

Berkshire Museum Press Release

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Berkshire Museum Unveils \$60 Million Reinvention Plan

New interdisciplinary approach strengthens Museum's unique niche as region's premier science and history museum

[Pittsfield, Mass.] — On Wednesday, July 12, 2017, the Berkshire Museum Board of Trustees and Executive Director Van Shields announced the results of nearly two years of research and planning – the creation of an exciting new interdisciplinary Museum, where connections among science, history, and the arts are explored to inspire curiosity and wonder in audiences of all ages. The announcement was made at 3:30 p.m. during an hour-long gathering at the Museum that featured an introduction by Berkshire Museum Board of Trustees president Elizabeth “Buzz” McGraw, a detailed presentation of the Master Plan process and the concepts and designs for the new Museum by Shields, and closing remarks by John L. Bissell, president and CEO of Greylock Federal Credit Union.

Earlier in the day, the Board of Trustees met and voted unanimously to approve the plans for the new Museum as well as the plans for funding the transformation, marking the end of the planning process and the beginning of implementation.

“We are so proud of this thrilling new vision for the Museum,” says McGraw. “As a board, we have been united in the development of this plan, and we are united in our enthusiasm for moving forward. We have worked tirelessly over the last two years to ensure the future survival and relevance of our beloved Berkshire Museum. It was important to us, as Trustees, to take bold steps to address our financial challenges and to affirm that the Berkshire Museum of the future will reflect the growing needs of our community.”

The Berkshire Museum has been experiencing a burgeoning demand for its programs and services to the community. The July 12 announcement unveiled a new vision for its future, that of an interdisciplinary museum with a heightened emphasis on science and history. Realization of this ambitious plan is expected to cost \$20 million; in addition the Museum will create a new endowment of at least \$40 million in order to provide financial stability for the future. These initiatives will be largely funded through the sale of artworks in the Museum's collection, which have been deemed no longer essential to the Museum's new interdisciplinary programs, and include two Norman Rockwell paintings.

A transformed Museum

For more than a century, the Berkshire Museum has been the region's premier museum of science, history, and the arts. Building on this legacy, the Berkshire Museum will create a radically new interdisciplinary approach to the experiences and educational opportunities it provides. Treasured objects from the collection will be integrated with new interpretive techniques, cutting-edge technology, and a fresh perspective that aims to extract contemporary relevance from historical artifacts. Static museum galleries will be transformed into active teaching laboratories, and the Museum will extend its leadership position as the region's authority on science and history for the general public. By inspiring curiosity and wonder in its audiences, the Museum will continue to nurture the social, cultural, and economic development of Pittsfield and the Berkshires.

"The Berkshire Museum's plan for a major investment in our city will greatly accelerate Pittsfield's ongoing transformation," says Mayor Linda Tyer. "I'm thrilled that the Museum is doubling down on its well-known dedication to meet community needs."

"Pittsfield's economy is on the rise, and we know that arts and culture is a driving force behind that," says State Senator Adam G. Hinds (D- Pittsfield). "Cultural attractions help to revitalize downtowns in Pittsfield, North Adams, and elsewhere. The Berkshire Museum is a cornerstone of that effort. We know that when the Berkshire Museum does well, Pittsfield is doing well. And the city's prosperity echoes throughout the Berkshires and

the larger western Mass region.” Hinds serves as the Senate chair of the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development.

Engaging the community

The mission statement of the Museum, as adopted in April of 2011, is and remains: “To bring people together for experiences that spark creativity and innovative thinking by making inspiring, educational connections among art, history, and natural science.”

In developing the plan for a transformed Museum, one which will better support the mission, better serve the community, and lead to long-term stability, the Board of Trustees and staff executed an extensive planning process, beginning with identifying community needs. The process began in December of 2015 and is ongoing. It included seven special day-long Board retreats totaling more than 60 hours of focused work, outside of regular Board responsibilities.

Three groups of community leaders were convened and met several times. The Stakeholder Advisory Board, comprised of 18 individuals from Berkshire County’s business, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors, offered insight on the needs of the wider community. The Program Working Group, consisting of representatives from 13 organizations in Berkshire County, explored programmatic collaborations, particularly around education and interdisciplinary experiences. The Cultural Partner Working Group, including leaders from 12 peer environmental, historic, performing and visual arts organizations in Berkshire County, acted as a sounding board.

In addition, a series of 22 focus groups met, engaging approximately 235 individuals from ages 8 to 55 and over. The participants included local children in both public and private school systems; Museum donors, members, and volunteers; young professionals; business leaders; innkeepers; and second homeowners. Several dozen meetings with individuals and small groups to gather and assess feedback have taken place as well. Between standing stakeholder groups, focus groups, and individual and small group meetings, approximately 400 people have participated in the community consultation process, in addition to the Museum’s trustees and staff.

The Museum has developed strategies to meet several community challenges identified during the planning process. These challenges included Berkshire County's under-resourced schools; declining year-round population; a fractured community identity; and the lack of access to cultural resources, among others. The Museum's response to these challenges will include creating programmatic resources for educated, curious, well-rounded individuals with a diverse range of talents; providing a contemporary view of the Berkshires that feels relevant and will inspire people to find connections and become better local and global citizens; and becoming the most welcoming cultural institution in the Berkshires.

"The process undertaken by the Museum to reach this point has been thoughtful and thorough, marked by intense community engagement and involvement," says Van Shields, the Museum's executive director. "The vision for how the Museum can best serve Pittsfield and the Berkshires is a reflection of the wishes of the community that surrounds us. By aligning our vision to community needs today, we will ensure the Museum continues its century-long track record of success as a vital cultural and educational resource for Pittsfield and Berkshire County."

The visitor experience

Community participation in the planning process revealed a strong interest in strengthening the Museum's programs related to science and history. With that in mind, the Museum's Master Plan will establish a truly interdisciplinary institution based on collections related to science, history, and the arts, unique in the Berkshire County region. New programs and exhibitions will create opportunities for people to discover more about the Berkshires and its impact on the world around them. The new model will provide visitors with technology that allows them to interact in a variety of modalities, and create regular opportunities for the community to come together.

The historic building will be updated inside, with a spacious, sunlit entryway, and an innovative display of objects from the Museum's collection enlivening the central space. Visitors will see many of the familiar, iconic objects interpreted in new ways

throughout the galleries. Wally the stegosaurus will be relocated indoors, protected from the elements. Tom Patti's magnificent glass installations will be in new locations within the Museum. Multi-media programming will be presented in a modern, more intimate space, with greatly improved sound and projection capabilities. The Alexander Calder mobiles now in the Theater will be re-installed as well.

Five thematic zones will define the visitor experience: Our Human Fabric, Make & Create, Shaping History, Perceive & Process, and Our Living World. Our Living World will feature a significantly expanded and improved aquarium, highlighting the streams and ponds of New England as well as exotic environments from around the globe. The iconic Egyptian mummy Pahat will be an important part of the Human Fabric thematic zone, prominently displayed with richer and more detailed interpretation than has been possible to date. The full-size wigwam will be moved to a new location, and visitors will still be able to enter and explore the structure.

Financial strategy

The vision for the new Berkshire Museum will be supported by a bold financial strategy designed to properly capitalize the Museum. In addition to upgrading its facility and core educational experiences, the Museum will establish an endowment sufficient to sustain operations through investment earnings to complement annual earned and contributed income. The Museum will also strengthen its balance sheet to reduce financial risk, pay down existing debt, and establish reserve funds for long-term capital maintenance and to mitigate unforeseen events.

To support the capitalization strategy, the Board of Trustees has opted to deaccession 40 works of art from the Museum's extensive collection numbering approximately 40,000 objects. The Museum is working with Sotheby's to offer these works for sale. The Museum anticipates the proceeds to be in the region of \$50 million. Included are two paintings by Norman Rockwell, *Shuffleton's Barbershop* and *Shaftsbury Blacksmith Shop*, as well as other works in the fine art categories of Impressionist and Modern Art, Contemporary Art, 19th-Century European Paintings, American Art, Old Master Paintings, and Chinese Works of Art. The works that have been selected for deaccession have been deemed

to be not essential to the Museum's refreshed mission and do not directly contribute to its new interdisciplinary interpretive plan with its heightened emphasis on science and history. The complete list of works to be deaccessioned will be released by Sotheby's in due course.

The Museum will also continue to engage with its members, visitors, and supporters through fundraising campaigns, annual appeals, corporate sponsorships, and support from its membership base, including a \$10 million campaign to support the new strategic plan.

Together with its existing holdings, the proceeds from sales and additional fundraising will ensure the Museum can fund its capitalization goals.

Partnerships

A team from Boston-based firm TDC, led by Anne Engel, vice president, acted as the lead consultants to work with the Museum's Trustees and staff to facilitate the development of the Master Plan, with a focus on business analysis and management. Experience Design, led by principals Larissa Hansen Hallgren and John Carney, has been part of the master planning process from the beginning and will continue to be the Museum's partner in the design and creation of the new exhibitions and experiences. Architects Tessa Kelly and Chris Parkinson, partners in the firm ARCADE based in Pittsfield, are designing the improvements to the building, working with a team from Hill-Engineers, Architects, Planners, Inc. of Dalton.

About the Berkshire Museum

Located in downtown Pittsfield, Massachusetts, at 39 South St., the Berkshire Museum, a Smithsonian Affiliate, is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Saturday, and noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday.

In association with the Smithsonian since 2013, Berkshire Museum is part of a select group of museums, cultural, educational, and arts organizations that share the Smithsonian's resources with the nation.

The Berkshire Museum integrates science, history, and the arts in dynamic, educational, and engaging programs and exhibitions for visitors of all ages. ***Curiosity Incubator*** is on view. ***GUITAR: The Instrument That Rocked the World*** is on view now through September 4, 2017. Little Cinema is open year-round. Lab102, Feigenbaum Hall of Innovation, Worlds in Miniature, Aquarium, and other exhibits are ongoing.

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