

Canadian
Historical
Association



Société
historique
du Canada



Canadian Archaeological Association
Association Canadienne d'Archéologie

Ottawa, May 6, 2013

Mr. Mark O'Neill
President and Chief Executive Officer
Canadian Museum of Civilization
Directorate
100 Laurier Street
Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0M8

Dear Mr. O'Neill,

On behalf of our respective associations, we write to express our serious concern regarding the lack of extensive or systematic engagement of the professional community of historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists in the CMC's planning for the proposed Canadian Museum of History. Unless redressed through significant and meaningful consultation with the professional heritage community, we fear this lack of engagement will critically compromise both the quality and credibility of the new museum.

A major problem is that the meetings on the new museum convened to date do not meet the definition of true consultation, that is, "a formal discussion between groups of people before a decision is made." The public meetings held last fall were reportedly brainstorming or awareness sessions but not actual consultations. At these meetings the museum's representatives did not undertake to provide participants with a synthesis of comments, a formal response to their concerns, or any specific indication as to how the museum would seek to integrate the received feedback in the research or implementation of the new exhibits. If notes were kept, they reportedly have not been shared with the participants. For any major national heritage development it is essential to provide a transparent framework to enable

participants to see that their inputs are being seriously considered and that mechanisms are in place for formal follow-up. This has not yet happened.

Another problem is that only a minority of professional practitioners of the historical disciplines were invited to participate in these meetings. In its president's letter of 3 December 2012 to you, the Canadian Historical Association outlined its proposal that an arm's length panel of senior historians, anthropologists, archaeologists and museum professionals should be appointed to provide non-partisan expert advice to the museum on its research and implementation of the new museum. Five months later, this letter has not been answered. In our view this lack of response is not acceptable and it does not meet the test of consultation, that is, serious engagement and transparency, which is surely needed with the major professional organizations whose disciplines bear upon the content of the new museum.

Our associations, representing professional historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists in every region of Canada, are vitally interested in the new museum, its research and exhibits and we want help it succeed. This will not be possible unless the CMC makes a sincere effort to reach out to the professional community with a proposal for meaningful engagement at this time. We urge you to take steps to set up a formal process of consultation to enlist wide-ranging, meaningful inputs from the professional community that will be essential to the integrity and credibility of the proposed Canadian Museum of History.

We look forward to your early reply.

Sincerely,



Lyle Dick
President
CHA/SHC



Ellen Judd
President
CAS/SCA



William Ross
President
CAA/ACA