

Date: December 16, 2009

To: Pacific Grove Museum Board

From: David Shonman

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Hello Sharon, Judy, John and Geva,

I want to let you know that I am resigning my seat on the Pacific Grove Museum Board, effective immediately.

At the end of yesterday's Special Board meeting, I realized that the direction the Board has chosen no longer reflects my personal view of what our responsibility should be. It was clear that there was nothing I could say that would change the viewpoint of enough members to make a difference. After the meeting, as I was preparing to attend the City's BNRC meeting, I realized that I could no longer, in good conscience, represent the Museum Board in public.

First, I want to thank each of you for all the energy and hard work you have put into both the Museum and the Board. We have come a long way together over the past two years, under some very difficult and chaotic conditions. Our meetings were conducted in an open and civil manner, we managed to regularly get information out to both Board members and the public, and we treated everyone with courtesy and respect.

I was proud of the way we dealt with the issues surrounding the City's agreement with the Museum Foundation of Pacific Grove, and was especially pleased with the way that we listened to and considered public comment.

During the past year, the Museum Board has encountered pressure from two different directions. First, from a group of citizens who have opposed the Museum Foundation and Lori Mannel at every step. And second, for the past several months, we have also been under more subtle pressure from the Foundation.

I think I understand why we are being pushed from both sides. The citizens I referred to above are truly concerned about the Museum, but several of them seem to have personal grudges with Lori and some of the Foundation members. They have sometimes acted rudely at our meetings, but I believe the Board has done a good job of listening to them, considering their comments, and acting on those concerns that we think warrant action.

Lori and others representing the Foundation also care deeply for the Museum. And, as we know, they face a daunting task. The Museum was in dreadful condition. There was a need to develop a new vision that required wide-spread acceptance. To achieve this, I think they felt that the flow of information should be closely controlled, that the new separation between the Museum staff and the City should be maintained, and that power should be consolidated. This resulted in the dissolution of the Association, a severe reduction in communication with the Museum and its staff, and a marginalizing of anyone or anything that could slow their progress. In my opinion, the weakening of the Museum Board is just one element of this strategy.

I do not think our community or the Museum will be well served by a weakened Board. During all those meetings that were held while the City was considering the proposed agreement, whenever someone asked where can the public turn when they are concerned about the City's Museum, our answer was always the Museum Board.

I hope you remember that the Foundation (including Geva), Lori and her staff, are private contractors operating the Museum for the City. It is understandable that they will always put the best face on their reports to the City Manager. As knowledgeable citizens appointed by the Mayor and approved by the Council, our Board could provide an independent perspective. I'm not being disloyal or disrespectful. I strongly believe this is the role we should be performing for the City, for the citizens and for the Museum. I thought that the majority of Board members accepted that idea (though I guessed that neither Geva nor Lori were happy with it). But yesterday, I saw that the majority had developed a different view. And I soon realized that I could not represent that view. I saw no other option but to resign.

I wish all of you the very best. I hope and expect that the Museum will continue to flourish and develop into the institution that most of us envision. I hope that this will be achieved in a manner that respects the Museum, its volunteers and supporters, and the City and citizens who still own this institution. I regret that I will no longer be as deeply involved as I have been for so many years, but I'm proud of my contributions and so pleased by the friendships that I have gained by being a member of the Museum community.

With my very best regards,

David Shonman