Five years ago, the Parks and Recreation Department of Kansas City, Missouri, took over the management and operation of the Kansas City Museum and launched a comprehensive architectural master plan and design process for a multi-staged, multi-year restoration and renovation of the entire Kansas City Museum property (five original 1910 Beaux-Arts style buildings) in the Historic Northeast. Today, JE Dunn Construction has completed the architectural construction at Corinthian Hall, the former R.A. Long family mansion. Designed by International Architects Atelier (IAA), Corinthian Hall is now ready to be filled with exhibitions and interactive digital technologies, currently being developed by internationally recognized museum design firm Gallagher & Associates in collaboration with IAA, Museum staff, and a team of historians, curators, educators, and artists. Interactive arts educator and artist Michael Toombs says, “We have built the body, now we need to infuse the soul.”

Slated to open to the public in late 2020, Corinthian Hall is thriving under the governance of the Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners with essential support from the Kansas City Museum Foundation, a nonprofit organization. Corinthian Hall is a $22 million-dollar project with $16 million in public funds — including $8 million from GO bonds passed by public vote in 2017 — and $6 million from private contributions for exhibitions. The Kansas City Museum Foundation is nearing its fundraising goal with a...
recent gift from The Sunderland Foundation of $1 million to be used in part to begin architectural design in 2019 for the restoration and renovation of the next two buildings on the property, the Carriage House and Caregiver’s House.

“The Kansas City Museum is the first public buildings project to be completed under the GO Bond initiative, and that is a major accomplishment for our city,” says Parks and Recreation Director Terry Rynard. “It has taken a tremendous amount of work to architecturally transform Corinthian Hall into a 21st-century museum. In addition, we assembled a stellar team that has invested time and expertise in organizational planning; we’ve produced a strategic plan, business plan, and economic impact study, for example. We are mindful every day of our civic responsibility to create a welcoming and sustainable cultural institution that fulfills its important mission and vision.”

The Kansas City Museum’s mission is to preserve, interpret, and celebrate Kansas City through collections, exhibitions, and bold programs that reflect the city’s evolution and spirit, and engage visitors in unfolding stories about Kansas City’s vibrant history, cultural heritage, and pride. Its vision is to be a hub of learning, creativity, and collaboration where individuals and communities innovate and inspire engagement and civic unity.

With the architectural restoration and renovation of Corinthian Hall realized, the Museum is now laser focused on working with its growing base of partners to develop the dynamic exhibitions and programs that will bring life, learning, and longevity to the project. Partners include the Kansas City Public Library, One Kansas City Radio, The Northeast News, Arts & AGEing KC, University of Missouri-Kansas City’s Center for Neighborhoods, Bruce R. Watkins Cultural Heritage Center & Museum, UNESCO Creative Cities Kansas City, Crossroads Preparatory Academy, and more. “We are all working together, sharing the same core values and practices for engendering an inclusive, just, and participatory experience,” says Executive Director Anna Marie Tutera.

The Center for Neighborhoods and the UNESCO Creative Cities Kansas City, for example, are working with the Museum and the Parks Department to advise on a cultural and social equity plan to ensure that visitors have equal access to the opportunities and benefits of the Kansas City Museum, and that they feel represented in its content. Museum curator Dr. Gene T. Chávez says, “We want Museum visitors to learn about the past, present, and future of Kansas City in a safe, encouraging, and empowering environment that fosters awareness, understanding, and conversation. Kansas City’s history is profound, complex, and storied. There is a lot to unpack and bring to light. If we do this right, connectivity, healing, growth, and positive change will be meaningful outcomes.”

For more information, visit www.makingamuseumkc.org.