

White Paper Report

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White Paper

Grant Number: PF-50021-10

Title: Developing a Master Preservation Plan for Collections at the Museum of History and Art

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Grantee Institution: City of Ontario – Museum of History and Art, Ontario

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Narrative Description

Project Activities

In June 2010, the Museum of History and Art, Ontario was awarded a \$40,000 Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections planning grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to engage a team of three highly qualified consultants to develop a *Master Preservation Plan for Collections* to guide the professional care and stewardship of the museum's collections. The consultant team included Katherine Untch, a fine arts conservator, Michael Henry, an engineer/architect and environmental management specialist, and James McLane, a historic preservation and LEED certified architect. They worked with staff of the museum and the City of Ontario which is the museum's parent organization. Museum and City staff include the Museum Director, Curator, and Museum Assistant, Community and Public Services Agency Director, the Equipment and Facilities Director, the Public Facilities Maintenance Manager, and two City Planners responsible for the city's Historic Preservation and Certified Local Government program. The project resulted in a *Master Preservation Plan for Collections* report that will provide museum staff and city officials with much needed professional guidance for addressing collections preservation issues in the museum's existing historic building, which was constructed in 1936-7 as Ontario's second City Hall.

The *Master Preservation Plan* provides additional guidance on the importance of developing strategies to balance collections needs and vulnerabilities with the performance capacity of the historic building and its envelope. including appropriate passive and active measures to mitigate risks to stored collections. The plan emphasizes reasonably achievable targets for collections environments, as well as solutions that are energy and cost efficient, respect the historic fabric of the museum and make efficient use of available storage spaces by utilizing the most effective storage methods and furniture.

Changes in the Project

Project activities occurred essentially as envisioned in the original project proposal, with a small change in the contracting arrangements for the project consultants. There were no substantive omissions in the project although its timeframe ran longer than originally planned due to staffing issues/medical leave. The longer time frame however, enabled the museum staff to gather more complete environmental (temperature/humidity) data for the consultants to analyze. Because of the major recommendations of the consultants regarding the museum building, the final report resulted in a more generalized set of recommendations than was perhaps originally envisioned as explained below. There were no changes in key project personnel during the project. Katherine Untch left ARG late in the project term, but the report was nearing a complete draft by that time

and other ARG staff were able to respond to comments from museum staff and complete the final report.

Publicity efforts on this project were rather limited since the scope of activities fell primarily in internal study and consultation. The receipt of the grant and its purpose were shared with the museum's support base through the quarterly newsletter.

Accomplishments

In quantitative terms, the project occurred as originally envisioned. Museum staff gathered building plans and data for the consultants. The consultants reviewed the material. All three consultants visited the museum together, conducted detailed physical inspections and interviewed museum staff. The consultant team, led primarily by Michael Henry, led a lively discussion charette which included museum, city building/facilities staff and city planning/Historic Preservation staff. The museum purchased new environmental data loggers and engaged in 18+ months of data gathering for Henry to evaluate in the final report.

In qualitative terms, the project resulted in a more generalized report than was perhaps originally anticipated. Early in the site visit, the significant and overarching challenges faced by the museum with regard to collections preservation became apparent to the consultants. These were discussed with the full city team at the charette and the need for the character of the report to be more 'macro' in nature, especially regarding large scale facility issues and staffing needs. These pushed back the emphasis on collections-specific solutions until steps are taken to address these needs. A full analysis of the environmental data gathered was conducted, however, providing the museum team with full information on environmental conditions to include in future decision making.

Two of the most significant recommendations relate to a structural study of the museum building and the addition of a Collections Manager to the museum staff. The museum's approach to addressing these issues is discussed below in Continuation of the Project.

Audiences

This Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections project was primarily an internal project and, while receipt of the grant and its purposes was shared with museum stakeholder groups through the museum's newsletter, there was not much to be shared with the general public.

Evaluation

There was no formal evaluation component to this project.

Continuation of the Project

The receipt of this Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections grant occurred at a critical juncture in the museum's history as the Board of Trustees and other key stakeholder groups were about to begin a fuller Institutional Assessment project to study all of the museum's activities in the context of professional museum operations. This Institutional Assessment is intended to serve as 'data gathering' to be used in an upcoming Strategic Planning project to outline the next phase of the museum's development. Throughout 2013, six Assessment Teams consisting of museum board members, volunteers, donors, and community supporters engaged in assessments of the museum's operations using the American Association for State and Local History's StEPS program as a guideline. The Collections Stewardship Assessment team had access to the draft Master Preservation Plan produced with this grant as part of their work.

Following the initial recommendations of the SCHC consultants that the museum building needed to undergo some serious structural study, museum and city staff discussed several options. The consultants initially suggested a more limited-scope 'Structural Assessment' might suffice. The building has not undergone any kind of structural assessment at all since becoming the museum and the Director of the city's Community and Public Services Agency (of which the museum is a department) determined that the most prudent course would be a full scale Structural Analysis to fully understand the building's current condition. This is a considerably larger financial investment for the City than a limited-scope assessment and the Community Services Director and Museum Director began the process of bringing this need to priority consideration with City administration. This took some time but funding was secured for a full Structural Analysis in the FY 2013-14 city budget and the same preservation architectural firm (also LEEDS certified) that participated in the grant project - Architectural Resources Group (ARG) was selected to lead and coordinate the effort to conduct a full scale structural assessment.

This continuity, of using the same firm that participated in the grant, is, we believe, a critical factor that will result in a comprehensive set of building documents and information, ready for the bidding phase of changes to the building. The grant project has led to a deeper understanding and support, not only amongst museum staff, but also within City Administration, for what needs to be done in order for the museum to achieve a more professional standard of collections care and management, mindful of the preservation requirements of the museum's historic building.

Within City Administration, these discussions also brought forward a fuller awareness of the role of the broader Institutional Assessment project and an understanding that once the Structural Analysis and the Institutional Assessment project are completed, the museum/city will have a large 'data set' of information on the existing condition of the museum building, the state of the museum's current operations and considerably information regarding community demand for museum programs to undergird the new Strategic Plan. Most of the other issues identified in the Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections grant project will then be considered within that larger Strategic Plan.

Long Term Impact

The long term impacts of the Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections grant received by the Museum of History and Art, Ontario are likely to be significant – albeit largely behind the scenes and integrated into the implementation of the new strategic plan. This is in keeping with the museum’s historical development to become a community-based, professional museum. Within the goals of the Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections grant program, this grant will also provide significant frameworks for decision making that is sustainable in environmental terms, financially and in terms of the museum and city organizational culture.

Grant Products

The primary product of the grant is the Master Preservation Plan for Collections which is attached as an appendix.