



City of Arts & Innovation

Museum of Riverside Board Memorandum

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TO: MUSEUM OF RIVERSIDE BOARD **DATE: FEBRUARY 4, 2026**

FROM: MUSEUM COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: RECOMMENDATION TO THE MUSEUM OF RIVERSIDE BOARD TO RECOMMEND THAT CITY COUNCIL APPROVE DEACCESSION FROM THE PERMANENT COLLECTION OF NINE (9) PLASTER-CAST REPRODUCTIONS OF FOSSIL ANIMAL SKULLS

ISSUE:

To recommend that City Council approve deaccession from the permanent collection of nine (9) plaster-cast reproductions of fossil animal skulls.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Museum of Riverside Board recommends that City Council approves deaccession from the permanent collection of nine (9) plaster-cast reproductions of fossil animal skulls.

BACKGROUND:

At its meeting on November 11, 2025, the Museum of Riverside's (Museum) Collections Committee voted unanimously in support of recommending that the Museum of Riverside Board forward a recommendation to City Council for deaccession of nine (9) plaster-cast reproductions of fossil animal skulls.

These skulls were purchased from the Page Museum (currently called the La Brea Tar Pits & Museum) for use in the then-named Riverside Municipal Museum, which was planning a remodel in 2000 that was never completed. The original intent is surmised to have been an exhibition of ancient life in one area of the Museum. In spite of the fact that they are plaster copies and not original fossils, the plaster-cast skulls were accessioned into the permanent collection. Records indicate that they have never been exhibited.

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 objects in question are nine (9) fossil casts of nine different extinct taxa that lived in the region during the Pleistocene (2.6 million to 11,700 years ago). They are plaster reproductions of original fossils and have been painted brown to resemble the weathering seen on fossils recovered from the La Brea tar pits. They range from a few inches in size to over two feet x two feet x two feet. The two most recent acquisitions were purchased in 2000.

As these are reproductions and not actual fossil specimens, there is little research value in the objects. Any scientific inquiry would be directed to the original fossils themselves rather than mass-produced castings. The best purpose these casts serve is exhibition to the public in the form of community “mini-museums,” and staff propose to reclassify these objects to the Community Collection. Objects in this category of collection may be used at locations such as library branches, schools, and community centers where there will likely be lower standards of environmental and security controls than in museum galleries. These specimens are relatively hard-wearing, meaning that they would stand up well on exhibition and in fact do not require the rigorous environmental controls demanded of our permanent collections. Deaccessioning these objects from the permanent collection to the Community Collection will expand their utility, free up valuable storage space in high grade permanent collections storage and will negligibly impact the condition and life-long utility of objects created for exhibition purposes in the first place.

Justification for this recommendation is drawn from the Museum of Riverside’s Collections and Exhibitions Management Policies where it is codified that the process of deaccession may be initiated when:

- The object/specimen has failed to retain its identity or authenticity, or was accessioned inappropriately or on the basis of false information (for example, replicas or forgeries)

Best practices today rarely support the accession of replicas such as these.

The photographs included represent only a selection of the nine (9) casts.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

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

