

**Sitka Historical Society
Museum Committee
24 October 2011, Meeting Notes**

Attendees: Bob Medinger/Society-Museum Executive Director, Mary Pat Wyatt/Pre-D Museum Consultant, Martha Schoenthal/Pre-D Project Manager, Michael Harmon/Sitka Public Works Director, Jerry Dzugan/Society Board Member, Patricia Alexander/Society Board VP, Kay Simmons/STA, John Stein/Society Board President, Ernestine Massey/Society Board Treasurer, Linda Trierschield/Society Board Member, Leigh Kainuleinen/Public.

Via telephone: Marilyn Knapp/Retired Curator, and Scott Carrlee/Curator of State Museum Services.

Absent/Traveling: Mike Reif/Assembly Member, Tonya Rioux/SCVB Exec. Director

Official Committee Members:

John Stein, Ernestine Massey, Pat Alexander: Sitka Historical Society Board
Mike Reif, Assembly Member
Michael Harmon, Director of Public Works, C&B of Sitka
Tonya Rioux, SCVB Executive Director
Jeff Feldpausch, STA Director of Cultural Resources
Marilyn Knapp, Retired Curator / Public
Scott Carrlee, Curator of State of Alaska Museum Services
Bob Medinger, Executive Director, Sitka Historical Society & Museum
Martha Schoenthal, Project Manager, Foraker/Rasmuson Pre-Development
Mary Pat Wyatt, Museum Consultant, Foraker/Rasmuson Pre-Development

After introductions, Martha Schoenthal, Project Manager with the Foraker Group gave a PowerPoint presentation describing the Foraker Group, the Pre-Development program process and what steps are involved. Michael Harmon, director of Public Works, gave a status report on the Centennial Project. Mary Pat Wyatt, a museum consultant for the Foraker Group, led the discussions.

Some of the questions/comments that came up during the meeting are as follows:

The museum needs to be sure to understand its' own niche & mission. With regard to other museums in Sitka, this museum could provide introductions to the natural history and introductions to the First Peoples. Consortium member input will be provided at a meeting tomorrow.

Sitka been marketed as the Russian American destination by the cruise ship companies, but Sitka's history is much more varied and richer than just that. From the Tlingit (pre-contact to today), transfer & early American era/Capital, SJ, Presbyterians, Russian Orthodoxy, economic development (Forestry/Mill, Mining, etc), WWII, Fishing, etc.

There were discussions about the exhibit focus being on the stories of the unique people of Sitka and having those people provide a highlight thorough the chronological exhibit format of the human history of the region. (Pat & Bob)

It was noted that security and environmental controls were important for the facility and in line with national museum accreditation standards. (Marilyn)

It was desirable that space be provided to meet the needs of researchers. (Pat)

It was stated that the museum should have something unique or special that no one else has such that it becomes a draw to visitors. (John/Bob)

There was some discussion about the Museum store and its contribution to sustainability, size, etc. It was noted that sales are down right now, which is in line with general downtown merchants dependent of tour boat visitor numbers. Mary Pat will be meeting with Shirley for input.

It was suggested that the waterfront location might be too valuable to be used for storage space and that other sites might be considered. The mill site was mentioned, but could not meet standards. There was also a comment that perhaps the building could go vertical to assist, if space conditions warrant.

There was some discussion about training for docents and student internships for the summer season; this would provide a special highlight to visitors, if done properly.

Marilyn stated that professional exhibit planners should be engaged as the project progresses, and that it is easier to find funding sources for specific components such of improving the Diorama and/or for Compaq storage. Martha stated that new exhibits could cost up to \$1000 per foot and should be included in cost projections.

Several people agreed that the existing Diorama of Sitka on the day of the transfer in 1867 should be a highlight in the museum and the exhibit could be enhanced further. Scott/Bob referenced CMAP discussion of ideas to improve the presentation/interpretation.

All were in strong agreement that more exhibit space was needed. This included permanent and temporary exhibit space. For tour bus shore excursions, space should be examined in order to permit those capacities.

There was discussion about potential partnerships for the project, their potential, but also possible impact on size/staffing/sustainability. Possible partners were to meet the next day for review of the project. It was pointed out that tribal repatriated clan artifacts need storage and could become a highlight of possible exhibits.

Martha explained that Mary Pat would be issuing a draft report that would be distributed to the committee on **November 7th**. The report will make recommendations based upon industry best practices. The committee will develop the strategy for going forward. The next meetings are schedule to be every other Monday evening:

- November 14
- November 28
- December 12

The goal is to be able to prepare a “white paper” describing the project before the legislature convenes in mid-January. (Michael)