



City Council Memorandum

City of Arts & Innovation

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL DATE: JUNE 23, 2026

FROM: MUSEUM DEPARTMENT WARDS: ALL

SUBJECT: DEACCESSION FROM THE PERMANENT COLLECTION OF ONE (1) LOT OF INDIAN WELLS ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIALS INCLUDING ANCESTRAL REMAINS (A744), ONE (1) PALM SPRINGS OLLA (A5-234), ONE (1) DESERT HOT SPRINGS MANO (A513-1), AND ONE (1) COLLECTION OF PALM DESERT ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIALS (A688-21(2), A688-25, A688-25(1), A688-27(1-3), A688-28(1-7), A688-31) ASSOCIATED WITH THE AGUA CALIENTE BAND OF CAHUILLA INDIANS

ISSUE:

Approve deaccession from the Museum of Riverside’s permanent collection one (1) lot of Indian Wells archaeological materials including ancestral remains (A744) one (1) Palm Springs olla (A5-234), one (1) Desert Hot Springs mano (A513-1), and one (1) collection of Palm Desert archaeological materials (A688-21(2), A688-25, A688-25(1), A688-27(1-3), A688-28(1-7), A688-31) associated with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council approves deaccession from the permanent collection one (1) lot of Indian Wells archaeological materials including ancestral remains (A744) one (1) Palm Springs olla (A5-234), one (1) Desert Hot Springs mano (A513-1), and one (1) collection of Palm Desert archaeological materials (A688-21(2), A688-25, A688-25(1), A688-27(1-3), A688-28(1-7), A688-31) associated with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

BOARD RECOMMENDATION:

At its regular meeting on April 22, 2026, the Museum of Riverside Board, with eight (8) members present for this vote and one (1) absent, unanimously voted to recommend that City Council approve deaccession from the permanent collection of one (1) lot of Indian Wells archaeological materials including ancestral remains (A744) one (1) Palm Springs olla (A5-234), one (1) Desert Hot Springs mano (A513-1), and one (1) collection of Palm Desert archaeological materials (A688-21(2), A688-25, A688-25(1), A688-27(1-3), A688-28(1-7), A688-31) associated with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

BACKGROUND:

Over several years, the City of Riverside’s Museum Department acquired and accessioned the objects and human remains described in this report. In 1953, the City of Riverside’s then-named Municipal Museum acquired and accessioned one (1) olla (A5-234) donated by Mr. F.A. Little (1868-1965), who removed it from a cave near Palm Springs in 1910. In April 1967, Ms. Charlotte Stocks donated to the Museum a mano (A513-1) previously removed from Palm Oasis in Southern Desert Hot Springs. During the mid- to late-twentieth century, Jeff Backstrand and Richard Heller removed materials from several archaeological sites around Riverside County. These included areas described to have been in Palm Desert that are of cultural significance to the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. This includes a soil sample (A688-31), ceramics (A688-25), and lithics (A688-21(2), A688-25(1), A688-27(1-3), A688-28(1-7)). In 1969, Mr. Larry Bowles and Mr. Grasso removed archaeological materials, including human remains, from and around Indian Wells near Palm Springs. These resources were donated and accessioned into the Museum collections in 1971.

During a 2025 consultation with representatives from the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, bone was identified and analysis was requested. The 2026 analysis confirmed the presence of human remains. The objects associated with the ancestral remains are funerary.

DISCUSSION:

The term “deaccession” refers to the procedure of formally removing an object from a museum’s permanent collection, after which the object may be considered for sale, exchange, gift, transfer to another entity, transfer to a collection other than the permanent collection, or – in the case of irretrievably deteriorated objects—disposal.

To “accession” an object is the process of including it formally in a museum’s permanent collection, which is the category of collection for which the greatest effort will be made to preserve the object in perpetuity and document it fully.

The Museum continues to fulfill its responsibility to North American Indigenous peoples and in compliance with Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), 25 USC 3001 et seq. NAGPRA was enacted on November 16, 1990, to address the rights of lineal descendants, Indian tribes, and Native Hawai’ian organizations seeking repatriation of human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony. NAGPRA is administered by the National Park Service (NPS).

The National Park Service defines an object of cultural patrimony as:

An object that has ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance central to a Native American group, including any constituent sub-group (such as a band, clan, lineage, ceremonial society, or other subdivision), according to the Native American traditional knowledge of an Indian Tribe or Native Hawaiian organization. An object of cultural patrimony may have been entrusted to a caretaker, along with the authority to confer that responsibility to another caretaker. The object must be reasonably identified as being of such importance central to the group that it:

- (1) Cannot or could not be alienated, appropriated, or conveyed by any person, including its caretaker, regardless of whether the person is a member of the group, and

(2) Must have been considered inalienable by the group at the time the object was separated from the group.

The National Park Service defines funerary objects as:

Any object reasonably believed to have been placed intentionally with or near human remains. A funerary object is any object connected, either at the time of death or later, to a death rite or ceremony of a Native American culture according to the Native American traditional knowledge of a lineal descendant, Indian Tribe, or Native Hawaiian organization. This term does not include any object returned or distributed to living persons according to traditional custom after a death rite or ceremony. Funerary objects are either associated funerary objects or unassociated funerary objects.

Following correspondence and in-person consultations with representatives of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians (ACBCI), it was determined that these objects and ancestral remains were removed from four areas identified as being of cultural significance for the people ACBCI. The Museum consulted with representatives from the ACBCI including Xitlaly Madrigal, NAGPRA Supervisor, with in-person consultations taking place on September 22, 2025, and February 19, 2026. During the consultation in February, the Museum hired an osteologist recommended by the tribal representatives to review bone fragments, which were confirmed to be human. In-person consultations also determined that the materials and ancestor(s) described in this report are associated with Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

The Museum's decision to deaccession is the next step to ensure the Museum's compliance with NAGPRA. The Museum's Collections and Exhibitions Management Policy, Section 4.2, lists conditions that must apply to deaccession from the permanent collection. Compliance with state, federal, or international law is at the top of that list.

Respecting tribal wishes, funerary and sacred artifacts and resources are not photographed for inclusion in published reports.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

Prepared by:	Robyn G. Peterson, Museum Director
Reviewed by:	Julie Nemes, Interim Finance Director
Approved as to form:	Rebecca McKee-Reimbold, Interim City Attorney
Reviewed by:	Kris Martinez, Assistant City Manager

Attachments:

1. Museum Board draft minutes – April 22, 2026
2. Museum Board deaccession recommendation report – April 22, 2026