

**City Manager’s Review Committee Recommendations  
Library and Parks & Community Services Departments  
Management and Operational Review of Log Cabin Village**

**City Manager’s Review Committee for the Library and Parks & Community Services  
Departments recommendations pertaining to Log Cabin Village**

- I. Review the current role of all support groups.
  
- II. Study any possible changes that would enhance the operation for the benefit of the public.
  - a. Evaluate the financial benefit potential including increased revenue from fundraising, private foundations, corporations, trusts, memberships and fees for programs, special events, rentals, admissions and parking while maintaining accessibility across diverse social and economic levels.
  - b. If the City decides to engage in any contracts, ensure that development of the facilities is consistent with a publicly adopted master plan.
  - c. Conduct appropriate market studies to understand origin of patrons and willingness to pay for services.

**Background**

In studying the management and operations of Log Cabin Village (hereafter referred to as LCV), it is important to discuss what a museum is, how LCV fits in this definition, the history of LCV, and the history of our support group, the Log Cabin Heritage Foundation. Other information to be considered includes the economic impact of museums and heritage tourism, professional recognition of LCV, recent accolades, how LCV compares to museums across the country and from similar disciplines and budget sizes, and the current climate for history museums and non-profits.

According to the federal government’s Museum and Library Services Act, a museum is defined as “a public or private nonprofit agency or institution organized on a permanent basis for essentially educational or aesthetic purposes, which, utilizing a professional staff, owns or utilizes tangible objects, cares for them, and exhibits them to the public on a regular basis.” LCV is classified as an open-air, outdoor museum, a specialized museum category, due to the fact that the historic collections include historic houses and structures, as well as smaller artifacts. In addition, LCV operates as a living history museum, with historic interpreters dressed in period-correct attire demonstrating crafts and relaying 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas history.

Dedicated to educating the public and preserving 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas frontier history, LCV is comprised of seven log homes dating to the mid-1800s, an 1860 smokehouse, the 1870s era Marine Schoolhouse, a working gristmill, and reproduction blacksmith shop. Historical interpreters in 19<sup>th</sup> century attire provide education programs and customer service for the general public six days a week. The professional staff of LCV also oversees the off-site 1850s Van Zandt Cottage, a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark.

The concept for Log Cabin Village originated in the 1940s to 1950s with the Pioneer Texas Heritage Committee, a small group of preservation minded individuals who wanted to save

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vanishing pioneer homesteads. They worked closely with the City of Fort Worth in the 1950s to find a suitable location to relocate selected structures. This group was extremely forward-thinking in their desire to preserve representative styles (i.e, dog trot, single pen, two-story, and one and a half story cabins). The current location in Forest Park was selected on May 8, 1958, and the historic homes were moved. The relocation of these first structures was completed in 1959.

In the early 1960s, the Pioneer Texas Heritage Committee requested the Tarrant County Historical Society take over the restoration portion of the project. This dedicated group oversaw the completion of the cabin rebuilding, and the furnishings committee worked to acquire 19<sup>th</sup> century artifacts to complete the exhibits. The first open house took place in 1964 to allow the public to view the progress that had been made.

A contract dated November 1, 1958 between the Park Board and the Pioneer Texas Heritage Committee stated the intent to gift the Village to the City of Fort Worth. The Park and Recreation Board officially voted to accept the responsibility of operating Log Cabin Village on September 23, 1965. Receiving a medallion from the Texas Historical Commission, LCV officially opened to the public on April 15, 1966, with a grand opening on San Jacinto Day, April 21, 1966. It has educated and entertained thousands of visitors each year since.

Accessibility to programs, information, and facilities is integral to truly serve the needs of audiences. The American Association of Museums states it best in ***National Standards and Best Practices***, "Beyond what is required by law – notably the Americans with Disabilities Act – museums have an ethical imperative to make their resources as accessible as possible." LCV has maintained a pass program since 2004 in partnership with the Fort Worth Library to ensure that all people who want to visit the Village have free access. Most of LCV's archival collections are available digitally through the University of North Texas' Portal to Texas History. More in-depth researchers desiring physical access to LCV archives are accommodated by appointment, with genealogists being our most frequent patrons. LCV utilizes social media to improve communication and approachability. Information can literally be shared instantaneously. Staff is trained on tour strategies for vision, mobility, hearing and other impairments. Individuals serving as aides or interpreters are admitted free of charge. Most recently, LCV staff was interviewed for a 58 minute radio show, "Eyes of North Texas," which is a syndicated radio show produced by the North Texas Radio for the Blind.

Log Cabin Village serves a broad audience. The majority of visitation is comprised of individuals from the general public. These visitors are from the local Fort Worth/Metroplex area and represent residents and visitors from more than 30 countries and at least 45 states annually. Group visitation comes from public and private schools, day cares, home schools, senior centers, community centers regionally and statewide, and scouts. LCV also serves those with special interests such as researchers, hobbyists, craftsmen, folklorists, architects, historians and photographers.

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Visitors let us know where they are from and what they want on a regular basis through guest register comments and visitor surveys on-site and online. LCV staff also utilizes anecdotal stories and comments made by visitors during their stay and through repeat visitation. Formal program evaluation employing surveys and tracking studies is completed periodically.

Museums have a variety of governing structures. Despite the broad range of options, the American Association of Museums is clear on the purpose and importance of good governance. They state in ***National Standards and Best Practices***,

“Good governance is the foundation that enables the museum to succeed. The effective operation of a museum is based on a well-functioning governing authority that has a strong working relationship with the museum director. Together, the governing authority and director set the direction of the museum, obtain and manage the resources needed for it to fulfill its mission and ensure that the museum is accountable to the public. These expectations apply to all museums regardless of governance type, structure or name.”

The City of Fort Worth Parks and Community Services Department has governed LCV since 1965, and has been an integral part of LCV's history since the 1950s. As a City of Fort Worth facility, LCV has access to a number of services and departments at reduced or no cost. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- City Manager's Office - Media and Public Affairs, Budget and Research
- Financial Management Services – Purchasing, Accounting, Treasury, Financial Systems, Risk Management
- Human Resources – Training, Hiring, Benefits
- Internal Audit
- IT – Equipment, Service, Alarm, Telephone, Help Desk
- Legal – Contracts, agreements, and document review
- Parks & Community Services – Operations, Trades, Forestry, Planning and Resource Management, Volunteer background checks
- Transportation & Public Works – Architectural Services, Facilities Maintenance, Streets.

Without these critical services, LCV would have to drastically increase its operating budget to cover these costs just to maintain the current level of operation.

In order to supplement LCV's City of Fort Worth operating budget, the Log Cabin Heritage Foundation (hereafter referred to as LCHF), a private, non-profit 501(c)(3), was founded in 1999 to serve as a support group. The LCHF supplements the City of Fort Worth budget allocation through fundraising and grants. Funds are provided for professional development, artifact conservation, education programs, marketing and advertising, and web site hosting and development. Previous support has averaged approximately \$10,000 per year. The 2012 draft budget of the LCHF allocated \$20,000 for LCV projects and programs.

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The LCHF actively followed the discussions of the City Manager's Review Committee of the Library and Parks and Community Services Departments. After hearing the initial recommendation to seek non-profit management of Log Cabin Village, the LCHF wrote in a letter dated May 17, 2011, that they are

*“not interested in managing Log Cabin Village. We are a non-profit support group for a City facility and it is our intent to remain a support group.... The LCHF does not have the resources to replace City infrastructure and/or the capacity to operate and manage a museum.”*

They state clearly in their response letter (attached) that they feel LCV is managed effectively and efficiently with its current governing authority.

**Findings**

Log Cabin Village annually reviews its operations to maximize efficiencies and better utilize limited or reduced resources. In addition to raising fees for programs to bring in added revenues, LCV has changed hours of operation, reduced the number of weeks open each year, and drastically altered, revised or eliminated programs based on trends, evaluations and attendance. Changes were implemented in order to achieve reductions without eliminating key historical interpreter positions and thereby gutting the public programs of the Village. Program changes are routinely made to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the public with the best use of resources possible. Budget cuts in fiscal year 2011 resulted in LCV losing one-third of its professional staff, the Historical Curator position. The two remaining staff absorbed the critical duties of this position, with the vast majority being taken on by the LCV Educator (now Educator and Collections Manager). These were duties that could not be eliminated with the position since LCV is legally and ethically bound to care for historic items and structures donated and subsequently held in the public trust. Since fiscal year 2003, LCV budget reductions and increased revenue generation has resulted in a net savings of \$136,938 to the City of Fort Worth.

Log Cabin Village revenue collections from admissions, souvenir sales, photo fees, and cornmeal sales in fiscal year 2011 totaled \$99,887. The net cost to operate LCV six days a week for 47 weeks in 2011 was \$326,178. The total budget allocation for LCV in fiscal year 2012 is \$425,483. Of this amount, \$357,414 or 84% is earmarked for personnel expenses. Employees allow LCV to put the “living” in living history. LCV also relies on a dedicated corps of volunteers, but when guaranteeing education programs tours to groups twice a day Tuesday through Friday, it is necessary to rely on historical interpreters who are City of Fort Worth S0-1 employees (no benefits). The rest of the LCV operations and contractual services budget comes to \$68,069 for the year.

Tourism is a major industry in Fort Worth. Some believe that being part of a university or government system (i.e., lack of 501 (c)(3) status) can inhibit public support and visitation. Instead, as John L. Crompton states in 2010's ***Measuring the Economic Impact of Park and Recreation Services***,

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“park and recreation agencies provide opportunities for both local residents and visitors. It (Exhibit 1-7 in the PowerPoint) recognizes that four major segments are widely recognized in the tourism field. One of them, pleasure travel, is primarily stimulated by opportunities provided by park and recreation agencies.” Crompton acknowledges that the parks and recreation field plays a “role in attracting visitors to a community...”

LCV's visitation numbers indicate that this role as a tourism and public service engine is not hampered by LCV's current management under the City of Fort Worth Parks and Community Services Department. LCV gets its share of visitors from other states and countries, as noted in LCV's guest register. As mentioned earlier, at least 45 states and more than 30 countries are represented annually. This provides LCV with an excellent opportunity to represent the City and Department to an international audience. “Hidden jewel” and “Fort Worth's treasure” are common phrases written by visitors, and one visitor proclaims LCV her “favorite Fort Worth attraction” in *Texas Highways* May 2011 magazine.

In order to leverage resources and attract local, regional, national and international audiences, LCV works with a diverse group of partners. In areas of marketing, promotion and tourism, LCV works with the Fort Worth Convention and Visitors Bureau, Dallas Fort Worth Area Tourism Council, Texas Lakes Trails Region, Museum Marketing Council and the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce. To efficiently, effectively and inexpensively advertise, LCV participates in radio station promotions; provides admission passes as door prizes and auction items for non-profit fundraisers, school events, and achievement incentives; utilizes social media; takes advantage of free listings in tourism and travel publication; and participates in limited daily deal offers through Groupon, Seize the Deal and Entertainment. LCV is fortunate that the LCHF provides funds to purchase advertising for both special events and the site itself. Targeted outreach initiatives, such as Frontier Forts Days and Prairie Fest, are beneficial to LCV because they attract large numbers of the target audience who would be inclined to visit in the future.

Once visitors make the decision to visit LCV, their survey responses show that they enjoy their stay. In fiscal year 2011, 100% of all respondents stated that they were treated in a friendly and courteous manner, that the Village experience met or exceeded their expectations, and that they would recommend the Village to a friend. In addition to receiving positive reviews from our audience, LCV has also been recognized within the museum profession. Conservator of Objects, Csilla Felker Dennis, wrote in her 2009 Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) report that, *“This institution [LCV] was one of the best organized and well run museum complexes I have visited in the past ten years during the CAP projects.”* LCV was honored in 2010 with Historic Fort Worth, Inc.'s Preservation Award for the Howard Cabin restoration and named Best Historical Attraction in the Metroplex. LCV has been nominated in 2009, 2010 and 2011 for this award.

The professional staff of LCV has received recent accolades as well. In 2010, Rena Lawrence, LCV Educator and Collections Manager, was named Texas Association of Museums Educator of the Year, and in 2011 Kelli Pickard, LCV Director, received

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recognition of her service and leadership in the same organization. Also in 2011, the LCV Director consulted on the Board Relations chapter in the upcoming **Small Museum Toolkit** book series and was one of 26 museum professionals nationwide invited to participate in the Museum Accreditation Reinvention Convening in Chicago. And, from 2009-2011, the LCV Director was appointed to serve on the Institute of Museum and Library Services Museums grant review panel in Washington, DC.

In order to thoroughly capture how successfully LCV is managed and operated, it is important to benchmark operations with other museums, and specifically, with operations of similar disciplines and sizes. Fortunately, one of the main initiatives of the American Association of Museums is to provide data on the current state of museums as a way to help them plan for the future. The most recent culmination of this effort is **2009 Museum Financial Information**. The vast amounts of data in this book were culled and compared with similar data from LCV statistics. Because LCV is a combination of a specialized museum, historic house/site, and history museum/historical society, those statistics in particular are highlighted throughout the study.

The total number of survey respondents totaled 671, with 13.3% representing historic house/sites, 28.3% history museum/historical society, and 10.9% specialized museums. Extrapolating from this survey and one conducted by the Institute of Museum and Library Services in 2008, there are approximately 17,744 museums in the United States, of which roughly 2,000 are historic house/site museums and 6,000 are history museum/historical society.

When comparing LCV operating expenses with all respondents, LCV falls roughly within the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile. When comparing within similar disciplines, however, LCV falls within the median of respondents. LCV, as a municipally operated museum has a parent organization, as do 34.9% of all respondents. When considering discipline and size specifics, however, a distinction is made: 42.7% of Historic house/site, 42.5% of specialized museums, 45.1% of museums with similar operating budgets, and 84.6% of government museums have a parent organization. Of all respondents with a parent organization, 49.1% have a government parent. For museums with operating budgets the size of LCV, that number is 56.5%, and for history museum/historical society the percentage is 58.9%.

When governing authority is examined, the breakdown of all respondents is as follows: Municipal 6%, County 2.4%, State 9.7%, Federal 1.9%, Tribal 0.3%, Private nonprofit 69.3%, For-profit 0.4%, Dual 6.4%, and, Other 3.6%. Of the overall respondents, 20.3% had a governmental governing authority like LCV.

Separately incorporated support organizations like the Log Cabin Heritage Foundation were not uncommon, with 21.6% of all respondents having an organization like this in place. That number increases to 56% when looking specifically at government run museums. Support organizations are valuable partners of government agencies in particular because they not only help leverage resources, but also provide a vehicle to

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receive additional grants, donations and bequests if 501 (c)(3) non-profit status is required or preferred.

Log Cabin Village charges admission fees, as do 59% of all respondents. This number hits highs of 77.4% with historic house/site and 66% of nonprofit run museums. Only 36.2% of government run museums imposed an admission fee.

When comparing attendance, LCV falls exactly within the median of all respondents with just over 26,000 visitors. LCV exceeds the median visitation numbers of historic house/site (11,700), history museum/historical society (10,000), specialized museum (22,000), and operating budget size (20,000). LCV falls just under the median for other government museums (27,128).

When overall attendance is broken down into paid, free and school groups, LCV falls roughly in the middle on paid attendance, below average on free attendance, and higher than all compared categories on school group attendance. Museums have struggled the last decade with declining field trips. This decline is attributed to loss of funding for transportation and fees and lack of time allowed outside the classroom with a focus on standardized tests. LCV has experienced this same decline, but still attracts school groups in higher numbers than the national average.

Cost per museum visitor is calculated by dividing the operating budget by the number of annual visitors. No offsetting revenue figures are considered in this calculation. When comparing LCV with all respondents, LCV falls within the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile at a cost per museum visitor of \$16.46. The 10<sup>th</sup> percentile was \$10.00, the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile \$16.97, the median \$31.40, the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile \$55.52, and the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile \$105.12.

In the area of staffing, LCV ranks in the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of all respondents with three full-time employees, and in the median with 4 part-time staff. When compared with discipline related museums, LCV falls between the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile and the median for full-time staff, and within the median for part-time staff. Seasonal employees are utilized by 33% of all respondents and 44% of historic house/site museums. The overall median is 5.0, with LCV having 8.0 seasonal staff. Volunteers are used by 95% of all respondents. The median number of volunteers is 64.5. LCV has a volunteer corps of 111. Both of these categories are higher than overall respondents because of the living history component of LCV, the number of structures that need to be interpreted, and the site size.

The **2009 Museum Financial Information** also includes breakdowns by governance which is helpful in a direct comparison to LCV. LCV, at \$429,215 in fiscal year 2011 falls just below the median operating budget of other municipal/county museums of \$484,358. Sixty-six percent of municipal/county museums have separately incorporated support organizations like LCV's Log Cabin Heritage Foundation. When comparing staffing, LCV is in the median for paid part-time and full-time staff, and in the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile for seasonal staff and volunteers for the reasons mentioned previously. The ratio of volunteers to FTEs at LCV is 22.2, which also ranks in the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile. LCV, with gross revenue of \$23,354

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in the museum store, ranks on par with the median gross revenue generated in a sales-related facility of other municipal/county museums. The difference comes when considering the square feet available for sales. The median square feet of sales space was 500 square feet, while LCV only has approximately 100 square feet of sales area. The median revenue per square foot is \$56.15, and LCV generates \$233.54 a square foot. LCV has a higher three-year average attendance (27,397 versus 21,876) than responding municipal/county museums, and twice as many school group attendees.

Sustainability for museums has always been a concern, but urgency has developed over the last several years due to the economic crisis and the domino effect on quality of life programs in general and museums specifically. Due to shrinking museum endowments, a decrease in donations, and cuts in public funding, museums across the country are struggling to survive. Some museums are able to weather the storm by laying off staff or reducing hours of operation. LCV has utilized both of these options over the last eight years. Other museums, with no stable funding source, have had to close entirely. The Women's Museum in Dallas, Fort Pitt Museum, Chapel Hill Museum, and Fayetteville Museum of Art are just a few of those who have had to shut their doors. Funding agencies targeting museums and/or historic organizations are reducing or eliminating grant funding and cutting staff and services. The Texas Historical Commission has eliminated their History Museum Grants program which had funded collections care projects in small history museums since 1984. The Texas Commission on the Arts, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Institute of Museum and Library Services, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation have all had their budgets and staffs cut in the last year. The National Trust closed four of their six field offices, including the one in Fort Worth. Programs such as Save America's Treasures, Teaching American History, and Arts in Education have been eliminated.

Cultural organizations have long struggled for their portion of charitable dollars. Historically, only 5% of charitable contributions are given to arts, culture or the humanities. The amount of charitable dollars further dwindles because even though only 2% of arts and culture non-profits have budgets of \$5 million or more, they receive 55% of all contributions, gifts and grants. In the current economy, evidence points to donors shifting their giving to organizations that are focusing on social services and providing basic human needs, not enhancing quality of life through cultural giving.

As part of LCV's ongoing management analysis and in an effort to remain relevant to current and future audiences, LCV has identified several opportunities for operation enhancement. To enhance revenue, an admission fee increase is possible in fiscal year 2013. The last increase occurred in October 2009. Outreach programs currently in development would also provide additional opportunities for revenue generation. Due to budget cuts and the increased cost of transportation, Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) does not visit LCV with the frequency of other regional districts. Outreach programs would target FWISD schools to better accommodate their resources and to keep costs down for LCV as program providers. Another revenue stream to be enhanced is the

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sale of merchandise in the LCV museum store. In fiscal year 2011, LCV historical interpreters focused on producing Village made crafts and products which resulted in a 9.11% increase in souvenir sales. Visitors have appreciated their purchases so much more when they have met the craftsperson and seen the items being made.

Log Cabin Village has additional opportunities as well with programming and promotion. LCV is focused on evaluation and will continue to streamline special events and programs. LCV would benefit from expanded marketing and advertising through an increased budget allocation or LCHF supplementation. Excellence in programming is only one part of the equation; outstanding programs can be offered, but fail to benefit visitors if no one knows about them. For future program expansion, the reinstatement of the full-time position lost in fiscal year 2011 will be required. Existing staff can maintain programs, but are not able to expand. All staff could benefit from ongoing education and development to enhance knowledge, customer service, and craft skills. Visitor experience could be improved by hiring additional historical interpreters to fully staff the Village for weekend operations. Additional interpreters would increase site safety and security on weekends where visitation is increasing. Currently, half of our interpreters work every other weekend. This results in three or four interpreters covering a site with ten structures. Opportunities for visitation could be increased for patrons if hours of operation could be added back in the future.

Site improvements would improve visitor experience and accessibility. LCV currently utilizes permanent portalets for the public and a septic system with a single toilet for staff. No diaper changing facilities are available. Constructing a public restroom would better accommodate increased visitation and provide visitors with enhanced amenities. The paths around the 2.5 acre site need to be improved in order to maintain accessibility around the site. LCV needs to continue to remediate and/or restore the historic structures on a strategic basis. LCV staff will also continue to refresh exhibits in order to meet LCV's preservation mission and to provide changing content to encourage repeat visitation.

**Conclusions/Recommendations**

A review of the history of LCV's founding, 45 years of City of Fort Worth management, and benchmarking operations with similar museums across the country, yields the following information:

- LCV's operating budget is slightly below the median
- Cost per user falls in the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile
- LCV enjoys higher than average total visitation and school group visits
- LCV is on par with staffing levels
- LCV has received nominations and awards for both its preservation oversight and visitor experience

All of this provides evidence that LCV is efficiently operated under its current City of Fort Worth management structure.

Log Cabin Village staff members are recognized on the local, state, regional and national level for their professional expertise and knowledge. They are requested to speak to local

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groups as well as state and national conferences. They frequently consult with other museums and individuals on museum, historic structure and a variety of related topics. They serve on committees, panels and focus groups, and have reviewed grants and award nominations. In every capacity, LCV is serving as a representative of the City of Fort Worth, the Parks and Community Services Department, and Log Cabin Village.

The Log Cabin Heritage Foundation, LCV's non-profit support group, made it clear in their May 17, 2011 letter that they do not want to assume management of LCV. The current climate for museums and non-profits is not conducive to better success or efficiencies in an alternate management structure. History is typically something that everyone wants to save, but that no one wants to fund. Sustainability of historic houses and sites is a common topic of concern, and there is no shortage of articles and books on the subject. The Spring 2011 issue of the American Association of State and Local History's **History News** features the article "House Museum Partnerships with Local Governments: A Broken Model?" by Gary N. Smith. In the article, Smith states,

"Cities, counties, and states must accept more responsibility for the care and preservation of the structures that belong to them. We should be beyond thinking that opening a restored historic house to the public is the end of the project. If governments are not willing to offer significant and permanent support for a historic property that the community wants to save, then private groups would be wise to not enter such agreements in the first place."

Even if a non-profit were to take over management of LCV in the future, no efficiencies would be generated. Instead, this model would result in either an increased budgetary need to compensate for the lack of City of Fort Worth infrastructure, or a gutted public program due to a drastically slashed operating budget to compensate for these new expenses.

If the City of Fort Worth is to continue to preserve the historic buildings and artifacts entrusted to them, offer at a minimum the programs currently being conducted, and continue to attract local, national and international audiences, then the current management and operational structure is the most efficient and effective available.

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**Attachments to be included after Parks and Community Services Advisory Board (PACSAB) endorsement**

Selected slides from powerpoint presentation to PACSAB, November 16, 2011  
PACSAB Information Item, November 16, 2011  
Minutes of November 16, 2011 PACSAB meeting  
PACSAB Action Item, December 14, 2011  
Minutes of December 14, 2011 PACSAB meeting  
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