

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION

DATE: June 7, 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: AN ACTION REPORT REQUESTING AUTHORIZATION AND DIRECTION OF A TRANSFER OF \$93,500 FROM ORG. UNIT 1940-1945 – APPROPRIATION CONTINGENCIES TO ORG. UNIT 9711 – MILWAUKEE PUBLIC MUSEUM FOR THE PURPOSES OF PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE COLLECTIONS

REQUEST

Milwaukee Public Museum (MPM) is requesting the authorization and direction of a transfer of \$93,500 from Org. Unit 1940-1945 – Appropriation Contingencies to Org. Unit 9711 – Milwaukee Public Museum.

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
File 21-259 – Action Report – Authorization to Execute a Revised Milwaukee Public Museum Collections Policy

REPORT

Last year, MPM went through the reaccreditation process which included submitting a self-study and supporting documents and a site visit. At their February 2021 Accreditation meeting, the Commission discussed the Milwaukee Public Museum at great length. After much consideration, they voted to table their decision on reaccreditation for approximately one year so that the museum and the County could work together to demonstrate they are able to properly care for the collections in the near-term, which would mean developing a plan that would address those collections most vulnerable to building deficiencies. All of this information was shared with the County Committees on Finance and Audit and Parks, Energy, and Environment at their March 2021 meetings.

The bridge plan to protect those most vulnerable collections follows:

Of the collections stored in the museum's basement, open storage in the Anthropology and History Collections are at the greatest risk of damage from leaking infrastructure. The majority

of these collections are stored in oak drawers fitted into open-air slotted shelves. This proposal seeks to address the immediate threat of both physical and environmental damage to the collections in these open drawers. The proposal is broken into 3 main phases: 1) polyethylene barriers, 2) pre-packing curation, and 3) containerization.

Phase 1: Installation of polyethylene barrier layer around all open-aided shelving and drawers.

Collections stored on open-air shelving are prone to both physical and environmental damage. While environmental damage from fluctuating temperature and humidity levels poses a serious threat, physical protection from water, dust and debris is more immediately achievable using polyethylene sheeting. This practice has been applied to collections in the past, but the application relied on adhesive tape that over time can fail, requiring frequent maintenance or potentially creating areas of exposure. This phase seeks to deliberately and neatly apply and replace sheeting to all open-air shelving, with the aim of establishing a low maintenance system that eliminates areas of potential exposure where water or dust may seep through.

Anticipated Cost (see attached budget): \$7,950 (includes materials and part-time employee to hang plastic/design set up). *MPM has committed to this in the FY2021 budget and begun work.*

Phase 2: Pre-project curation, digital record cleanup, and EMu inventory from catalog books.

Several collection areas at the museum do not have fully digitized inventories available in the museum's collections database, EMu. While all History catalog books are available in a digital pdf-format, the files are not searchable and are thus little more than an archival copy of the physical books. Additionally, EMu storage locality information for history collections requires refinement and maintenance before object records can be linked to location records. Because the phase 3 containerization process requires detailed and precise locality and inventory records to properly apply barcodes, a significant amount of digital and record preparatory work must be completed before beginning the physical work in the basement.

Anticipated Cost (staffing - 4 months): \$4,148. *MPM has committed to this in the FY2021 budget.*

Phase 3: Containerize most vulnerable collections using polyethylene bags, packed in ethafoam and then packed into durable plastic containers for storage until the move.

Using poly bags and containers have been shown to possess strong buffering capabilities against unstable environmental fluctuations. Alone, the containers lessened spikes in humidity by as much as 10% and provided a moderate buffer against fluctuations. The addition of the poly bag within the container almost negates spikes altogether, and provides an excellent buffer to the ambient environment. Crates also create an additional barrier to moisture and dust.

To properly track objects and crates, each item and crate would need to be barcoded and linked to the collection record that was created during phase 2.

In order to properly pack and inventory all collections, a team of 3 limited-term staff (2 packers, 1 digital) are required to work on the project. It is essential for packers to work in teams of two, to both handle large and unwieldy objects and to ensure quality control and consistency during the pack. The 2 packers should be part-time employees, as compared to the fulltime digital employee. This is because the work completed by the digital employee will take longer and

move more slowly than the work of the packers. Increased work time is therefore required to keep the two groups in line with each other during the project. This work would be overseen by the registrar and history collection manager each at 10 hours/wk.

Anticipated Cost (packing materials +barcoding equipment and supplies + 10% contingency on cost increases): \$85,000 + \$8,500 = \$93,500 ***Requested from County.***

Personnel (conservator + 2 halftime packers and 1 full time digital tech + 10% registrar and 10% history collections manager): \$53,612 + \$12,286 ***MPM has committed to this in the FY2022 budget.***

Summary

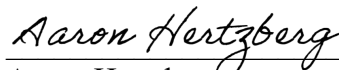
At the conclusion of this plan, all open-air Anthropology and History basement collections will be protected against water, dust, and debris and the bulk of History catalog records will be digitized. The most vulnerable collections will be buffered against environmental fluctuations, barcoded, and prepped for easy transportation to a new storage facility. With an estimated average of 20 objects per drawer, the approximate number of rehoused collections falls just shy of 20,000. The proposed plan attacks collections vulnerabilities from two fronts, and aims to bridge the gap between current times and the museum's move to a new building.

In summary, the total costs of these 3 phases are as follows:

MPM Costs - \$76,395
Proposed County Costs - \$93,500
Total Costs - \$169,895

RECOMMENDATION

Due to its reaccreditation process, MPM has requested additional funding in its implementation of a bridge plan to protect the most vulnerable collections. Based on this information, the DAS recommends accepting the revisions.



Aaron Hertzberg
Economic Development Director



Dr. Ellen Censky
President & CEO, Milwaukee Public Museum

Cc: David Crowley, County Executive
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