

**TO:** CHAIR AND MEMBERS  
COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION

**DATE:** 2018 January 10

**FROM:** CITY ARCHIVIST

**FILE:** 2410-20  
*Reference: Community Heritage  
Commission*

**SUBJECT:** CITY OF BURNABY ARCHIVES ANNUAL REPORT 2017

**PURPOSE:** To present the 2017 Annual Report of the City of Burnaby Archives

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. **THAT** the report be received for information.

**REPORT**

**INTRODUCTION**

2017 was a very productive year at the City of Burnaby Archives.

A temporary increase in archives staff resulted in a significant shift towards best practices in preservation for a number of record groups held at the City Archives, including born-digital records, glass plate negatives, microfilm, and Council minute books.

The most significant outcome of the work completed in 2017 is that now all open Council records are directly accessible online as full-text PDF documents through Heritage Burnaby ([www.heritageburnaby.ca](http://www.heritageburnaby.ca)).

The City continues to explore new ways of temporarily extending the life of the current archives, and in 2017, off-site storage was implemented as the most viable, short-term, stop-gap solution. It is important to keep in mind that the various options and alternatives that have been considered and implemented will not in themselves preclude the need for more archival storage space as a means of preserving the City and community permanent records and history.

The following report provides a summary of our operations throughout 2017.

**HISTORY OF ARCHIVAL RECORDS PROGRAM [OVERVIEW]**

The City of Burnaby Archives opened in the new McGill Library in 2001 and functions as a division of the Office of the City Clerk. The Archives is the official repository for all inactive civic records of permanent administrative, legal, fiscal, historical, evidential and/or informational

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value to the City of Burnaby. Archival material is preserved as evidence of the functions, legal rights, obligations, policies, decisions, procedures, accountabilities, and operations of the City. It is the responsibility of the City Archives to ensure the preservation and accessibility of these vital records by providing proper facilities, environmental controls, and professional management resources to maintain the archival material in perpetuity.

Our City record description and digitization program has produced a current index of all Council minutes and reports dating back to 1894 and can be searched online with full-text versions of the documents, now available from 1894 to the present. All City Bylaws, dating back to 1892, are available as full-text PDF documents online as are descriptions and finding aids for all files and records in our holdings.

In addition, the Archives has supported the protection and preservation of the City's documentary heritage by way of its expanded collections mandate and the incorporation of the Burnaby Historical Society Community Archives collections into the City's holdings. This transfer saw over 100 metres of textual records and over 10,000 photographs moved to the Archives facility in 2007.

## **CURRENT ARCHIVAL RECORDS PROGRAM**

Building on the success of a temporarily expanded digitization program in 2016, which updated our Heritage Burnaby website with PDF versions of 1970s open Council records, the 2017 program focused on providing online access to the remaining records in this vital record group – those dated from 1894 to 1969.

Now a current index of all Council minutes and reports from 1894 to present day is entirely searchable online with full-text versions of the documents freely available to view. Among these records are some of the oldest known surviving records created by the Corporation of Burnaby.

In the early years of Burnaby's incorporation, the Municipal Council met for its weekly meetings in some rather unusual places, like the tram station, local schools, and private homes. There was no permanent and secure place in Burnaby where official records could be housed. To remedy this situation, in March 1898, the Municipal Council authorized the purchase of a large safe that could hold all the records and would be housed in a municipal building in New Westminster.

Six months later a devastating fire destroyed the entire downtown section of New Westminster. The minute books from 1892-1893 were destroyed completely and the others were thought to be lost or destroyed as well. In October of 2004, the British Columbia Archives in Victoria miraculously found the 1894-1898 records in their holdings and donated them to the City of Burnaby where they went through immediate conservation treatment.

Now that these records and all actions of Council since are available electronically, anyone with access to a computer can gain a unique window into the actions, decisions, and events that transpired from Burnaby's earliest years and the workings of some of Burnaby's first Mayors and City Council members, through to present day Mayor and Council.

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This creates the dual benefit of helping ensure open and accountable government while still having a positive impact on the staff time: the time normally required to respond to requests for Council records from both City staff and the public is now reduced by as much as 92%.

The success of this project also attracted the attention of local media and was featured in the 15 September 2017 edition of the Burnaby Now.

44 boxes of permanent records that were newly transferred this year from the Legal Department, the Office of the City Clerk and the Finance Department were described using our automated system. These records have now been catalogued and indexed according to the highest level of archival practices and standards, thus allowing the public and City Officials quick, efficient, and direct access to information stored within them.

## **RECORD PRESERVATION**

Through partnership with the City's Information Technology (IT) department, we are taking the steps to preserve the digital records currently in our holdings.

In February we completed a Digital Asset Register to accurately assess the what (media type), when (reason for retention), where (storage location), how (source) and why (access use) involved in this record group. From the Digital Asset Register, we were able to conduct a maturity check for all digital assets in our holdings. The maturity check assessed where we are at with our digital preservation activities, identified risks and issues, and determined next steps.

Photograph preservation masters (TIFFs) were migrated from CDs to a secure permanent drive maintained by the IT department. Any missing surrogate records were replaced by scanning & copying the analogue originals. This has resulted in 2,250 updated photograph descriptions and 1,500 new digital access copies available online at [www.heritageburnaby.ca](http://www.heritageburnaby.ca).

The Archives has been working towards best practices for preservation of physically fragile records as well. Twenty of the forty-nine leather-bound Council minute books in the Archives were fraying due to age. These vital records have now been wrapped to forestall further deterioration.

Seventy-six glass plate negatives taken by photographer J.W. Phillips between 1910 and 1914 are some of the most fragile and historically significant community records held at the Archives. These negatives have now been carefully rehoused in new, upright enclosures to ensure their preservation.

## **PUBLIC PROGRAMMING**

The year began and ended with outreach; in February, the Archives participated in the Burnaby Public Library's screening of the documentary on the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Gilmore Avenue School at the McGill Branch, and in November we provided an engaging workshop to the Grade 10 Photography class from Alpha Secondary School.

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## CONCLUSION

Archives staff will continue to work closely with the City's IT department in 2018, as together we take the next steps required in preservation management for the digital records currently in Archives' holdings. Preserving the most at-risk materials in our holdings – those that are born-digital or material for which we only hold electronic copies (digital content) – is our next step.

Our 2018 work schedule also includes processing both our backlogged [existing] records, and the continued pursuit of a solution to Archives space shortage.

Under the continued guidance and support of the Community Heritage Commission and Burnaby City Council, we look forward to building on these successes as we move into 2018.

Respectfully submitted,



Rebecca Pasch  
CITY ARCHIVIST

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cc: City Manager  
Deputy City Manager  
Chief Information Officer  
Director of Planning and Building  
City Clerk