

## **The Carnegie Cornerstones concerns over the staff proposal for the Carnegie Art Museum**

The staff report proposes changing the Carnegie Art Museum to an arts center without benefit of the permanent collection.

In assessing the future of the Carnegie Art Museum and the Collection, there are more than just financial aspects to be considered. There are social, educational and cultural considerations, as well.

It is important for the committee to have a full perspective before deciding on referring this to the City Council. We respectfully request that the committee declines to pass this proposal on to Council, and that they allow time to address questions & concerns raised here and gather input from the community, the artists and patrons.

To that end we have several areas that need to be considered:

### **What the summary in the proposal packet does not tell you:**

1. The cost to reopen as an art center would be comparable to reopening as the Museum. Beyond the basics, the air conditioning system needs to be repaired and updated, and steps must be taken to repair or replace the antiquated lift system (which has never worked on a consistent basis) to meet the legal requirements for handicapped access, regardless of building use.
2. Save for the salary of a museum director/curator, the ongoing costs for an arts center (utilities, maintenance, staffing, security, etc.) would be comparable to that of our museum. Yet the art center would serve fewer people with just afternoon classes and evening openings.
3. The building, with no kitchen, is limited in the size and type of events that can be held there, reducing the proposed rental income potential significantly. Staffing and insurance costs would also reduce income.
4. The proposed classes were what the Museum was already providing, utilizing examples from the Collection to educate on art techniques and inspire creativity. The City would need to cover the costs of the classes formerly covered by the Cornerstones.
5. Any creative options or think outside the box ideas for how to keep the collection until a future generation can support it better:
  - Keep it and partner as a satellite museum with others.
  - Lend individual artworks to the special exhibits of major museums such as: Riverside Art Museum' The Cheech Project, or LA's Museum of Latin American Art, The Crocker Art Museum, San Antonio Museum of Art, El Paso Museum of Art, Chicago Art Institute, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Palm Springs Art Museum, National Museum of the American Latino and/or local museums such as Santa Paula Art Museum, Museum of Ventura County.
6. Museums hold collections in the public trust for public access. The guidelines of the American Alliance of Museums and the Association of Art Museum Directors allow for the funds from deaccessioning of art in a permanent collection to be used *only* for direct care of objects in a museum's collection, with a very specific definition of "direct care." These funds may not be used for capital expenses, staff salaries or exhibitions.
7. The legal issues that could arise in de-accession of donated art in the collection depending on the nature of the bequest.

8. By converting the Museum to an arts center and deaccessioning the collection, the City will lose the potential to use the Museum as a cornerstone of downtown redevelopment.
  - 2016 Charrette conducted by Congress for the New Urbanism in conjunction with the Oxnard Community Planning Group and the City of Oxnard envisioned a downtown arts cluster with an expanded Carnegie, visitor accommodations, affordable housing with live-work units for artists, etc. While downtown revitalization stalls, Oxnard will remain a “hub and spoke” city (stay here and sightsee elsewhere) as opposed to a destination.
  - That the ERA report found the area demographics and growth would support a museum expansion, and that the “potential benefits of a museum expansion are numerous to both the Carnegie’s ability to generate higher attendance and earned income” and could provide “numerous economic and cultural benefits to city residents and businesses.”
  - There has to be a vision for the future, and if you are not growing, you are dying.
9. The progress and growth of the Museum and the collection, and community interest/support:

- In the four years prior to the museum’s abrupt closing annual, on-site visitors increased from 9,747 to 14,850.
- In the six months prior to closure, the social media and on-line visitors served averaged 13,620/month, and 4 to 5 newsletters were sent out per month with an average opening of 1,184/mo.
- Nowhere in the 2010 management agreement with the City, or in the staff report to Council, were there any stated expectations of deliverables/metrics of the Cornerstones to fundraise for the museum’s operating expenses. That was expected to continue to be a City responsibility — we were just going to deliver better value for the same amount of expenditure! We took on management to devote more focused attention to excellence in museum education and programming than was provided by the Library Director (under whose purview the Carnegie fell at the time in 2009).

When a later city budget crisis occurred, it was the previous City Manager and the Finance Department that, needing money, began penalizing the museum budget with less funding, forcing the Cornerstones into raising operating funds to cover the City’s shortfall. Without contractual basis, the City started holding Cornerstones accountable for unattainable monetary goals, while neatly shirking their own financial obligations

- With the assistance the Cornerstones, the Museum received over 200 artworks donated by area art collectors, community members and the artist themselves.
- The Cornerstones were directly involved and helped fund the Frank Romero’s mural “History of the Chicano Movimiento,” John Valadez’ huge pastel painting “Europa” and Gronk’s “Tormenta.”
- Despite the lack of a functioning museum the Carnegie Art Cornerstones currently serve 1,153 newsletter subscribers with a 58% “open rate,” and 1,241 Instagram followers.
- Following the 2020 passage of Measure E, the City conducted a survey and found that (re)opening the Carnegie was in the Top 10 desired areas for allocation of that sales tax increase.

10. The **educational impacts** of their proposal:

- When the museum was open, 1,500-4,000 students came through the Carnegie annually on class tours to view a high-quality museum collection. For many, this was their first and only in person exposure to the fine arts. It is estimated that prior to closure, 80% of Oxnard school students had had the opportunity to visit the Carnegie. With the statewide gutting of fine arts programs in schools, the Museum provided much needed educational balance.
- Our Education Curator provided teacher packets and lessons for before and after visits to support area teachers.
- The Museum has been a teaching resource for area colleges, with class visits and opportunities to study the art first hand. EVERY college has told us what a loss the Museum closure has been as they need a local museum of Carnegie's caliber for student assignments. Also, college seniors have relied on the Carnegie's collection to complete their Capstone Projects.
- Guest lecturers, gallery talks, artists in the classroom, family days, off-site projects and studio visits provided added educational benefits.
- The annual TRAC Conference brought college educators, artists and professionals in the fine arts fields to the Carnegie.

11. **Social and cultural impacts** on community pride and self-worth: The quality and caliber of the Collection is excellent, especially for a smaller museum. The Collection was started in 1922 and with community support for 100 years has grown to encompass over 1,000 works of art from hundreds of artists. The citizens of Oxnard have worked hard to grow the Collection and support the Museum.

- These art works represent some of the best artists in Southern California, many of whom have gained national and international acclaim, and are collected by major museums.
- The Collection includes an impressive assembly of significant works by major Latino artists that serve as a source of pride for the community in their culture and traditions.

Don't the citizens of Oxnard deserve to keep their collection? Don't they deserve a quality Museum?

Again, we respectfully request that the committee decline to pass this proposal on to Council, and that they allow time to address questions & concerns raised here and gather input from the community, the artists and patrons.

--The Carnegie Art Cornerstones Board  
9/12/23