

PUBLIC MUSEUMS IN TAURANGA – AN OVERVIEW

Introduction

Public museum displays were established in Tauranga in 1873 and 1882, in the former Mechanics Institute, and in 1938, in the Town Hall.¹ None of them lasted. This review looks at attempts to establish a museum in the city over the last fifty-odd years, since 1969. A detailed timeline, with references, is attached as Appendix 1. The term ‘Council’ is used throughout to refer to the Tauranga Borough Council, the Tauranga County Council, the Tauranga District Council and the Tauranga City Council.

1. The Historical Society Museum 1969-1976

The Tauranga Historical Society founded a small volunteer-run museum in a Council-owned house in Hamilton Street in 1969. Control of the museum and collections was placed under Council control in 1972 through a Museum Board, serviced by Council and including representatives from the Tauranga Historical Society and the Tauranga Maori Executive.

2. The Tauranga Historic Village 1976-1998

Established in 1976 by a group of enthusiastic volunteers, responding to the destruction of many of Tauranga’s early buildings, and supplemented by workers under the central government’s *Project Employment Programme* work scheme, the so-called Historic Village took over control of the Historical Society’s museum, moving the collections to its site in 17th Avenue. The collections were augmented by wide-ranging acquisitions, with little or no control over accession and registration policy, and housed in sub-standard conditions in a range of original and reconstructed wooden buildings. Once government subsidies were withdrawn, the Village’s infrastructure became unsustainable and it was closed in 1998 (though it was subsequently reopened under Council control).

Comment:

The Village’s mandate went well beyond that of a museum. As well as collecting individual authentic buildings of historic significance, a range of structures rebuilt from the remains of demolished wooden buildings were constructed to form a “village” with little resemblance to the early Tauranga it was intended to represent. Elements such as a railway and restored vintage machinery created elements of a theme park, and collection objects were stored and displayed under conditions unsuitable for their long term preservation. While popular with volunteers and visitors, the Village did not fulfil the requirements of a civic museum.

3. Dive Crescent 1998-2000

With the closure of the Historic Village, Council proposed to build a new museum on land at Dive Crescent. Plans were developed, but the project was shelved through uncertainty over availability and ownership of the land.

Comment:

¹ Fiona Kean, 2021, History of a museum for Tauranga in *Heritage Together – Kotahitanga*. Taonga Tauranga Heritage Bay of Plenty Charitable Trust.

It is fortunate that the Dive Crescent proposal did not go ahead, since the situation, on reclaimed land adjoining the harbour, would not have been appropriate for a permanent museum and would now be seen as threatened by sea level rise. The fact that concept design went ahead before land ownership was determined was an unfortunate failure of planning.

4. Storage 1999-2021

During 1999 most of the museum collections, comprising a wide variety of objects of differing value, were moved to temporary storage in a rented commercial building in Tyne Street, at Mount Maunganui. A range of machinery and large objects from the Village collections was stored temporarily at Dive Crescent and some subsequently disposed of. After five years, in 2004, the collections were moved once more to a newly-built commercial warehouse in Newton Street, rented by the Council, with the intention that a new museum would provide permanent storage within a few years. The collections, numbering 30,000 objects and now known as the *Tauranga Heritage Collection*, operates publicly through a loans service to schools of deaccessioned objects transferred to an education collection, using the website *Handsontauranga*. Ten thousand items from the collection are also available for viewing online. The two staff responsible for the collection have created a number of exhibitions and publications based on the collection, most notably a series of mobile exhibitions between 2014 and 2018, commemorating the centenary of World War I. The Heritage Collection has also collaborated with the Tauranga City Library and the Tauranga Art Gallery in mounting a number of small exhibitions.²

Comment:

The Tyne Street storage was completely unsuitable for museum collections – dirty, uninsulated and vulnerable to fluctuating weather conditions. It is a tribute to the three staff who worked there that they were prepared to do so, but the episode perhaps reflects the value ascribed to the heritage collections by the Council of the time. While the Newton Street storage building is a substantial improvement – fitted out with museum-standard shelving and with some degree of climate control, it does not meet contemporary standards for the care of museum collections and, located on a sand spit at only six metres above sea level, is vulnerable to earthquake, tsunami, flooding and salt spray. While it was only intended for temporary storage, the building has now been in use for 17 years, at a cost of over two million dollars in rent alone. In hindsight, Council could have funded a permanent purpose-built facility, on a more suitable site, for a similar amount.

5. Museum Definition Study Working Party 2000-2003

In 2000, following the failure of the Dive Crescent proposal, Council established a Working Party to advise on the nature and interpretive focus of a museum in Tauranga. A *Museum Definition Study* was commissioned to undertake a range of concept testing through public consultation and to recommend a pathway to establish a museum. The study set out major themes for a museum, outlined a scheme for development of a project brief and recommended the urgent appointment of a museum Director. Instead, a further set of detailed concept development reports was commissioned over the next year, resulting in a thematic concept document, *The Way Forward*. A temporary “Museum Development Manager” was appointed in 2003 on a two-year contract.

Comment:

The Council and Working Party lost momentum by focussing too much on the detail of the museum’s thematic content, rather than proceeding with appointment of a Director and enabling planning for the building itself to proceed, with the detail of interpretive content planned by

² <https://view.taurangaheritagecollection.co.nz/explore>

professional staff. However, *The Way Forward* is still relevant as a thematic scheme for a western Bay of Plenty museum.

6. Museum Project Steering Group 2003-2005

Having produced *The Way Forward*, the “Working Party” was replaced by a “Steering Group”, under the control of Council staff. With the Development Manager, a Project Manager and three collection management staff, planning for a new Museum proceeded over the next two years to the stage where a preliminary feasibility study could be prepared and plans for a building firmed up. During this period, the collection was moved to its current storage facility.

Comment:

Project development appears to have been hampered by a lack of understanding on the part of Council staff of the processes and philosophy behind the establishment of a museum and also by the degree of control they wished to exercise over the project. Importantly, the Museum Development Manager was involved both with the operational task of finding suitable storage for the collection and with longer-term project-based museum planning. The two did not sit well together. An alternative strategy of assembling a relatively independent higher-level team of highly-focussed museum professionals to undertake planning might have made more progress.

7. The Museum on a Pier 2005-2007

In 2005, an external consultant recommended that the new museum should be built on a pier on the Strand waterfront, a proposal accepted by the Project Steering Group and the Council. The Museum Development Manager was replaced by two successive Museum Directors and planning reached the resource consent stage. The concept was opposed, however, at resource consent hearings in 2006, on the grounds of inappropriate siting, by individuals who might otherwise have supported the museum. This opposition made it easier for a newly-elected council to abandon the project at the end of 2007, only a month before a new Art Gallery, promoted and governed by a Council-controlled trust board, was opened.

Comment:

Planning at the later stages of the Pier project, leading to resource consent, proceeded slowly, probably due partly to the fact that Council, lacking specialist expertise, was dependent on a variety of consultants to pursue the concept. This may have left the two museum directors isolated, rather than being part of a tightly-knit planning team operating from a single site. It was the pier proposal, however, that gave political opponents of the museum some encouragement from the public, both from those who were opposed in principle to a museum and those who simply saw the pier proposal as inappropriate. Reservations included obstruction of harbour views, the effect of salt air on the collections, the retention of the ‘temporary’ Newton Street facility for collection storage and staff offices, and potential difficulties in gaining outside funding.

8. The Tauranga Moana Museum Trust 2010-2018

Shortly after the decision not to proceed with a museum, Council established another *Museum Steering Group* of six citizens and five councillors, “to progress the community's desire for a regional Museum”. A year later, after consultation, the group reported back to Council recommending that a museum should be “community led”, and that Council’s operational costs for the project should be limited to providing the site (reserve land on Cliff Road was favoured) along with “current budgets for the retention and storage of an appropriate collection”. Following the Steering Group’s recommendations, Council established a “community trust”, in 2010, with a grant of \$54,000, to “be responsible for progressing the museum project.”

In the first four years of its existence, the *Tauranga Moana Museum Trust* developed a Business Case for a museum and a Communications Plan, and participated, at the City Council's request, in discussions on potential synergies between a museum, The Elms Trust and a proposed iwi cultural centre. In 2013 the Trust applied unsuccessfully for major capital and operational funding from the Regional Council's Regional Infrastructure Fund and later developed a fundraising brochure setting out its proposals. Fundraising and communication about the Trust's objectives failed to proceed, however, the trustees lost momentum and, after some years, the Trust was effectively supplanted by another community group, *Taonga Tauranga* (now *Taonga Tū | Heritage Bay of Plenty Trust*), which lobbied intensively during 2018, and since, for the establishment of a museum. The Museum Trust still exists but will shortly be wound up.

Comment:

The Tauranga Moana Museum Trust was largely condemned to failure by the Museum Steering Group's unrealistic recommendation that it be solely responsible for its own operational funding, for raising capital and operational costs for the museum through the community, and that Council's operational contribution be limited to the existing expenditure on housing the Heritage Collection. Without significant operational funding, the Museum Trust could not realistically advance the agenda it was tasked with, of raising community support for a museum and implementing its establishment. The Trustees' one major attempt to raise operational funding, from the Regional Council, failed, and its main concrete achievement – a substantial brochure intended for use as a fundraising tool – was never utilised. While Trustees may have lacked the required range of community and business connections, and the commercial experience, to advance the Museum cause significantly, they were also severely hampered by an absence of staff support. They did, however, keep the issue of a museum alive, through local newspapers and regular communications to Council.

9. The Cliff Road Proposal 2015-2018

By 2015, a museum was back on the Council's agenda, potentially combined with a new City Library. Extensive planning and community consultation, carried out through consultants and existing Council staff, took place over the next three years, a survey finding 64% of residents in favour of a museum. The Cliff Road reserves, the site of the former Otamataha Pā, were chosen for the museum, with the approval of tangata whenua, in preference to a central city site adjoining or combined with a new library. Having approved the project in the 2018-28 Long Term Plan, Councillors then agreed to hold a referendum, in conjunction with a by-election, to determine whether the community supported a museum. The non-binding referendum resulted in a 60/40 vote against the museum, from 30% of eligible voters, at which Council, for the second time in eleven years, resolved to withdraw capital and operating provisions for the museum from the Long Term Plan. In 2021 the Minister of Local Government replaced the Council with the present Commissioners, their term to end after the triennial local authority elections on 8 October 2022.

Comment:

The two most recent museum proposals in Tauranga have been driven directly by Council, but brought to a halt through the political process, with some election candidates campaigning against a museum. In both cases, Councillors opposed to the project have taken advantage of opposition to it from members of the public, in spite of the fact that extensive community consultation and surveys had revealed a significant degree of support. The 2018 referendum on the museum, combined with a Council by-election, politicised the issue, effectively resulting in the referendum result overriding the LTP consultation process. (The Council's legal advice had made the point that a survey of residents would have provided a more valid result, but this was apparently not heeded.) It would

seem that, for continuity of planning and operation, an independent body, with adequate funding, protected from local government political processes, may be needed to deliver a museum or heritage centre for Tauranga, as was the case for the Art Gallery.

Additionally, the choice of the Cliff Road recreation reserves as a museum site, while understandable in terms of proximity to early nineteenth century historic sites, and the importance of those to tangata whenua, was questionable. The Council's own *Multi-Criteria Matrix* made it clear during the planning process that a central-city location, taking advantage of the synergies to be gained by proximity to Library, i-Site and Art Gallery, all attracting a similar cohort of visitors, would be cheaper and attract higher numbers. The Cliff Road site would have required expensive archaeological investigations and a change in the reserve designation, a potentially-lengthy process. Although any public opposition during the resource consent process was never tested, it could have been anticipated, from citizens concerned at the loss of public open space and from residents opposing increased traffic and loss of views. The M\$55 cost, although not all to be funded by Council, also appeared excessive to some, and building height restrictions may have constrained the design. Some of the planning documents produced for the latest iteration of the museum also contained questionable propositions which were insufficiently examined and had already been questioned for the 2005 pier proposal. One such included the unrealistic prediction of 275,000 visitors in the first year of the museum's operation, while the issue of permanent storage was left, as in the past, unaddressed.

10. Summary

Five attempts over the last fifty years to establish a museum in Tauranga have failed, the first two likely due to naivety and lack of expertise, one from unforeseen circumstances and the two latest from over-complicated extended planning processes, lacking specialist, experienced, paid personnel, delegated the flexibility to drive the project to completion. Above all, control of the project by the Council, subject to the vagaries of the political process and the prejudices of individual councillors, with staff inexperienced in the complexities of museums and museum planning, appears in hindsight to have been a deciding factor in the successive failures. The Tauranga Art Gallery provides a model for the successful establishment and operation of a major cultural facility in Tauranga.

Afterword

As Museums Liaison Officer at Auckland Museum 1988-1995, writer of concept development reports for the Museum Working Party in 2002, Museum Development Manager 2003-2005, secretary of the Tauranga Moana Museum Trust 2010-2015 and currently secretary of the Tauranga Historical Society, I have been involved in one way or another with plans for a museum in Tauranga for much of the last thirty years. This commentary represents my personal and professional opinions, based on both documentary research and direct experience of plans to found a museum in Tauranga.

John Coster
October 2021.

Appendices:

1. Timeline & References
2. Bevan's letter to the Mayor

APPENDIX 1

TIMELINE – TAURANGA MUSEUM 1969-2021

1969.12.20	Tauranga Historical Society museum opened in Hamilton Street. ³
1972.03.27	Museum placed under City Council control. Tauranga Museum Board established.
1976.12.11	Tauranga Historic Village opened in 17 th Avenue and took over responsibility for museum management. City Council assumed ownership of collection. Acquisitions continued. ⁴
1998.08.00	Historic Village closed.
1999.00.00	Feasibility study and plans for new museum in Dive Crescent developed by staff but land became unavailable due to uncertainty over land title.
1999.09.14	Pupils of Bellevue Primary School write to Mayor requesting a museum.
1999.12.00	Collections removed from Historic Village and placed in temporary storage (Tyne St.). ⁵
2000.00.00	Dive Crescent proposal abandoned.
2000.01.22	<i>Museum Definition Study</i> commissioned – J Cave et.al. – concept testing and public consultation. ⁶
2000.09.01	Museum Definition Study Working Party established by Tauranga District Council.
2001.02.23	Museum Definition Study and implementation plan for “culture & heritage centre” presented to Council. ⁷
2002.12.12	Commissioned concept development reports presented to working party (<i>He Pataka Iringa Korero; Natural History themes; Post European Arrival themes; Partners and Relationships; Who is Telling our Stories?</i>).
2003.00.01	Tauranga becomes a city, with a population of 100,000.
2003.00.02	Concept report <i>The Way Forward</i> completed. <i>The major and encompassing theme recommended for the museum by the Working Party, is that of the region’s rich natural heritage and viewing this through the relationships of people with land, water and climate.</i>
2003.05.06	Museum Project Steering Group formed, replacing the Working Party. Council takes over museum planning.
2003.06.30	Museum Development Manager appointed ⁸
2004.00.01	"Smartgrowth" (Western Bay of Plenty development plan) "Tauranga Tomorrow" (Community Outcomes Plan) and "Smart Economy" (economic development plan) propose development of a museum in Tauranga.
2004.00.02	Museum collection moved into temporary purpose-modified rented 800 m ² storage, to become Tauranga Heritage Collection.
2004.05.00	Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) includes a museum to be opened in 2008.
2005.05.05	Gorbey Report: Assessment of Museum Siting (pier proposal).
2005.07.00	“ Interim Governance Group ” established.

³ Davies, Rachel, n.d. Tauranga Museum – History. Report, 3pp. Tauranga City Council.

⁴ Davies, Rachel, 19.02.2001. History of collection. Report to Tauranga City Council..

⁵ TDC file 7440-10 Vol 10; J Cave & Associates, 2001. Status report the museum definition study... Report to Tauranga District Council Project Steering Group.

⁶ Davies, Rachel, 22 January 2001 TCC staff email.

⁷ Cave et al.

⁸ Project Steering Group Minutes 27 June 2003; letter of appointment JNees/JCoster.

2005.10.00	Waterfront museum proposal presented to City Council. ⁹
2006.00.00	Museum Establishment Director Mark Clayton appointed.
2006.00.00	Council-sponsored telephone survey to gauge support for museum - 50% favoured a museum, 81% supported 50% of funding from outside Council; 56% opposed \$55 pa running costs through rates (Key Research).
2006.06.00	TCC hearings on M\$21 pier museum proposal for 10-year plan. Museum opening date deferred to 2011.
2006.12.14	Council resolution that planning for Museum project proceed, opening 2011, 50% of capital costs to be raised outside Council.
2007.00.00	Museum Establishment Director Neil Anderson appointed.
2007.06.08	Design Brief for pier museum compiled. ¹⁰
2007.08.00	Numerous letters to local newspapers regarding museum proposal.
2007.10.00	Museum preliminary design completed, resource consents lodged, some external funding secured.
2007.10.13	13 October Council elections.
2007.11.14	New Council resolution (Nov 14) to halt all expenditure on museum project. ¹¹
2007.11.22	Museum Establishment Director position terminated. ¹²
2007.12.12	Tauranga Art Gallery opened.
2008.06.03	3 June - Council Annual plan deliberations. Submissions: Maintain existing collection expenditure 553 (83%) /Reduce collection expenditure 113; Support museum remaining in LTCCP 678 (88%) /Oppose museum 94.
2008.06.03	3 June - "The Council chose to go with Option One for the Museum collection which means no exhibitions, a very limited schools programme, no public access, and no further cataloguing of the collection." "Expressions of interest [to] be sought for appointment to a Project Steering Group, of five community members and five Elected Members...[to] plan for a community led, Council facilitated, new museum proposal. ¹³
2008.11.00	Museum Steering Group established "to progress the community's desire for a regional Museum". ¹⁴
2010.04.00	Museum Steering Group report to Council: recommends museum be "community led", Council's operational costs contribution limited to providing a site and "current budgets for the retention and storage of an appropriate collection", community trust to be established with funding of \$54,000. ¹⁵
2010.06.18	Museum Steering Group disestablished. A new "stand alone Community Trust" (TMMT) to be established by Council, to "be responsible for progressing the museum project." ¹⁶
2010.11.02	Tauranga Moana Museum Trust established by TCC with a mandate to "progress the museum development project" ¹⁷

⁹ Jones, C, 2005. Museum Development Project. Presentation to Tauranga City Council, September 2005.

¹⁰ BECA, 8 June 2007, Design Brief for a New Museum in the Western Bay of Plenty. 31pp.

¹¹ Groves, M, 2007. Tauranga City Council Museum Project status report to completion of concept design. Beca November 2007.

¹² Tauranga City Council Meeting Agenda 29 January 2008.

¹³ Tauranga City Council, 2008. Draft Annual Plan 2008/09, Draft amendments to the LTCCP.... Notice of meeting & agenda 3-5 June 2008, p.86. Minutes, Tauranga City Council, 3 June 2008.

¹⁴ Jones, C 2010. Museum project and governance arrangements DC138. Report to Tauranga City Council 18 May 2010. Members of the Steering Group were Colin Bidois, Michael Ludbrooke, Jon Mayson, Susan Northey, Graeme Purchas, Alan Tate, Stuart Crosby, Norm Bruning, Mike Baker, Wayne Moultrie, Catherine Stewart and administrator Jo Bond.

¹⁵ Museum Steering Group Final Report to Council 2010.

¹⁶ Jones 2010.

2015.00.01	TMMT museum proposal document completed. ¹⁸
2015.04.17	Community engagement regarding a museum and the central library in the city centre commenced, continuing until June. ¹⁹
2017.10.16	Council resolves to proceed with a Museum in LTP. Council to contribute M\$26.3 capital, \$200,000 planning. ²⁰
2017.11.00	Telephone survey of residents finds 64% support a museum, 41% willing to pay for it. ²¹
2018.00.00	GPR Survey and subsequent excavations on proposed Cliff Road site reveal trenches of Otamataha Pā. ²²
2018.01.31	Following the Council meeting on 31 January 2018, Deputy Mayor, Kelvin Clout, proposed that the Council hold a referendum (in conjunction with the by-election) to determine whether the community supports a museum. ²³
2018.02.15	Community group Taonga Tauranga takes over lobbying for a museum with a series of public presentations.
2018.02.20	Council agrees to hold a referendum on the Museum combined with an April by-election. ²⁴
2018.02.22	The promoter of the referendum, Tauranga's deputy mayor Kelvin Clout, ".... disagreed the referendum displayed a lack of resolve and leadership by the council. "It's an opportunity for democracy in action'." ²⁵
2018.05.02	Referendum results in 60/40 vote against from 30% of eligible voters. ²⁶
2018.05.29	Council resolves to make <i>no capital or operating provision in the 2018-2028 LongTerm Plan for a new museum</i> and requests <i>Issues and Options paper for partial de-accessioning of the current heritage collection.</i> ²⁷
2021.02.02	Commissioners appointed to Tauranga City Council, starting 9 February 2021 and ending after the triennial local authority elections on 8 October 2022. ²⁸
2021.00.00	TCC approves funding to Taonga Tū Heritage BOP to prepare a business case for a Heritage Centre in the CBD, serving the entire western Bay of Plenty.

¹⁷ Tauranga City Council Long Term Plan 2012-2022. https://www.tauranga.govt.nz/Portals/0/data/council/long_term_plans/2012-2022/files/groups_activites_%207-14.pdf ; https://app.businessregisters.govt.nz/sber-businesses/viewInstance/view.html?id=229a78e05307b6d8bf1b29667f00cb17d45b78c93b6fb711&_timestamp=407350810756733

¹⁸ Tauranga Moana Museum Trust n.d. (2015) Proposal Museum Tauranga Moana. A3 proposal document.

¹⁹ Tauranga City Council Council meeting agenda 20 February 2018: DC52 - Attachment B - Consultation Summary on Museum & Library.

²⁰ Tauranga City Council Minutes of Council, Monday, 16 October 2017; BoP Times 5.12.2017.

²¹ Key Research, 2017. Tauranga City Council exploring willingness to pay for a museum.... Report to TCC.

²² Phillips, K, 2018. Final report exploratory archaeological investigations within Otamataha pa U14/189 Heritage New Zealand Authority 2018/349

²³ Tauranga City Council Council agenda 20 February 2018.

²⁴ BoP Times, 20 Feb, 2018. Referendum mooted for \$55.7m Tauranga museum plan - council to decide Tuesday.

Tauranga City Council, minutes of council 20 February 2018.

²⁵ <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/bay-of-plenty-times/news/museum-referendum-pitched-as-turning-point-in-taurangas-history/OZ6HNLVSECIT3CZTZNYDOIXFCY/>

²⁶ Voters in the cultural desert that is Tauranga say no to museum Stuff.co.nz 2.5.2018

²⁷ Minutes Tauranga City Council Council meeting 29 May 2018.

Sun Live Tuesday 29 May, 2018. No go on Tauranga museum. <https://www.sunlive.co.nz/news/180759-no-go-on-tauranga-museum.html>

Tauranga City Council Long Term Plan 2018-2028

²⁸ <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/commissioners-appointed-tauranga-city-council>

APPENDIX 2

