

Cultural Heritage Protection: Next Steps

Minutes of 9 February 2004 meeting

The Trustees Room, Boston Public Library

A follow-up meeting to the Boston Alliance for Response Forum was held on February 9, 2004, at the Boston Public Library. Present were Bernard Margolis, BPL; Arthur Beale, Curt DiCamillo, MFA; Fred Vanderschmidt, FEMA; Charlie Jewell, BWSC; Steve Morash, BEMA; Sgt. Matthew Whalen, BPD; Steve Dalton, Lori Foley, NEDCC; Michael Comeau, Mass. Archives; and Gregor Trinkaus-Randall, MBLC.

Introductions. Host Bernard Margolis welcomed attendees and introductions were made. Sarah Hutt, Director of Public Art for the City of Boston Office of Cultural Affairs, was unable to attend due to illness.

History of joint efforts in emergency preparedness. Gregor Trinkaus-Randall provided some background on recent emergency preparedness efforts. In 1996, Judy McDonough, executive director of the Mass. Historical Commission, spearheaded efforts to place cultural resources on the radar screen of the emergency **management** community. A Cultural Resources Disaster Planning **and Mitigation** Task Force was created with a mission to ensure the survival of Massachusetts patrimony in the event of a catastrophic disaster. (Gregor, Steve Dalton, Arthur Beale, and Mark Winetrout [Mass. Cultural Council] were also members of this task force.) Although the focus was primarily on response to catastrophic events, the need for individual institutions to develop disaster plans was underscored. A one-page check-off sheet was developed for distribution within the municipalities. Two forums were subsequently held in Stockbridge and Marshfield.

The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) has an ongoing emergency assistance program for Massachusetts libraries and archives. Program components include training in response, recovery, and the development of disaster plans; technical assistance in disaster recovery in conjunction with NEDCC; the availability of recovery supplies in the event of a small emergency; and a pre-arranged contract with Munters Corporation/ Moisture Control Services to provide freezing and drying facilities for large quantities of damaged materials.

NEDCC and MBLC are developing an online library disaster-planning workbook that can be used to generate complete, site-specific disaster plans. Electronic access to the planning tool on the Internet will expand the audience for this resource.

Heritage Preservation and the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) have also been instrumental in developing programs for cultural institutions that raise awareness and encourage action in the areas of disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

BEMA. Steve Morash discussed the role of BEMA in the national response system and its role in maintaining the city's emergency preparedness plan. BEMA falls within the Emergency Management Division of the Boston Fire Department and functions as the

liaison between MEMA and FEMA. At the Emergency Management Center on Bragdon Street, all elements of response are coordinated both inside and outside of the city.

Steve M. offered the cultural institutions an Emergency Support Function (ESF) seat at BEMA's Emergency Operations Center. It was agreed that Arthur Beale will sit at the table; the next BEMA meeting will be held on March 3.

The creation of an annex for cultural resources was discussed. Annex P, "Flood," of BEMA's Emergency Operation Plan, can be used as a model for the creation of a similar annex for cultural institutions. By adopting an all-hazards approach, pre-disaster plans can be spelled out and put in place. Both Fred and Steve M. will look for existing annexes for cultural institutions **in other cities and states**. If none exists, the creation of such an annex for Boston could serve as a model for other cities.

Because no umbrella organization for – or inventory of – Boston's cultural institutions and resources exists, the questions arose on how our institutions could communicate with one another and what forms this communication would take. Bernie discussed his participation in the Cultural and Scientific Directors Group, an organization of about 30 institutions that includes the BPL, WGBH, the MFA, the Children's Museum, the Museum of Science, the Wang Center, Mass. College of Art, and Zoo New England. Bernie will bring this topic up at the next CSDG meeting.

FEMA. Fred Vanderschmidt provided insight into FEMA's perspective. He offered to look into FEMA funding that would help Boston's cultural institutions conduct risk and hazard assessments and then create emergency management plans. Fred pointed out that these plans should dovetail with plans that are currently being created at the local and state levels. For this to occur, cultural institutions need to learn the language of emergency management and understand how business is done. Please review FEMA's independent study program on the Basic Incident Command System, at <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is195.asp>. Also, a focus group at the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) could provide additional training.

The creation of a cultural SWAT team was discussed. This team of trained experts would provide mutual aid to institutions in the event of a large-scale disaster. Again, its structure could parallel what already exists in emergency management; a memo of understanding could be created similar to the Fire Department's mutual aid agreement. How do we go about creating such a team? What training would be entailed? How would such a Disaster Cultural Assistance Team be activated?

Also needed would be that umbrella organization, a support group that keeps the team of trained experts replenished, that keeps upper management informed, and is the source of the seat at the BEMA table. Bernie proposed the acronym CEMT (pronounced "cement") – Cultural Emergency Management Team – for the steering committee (of which we are all a part) that has coalesced.

In addition to the funding needs noted above, the committee (under the aegis of a Boston cultural institution) could pursue a planning grant to establish a mechanism to pull the 500-odd institutions together. Work can begin with existing frameworks, such as GIS (Geographic Information Systems; see <http://www.gis.com/whatisgis/whatisgis.html>). The position of a coordinator should be written into the grant proposal.

The next meeting of CEMT will be held on Thursday, March 11, at 2 pm at the Boston Public Library, Trustees Room. In preparation for that meeting, cultural representatives should begin drafting the annex for cultural institutions. Look at the first page of Annex P (“Floods”) and jot down ideas that fall under the Purpose and Situation & Assumptions headings. Finally, bring a colleague to this next meeting!

Respectfully submitted,
Lori Foley
2.20.04