On July 15, 2019, Brian Kennedy invited staff to a meeting in East India Marine Hall on his first official day as the new director of the Peabody Essex Museum. He chose the location for a reason. The historic hall, in many ways, is the heart of the museum. It’s also a visible link to the museum’s founders, the visionary Salem ship captains who sailed around the globe and returned home with a diverse collection of objects and experiences that they wanted to share with the community.

That morning he invited everyone in the room to think like a founder — to imagine being tasked with the role of creating a new museum for today. What should it look like? How should it behave? Who should it serve? In the months that followed, the PEM community has worked on this challenging yet exhilarating directive: Consider how to take the best parts of our past into the present to create a better future.

PEM is at a pivot point, on the cusp of a great next chapter in the museum’s history. Like the bold founders who created this museum in 1799, we are driven by curiosity and open to taking risks. We are still asking questions, of others and ourselves.
STRATEGIC PLAN
Let’s start at the very beginning.

1799
Founding of East India Marine Society

1821
Founding of Essex Historical Society

1825
East India Marine Hall

1833
Founding of Essex County Natural History Society

1848
Merger forming the Essex Institute

1857
Move to Plummer Hall

1867
Peabody Academy of Science

1915
Peabody Museum of Salem

1964
Founding of the Museum of the American China Trade
PEM is an international museum with deep local and regional roots, a contemporary institution with DNA stretching back more than two centuries. To create a long-range plan for the future, America’s oldest continuously operating museum began with a study of its past. PEM’s Board of Trustees and Advisors officially launched the strategic planning process, an intensive, collaborative undertaking. It was clear the aspirations of the early founders would provide promising clues for the museum’s evolution and goals.

1984
Most of collection merges with Peabody Museum

1992
Merger forming Peabody Essex Museum. Dan L. Monroe is hired as the first director and CEO.

2003
Safdie building opens

2019
Ennead wing opens. Brian P. Kennedy is hired as PEM’s second director and CEO.

ABOVE Sketch of the interior of East India Marine Hall (built in 1825) as it appeared in the mid-19th century. In the center of the room is Kūkāʻiliʻimoku, donated by John T. Prince in 1846.
SHAPING OUR FUTURE

A series of thoughtful, deliberate steps are guiding PEM’s strategic planning process.
Brian Kennedy invited staff members, Guides, Trustees and members of the Board of Advisors to roundtable sessions to launch the strategic planning process. Individuals wrote and spoke candidly about the role they felt museums, and PEM specifically, should play in people’s lives. The responses were cataloged, analyzed and shared. The document had many voices, but common themes surfaced.

The next question sought to clarify who is PEM for? The museum needs to be more accessible and inclusive, outward facing and engaged with its many communities came the chorus of answers. The relationship between PEM and the Salem community needs to improve.

Throughout this process, PEM worked closely with strategic planning consultant András Szántó, Ph.D., who provides counsel to museums around the world. He studied the museum's DNA and identified through lines for how PEM can be true to its roots while also embracing innovation.

He and Kennedy began to outline the direction of the strategic plan, review the museum’s foundation statement and prioritize critical issues.

When the pandemic interrupted in-person meetings, sessions resumed virtually. Surveys were sent this fall to museum members, community leaders and the public to ensure that their insights inform PEM’s strategic plan. Meanwhile, staff tackled developing the specifics: What are we going to do? How are we going to do it? And who is going to do it? This was the most rigorous portion of the strategic planning exercise.

In December, PEM’s Board of Trustees will be asked to approve the five-year strategic plan, along with a one-year plan for FY 2021. The document will identify PEM’s goals, action steps and assessment tools needed in place to determine if objectives are met. Expect more information about this collaborative and disciplined effort to create the museum all of us want it to be.

Over the course of four days in September 2019, more than 15,000 people flooded through our doors for members' open houses and free public events for the opening of the new wing. Smiling PEM staff in red T-shirts, roving musicians and street performers on stilts set a festive tone and a palpable sense of energy and enthusiasm flooded the new sun-dappled spaces.

The stunning 40,000-square-foot addition designed by Ennead Architects, the vision of former longtime Director Dan Monroe, added three new floors of gallery space, a light-filled atrium and a welcoming entrance for school groups. An outdoor garden designed by Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects added multiple water features, diverse plantings and inviting spaces to sit, talk and contemplate.

The $125 million expansion, a component of the museum’s $650 million Connect Campaign, provides new opportunities (and the glorious space) to display more works from PEM’s vast permanent collections and to tell new, engaging stories. Each installation is distinct in its ideas and design.

The new maritime gallery offers dramatic paintings by celebrated artists next to objects made by lonesome sailors aboard ship, both reflecting the creative output long inspired by the sea.

With more than 200 sumptuous works made in China, Japan and South Asia specifically for other markets, the new Asian export art gallery reveals that today’s complex global economy is not the first, by any means. And the fashion and design gallery combines traditionally disparate collecting fields to explore how we are creatures who continually design, manipulate and mold our changing world.

The opportunities to explore the collections extend beyond the new galleries. The expansion brought new works by commissioned artists, more art in public spaces and a gallery devoted to the Phillips Library collection. Kūkā‘ilimoku, a rare 19th-century carving of a 19th-century Kanaka Maoli (Native American) deity, is now situated outside East India Marine Hall and facing west toward his homeland.

1. A delegation of Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners led a ceremony to welcome Kūkā‘ilimoku to his new home. 2. Stilt walkers dressed as butterflies greeted guests during the free opening weekend. 3. Three hundred varieties of shrubs, 60 trees, 37 species of flowers and three distinctive water features are found in the new garden.
On a warm afternoon last fall, hundreds of Salem residents, community leaders and PEM staff celebrated the return of a 4,450-pound anchor to its home outside East India Marine Hall. PEM removed the popular landmark for safekeeping during construction of the new wing, which allowed time for extensive conservation work.

Made for an unknown ship sometime before 1820, the anchor was hand-forged during the era of the early frigates. Its twisted shank suggests it endured a storm powerful enough to bend iron.

The anchor’s return underscored Salem’s origins as a maritime and global trading community, one that cherishes its spectacular historic architecture. It also marked the beginning of a concerted effort to create more exhibitions with local and regional connections. One year later, the Salem Stories and The Salem Witch Trials 1692 exhibitions have opened to the public.

Director Brian Kennedy said the presence of the anchor, a sentimental favorite of many, reaffirms PEM’s commitment to be an anchor institution in the city of Salem. “I see it as our collective responsibility to continue to show deep respect to the history and legacy that brought us here to this moment today,” he added.
With the opening of the new wing signifying the completion of many years of expansion, the need for a holistic campus master plan became apparent. This effort will produce a comprehensive strategy to ensure PEM’s 55 acres, 32 individual buildings, 560,000 interior square feet, and 105,000 square feet of public gardens and grounds are aligned with the museum’s mission.

Since opening in the summer of 2018, the Collection Center in Rowley has become a vital operation for PEM and a hub of activity as the new home of the Phillips Library. The space provides the highest standards of preservation, protection and care for PEM’s large and diverse collections. It also makes the collections more accessible in the support of exhibitions, programs and research.

PEM’s architecture collection is the largest of any American art museum, including four properties designated as National Historic Landmarks. Under the direction of Robert Monk, Chief of Security, Facilities Operations and Planning, historic preservation efforts continue on many museum sites. In the last two years, extensive work has been completed on the Daniel Bray House, Plummer Hall and John Tucker Daland House (the former Phillips Library), the Lye-Tapley Shoe Shop, the Cotting-Smith Assembly House and the Peirce-Nichols Carriage Barn, which is now leased by cookie company Goodnight Fatty.

Last year, for the first time in many years, PEM hosted several public programs inside the restored Cotting-Smith Assembly House on Federal Street. There is much excitement about future plans to unlock the full potential of these important properties.

1. Restoration work, including new paint, on the Daniel Bray House. 2. The new PEM Collection Center in Rowley. 3. A visitor conducts research inside the Phillips Library Reading Room. 4. Pretty as a postcard: The 1819 Andrew-Safford House after an early snowfall.
PEABODY ESSEX MUSEUM CAMPUS

MAIN BUILDING
1 PEM Museum Building & Garden 161 Essex Street
2 East India Marine Hall
3 Yin Yu Tang House
4 Axelrod Garden Walkway
5 Armory Park

HISTORIC PROPERTIES
6 Crowninshield-Bentley House 126 Essex Street
7 Gardner–Pingree House & Carriage House 128 Essex Street
8 John Tucker Daland House 132 Essex Street
9 Plummer Hall 132 Essex Street
10 John Ward House 9 Brown Street
11 Lye-Tapley Shoe Shop 9 Brown Street
“Working and bonding with people from vastly different backgrounds.”