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CITY OF BOSTON

Archives & Records Management Advisory Commission

Minutes

Thursday, December 9, 2021, 3:00 P.M.

Google Meet

Members Present: Maureen Feeney (City Clerk), Henry Luthin (Law), Patty McMahon (Registry), Brendan Haley (Public), Giordana Mecagni (Public), Jill Snyder (Public), Kara Elliott-Ortega (Arts and Culture), Patricia Gilrein, designee of Kara Elliott-Ortega (Arts and Culture), David Leonard (BPL), Gail Hackett, designee of Justin Sterritt (CFO).

Others Present: City Archivist John McColgan, Archivist Kristen Lafferty, Archivist Kayla Skillin, Archivist Marta Crilly, Assistant Archivist Meghan Pipp, Shawn Williams, city's Public Record Officer and Alison Pultinas, member of the public.

Call to order at 3:07 PM.

Chair Maureen Feeney welcomed Commission members and introductions took place.

Motion offered by Maureen Feeney to approve the minutes of the February 27, 2020 Commission meeting. Brendan Haley moved to accept and seconded by Jill Snyder. All voted in favor.

Maureen Feeney motioned to address agenda item (Sec. 4 ii) out of order. No objections.

Return of City's Archives from BPL to City Clerk Official Custody

David Leonard entered into the record an email sent prior to the Commission meeting. David Leonard updated Commission that the BPL is willing to confer with the Archives to determine how best to move forward in satisfying the City Archives request, legal obligations, collection needs, and public access. The BPL acknowledged the City Archivist's passion and apologized for delay. The BPL took the issue very seriously, consulted their records and the advice of Corporation Counsel. The BPL would like to do what is best for the records and David Leonard will direct his staff to set up a meeting.

Commission members expressed appreciation to BPL, Corporation Counsel and City Archives. Brendan Haley asked if there was a list of records. City Archivist John McColgan confirmed an initial draft list and will forward to Commission members.

Archivist's Report

City Archivist John McColgan presented his report for 2020-2021 and is part of the meeting minutes. His report touched upon the Archives' Access and Outreach, Collections Management and Records Management.

Commission members expressed appreciation for work done by Archives during quarantine due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Rivermoor Facility: Space Depletion and Environment

City Archivist John McColgan presented an update on the space and environment issues of the Rivermoor building.

- Shelving hazard identified by the State has been repaired.
- HVAC system in record storage areas has been down since May 2021. Building management is waiting on a part to complete repair.
- EMS Training Center project/Archaeology Department relocation is in initial stages. City Archives will see how it affects operations.
- Space depletion issue. The Property Management Department's Rivermoor Archives capital project study, submitted in November 2019, specified the need for mobile compact shelving and environmental upgrade. The project's design phase has been funded in Property Management's capital budget since FY 2021 but has yet to be scheduled. The Public Facilities Project Management unit has given assurances that the project will be scheduled soon. The design phase will identify budget requirements for construction.

Commission members discussed operational impacts of the EMS Training Center project and the need to improve the building environment. Commission members expressed frustration over environmental issues and slow process for capital construction projects.

Commission members discussed ways to bring attention to the Archives and make it a priority for the new administration. Commission members discussed reaching out to a member of the Mayor's transition team to help move the process along. City Clerk Maureen Feeney will work to identify which transition team member will best assist the Archives.

Motion to adjourn meeting was offered by Brendan Haley and seconded by Henry Luthin. All in favor.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:45 PM.

CITY OF BOSTON
Archives and Records Advisory Commission
Archivist's Report March 2023

Since the last meeting of the Commission, the Archives and Records Management Division has continued to maintain and strengthen its program, facilitating the City's statutory obligations for managing records and archives, preserving the City's historical documentary legacy, and maximizing the utility of official archives as a critical information asset for City government and the public. The high quality of the City's archives services is again due to the professionalism and dedication of the Division's senior archivists, Kristen Lafferty, Marta Crilly, Kayla Skillin, and assistant archivist Meghan Capone. The accomplishments of the Division outlined in this report are the product of their work.

CONTENTS

[Note: content headings and subheadings link to sections in the report.]

Facility Issues

City of Boston Archives Center (COBAC) Capital Project

EMT Training Center Project

Collections Management

Accessions

Collections Processing

Digital Archives

Records Management

Reference and Access

Outreach

Public Programming

University and High School Programming

Social Media

Grants

The Mary Eliza Project

Boston 200 Bicentennial Commission Recordings at Risk

ARCHIVES STAFF RECLASSIFICATION

Facility Issues

City of Boston Archives Center (COBAC) Capital Project

The most challenging issue facing the Archives remains space depletion. Storage space for the preservation of the City's archives at the Rivermoor facility has been practically depleted for more than three years. This is a critical situation preventing the accessioning, preservation, archival processing and public access of thousands of cubic feet of non-current, permanent City records expensively, unproductively and perilously retained in department custody.

Fortunately, under the City's FY23-27 capital budget, the Property Management Department's Archives Center ("COBAC") project is currently designing high density shelving for City and BPDA collections, and environmental upgrades for both public archives and BPL storage. Design completion is set for June, with construction contract bids going out in July and construction scheduled to begin 4 September. Temporary offsite relocation of twenty-nine shelf ranges of BPL material will afford in-house swing space for the Archives and BPDA while their storage areas are environmentally upgraded and fitted with mobile shelving. (This swing space will also serve BPL's "pallet room" contents while this room's space is environmentally upgraded). Completion of work in the archive storage areas is anticipated for spring 2024.

EMT Training Center Project

Meantime, the City, through its Public Health Commission, is renovating space at Rivermoor for its Emergency Medical Technician Training Center. The Training Center will occupy the second floor of the building's head house and involve a new dock configuration serving the docking needs of tenants. Construction is currently proceeding at full throttle. The project necessitates relocation of the City Archaeology Lab from the second floor, resulting in Archives loss of previously shared access to certain spaces, e.g. the erstwhile conference room and part of the large reading room area. Fortunately, all critical occupancy - records storage areas, processing room, offices and a smaller but adequate reading room - have been retained. Also, the allotment to Archaeology foreseeably presents no major disadvantages for the Archives and will create opportunity for collaborative exhibitions. During construction the public reading area has been temporarily located in a confined corner of the building foyer, limiting the number of patrons who can be accommodated at one time, but the permanent reading room is expected to be ready by April. Completion of the project at large is expected some time in the fall.

Collections Management

Accessions

During FY 22, the Archives accessioned 202 cubic feet and 1 gigabyte of records. In FY 23 thus far, the Archives has accessioned 97.5 cubic feet and 14.1 terabytes of records. This includes accessions from several departments including the Mayor's Office, Assessing, DoIT, BFD, BPS, City Clerk's Office, Public Works, Parks, Labor Relations, Immigrant Advancement and the Transportation Department. The Archives also continues its collaboration with BPL in determining the best way forward for managing the repossession of City records in BPL custody.

Collections Processing

The Archives continues to process and bring under finding aid control important and compellingly interesting archives of several departments and City officials. Recent processing initiatives include projects servicing the records of the Fire Department, Transportation Department, Model Cities Administration, Acting Mayor Janey and Mayor Walsh.

To facilitate records relocation to high-density shelving, the Archives has initiated a major barcoding project in FY23. To date, shelf-reading of approximately 10,000 archival record cartons has been completed and physical labeling and entry into the cataloging system have begun, with 6,300 record cartons barcoded and cataloged.

In curating ISD building permit plans, transferred to Archives custody in 2019 after forty-five years in the Library, Archives staff have continued to rehabilitate the collection with item level indexing, the return of misplaced items to their appropriate bins, and the provision of protective housing for fragile items. To date, 9,930 plans have been indexed. As plans are scanned for patron use, a digital copy is maintained for future reference, eliminating the need for manual searches for those items.

Digital Archives

The City Archives [Digital Archives Initiative](#) preserves and makes digitized and born-digital public records and information easily discoverable and available by migrating at-risk public records from obsolete media formats into stable preservation formats; harvesting and preserving city websites; and ingesting the City's legally permanent digital records into the City Archives digital preservation system (Preservica). The Archives collaborates with Digital Commonwealth and Digital Public Library of America to increase the digital visibility of Boston's historic public records and reach a wider audience. To further enhance the City's public image, the Archives also continues to work closely with the City's social media team to provide historical content for the City's social media feeds.

In FY22, the City Archives digitized approximately 1,600 documents and images of material and made it freely available to the public via the City Archives digital repository. Digital records accessioned include videos of City Council meetings and Mayoral events, tweets from the @cityofboston and @MayorWU accounts and over 14 tb of photographs from the Walsh Administration. Thus far in FY23, we have digitized 470 pages of material.

Grant-funded digital initiatives include the "Mary Eliza Project", an endeavor transcribing original hand-written 1920 City of Boston Women's Voter Registers into searchable, sortable datasets; and the "Boston 200 Bicentennial Commission Recordings at Risk" project, which has digitize 184 audio cassettes containing about 227 hours of oral history recordings collected during the Boston 200 bicentennial celebration. Recordings are currently being processed and made available in the City Archives Digital Repository. Currently 10 interviews are available to the public via the Archives digital repository. Additionally, two of the interviews have been featured on WBUR's Radio Boston. (See more on both grant projects below under ["Grants"](#).)

Since the beginning of the Digital Archives Initiative, the Division has made over 40,000 records (both digitized and born-digital) digitally available and searchable, including historic photographs, documents, and public meeting records. For FY23, we will have 9 tb of S3 storage and 33 tb of Glacier storage. For FY24, we will need to add an additional 1.5 tb of S3 storage and 7 tb of glacier storage **for a total of 10.5 tb of S3 storage and 40 tb of glacier storage** in order to accommodate the unanticipated transfer of the records of two mayoral administrations in one year, the City Council video project, the Boston 200 audio tape conversion, and what might be stored from the Ancestry.com project.

Records Management

The Archives continues to assist City departments in carrying out their records management responsibilities. The Division aims to raise City agency awareness of records management and to assist departments in eliminating obsolete records that consume valuable office space in City Hall and other locations. It facilitates departments with State-authorized disposition and inactive records transfer off-site or to the Archives, and employs software tools streamlining both retention schedule development and procedure for obtaining State authorization to dispose of records. Services include consultation by email and phone, in-person records surveys, and assistance with coordinating proper retention and disposition of municipal records.

In the past year, the Archives has provided consultation services for various departments including Boston Fire Department Arson Unit, Boston Public Library, Treasury, Transportation, City Council, Registry and the Mayor's Office. We continue to serve as the point of contact for all departments to manage their off-site storage needs.

With the unusual circumstances of having three mayors in 2021, we have been working diligently with the Mayor's Office to ensure that all appropriate records are retained, including both physical materials and born digital records. This involved coordinating with DoIT in order to initiate transfer of digital materials; the majority of records created by the Mayor's Office and Cabinet Heads are in their native, digital formats. This increases the need for budget investment into digital preservation and storage as more and more permanent records are in these formats.

In order to streamline the process of records destruction, and make it easier for departments to comply with statutory procedures for authorized disposition, we have worked with DoIT to create an electronic records destruction form using City-sponsored software. This past year, there have been 75 cubic feet of records approved for destruction.

We have also designed a database of department file plans, obviating renewal of the \$4,500 three-year contract with Virgo, and enabling us to put the money in the coming year's budget to more productive alternative use.

Reference and Access

Reference request numbers continue to grow, reaching a record 2,315 in FY22, a 6% increase over FY21 and 24% increase over FY19's pre-pandemic figure. In FY23 requests stand at 1,363 as of 14 March. In FY22, requests from City departments reached a new record of 324.

Reading room visits in FY22 numbered a record high of 349, a 10% increase over FY21. The FY23 figure currently stands at 163. Rivermoor building construction and consequent limited reading room capacity will likely result in fewer visits in FY23 than in FY22. On the other hand, visits to the Preservica digital repository doubled from 13,239 in FY 21 to 26,701 in FY22. In FY23 thus far, there have been 17,600 visits to the Preservica digital repository.

Outreach

Public Programming

In FY22, the City Archives gave two virtual genealogy programs, one through the Boston Public Library's Local and Family History Speaker series and one at the Massachusetts Genealogical Council Conference. Each program was attended by more than fifty individuals.

In FY23, the Mary Eliza Project Team provided programs at the South End Historical Society and Dorchester Historical Society. The City Archives also provided programming at the East Boston Branch of the Boston Public Library. In the remainder of FY 2023, the City Archives will give programs at the West Roxbury Branch of the Boston Public Library and the Boston Public Library's Family and Local History series. The Mary Eliza Project has scheduled programs at the East Boston Branch of the Boston Public Library and the African American Historical and Genealogy Society.

University and High School Programming

In FY22, the City Archives guest-taught classes in primary source literacy and Boston neighborhood history at the Jeremiah Burke High School and the Mozart K-8 School. The City Archives also provided material for a school history project at the John D. O'Bryant High School and provided programming for the Arlington High School Library Club. In FY23, the City Archives will continue its partnership with the Jeremiah Burke High School by guest-teaching primary source and neighborhood history class sessions as well as collaborating on a visual art project focused on the history of the Burke High School and the Grove Hall neighborhood. The Archives will also continue to teach a yearly class session on primary source literacy at the Mozart K-8 School.

In FY23, the City Archives hosted classes from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design as well as Boston University. The City Archives is currently working with a graduate public history class at UMass Boston focused on the history of art at Faneuil Hall.

Social Media

The City Archives continued to grow its social media presence, adding an Instagram account (@bostoncityarchives) in FY23. Its Twitter account currently has 16,300 followers, up from 14,400 a year ago, while its Facebook account has 6,263 followers, up from 5,770. The new Instagram account has 368 followers.

Grants

The Mary Eliza Project

In FY22, the Archives was awarded a Community Preservation Act (CPA) grant for \$78,000, funding a project transforming original hand-written 1920 City of Boston Women's Voter Registers into a searchable, sortable dataset.

In 1920, the City of Boston registered over 50,000 women who registered to vote in Boston in the months after they gained voting rights from the Nineteenth Amendment. These voter rolls contain valuable and detailed information about Boston's first women voters, including age, occupation, place of birth, naturalization information, and closest male relative.

The 1920 Women Voters Register datasets will be stored in the City Archives digital repository to ensure long term preservation. Users will be able to access the dataset in the City's analytics portal (<https://data.boston.gov/dataset/1920-women-s-voter-register>) as well as the digital repository's public access portal. The Mary Eliza Project began in 2021 as a collaboration between the Boston City Archives and Simmons University. Approximately 15,000 women's voter records from 1920 have been transcribed

and are available to the public thus far. This partnership continues to develop and supports public programming, events, research, and writing that focus on the transcribed voter registrations. Project team members have authored twenty-one blog posts for the City Archives' blog, with new posts coming out several times each month. (Here is our latest Mary Eliza newsletter: [The Cost of Love and Marriage.](#)) A collaborative digital exhibit will follow after the transcriptions are complete.

Additionally, in October 2022 Simmons University funded a Faculty Student Collaborative Fellow to begin work transcribing the City Archives' pre-1920 Women's Voter Registers. The first group of pre-1920 voting records was made available to the public in mid-January of 2023.

Boston 200 Bicentennial Commission Recordings at Risk

In 2022 the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) awarded the Archives a \$40,000 "[Recordings at Risk](#)" grant, enabling the Archives to digitize 184 audio cassettes containing about 227 hours of oral history recordings collected during the Boston 200 bicentennial celebration. In January the New England Document Conservation Center successfully completed the transfer of the oral histories from the original cassette tapes onto digital media.

The digitization of the oral histories was complicated by multiple cassettes exhibiting a form of soft binder syndrome that did not react to established and vetted procedures. NEDCC used experimental methods to migrate the oral histories on these tapes, effectively rescuing content that would have been lost if standard migration procedures had been used.

The oral histories were collected across Boston neighborhoods as part of the U.S. bicentennial celebrations, and include recordings of a diverse range of community members. The transcripts show interview subjects discussing immigration, the Great Migration, labor movements, the Boston Police Strike, the Great Depression, both World Wars, the Civil Rights Movement, housing issues, and the effect of urban renewal on Boston's neighborhoods. Saving these recordings and making them available will be invaluable for scholarly research as well as public history initiatives in Boston. These historical resources would be particularly pertinent for the nation's Sestercentennial celebrations to be planned by the Commemorations Commission for 2026.

The oral histories are being made available to the public on a rolling basis as they are processed. They will be available in their entirety by May of 2023.

ARCHIVES STAFF RECLASSIFICATION

Inadequately compensated staff positions in the City Clerk Archives and Records Management Division require reclassification. Preliminary research shows that these employees are currently not being equitably compensated in comparison to individuals in various City departments doing work requiring an equal or lower level of experience, skill, effort and responsibilities under similar conditions. Work performed in the Archives Division requires the professional expertise that can only be gained with the solid educational background of the relevant post-graduate degree. Current pay grades for these employees, however, are incongruously low - too low for labor effectively requiring such a degree. Rather, these employees are classified at levels more appropriate to semi-clerical or paraprofessional positions requiring no appropriate postgraduate qualification. All possess the Master's degree in Library Science with Archives concentration, a major factor in their selection for the job, although not actually required by the currently designated classification. All possess the professional competencies afforded by the degree as well as significant critically-related archives management experience. The competencies required for effectively administering archives management responsibilities in the Clerk's

Office are of significantly more value to the City than compensation afforded by current pay grades. Current titles and grades instead undervalue actual duties, unjustly depreciate the professional nature of responsibilities, and fail to construe accurately, adequately, or appropriately the work's meaning, character, or significance. The Division's archivists do more than "analyze" or "assist". They promote and oversee implementation of policy and procedure for City-wide records management in City departments, helping to ensure both access to needed information and City compliance with public records laws. They preserve and document hundreds of collections of permanent/historical records, comprising millions of documents, generated by Boston's government from its founding to the present, and thereby safeguard the City's documentary legacy and the rights of its citizens. With specialized expertise and cutting-edge technology they preserve and manage the City's digitized and born-digital archives. They design, manage, and provide access services to departments and the public, and promote use of the City's archives by way of lectures, presentations, exhibitions and external collaboration. The highly specialized, professional nature of archives and records management being carried out in the City Clerk's Office justifies reclassification of professionally trained archivists in these positions, and the adjustment of their compensation to bring it more in line with those performing like-responsibilities in significantly higher grades and pay brackets.

*Report respectfully submitted by John McColgan, Archivist
16 March 2023*