Taliesin West, Frank Lloyd Wright’s winter home and studio in Arizona, is a National Historic Landmark and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, designations earned because of the site’s remarkable history and its intrinsic cultural and aesthetic character. The large complex, made up of desert-inspired buildings integrated into the Sonoran Desert landscape, also houses notable collections that include: Wright-designed furnishings and objects; works of art, books, and other objects acquired by Wright and his family; art works created by the designers and architects of the Taliesin Fellowship; and a significant research archive of oral histories, books and articles by and about Wright, correspondence, and drawings and photographs of both Taliesin West and Taliesin (Spring Green, Wisconsin) among other materials.

These disparate items were stored for many years in several locations both onsite and offsite, often in less-than-ideal conditions. In 1986 the Foundation constructed an Archives and Collections Building as a dedicated onsite storage building and later an adjacent unconditioned “Garage” used for storage of less heat-sensitive materials. Over the following years, both spaces were encroached upon by other departments seeking office and storage space.

A 2018 IMLS-funded CAP report emphasized that “insufficient space has been allocated for storage, care, and stewardship of the collections” on site with the resulting congestion increasing risks when collections are accessed. It was further noted that collections stored in some areas of the site were at high risk for damage from pests and climate fluctuations. The CAP team recommended that the collections be consolidated and that the entire Archives and Collections Building be returned to its original functions, solely dedicated to collections storage, care, and research. They further recommended that the adjacent Garage be upgraded to a comparable level of performance for additional storage capacity.

Following these CAP recommendations, the FLWF applied for and was awarded an NEH Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections (SCHC) planning grant of $50,000 to prepare a comprehensive Collections Storage Improvements Plan. This funded an external consulting team of a Preventive Conservator and an Architect/Engineer to work with FLWF Collections and Preservation staff to prepare the plan. The plan would set out the reallocation of collections and spaces, necessary building envelope and systems improvements for environmental management, fire safety and security, and identification of appropriate storage furniture for efficient use of space.

The grant awarded $40,000 for the Storage Improvements Plan itself and $10,000 to implement critical building upgrades as a pilot project where the greatest need was identified.

With this grant funding in hand, the same consulting team that had completed the CAP Assessment for the Foundation was brought back to work on the SCHC plan, due to their high level of professional expertise and familiarity with the wide-ranging issues we were facing at Taliesin West. The specific objectives of the plan were:
a redesign of existing storage arrangements in the Archives and Collections Building and the adjacent Garage;
identification of appropriate storage furniture and equipment to maximize the existing space;
identification of required environmental improvements; and
assessment of the exterior envelopes of both buildings’ fire, water, and security risks.

As arrangements were being made for the consultants to visit the site in spring 2020, the outbreak of Covid-19 and the ensuing lockdown made such in-person visits impossible. Forced by these circumstances to find an alternate solution to getting the work done, the FLWF, like many organizations worldwide, took advantage of newly-available technology, wherein the consultants and FLWF staff met numerous times via Zoom meetings. These virtual meetings were, unexpectedly and amazingly to some of us, successful.

We jointly decided that the best move forward would be to conduct Covid-friendly virtual walk-throughs that proved a viable means of looking at the spaces. We conducted seven of these virtual tours, narrated by staff, and recorded for future reference. Discussions of needs and aspirations followed, after which two workshops were held – also via Zoom – which were attended by all relevant staff including the CEO, VP of Preservation, Director of Preservation, and the Collections Department staff.

WORKSHOPS

The first workshop was to clearly identify what needed to be done to achieve the objectives set forth in the planning grant. These were to:

- organize and optimize the space needed for storage;
- address special environmental needs for the collections;
- address end-of-service-life of critical building envelope components;
- improve interior environments and energy use through building envelope upgrades;
- improve interior environments and energy use through systems upgrades;
- reduce airborne and surface particulates;
- reduce physical risk;
- reduce fire risk; and,
- improve staff efficiency.

The second workshop focused on creating strategies for accomplishing the above objectives. Three strategies emerged as options. These included:
• **Strategy 1 - Rearrange the Furniture.** This would have consisted of implementation of collections management protocols, removal of non-collections items from collections storage, and redistribution of collections within existing storage spaces with the addition of some more efficient storage equipment;

• **Strategy 2 - Mostly Environment.** This would have consisted of implementation of collections management protocols, removal of non-collections items from collections storage, and improvements to interior environmental conditions through selective envelope upgrades and introduction of HVAC to the Garage to turn it into a future Vault 4; and,

• **Strategy 3 - The Full Monte.** This proposed the implementation of collections management protocols, removal of non-collections items from collections storage, reconfiguration of inefficient storage spaces, introduction of more efficient storage equipment, and improvements to environmental management through envelope upgrades, replacement of HVAC systems, and introduction of HVAC to the Garage to turn it into a future Vault 4.

The FLWF Preservation Team unanimously selected *The Full Monte*. The consultants and FLWF identified the specific work that would need to be done along with a budget and timeline to make it happen, with the goal of applying for an SCHC Implementation Grant to achieve the building modifications called for in *The Full Monte* proposal. Following the receipt of the SCHC Planning Grant’s final report, Foundation staff prepared the SCHC Implementation Grant application, which we submitted in January 2021.

Further, it was determined that the best use of the supplemental $10,000 “pilot project” funding would be to address issues identified in the unconditioned Garage. While installing a high-efficiency HVAC system was considered, it was decided that this money would best fund the replacement of the leaking, non-heat resistant roof structure with a non-permeable, heat-resistant, urethane foam and elastomeric-coated roof. The “cool roof system” also enhances energy efficiency and was completed in early 2021.

The balance of the $10,000 was then used to purchase two sets of doors (each set consisting of two 36”x 80” doors) which will replace the overhead roll-up Garage door. A new entrance with a vestibule will be constructed in the entrance space, the two sets of doors enclosing the space which will reduce the amount of outside air exchange and control access through the vestibule into the storage space. This will create a significantly more stable interior environment with particulate and climate control within the building. The actual creation of the vestibule and installation of new doors will hopefully be funded by the SCHC Implementation grant in late 2021.
IMPACT

While the planning project itself had no direct impact outside of the institution itself, we do hope that as stewards of an important World Heritage Site, this FLWF Collection Storage Improvement planning project might serve as an example for the wider preservation community.

Within the organization the evaluation and planning process and the resulting step-by-step, prioritized plan provided the opportunity for the Preservation and Collections staff to actively participate in a comprehensive evaluation of current conditions and the criteria for researching and settling on practical solutions to existing challenges. The process and the needs that were defined enabled the Collections staff to articulate with very specific information the challenges facing the Collections department in its current situation. If we are successful in being awarded the Implementation grant, the work that went into the planning process will enable us to systematically re-organize our Collections materials in more environmentally secure spaces. In these spaces, storage and work can be carried out without risk to the materials or the staff and the collections will be more accessible as cultural and educational resources to scholars, students, and the interested community.

The planning project was widely shared on the FLWF website in January 2021. (It can be seen here: https://franklloydwright.org/caring-for-the-collection/)

Additionally, because we were able to successfully utilize online technology to accomplish the goals of this grant, we are now working with the Museum Association of Arizona to schedule a webinar for our Arizona museum colleagues later this year (2021), with four participants: Pat Evans, FLWF Registrar (organizer); Erin Richardson, consultant; Cherie Koss, ED, River of Time Museum; and Michelle Reid, consultant, to discuss “Site Visits in the Age of Covid: How using Zoom and other online tools can allow for MAP/CAP and other site visits to continue (and perhaps thrive!) virtually.”