditorium	Maybe (hosts)
December 7, 2025	First Sundays, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. Conifers with cookie ornaments.	Main Street	Yes
December 14, 2025	Christmas Open House, noon – 4:00 p.m.	Heritage House	Yes

Budget

While financial caution continues at the City, the Museum is incrementally moving ahead with as many hires and projects as it can. Preparation of the biennial budget for FYs 2026-2028 continues, with staff working to anticipate operating costs for a building that doesn't yet exist.

Staffing

All staff members continue to take on heavy workloads, which is the result of not having enough positions as well as not having those positions allocated to us all filled. We're pleased that Steve Mandeville-Gamble, formerly of UCR Libraries, has joined our staff as Archivist, reporting to Jennifer Dickerson, Curatorial Services Manager. The next recruitment will be a Marketing and Outreach Assistant, reporting to Chantal Downing, Institutional Advancement Coordinator. Former intern Oliver Huerta joined Maha Shbaita as our second Heritage House weekend staffer. Heritage House weekend staff are hired through a temp agency.

Advisory Teams

If you haven't selected an advisory team, we hope you will. Please contact Robyn Peterson if either you or someone you know has expertise and interest in any of our teams. The *ad hoc* Community Advisory Team for the immigration exhibition is the only one not open to new members.

Committee / Team	Meeting interval	Role	Chair	Next meeting
Collections	Every other second Wednesday	Advising on collections activity	Jennifer Dickerson	January 14, 2026

Harada House Project Team	Every other first Friday	Programs and communications regarding Harada House	Acting chair Robyn Peterson	December 5, 2025
Grand Reopening Steering Team (to evolve after 2027 into the Marketing Advisory Team)	Expect meetings to increase in frequency up to reopening	All aspects of reopening events and communications; general public communications, PR, website	Chantal Downing	October 29, 2025
Programs	Every other first Wednesday	Program development, implementation, and coordination with partners	Jennifer Dickerson	November 5, 2025
Immigration exhibition Community Advisory Team	Intermittent beginning late January 2025	Advising during planning for the immigration exhibition, estimated to be two years	Robyn Peterson	Pre-set meeting scheduled has concluded. Next meeting TBD as exhibition finalization becomes more clear.

Volunteer and Support Opportunities

We encourage all Board members to go through the entire process to become City volunteers. Steps include registering with the City's new volunteer management software system (<https://riversideca.cervistech.com>.) and being Livescanned. **Please note:** talk to Teresa Woodard about available volunteer opportunities and create your profile on Cervis before proceeding to additional steps.

Marketing and Communications

As of the writing of this report, the new website is expected to have launched by the time of the Board meeting. Please share your thoughts with us on all aspects of it, keeping in mind that staff's intention is to enrich it significantly over the coming months. The wait has been very long, so it was a priority to launch it with the basics as soon as we could.

Please continue to let us know when you see advertisements, articles, or any other mention of the Museum. In particular, staff have been providing features for the *Raincross Gazette* and hope you have seen them.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

Prepared by: Robyn G. Peterson, Ph.D., Museum Director
Reviewed by: Ann Lovell, Manager of Operations