

**Atwater Kent Museum (Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent):  
Public Comments**

**1. Why did the Museum close?**

The Museum began facing financial challenges in the 1990's. The Museum's Board of Directors took steps to address these challenges by restructuring the Board to include more members of the private sector who could help with fundraising; changing from a free museum to charging admission; hiring an experienced Executive Director to develop programming to attract more visitors; and renovating the building (which was built in 1826) to improve the exhibit space. All of these changes led to incremental progress, but ultimately the Museum could not attract the funding to build programming that increased paying visitors and the donor base. The Board of Directors closed the museum to focus on identifying a partner with the resources and expertise to effectively implement the Museum's mission.

**2. What is in the collection?**

The collection includes more than 133,000 objects, including paintings, sculptures, photographs, articles of clothing, political buttons, furniture, books, drawings, sheet music, dolls, trading cards, and other artifacts that have been donated to the Museum by Philadelphians, other museums and institutions with the goal of preserving Philadelphia's history.

**3. Who owns the collection?**

The collection is owned by the City of Philadelphia and managed by the Board of Trustees of the Atwater Kent Museum.

**4. Who will own the collection after the proposed plan is implemented?**

The collection will be owned and cared for by Drexel University. The Atwater Kent Collection would be overseen by the Senior Advisor to the President for University Collections. The Senior Advisor reports to the President of Drexel University and the Provost. In addition, there will be an Oversight Committee for the collection that will include representatives of the City of Philadelphia, the Museum, and the Kent family.

**5. Why is Drexel University the right institution to oversee the collection?**

There are many reasons why Drexel is the best institution to oversee the collection. It has always been part of Drexel University's philosophy to include the study of the arts in its curriculum. Drexel is a collecting institution that owns seven distinct collections. Aside from the 18 million specimens and artifacts at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, there are more than 20,000 objects in the University's collections of fine, decorative and graphic

art. In addition, Drexel's College of Medicine stewards a nationally important archive on the history of women in medicine, and significant archival materials are also held by the Library and the Sound Archive. The University mounts approximately 12 exhibitions annually in four galleries on its campus that are free and open to the public. Drexel is a member of the American Alliance of Museums and adheres to the Alliance's standards in its care and management of its collections. Drexel University has the staff and expertise to oversee the collection and has run graduate programs in Arts Administration for forty-five years and Museum Leadership for six years. Drexel's Lenfest Center for Cultural Partnerships also provides Drexel with relationships with cultural institutions across the City, which will ensure that the loaning of objects from the Atwater Kent Museum collection is fair and equitable. Drexel University also has the expertise to digitize the collection and develop an interactive website to allow the public to access the collection.

**6. Philadelphia is known for its history. Why aren't the Trustees and the City working to find a way to keep the City's history museum open?**

The City of Philadelphia treasures its history, culture and heritage, and understands their important role in civic pride, education and tourism. The plan to transfer the collection to Drexel University is the culmination of almost two decades of effort by the Trustees and City to preserve the Museum. In the early 2000s, the Trustees considered ways to increase visitors and financial support for the Museum. They made millions of dollars in renovations to update the exhibition space and they renamed the Museum to better convey its purpose. Despite those efforts, the number of visitors did not increase and financial support for the Museum from private funders did not increase either. In the last few years, the Trustees and City officials explored ways to keep the Museum open in its historic building, but they could not reach agreement with an organization that would assume the costs of managing the collection and operating the building. The Trustees and the City are now prioritizing keeping the collection in Philadelphia and ensuring that it continues to be accessible to the public. They are making arrangements with Drexel to ensure that the stories reflected in the collection are communicated to current and future generations of Philadelphians and visitors.

**7. Will Drexel University tell Philadelphia's history through exhibits on its campus?**

Yes, Drexel University will use the collection to curate exhibits on its campus. The 133,000-piece collection will provide Drexel University with an opportunity to have rotating exhibits that are timely and relevant, and that convey the stories of Philadelphia's past and present. Drexel will also create a user-friendly online portal for digital access to the collection and interpretation of it.

**8. What types of organizations and institutions will be able to borrow items from the collection for their exhibits and programs?**

Drexel University's Oversight Committee will develop a loan program that will make the collection available to as many museums, historic houses, schools, libraries, and other institutions as possible for exhibits, research, or education. The loan program will be supported

by Drexel's technical expertise to ensure the safety of the objects and to develop meaningful exhibits. Drexel will digitize substantial elements of the collection, making images and information about the collection available online. This will allow museums, historic houses, schools, libraries, and other institutions to discover the vast content of the collection that is available to borrow on a short- or long-term basis.

**9. Who will make decisions about which organizations and institutions get access to the collection? And how will they make those decisions?**

Drexel University's Oversight Committee will include representatives of the City of Philadelphia, the Museum, and the Kent family that will work with the University to develop the loan program. The criteria for which organizations and institutions will have access to the collection and the process of how decisions will be made are components of the loan program development. The goal of the loan program will be to have as many collection objects on display in Philadelphia's communities and institutions as possible.

**10. Will the people responsible for decisions about access to the collection reflect the diversity of Philadelphia and the diverse stories the collection can be used to tell?**

Drexel University and the City of Philadelphia are committed to ensuring that the staff and the committees responsible for the collection will be a group of individuals of diverse backgrounds with history, education, and museum expertise.

**11. Who will decide what objects are removed from the collection, what will happen to the removed objects, and how will those decisions be made?**

All objects in the Atwater Kent collection will be evaluated by a diverse committee of professionals and experts, called the Collections Evaluation Committee, to determine each object's unique historic value. Any items determined to be of no historic value, a duplicate, or in poor condition, will be recommended to be "deaccessioned" – removed from collection. All collection objects recommended for deaccessioning will be reviewed by Drexel University's curators and the Oversight Committee. In addition, the items recommended for deaccessioning must be approved by the Senior Advisor to the President for University Collections. If the object is valued at more than \$10,000, Drexel University's Board of Trustees would also have to approve the deaccession.

Collection objects approved for deaccessioning will be first offered for free to non-profit institutions in Philadelphia. Objects unclaimed by non-profit institutions will be sold at public auction, with proceeds going directly to the care and maintenance of the collection and/or to purchase new artifacts to add to the collection.

**12. Will Drexel University continue to add to the collection to reflect Philadelphia's current and future history?**

Yes. Drexel University's Oversight Committee will develop a strategy for acquiring new items to add to the collection. In addition to adding objects that reflect Philadelphia's current and future history, the Oversight Committee will seek objects that fill a gap in the collection regarding Philadelphia's history.

**13. Can Drexel University sell any item from the collection?**

See answer to FAQ#11. To sell an item from the collection, the same process would have to be followed to deaccession an item and remove it from the collection. Any proceeds from the sale going directly to the care and maintenance of the collection and/or to purchase new artifacts to add to the collection.

**14. What will be the City of Philadelphia's role in the future after the proposed plan is implemented?**

The City will serve on the Collection Evaluation Committee and the Oversight Committee.

**15. Will the City and Drexel preserve the name and legacy of the Atwater Kent Museum?**

Drexel will identify the collection as the "City of Philadelphia Atwater Kent Collection at Drexel University."

**16. Will individuals and organizations be able to view the collection online for free?**

Yes. Drexel University will develop an online digital portal of the collection where anyone can see images and information on collection objects, submit questions about the objects, and request objects for loan.

**17. Will organizations and institutions have access to collection items that are not on exhibit but kept in storage?**

The storage facility is a secure off-site building and is not conducive to public access. Also, the digital version of the collection that will be online will provide 24/7 access to many collection items that are in storage. Researchers needing direct access to individual objects will be able to request access, and every practical accommodation will be made to honor those requests.

**18. Will there be resources and educational materials to help non-exhibiting institutions such as schools and libraries use the collection for education?**

Yes. Using art for educational purpose is a core part of Drexel University's philosophy. Drexel will provide technical assistance for non-exhibiting institutions such as schools and libraries who wish to use the collection for teaching. Eventually Drexel will also consider developing traveling "trunk" shows of certain artifacts and reproductions that would be available for use in schools.

**19. How will the day-to-day administration and management of the collection be staffed?**

The collection will be managed by professional and experienced museum curators and staff at Drexel University, including staff hired specifically to work with the collection. The curators and staff will report to the Senior Advisor to the President for University Collections. Drexel also has graduate students who are studying museum leadership and arts administration who may serve as part-time staff.

**20. Who will pay for the loan program, collection maintenance, and the staff for the day-to-day-administration and management of the collection?**

The City of Philadelphia has committed to provide financial support for the transition of the collection to Drexel University for five years. Drexel will pay for all costs associated with managing the collection after that period.

**21. What will happen to the Museum building?**

The Museum building located at 15 South 7<sup>th</sup> Street was given to the City of Philadelphia by the Atwater Kent Foundation in 1938. Under the deed from the Foundation to the City, since the Trustees closed the Museum building the Foundation has the right to re-acquire the building from the City. Foundation officials are fully informed about the City's proposed transfer of the collection to Drexel. Rather than re-acquire the building now, Foundation officials are discussing the building's future with the City.

**22. Will Philadelphians be able to volunteer to work with Drexel University on the Atwater Kent Collection?**

Drexel would welcome trained and qualified volunteers to work with the collection. A formal volunteer program may be developed in the future.

**23. Will Drexel engage in fundraising in support of the collections?**

Yes. Drexel is prepared to raise philanthropic and grant funds to support the collection, just as it does with its other collections.

**24. Many students from grades K-12 attended the Museum. How will students and teachers be able see the collection in the future?**

Schools and libraries throughout Philadelphia will be able to request objects in the collection through the loan program. Students and teachers will also be able to access information about items in the collection from the digital version of the collection which will be online. Drexel will

also consider developing traveling “trunk” shows of certain artifacts and reproductions for use in schools.

**25. What happens if Drexel University no longer wants to care for the collection, or it does not make the collection available to the public as intended?**

Drexel University or the City of Philadelphia will be able to file a petition in Orphans Court to transfer the collection back to the City of Philadelphia.

**26. What happens if a new Museum can be organized and funded to display objects from the collection?**

Objects from the collection will always be available for a short- or long-term loan for any museum, new or existing, that wishes to use the collection for exhibitions.

**27. What is the timeframe for the transfer of the collection, loan program, and access to the digital version of the Atwater Kent Collection?**

The formal transfer of the collection is contingent on the ruling from the Orphan’s Court. In the first five years following the transfer, the Collections Evaluation Committee and the Oversight Committee will work to develop the loan program and the digital portal.