



To: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services
Committee

Date: June 27, 2017

From: Jane Fernyhough
Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services

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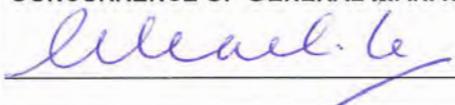
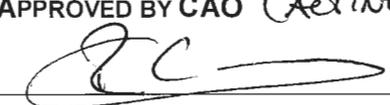
Re: **Museum Artefact Visible Storage**

Staff Recommendations

1. That the report titled 'Museum Artefact Visible Storage' dated June 27, 2017 from the Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services, be received for information; and
2. That the concept of artefact visible storage be considered in the Artefact Storage Warehouse project and the Museum Models Evaluation Study.

Jane Fernyhough
Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services
(604-276-4288)

Att: 1

REPORT CONCURRENCE	
CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER 	
REVIEWED BY STAFF REPORT / AGENDA REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE	INITIALS: 
APPROVED BY CAO (Active) 	

Staff Report

Origin

At the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee meeting of December 21, 2016 the following referral motion was endorsed:

That staff research options for an open purpose storage museum at an existing location in Richmond in place of building a museum at this time.

This report analyzes two types of open (visible) storage and outlines strengths and weaknesses of this method of displaying artefact collections.

This report supports Council's 2014-2018 Term Goal #2 A Vibrant, Active and Connected City:

Continue the development and implementation of an excellent and accessible system of programs, services, and public spaces that reflect Richmond's demographics, rich heritage, diverse needs, and unique opportunities, and that facilitate active, caring, and connected communities.

2.4. Vibrant arts, culture and heritage opportunities.

Analysis

Visible Storage Museum Overview

Visible storage, (sometimes referred to as open storage) is a method of displaying the vast majority of artefacts in a museum's collection. The artefacts are frequently grouped according to culture, location or subject.

For many reasons such as the desire to show previously hidden artefacts in the collection, the lack of storage space and the need to compete for audiences, the current trend in museums appears to be toward visible storage, either as part of a museum facility or part of a collection storage facility.

This is a way museums across the world are preserving their collections in beautiful, yet safe, environments that offer museum-goers a window into the daily operations behind-the-scenes, all the while maintaining tight conservation control over storage systems and collections.

The visible storage areas are generally side-by-side with curated and interpreted spaces in museums and back of house work and conservation spaces in storage facilities.

The proponents of visible storage believe that it is important to show as many artefacts in the collection as possible. The detractors of visible storage cite the frequent practice of displaying a plethora of objects with little interpretation beyond short entries in a Collections Database; the artefacts simply appear to be a "case or shelf of objects" with no stories, context or interpretation.

Attached are images of examples of visible storage. (Attachment 1)

Types of Visible Storage

There are two types of visible storage:

1. Artefact storage facilities that provide public access; and
2. A museum that uses visible storage to display part or most of their collection.

1. Artefact Storage Facilities That Provide Public Access

Artefact storage facilities that invite public visitation must be designed or retrofitted to accommodate the needs of visitors, and to safeguard the collection. These facilities are working Collections Storage Facilities and give visitors a behind-the-scenes feeling in a slightly unpolished, industrial environment. Visitors are generally welcomed in tours, or during supervised programs and events.

- Supervised access is generally limited to small-to-medium tours.
- Depending on the type of visitor access, the use of moving shelving must be assessed for safety issues. This may lead to an increase in storage area required.
- Artefact storage space should have a controlled environment (for temperature, relative humidity and light) to store and display the museum's artefacts.
- Unsupervised access to visible storage facilities is only recommended when the artefacts are securely housed (usually in secured glass cases to provide visual access). Some level of staff supervision or security is also required.

Requirements

- While visible storage doesn't require quality museum designed space, it still requires quality environmental controls, open spaces, adequate lighting and racking to ensure security, protection of the collection and accessibility.
- Requires additional knowledgeable staff to provide interpretation and supervision of visitors as artefacts are densely packed on shelves with no interpretation or security.
- Lighting controls and specific collection protection may be required depending on what is placed in visible storage.
- Typical museum security still required.

Advantages of Visible Storage Facilities

- Allows the public and source communities (i.e. First Nations and other cultures where objects originate) to view the vast majority of the City's historical artefact collection.
- Can create an atmosphere that makes artefacts feel like treasure chests or cabinets of curiosities and an exciting peek into what is behind the scenes.
- Advantageous for researchers who wish to make a quick visual assessment of collection.

Disadvantages of Visible Storage Facilities

- Additional security measures must be taken, i.e. secure, visually accessible (usually glass) shelving, security staff, cameras, etc.
- Lacks the interactivity of exhibitions.
- Would not apply to all in the collection to ensure protection of some materials. Sensitive materials, such as fabrics, watercolour paintings and photos, may need additional/specific protection or may not be visually accessible. This can be addressed by using low light levels or lighting that is triggered by motion or another form of activation.

Public tours of the main Richmond Collection Storage facility on River Road are conducted several times per year. These popular tours are necessarily small due to limited circulation space and security.

2. Museum that Uses Visible Storage to Display their Collection

The Museum of Anthropology and the Beaty Biodiversity Museum, both at UBC, are examples of museums that use visible storage to display and store their collections. The Museum of Anthropology was one of the first museums to use the visible storage display method and is internationally recognized as a world leader in this area. However, they are currently expanding their temporary exhibit space to provide more storytelling and interpretation. The artefact collections in both these museums are housed in state-of-the-art display cases that provide visual appeal and security for the objects they contain. Both museums have made efforts to provide interpretation throughout their facilities.

Key Features of Visible Storage Museums

- Display cases are arranged using a chosen organizational structure (e.g. geographic, cultural, artefact type or content).
- Cases are visually appealing (often glass) to ensure visitors can view all artefacts.
- Cases are secure to ensure visitors cannot touch or otherwise damage artefacts.
- Museum galleries must have controlled environments (for temperature, relative humidity and light).
- Some artefacts are not on display due to their fragility, rareness or for cultural reasons.
- Access to a Collections Database can provide limited information about each artefact.

Requirements

- Lighting control is required to protect some materials as these items will be permanently 'on display'. Sensitive materials, such as fabrics, watercolour paintings, and photos, need additional/specific protection or may not be visually accessible. This can be addressed by using low light levels or lighting may be triggered by motion or another form of activation.
- Typical museum security still required.

Advantages of Visible Storage Museums

- Allows the public and source communities (i.e. First Nations and other cultures where objects originate) to view the vast majority of the City’s historical artefact collection.
- Advantageous for researchers who wish to make a quick visual assessment of the collection.
- Provide alternatives to traditional museums. Could be facilitated within warehouses and non-traditional museum facilities.

Disadvantages of Visible Storage Museums

- Artefact cases tend to have limited interpretation. Cases are generally not as engaging to the public as conventional exhibitions, as less context or explanation is provided – the stories are missing and they lack the interactivity of exhibitions. Knowledgeable staff are required to provide interpretation.
- Galleries do not appear to change over time. They always appear to be the same which is an issue if repeat visitation is desired. Temporary exhibition space is required to provide change over time.
- Like other types of museums with permanent displays, a changing exhibition gallery is required to attract repeat visitation.

Collections Database

In 2015, the City developed an online Collections Database. As part of the database development, and with the help of a digitization grant, 2,100 of the City’s over 20,000 artefacts were digitized and made available to the public through a public portal.

An additional level request will be prepared to digitize the rest of the collection, providing public access to the collection and a photographic record for preservation, insurance and legal purposes.

City Owned Existing Locations

Staff have reviewed potential City owned locations for visible storage.

Phoenix Net Loft	rejected due to condition and location over water
River Road warehouses	rejected due to condition and reuse within 10 years
Minoru Aquatic Centre	rejected due to pending demolition
Minoru Place Activity Centre	study on future uses of the building is underway
Shell Road Warehouse	rejected due to size and very limited parking

At this point, the City does not currently have any locations that are suitable to house the collection and accommodate public visitors.

There are warehouses of the size that would be required to house the collection currently for sale or lease in Richmond. However, they too would require extensive tenant improvements. Purchasing or leasing a warehouse and retrofitting could be a potential consideration.

Next Steps

Staff are currently preparing a report on Artefact Storage Warehouse needs and options for Council consideration as well as a Museum Models Evaluation Study. It is proposed that the matter of visible storage of the collection be referred to both of those studies for consideration and evaluation.

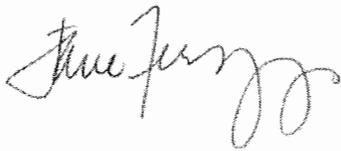
An additional level request to digitize the remaining City collection, providing public access to the collection and a photographic record for preservation, insurance and legal purpose, is also being submitted in the 2018 Budget process for Council consideration.

Financial Impact

None.

Conclusion

Staff were requested to look for options for storing the museum artefact collection at an visible storage facility at an existing location in Richmond. This report outlines the advantages and disadvantages of two types of visible storage, looks at existing locations owned by the City and recommends referring the issue of visible storage to two studies currently being prepared on museum models and artefact storage.



Jane Fernyhough
Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services
(604-276-4288)

Examples of Visible Storage



Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver



Dragi Markovic National Museum of Australia



Victoria & Albert Museum, London, England



Museum Aan de Stroom, Antwerp, Belgium