

Chapter 25

Western Development Museum—Permanently Removing Historical Artifacts

1.0 MAIN POINTS

By August 2022, the Western Development Museum fully implemented the one outstanding recommendation we first made in our 2016 audit regarding permanently removing historical artifacts from its collections.

The Museum developed its Collections Development Plan to guide systematic review of planned deaccession projects.¹ It includes a list of artifact collections and items to assess for removal from the collection, and criteria to assess each item. The Museum's Board of Directors approved this plan in November 2020. The Museum started evaluating its collection using the Plan in 2020 and expects to complete this work in five years.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

The Western Development Museum is the keeper of Saskatchewan's collective heritage.² A Cabinet-appointed Board of Directors manages the Museum.

The Museum is responsible for collecting, preserving, restoring, and exhibiting objects of historical value and importance to Saskatchewan, and for their disposal under *The Western Development Museum Act*.³ It has a collection of over 75,000 artifacts ranging from pins to locomotives in four locations in the province (Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, North Battleford and Yorkton). Its Corporate Office in Saskatoon is responsible for administrative and curatorial functions, as well as for collections storage.⁴

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our third follow-up audit of management's actions on the eight recommendations we made in our 2016 audit about the Museum's processes to permanently remove historical artifacts from its collections.⁵ By March 31, 2020, the Museum implemented seven of the eight recommendations made in our 2016 audit. It had not fully implemented one recommendation.⁶

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the

¹ Deaccession – to officially remove an artifact from listed holdings of a library or museum.

² *Western Development Museum, 2020–21 Annual Report*, p. 4.

³ Sections 11 and 16 of *The Western Development Museum Act*.

⁴ www.wdm.ca/about-wdm/ (14 September 2022).

⁵ *2016 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 30*, pp. 205–216.

⁶ *2020 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 45*, pp. 309–312 and *2018 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 48*, pp. 313–318.



Museum's progress toward meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit.

Our follow-up audit included discussions with Museum staff, reviewing supporting documentation, communications and policies, and testing artifact disposals.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION

This section sets out the recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at August 31, 2022, and the Western Development Museum's actions up to that date.

3.1 Plan in Place to Systematically Review Artifacts for Removal

We recommended the Western Development Museum systematically review its collections to identify potential artifacts for removal. (2016 Report – Volume 2, p. 212, Recommendation 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement March 21, 2017)

Status—Implemented

The Western Development Museum completed its Collections Development Plan to help guide staff on project-based reviews of its collection (e.g., automobiles, pump organs). The Museum's Board of Directors approved the Plan in November 2020 and plans to review and update the plan every five years.

The Collections Development Plan includes a summary of key projects that the Museum identified as priorities for staff to assess (i.e., identifying potential artifacts to deaccession). We found that the Museum has started or has plans to complete these projects within the period of the Collections Development Plan (i.e., five years).

Additionally, the Plan includes a sufficient assessment tool to help guide Museum staff in their assessments of artifacts. The tool requires staff to assess each artifact using established criteria including artifact condition, historical significance to Saskatchewan, rarity, and other aspects that increase the value to the Museum. Using the assessment, staff recommend whether the artifact should remain in the collection or be removed and disposed.

For example, the Museum started assessing its collection of antique vehicles from the 1920's in 2020 using the new tool. It is assessing the condition and significance of all automobiles in its collection.

We found staff consistently used this tool when assessing the Museum's artifact collection. We tested nine artifact assessments and found staff appropriately completed the assessment tool. In April 2022, the Board approved these nine items for disposal.

Having an approved Plan to guide a project-based review of the Museum's collection can help reduce costs and increase available storage space for artifacts that have more value and significance to the Museum.