

TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS
COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION

DATE: 2021 Feb 01

FROM: CITY ARCHIVIST

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

SUBJECT: CITY OF BURNABY ARCHIVES ANNUAL REPORT 2020

PURPOSE: To present the 2020 Annual Report of the City of Burnaby Archives

RECOMMENDATION:

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

REPORT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

2020 was an unprecedented year at the City of Burnaby Archives (the Archives), as it was for archival repositories all over the world.

Despite the necessary five month suspension of our in-person services (March-July, November-December) in 2020, the Archives was still able to respond fully to all but six of the 141 reference requests impacted by the suspension. We also reached a significant milestone in our digital record preservation program: we finished processing 8,900 digital files originally tallied at the launch of our program in 2017.

The City continues to explore new ways of extending the life of the archives' facilities. In 2020, off-site storage continued to be the most viable short-term solution for storing physical records.

The following report provides a summary of our operations throughout 2020.

2.0 POLICY SECTION

On October 16, 2017, Council approved the City's Corporate Strategic Plan (the Plan) which details the City's vision, values and goals. The goals help prioritize, plan programs and services and provide a framework for City strategies. The Archives aligns closely with the following goals laid out in the Plan:

Goal

- A Connected Community
 - Digital connection –
Provide online access to core City services and information
 - Partnership –
Work collaboratively with businesses, educational institutions, associations, other communities and governments
- An Inclusive Community
 - Serve a diverse community –
Ensure City services fully meet the needs of our dynamic community
- A Healthy Community
 - Lifelong learning –
Improve upon and develop programs and services that enable ongoing learning
- A Thriving Organization
 - Organizational culture –
Ensure that our core values are reflected in our policies, programs and service delivery
 - Human resources –
Foster an environment for teamwork, efficiency and excellence to deliver customer service in alignment with our core values
 - Communication –
Practice open and transparent communication among staff, Council and the community
 - Reliable services, technology and information –
Protect the integrity and security of City information, services and assets
 - Technology and innovation –
Support technology development and innovation to empower staff and to advance community objectives

3.0 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 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. In addition, the Archives supports 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.

Our description and digitization program has produced a current index of all Council minutes, reports and City Bylaws dating back to 1892 that can be searched for and accessed as full-text PDF documents online. The recent addition of high-resolution JPEGs (access copies) of 2,700 photographs has further increased the availability of our holdings, and removed unwarranted barriers on use. Descriptions and finding aids for all files and records in our holdings are also available online.

4.0 TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF SERVICES

The March 18, 2020 closure of all City of Burnaby public facilities due to COVID-19 temporarily suspended all in-person services at Archives. This suspension impacted family and private organization donations, paper-based City record transfers, and research visits to the Reading Room. Temporary lay-offs reduced Archives and Burnaby Public Library (BPL) staff by 50% on May 26. Our reduced workforces returned to the building that week and successfully maintained social distance, with a portion of the workforce working from home, as required, and as scheduling allowed.

The McGill building remained closed to the public until July 13 when all BPL Branches successfully pivoted to provide in-person computer access and curbside pick-up and the Archives re-instituted in-person services, modified from drop-in to by-appointment only. On November 23 in-person services were again suspended at Archives, and have remained suspended through to the time of writing this report.

Despite these changes to our operations, we have continued our daily work of responding to research requests and processing digital records. During this time, we have also increased our knowledge of digital preservation management (DPM) methods and practices, and worked on improving user access to online resources.

5.0 CURRENT ARCHIVAL RECORDS PROGRAM

Staff responded to 377 research requests this year. One of the more notable researchers was internationally acclaimed artist, Ken Lum, who used records from the Archives to solidify the idea for his piece *The Retired Draft Horse and the Last Pulled Log*, unveiled March 2, 2020 at Edmonds and Kingsway. Vancouver artist Nathan Lee accessed the Archives in March of this year to research the historic narratives of the City's Century Park Garden for his winning Public Art proposal.

This year we appraised nineteen boxes of permanent records transferred in 2020 from the Office of the City Clerk, the Planning Department, and the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department, and previously donated organizational records from the Burnaby Artist Guild, and added these to our permanent holdings. All of these records have now been described and indexed according to the highest level of archival practices and standards, allowing the public and City staff quick, efficient, and direct access to this information.

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We also received an opportune donation of fifty born-digital photographs, taken by members of the Burnaby Photographic Society for their 50th Anniversary project on the theme of COVID-19. The Society members intended for these to be deposited into the City Archives, and we will partner to exhibit at a later date.

6.0 RECORDS PRESERVATION

Archives staff must take explicit action in order to safely house and provide access to our records so that they will be meaningfully available in perpetuity. For analogue records, this process is straightforward: they can be put in proper storage enclosures and kept in an environment with the correct temperature and relative humidity to slow down deterioration and copies can be created to reduce the handling of originals. For digital records, preservation is a much more difficult and tenuous job. Ongoing and evolving challenges such as hardware obsolescence, mechanical failure, and deterioration of digital media make digital records a highly vulnerable record group.

The Archives reached a milestone in March of 2020: we processed all of the records that were originally tallied at the launch of our digital preservation program in 2017. Using Archivematica, more than 8,900 files totaling 640 GB have been converted to preservation formats and are now stored in secure remote and local network storage, ensuring that the Archives will be able to access its born-digital records even in instances of environmental or natural disaster or technological failure. Next in our priorities is enhanced security of our digital holdings and our digital data.

7.0 UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

This new year will see us continuing our close partnership with the City's IT Department, as we preserve new digital transfers and digital donations through our hosted instance of Archivematica, and increase security on our digital holdings and digital data. We are also teaming up with Corporate Communications and our Heritage Burnaby partners: Heritage Planning, Burnaby Public Library, and Burnaby Village Museum to strategize new ways to promote heritageburnaby.ca and engage virtually with the community.

The City plans to implement an Electronic Document Record Management System (EDRMS) in the next few years which will impact both our workload and our storage requirements as we continue to pursue a long-term solution to our current space shortage.

The Archives will be celebrating its 20th Anniversary on November 10, 2021. Over the coming months, we will reflect on the Community Heritage Commission projects in which we have participated, by working side-by-side with our Heritage Burnaby Partners; by developing strong relationships and providing archival support to our community members and community organizations; and, by undertaking projects to increase workflow efficiencies while still ensuring the preservation and accessibility of the City's vital records. Furthermore, we will work with the Community Heritage Commission to

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identify an anniversary project that builds on these achievements and continues to support the City and the community of Burnaby.

8.0 CONCLUSION

Under the continued guidance and support of the Community Heritage Commission and Burnaby City Council, we look forward to building on these successes and plans as we move into 2021, and to celebrating our 20th anniversary.

Respectfully submitted,



Rebecca Pasch
CITY ARCHIVIST

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Copied to: City Manager
Director of Corporate Services
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