

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION

DATE: February 10, 2021

TO: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services, Economic Development Division
Dr. Ellen Censky, President & Chief Executive Officer, Milwaukee Public Museum

SUBJECT: **Milwaukee Public Museum Collections Policy Review for County Board Approval**

REQUEST

Milwaukee Public Museum (MPM) is requesting the review and approval of the revised collections policy.

PREVIOUS LEGISLATION

File 13-598 – Action Report – Authorization to Execute a Lease and Management Agreement with MPM

File 16-180 – Action Report – Authorization to Execute a revised Collections Policy, pursuant to Section 5.5 of the Lease and Management Agreement between Milwaukee County and MPM

REPORT

As part of the review process for reaccreditation, MPM was asked to add or clarify a few items in its Collection Management Policy to bring the policy into compliance with the most recent updates and best practices for museums. Those items are redlined on the document attached to this file. MPM is seeking approval from the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors for these revisions.

The goal of the revision is to ensure that museum policies and procedures reflect current best practices in the museum field, reflect current ethical standards, are legally compliant and up-to-date. A collections policy delineates how the museum acquires objects or specimens for the collection (known as accessioning), cares for and protects them, removes objects from the collection (known as deaccessioning), keeps accurate records and inventories, loans objects to other institutions, treats intellectual property created by MPM staff based on research of museum collections, and hews to ethical practices in the museum field. MPM's collections policy was last updated in 2016.

As stated in the Lease and Management Agreement (LMA) between Milwaukee County and MPM, MPM has "...full and complete control and discretion in the management and operation of the Site, the building, the Personal Property, and the Artifacts..." including the right and duty "to determine and carry out all policies relating to the acquisition, maintenance, loan, exchange, lease, sale, disposal, accession and deaccession of the Artifacts." Section 5.5 of the LMA notes that

“The Milwaukee Public Museum shall adopt a formal written policy regarding the accession and deaccession of artifacts in compliance with Federal and State law. Upon its adoption and upon any amendment thereof, a copy of such policy or amended policy, as the case may be, shall be submitted to the County Board of Supervisors for approval, which shall not be unreasonably withheld.”

On a related matter, MPM received a letter date February 16, 2020 and a report from the Accreditation Commission (attached) notifying the museum that, after much consideration, they voted to table their decision on reaccreditation for approximately one year so that the museum and County can work together to demonstrate that we are able to properly care for the collections, citing the condition of the building as the cause for concern. While this decision does not relate to any of the requested changes to the Collection Management Policy, it does relate to the Collection Management Policy Section V. Collection Care:

“A. Responsibilities

1. Milwaukee County. Milwaukee County holds title to the Museum collections and provides the facility in which those collections are stored. It is the fiduciary obligation of the County to ensure the facility, including the physical and environmental conditions of the facility, meets the standards for collections care set by the accrediting authority for Museums, the American Alliance of Museums.
2. Board of Directors. The Board of Directors holds the collections of the Museum in trust for the citizens of Milwaukee County through a "Lease & Management Agreement" between Milwaukee Public Museum, Inc. and Milwaukee County. As owner of the collections, Milwaukee County also shares this responsibility.
3. Senior Management Staff. The Senior Staff, led by the President/CEO, is charged with overseeing the operations of the Museum and the care of the Museum collections. Through the budgeting process, they work to provide the necessary funds and staffing for the proper, long-term preservation of the collections. “

MPM will work with the County to prepare a bridge plan detailing short-term actionable steps to ameliorate the substandard conditions impacting the collections until such time that the collections can be permanently located to a new building.

RECOMMENDATION

Due to its reaccreditation process, MPM has requested its Collections Policy be revised to address updated best practices. Based on this information, the DAS recommends accepting the revisions.

FISCAL IMPACT

MPM staff have reviewed all necessary policies and procedures to ensure the updated collections policy reflects the current best practices in the museum field. There are no restrictions that would prevent an update to the MPM collections policy.

Aaron Hertzberg
Economic Development Director



Dr. Ellen Censky
President & CEO, Milwaukee Public Museum

Cc: David Crowley, County Executive
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, Office of the County Executive
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board
Supervisor Jason Haas, Chairman, Finance and Audit Committee
Finance and Audit Committee Members
Shanin Brown, Committee Coordinator
Steve Cady, Director of Research and Policy
Supervisor Sheldon Wasserman, Chairman, Parks, Energy and Environment Committee
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