

FINANCE AND CIVIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR
AND COUNCILLORS*

SUBJECT: CITY ARCHIVES ORAL HISTORY DIGITIZATION PROGRAM

RECOMMENDATION:

1. THAT Council approve an expenditure of Gaming Funds in the amount of \$75,000 (excluding HST) for implementation of the Burnaby Oral History Digitization Program, as outlined in this report.

REPORT

The Finance and Civic Development Committee, at its meeting held on 2010 September 30, received and adopted the *attached* report from the Community Heritage Commission seeking Council's approval for funding for implementation of the Burnaby Oral History Digitization Program.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor D. Johnston
Chair

Councillor N. Volkow
Vice Chair

Councillor C. Jordan
Member

Copied to:	City Manager Deputy City Manager (C. Turpin) Director Finance Chief Librarian Director Planning and Building Director Parks, Recr. & Cult. Services Chief Building Inspector
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TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS
COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION

DATE: 2010 August 09

FROM: CITY CLERK

FILE: 2410-20
Reference: Heritage Burnaby

SUBJECT: CITY ARCHIVES ORAL HISTORY DIGITIZATION PROGRAM

PURPOSE: To outline a proposal to develop and implement the Burnaby Oral History Digitization Program.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** Community Heritage Commission request approval for an expenditure of Gaming Funds in the amount of \$75,000 (excluding HST) for implementation of the Burnaby Oral History Digitization Program, as outlined in this report.
2. **THAT** this report be referred to the Finance and Civic Development Committee for consideration.

REPORT**1.0 BACKGROUND**

The Community Heritage Commission has recognized the need to identify, protect, manage and promote the valuable heritage resources under the control of the City Archives through the now well-established and award winning Heritage Burnaby website. To date, tens of thousands of records, including photographs, textual records and maps have been made available through this program. In addition, this digitization work has realized an invaluable preservation strategy for assets held in the Archives. By digitizing records – which by their very nature can be susceptible to damage and at great risk for loss or corruption – these otherwise inaccessible materials can be published and made widely available while at the same time preserving the original document in a stable environment without the need to remove it from storage for it to be used and appreciated. The digital files themselves become part of the Archives network files which are upgraded and converted as a routine part of the office workflow.

This report outlines the subject proposal to initiate another phase of digitization for some of our most vulnerable records and proposes to develop additional resources in the way of a new phase of oral history programming.

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2.0 BURNABY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

2.1 Phase One – Oral History Conversion Project

The City Archives currently holds approximately 100 hours of oral history recordings that consist of interviews of Burnaby pioneers done in the 1970s and 1980s. These interviews were completed by SFU students as well as by members of the Burnaby Historical Society and include former Burnaby Reeve William Pritchard, former Mayor Bill Copeland, prominent residents like Florence Hart Godwin, Drs. Blythe and Violet Eagles and many others who describe their lives and experiences in early Burnaby. Unfortunately, the tapes themselves exist only in analog formats (reel to reel and cassettes), the majority of which can no longer be accessed. The tapes are extremely fragile and their lifespan in their current format is nearing the end of its viability. Even if we could acquire the equipment needed to play them, the magnetic tapes are very brittle and can snap during playback. As a result, it is recommended that they be converted to a digital format before the content is lost entirely.

Creating digital files of these analog tapes will produce additional benefits for the City and the community in general. Once the material has been digitized, we will have the ability to make it available on the Heritage Burnaby website. These sound recordings can be described, indexed and made searchable using a similar approach as was created for making other records accessible online. People will be able to listen to the interviews in their entirety, or they can search the database and find specific “clips” related to subjects that are particularly relevant or interesting to them. This project will improve preservation while increasing access to this invaluable collection.

If approved, the project could begin this Fall with the conversion to be completed by the Spring of 2011, at which time detailed indexes and descriptions of the interviews would be completed by archives staff prior to their uploading to the website. Some adjustments would be required to the existing site to allow for these audio files to be available, but the flexibility of the current system will enable us to move forward with this conversion quite smoothly and it should be completed before the end of the summer of 2011. The costs associated with this phase of the program – which include the costs of conversion, editing, updating the website and server to store and make available the audio files and the staff costs associated with indexing and describing these records – have been estimated at \$50,000. Upon Council approval for this project, staff will be applying for grant funding which could help off-set the costs (up to \$15,000.00) and should an application be successful, any amount received would be used to repay the City expenditure. At present, it is being requested that the balance of \$50,000 (excluding HST) be funded from the Gaming Funds. The use of Gaming funds for this project is consistent with Council guidelines to support heritage, cultural and environmental projects.

2.2 Phase II – Oral History Project

Considerations for the oral history digitization project led staff to undertake a review of the possibility of increasing our current oral history resources by way of a new series of interviews

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featuring current Burnaby residents. The last set of interviews in the Burnaby Historical Society collection are approximately 30 years old, and feature many Burnaby residents who have since passed away. It is felt that now would be an appropriate time to initiate a pilot project to undertake new interviews to ensure vital parts of our history are not lost.

It is proposed that the City Archives spearhead a limited series of interviews, to commence in 2011 and estimated to be completed prior to the spring of 2012, to gauge the public interest and response to a new oral history project. A selection of interviews could be completed, captured in a digital format and made available online to improve our collection and increase the heritage resources for our community. If this initial phase of the program is successful, future phases in subsequent years will be developed and made part of the archives' long-term work plans.

The costs associated with this project will be offset by the infrastructure created during the first phase of digitization and conversion as outlined in the previous section of this report. Financing will be required for recording equipment, editing software and staff resources needed to complete each interview. These costs are estimated at \$25,000 (excluding HST) for this phase of the program and are requested to be funded through Gaming Funds.

CONCLUSION

Oral histories are often the only means of capturing and unearthing important sources of information that can not be retained in written records alone. While letters, newspapers, articles, books and photographs are vital parts of our heritage collections, oral histories can offer insights into the intricacies and intimacies of life that can never be found on a written page. These resources, both human and mechanical, are at risk of loss and it is hoped that this proposed program of digitization will enable the City to preserve these collective memories well into the future.

Debbie Comis,
CITY CLERK

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cc: City Manager
Deputy City Manager (C. Turpin)
Director Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services
Director Finance
Director of Planning and Building
Chief Librarian
Chief Information Officer

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