



San Bernardino County

Legislation Text

File #: 3209, Agenda Item #: 50

REPORT/RECOMMENDATION TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF SAN BERNARDINO AND RECORD OF ACTION

November 17, 2020

FROM

MELISSA RUSSO, Director, Museum

SUBJECT

Transfer of Historic Baskets and Basket Material Related to San Manuel Band of Mission Indians

RECOMMENDATION(S)

Authorize the County Museum to deaccession and transfer 25 basket and basket "starts" to the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians.

(Presenter: Melissa Russo, Museum Director, 798-8601)

COUNTY AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Promote the Countywide Vision.

Operate in a Fiscally-Responsible and Business-Like Manner.

Pursue County Goals and Objectives by Working with Other Agencies.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Approval of this item will not result in the use of Discretionary General Funding (Net County Cost). There may be nominal savings realized in future years because the Museum's collections care, conservation, and storage of these sensitive artifacts will no longer be necessary.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The San Bernardino County Museum proposes the transfer of 25 baskets and basketry material-based objects to the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians ("Tribe"). The material has substantial cultural significance to the Tribe and is attributed to Tribal elders and basketmakers, Jesusa Manuel (deceased 1952) and Louisa Manuel (deceased 1963).

This transfer conforms to our collection management policy, approved by the Board of Supervisors on February 14, 2017 (Item No. 36), which allows for deaccessioning and transfer when "another institution is in a better position to care for the object." The transfer also conforms to our standards as an accredited museum to ensure that our collections' stewardship respects and acknowledges the cultural traditions and beliefs of the Tribes whose artifacts and ethnographic objects with which the Museum has been entrusted. The museum's curator of Anthropology and Museum Director concluded that the Tribe is best suited to manage the baskets and basket material generated by their community, and recommend their repatriation to the Tribe's community.

Twenty-three of the baskets and basket starts to be transferred were acquired by the Museum in the 1980s as a donation from the Museum's first director Gerald Smith, who collected these and thousands of other artifacts

over his lifetime. Two baskets were collected by Dorothy Barron and Faith Hatch in the 1950s and were donated to the Museum in 1982.

In July 2020, the Tribe approached the Museum requesting the potential repatriation of the baskets. The Tribe views the baskets as encoded with the spirit, prayers, and songs of the two matriarchs who weaved them. Many of the motifs woven into the baskets have deep spiritual and historical meaning to the Tribe. The Tribe has long prioritized the importance of educating the public about Serrano culture and California Native history, which is a pillar of its Tribal mission and values, as well as its strategic philanthropy initiatives and its Tribal Unity and Cultural Awareness program. The basketry material and basket “starts” will contribute to the revitalization of basket weaving that is underway on the Reservation. This is an incredibly valuable outcome for an art form and traditional lifeway that could otherwise be diminished or completely lost to future generations.

The Tribe is well positioned to care for the material. The Tribe’s Cultural Resource Management (“CRM”) team boasts staff with subject matter expertise in archives and collections management and often assists externals, such as the Museum, with interpretive projects. The CRM Department also possesses the status of a Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, which was granted to the Tribe by the National Park Service in February 2020. This status acknowledges the internal capabilities of San Manuel to assume the roles and activities normally assigned to a State Historic Preservation Office, as their government and CRM team have amply illustrated both a robust and technically sound program of heritage stewardship.

These baskets are irreplaceable, and the cultural import and significance to the Tribe deems them priceless. This transfer is an opportunity to recognize the collaborative partnership between the Museum and the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, and to celebrate this extraordinarily meaningful repatriation.

PROCUREMENT

N/A

REVIEW BY OTHERS

This item has been reviewed by County Counsel (Julie Surber, Principal Assistant County Counsel, 387-5455) on October 16, 2020; Finance (Elias Duenas, Finance Analyst, 387-4052) on October 28, 2020; County Finance and Administration (Robert Saldana, Deputy Executive Officer, 387-5423) on October 28, 2020.