



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee
Date: January 5, 2026

From: Marie Fenwick
 Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services
File: 11-7000-01/2025-Vol 01

Re: **First Nations Building Committee Terms of Reference and Referral Response**

Staff Recommendation

That the First Nations Building Committee Terms of Reference, as detailed in the report titled "First Nations Building Committee Terms of Reference and Referral Response", dated January 5, 2026, from the Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services, be approved.

CM Fenwick

Marie Fenwick
 Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services
 (604-276-4288)

Att. 4

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Intergovernmental Relations and Protocol Unit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Finance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Facilities and Project Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
SENIOR STAFF REPORT REVIEW	INITIALS: 	APPROVED BY CAO 

Staff Report

Origin

At the January 30, 2024, Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee staff received the following referral in regards to the First Nations Building:

(2) That staff investigate the historical use of the building as a smokehouse; (3) That a joint committee of Council and Britannia Heritage Society members be formed to oversee the restoration; and (4) That the National Historical Sites and Monuments Board should be consulted on the restoration process.

At the July 22, 2024, Council meeting, Councillors Andy Hobbs, Chak Au and Carol Day were appointed to a joint advisory committee titled the First Nations Building Committee (the Committee).

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval for the Terms of Reference for the First Nations Building Committee (the Terms of Reference) to confirm roles and responsibilities and allow for the involvement of the Musqueam Indian Band in this project, and to provide information in response to items 2 and 4 of the referral.

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2022–2026 Focus Area #6 A Vibrant, Resilient and Active Community:

Vibrant, resilient and active communities supported by a wide variety of opportunities to get involved, build relationships and access resources.

6.5 Enhance and preserve arts and heritage assets in the community.

Analysis

The First Nations Building – Background

The First Nations Building is one of the last buildings at Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site (Britannia Shipyards) to be made operational.

Council approved \$6.5 million to restore and develop exhibits for the First Nations Building at Britannia Shipyards as part of the Consolidated 5 Year Financial Plan (2024–2028). On February 12, 2024, Council approved the interpretive program and level of service for the First Nations Building. The approved interpretive program includes:

- Museum-style displays and re-created historical displays, providing flexibility to tell Indigenous stories in a variety of methods;
- Climate-controlled washrooms, a kitchenette and storage;
- New landscaping elements, including native plantings, to support displays and programming related to Indigenous cultural heritage to the west of the First Nations Building; and

- In-person interpretative programming such as:
 - Curriculum-linked school programs;
 - Guided tours;
 - In-situ interpretation;
 - Demonstrations or workshops;
 - Storytelling or performances; and
 - Special/seasonal programs, including National Indigenous Peoples Day and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

Proposed First Nations Building Committee Terms of Reference

In follow up to Council's direction to create a committee to provide advice on this project, staff held several meetings with the Council-appointees and representatives from the Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site Society (the Society). This group guided the development of the proposed Terms of Reference found in Attachment 1.

Following discussions held at several meetings, the group endorsed the Terms of Reference for Council's consideration at a meeting on December 9, 2025.

As detailed in the Terms of Reference, the proposed purpose of the Committee is to provide staff advice and input at key milestones during the planning and restoration/construction process for the First Nations Building at Britannia Shipyards.

The Committee recommends that in addition to the voting representatives from Council and the Society, the Musqueam Indian Band (Musqueam) be invited to provide a non-voting advisor to provide input during the planning and restoration/construction process for the First Nations Building. Musqueam have expressed an interest in being involved with the First Nations Building project in recent discussions with City staff.

Working with Musqueam to ensure any future programming and interpretation is reflective of Musqueam and Indigenous perspectives is key to advancing Truth and Reconciliation in Richmond.

Historical Research on First Nations Building

Since the 1980s, there have been many historical research studies on Britannia Shipyards which included information about the First Nations Building. A comprehensive list can be found in Attachment 2.

Research on the historical use of the First Nations Building to date suggests it was originally built by the Phoenix Cannery company as a residence for Indigenous seasonal workers, due to its resemblance to Indigenous housing at other BC canneries. It was likely used by Indigenous groups from a variety of coastal communities in BC who came to the Steveston area to support cannery operations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although the building may have been used in similar ways to a traditional longhouse (sometimes referred to as a smokehouse), there is no evidence the building was a traditional longhouse whose hallmarks are cedar post and beam construction, totemic carvings, and communal living areas.

The original location of the First Nations Building was on a slough farther inland in Steveston. In the late 1940s, the Anglo-British Columbia Packing Company relocated the First Nations Building to the Britannia Shipyards site, to support its Phoenix Cannery operations. After its relocation and during its remaining years of operation, the First Nations Building was used for gear and net storage.

Dendrochronology testing conducted in 1992 on a selection of the wood battens and posts from the First Nations Building dated the lumber to 1884–1885, four years earlier than the shipyard building. In 1988, archaeologist Leonard Ham undertook archaeological testing around the site and provided some historical information and descriptions of the existing buildings. Based on his analysis of the First Nations Building’s structure, Ham stated, “The building may have been a cannery dwelling originally used to house Indian workers.”

Because the First Nations Building was moved from its original location, now occupied by townhouses, archaeological investigation of the original location is not possible. However, the archaeological study conducted across the western side of the site in 1994 concluded that, “All cultural material observed and recovered to date at the Britannia Heritage Shipyard Site (DgRs 26/DgRt 6) has been historic. No evidence of precontact aboriginal material has been recovered during monitoring of these excavations.”

In 2022, a research report titled, *Phoenix Cannery Building; Research Report and Conservation Options*, included a review of all previous research done and a new investigation of local archives. This report was shared with Council via memo on August 1, 2024. The research report concluded that, “...there has been no additional primary sources uncovered in the past three decades, or through an extensive search of historical records as part of this Research Report, which unequivocally demonstrates that this building served as an accommodation specifically for Indigenous workers. However, the peculiar form and scale of this structure is similar to other accommodations built by and for Indigenous people in resource extraction industries across British Columbia... While its original usage and date of construction have not been verified, its approximate age; construction method and material; known historical usage; and associations make it a significant heritage resource on its own...”

In June 2024, at the invitation of the Society, a group of archaeologists and anthropologists visited site and were invited to provide a professional opinion on the First Nations Building’s historical connection to Indigenous people. Consensus among this group was that the First Nations Building may be representative of a transitional period in Indigenous culture between the time when communities lived in traditional longhouses and when families began to live in western style housing. The result of this investigation was a letter from Dr. Bruce Miller, Professor Emeritus in Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, giving his opinion of the First Nations Building’s historical importance. In this letter, Dr. Miller states, “It is my opinion that the building in question was occupied and used by Indigenous people, Coast Salish, in the late 19th century and into the 20th century. This building should be understood as an early transitional building type, neither identical to historic longhouses or to the contemporary longhouses...” He continues to say, “I know of no other such transitional buildings in the Coast Salish area.” (Attachment 3).

Historical Research on Building – Next Steps

While there has been some research on the history of the First Nations Building and its uses, to date, the City has not received any information specific to the First Nations Building from Musqueam or other Indigenous communities. The Council-approved funding for the project includes funding further research and engagement with Indigenous communities, including Musqueam, to inform future interpretative exhibits and programs to take place in this space. Future conversations with Indigenous peoples may shed new light on the First Nations Building and its use. With the addition of a Musqueam advisor to the Committee, the procurement process to hire an Indigenous researcher to undertake this work can begin.

Role of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board in Conservation Activities

The role of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board (HSMBC) is to provide advice to the Government of Canada on the designation of places, persons and events that have marked and shaped Canada. The HSMBC does not have a formal role in the care of designated historic places. Parks Canada is the federal agency that supports the HSMBC and leads conservation work at historic sites owned by the federal government.

Staff have had two communications with Parks Canada regarding conservation work on buildings at Britannia Shipyards. In 2022, subsequent to a grant application to Parks Canada to support the repair and restoration of the Richmond Boat Builders building, staff were informed that the national designation for the site does not include the buildings. This is specifically outlined in the Statement of Significance for the national designation of the site (Attachment 4). Because of this, conservation work on buildings at Britannia Shipyards is not currently eligible for Parks Canada funding or the accompanying conservation advice that may come with the funding.

In 2024, staff corresponded with a Senior Built Heritage Advisor at Parks Canada to inquire about the possibility of Parks Canada providing advice for the conservation of buildings at national historic sites, such as Britannia Shipyards. The response was, “When a national historic site is owned by a custodian who is not Parks Canada, we are not directly involved in conservation projects. We might provide some informal advice about best practices but it would be very limited. An NHS designation is honorific and does not come with specific obligations nor protection.”

Parks Canada developed the *Standards and Guidelines for Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* (the Guidelines) to help custodians in caring for historic places. Application of these guidelines is a requirement of the City of Richmond Heritage Alteration Permit process. The Guidelines, as well as best practices in deconstruction and salvage of heritage buildings, will be used to inform future work on the First Nations Building including, ensuring character defining elements are reinstated; retaining as much original building materials as possible; and appropriate reuse of original materials.

Next Steps

Should Council approve the Terms of Reference, staff will invite the Musqueam Indian Band to appoint a representative to act as an advisor to the Committee. Committee meetings will continue to be held as the project progresses based on the work to be undertaken at the call of the City, in consultation with the Chair.

Council approved \$6.5 million to restore and develop exhibits for the First Nations Building at Britannia Shipyards as part of the Consolidated 5 Year Financial Plan (2024–2028). The project is partially funded by the \$3.4 million of the Province of BC's Growing Communities Fund grant received in 2023, which must be fully expended by March 2028. Design is scheduled to be completed by Q4 2026. Upon completion of detailed design, if required, staff will return to Council with updated project costing, as the original budget approved in December 2023 was based on a project construction start in 2025.

Financial Impact

None.

Conclusion

Approval of the Terms of Reference for the First Nations Building Committee confirm the roles and responsibilities of this committee and will allow for involvement of the Musqueam Indian Band in this project.

Extensive research has been conducted on the First Nations Building at Britannia Shipyards. It is one of the oldest original buildings in Richmond and is significant for its unique structure and use as part of the Phoenix Cannery. It is likely the First Nations Building was used as a residence for Indigenous peoples working in the early fishing industry in Steveston. Its transitional form (neither traditionally Indigenous nor Western) makes the First Nations Building unique in the area and possibly in Canada. Further investigations and conversations with Indigenous peoples may shed additional light on its past history.

Conservation work on historic buildings is the responsibility of the owner. Neither the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, nor their supporting agency (Parks Canada), play an active role in advising on the conservation of non-federal historic places. The *Standards and Guidelines for Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* were developed by Parks Canada to support custodians of historic places. These guidelines are actively used by the City to guide decisions about its designated heritage sites, including the First Nations Building.



Marie Fenwick
Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services
(604-276-4288)

January 5, 2026

- 7 -

- Att. 1: Proposed Terms of Reference – First Nations Building Committee
- Att. 2: Historical Research Related to the First Nations Building at Britannia Shipyards
- Att. 3: Letter from Dr. Bruce Miller, dated February 22, 2025
- Att. 4: Britannia Shipyard National Historic Site of Canada Statement of Significance

Proposed Terms of Reference – First Nations Building Committee

Purpose

The purpose of the First Nations Building Committee (the Committee) is to provide advice and input to staff at key milestones during the planning and restoration/construction process for the First Nations Building at Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site (Britannia Shipyards) in alignment with the Council-approved program. Should the Committee have recommendations outside the Council-approved program, these may be presented to Council for consideration.

Objective

In a collaborative manner, provide advice and input on the building, planning and restoration/construction and research related to the history of the First Nations Building.

Role of Committee

Committee members are to act within the Council-approved program for the First Nations Building.

Committee members are to act in the best interests of the community and the preservation of the Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site. Members are asked to refrain from personal opinions that do not reflect the interests of their respective group.

Members of the Committee are responsible for:

- Advising on building design and restoration/construction that considers the current and future needs of users of the First Nations Building and Britannia Shipyards;
- Communicating and liaising with their groups as required and in a timely manner; and
- Supporting decisions made by the Committee, even at times where consensus may not be attained but are supported by the majority of Committee members.

Members of the Committee are accountable for:

- Representing the interests of their respective groups while also considering that the interests of the broader community shall always supersede the interests of any one individual or group; and
- Adhering to all approved matters of scope, schedule and budget related to the project, as approved by Council.

Membership

There will be six (6) voting members. Membership shall consist of:

- Three (3) members of Richmond City Council; and
- Three (3) representatives from the Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site Society.

The Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage will be the designated staff liaison. Other City staff and subject matter experts will attend meetings and provide technical support when required.

Musqueam Advisor

The Musqueam Indian Band will be invited to provide a non-voting advisor to provide input during the project.

Procedures and Meetings

- The members of the Committee will choose a Chair and a Vice Chair.
- The term of the Committee will be for the duration of the planning and restoration/construction process of the First Nations Building.
- Meetings will be at the call of the City, in consultation with the Chair, based on the work to be undertaken.
- A quorum will be a majority of voting members.
- Copies of the agenda and record of the previous meeting will be circulated to the Committee members.
- The City will provide the Committee with staff support for the preparation of minutes and agendas.
- Community representatives are responsible for keeping other members of their group informed of the decisions of the Committee.

Member Conduct

Committee members are expected to be respectful towards each other and work cooperatively. Committee members will be expected to consider the best interests of the community in an effort to reach consensus.

Committee members are asked to identify any and all conflicts of interest prior to a discussion taking place. Where a conflict is not recognized, the City may exercise its prerogative to excuse the member from the meeting and/or restrict access to pertinent information.

Without the express consent of the City, members are not authorized to discuss with media identified confidential matters covered by the Committee or information provided in the course of carrying out their roles.

In addition to the conduct guidelines outlined above, all members of the Committee are required to comply with the *Richmond Council Code of Conduct – Policy No. 1500*. This policy applies to members of City Council and, where specified, to individuals appointed by City Council to boards, committees, commissions, panels, or task forces.

Committee members serve at the pleasure of Richmond City Council. Council may amend these Terms of Reference at its discretion.

Historical Research Related to the First Nations Building at Britannia Shipyards

Building History

The Britannia/Phoenix Heritage Study, Duncan Stacey, 1983, pp. 34–35

Final Report: Britannia Complex Phase II, Robert G. Lemon Architecture and Preservation, 1990, p. 3

Historic Sites and Monuments Boat Agenda Paper: Buildings on the Britannia Shipyard Property, David Lee, 1991, p. 591

First Nations Bunkhouse Statement of Significance, Luxton and Associates, 2016

Phoenix Cannery Building; Research Report and Conservation Options, Luxton and Associates, 2022

Phoenix Cannery Building; Research Report and Conservation Options, Addendum, Luxton and Associates, 2024

Letter of Opinion from Dr. Bruce Miller, RE: Indigenous longhouse located at the Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site, dated February 22, 2025.

Building Dendrochronology

Some Tree Ring Dates for Buildings at Britannia Heritage Shipyard, M.L. Parker, 1992

Site Archaeology

A Heritage Overview of “Area E” of the Britannia Waterfront, Being Part of the Cannery Row West Historic Archaeological Site; DgRt6, Leonard C. Ham, 1988

Archaeological Monitoring at Britannia Heritage Shipyard, Deva Heritage Consulting, 1994

Related History

Report on First Nations Involvement in the Fishing and Canning Industry in the Steveston Area, Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society, 2020



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Anthropology
Faculty of Arts

RE: Indigenous longhouse located at the Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site

February 22, 2025

The Luxton Report (December 2022) and other documents, including, significantly the work of the late Dr. Leonard C. Ham, an archaeologist, offer opinions on the nature of the structure variously termed the smokehouse, big house, longhouse, bunkhouse, and rancheria. As noted in the Luxton report, Dr. Ham asserted that this structure "may have been . . . originally for Indigenous cannery workers. . . (ibid., 2), and he noted the typological similarities of the structure to a traditional Coast Salish "smokehouse." This position is supported by the extensive oral history program with people associated with the cannery complexes (ibid.). The Luxton report provides a discussion of the similarities of the structure to Coast Salish structures of the region. There is no need to reproduce that work here; however, I wish to add some comments. I should note that I have visited the structure in question three times recently but, as of yet, have not been in the interior.

First, I spent eight summers in the 1990s living in an earthen floor Coast Salish longhouse in Stó:lō Nation territory at the invitation of the late Chief Frank Malloway. The structure I stayed in was a contemporary building but reproduced essential features of an historic longhouse and enabled the same activities as its' historic antecedents. Winter ritual/spiritual ceremonials were and are held in the longhouse; people resided temporarily on the wooden bleachers along the perimeter; community events were hosted there; ceremonial masks were housed in a separate compartment within the building. I witnessed all of these uses and features. As was done historically, the building was heated by a central fire and cooking was done in a separate space within the building. There are a number of other contemporary longhouses within the several Coast Salish communities and I have visited many of them. My conversations with Chief Malloway concerned how he and his father before him in an earlier iteration designed the longhouse to meet both cultural expectations and current building practices. From these talks I can conclude that their buildings had both historic and innovative features. Innovation does not preclude the buildings from being understood as Coast Salish longhouses, as they term them. In addition, these structures continue to be the site of important Indigenous ritual events--- including *Seowyn* spirit dancing, ancestral namings, marriages, funerals, and others.

Despite restrictions imposed by Canadian law, many of the Coast Salish ritual practices continued right through the nineteenth century to the present. We know, for example; that

Coast Salish people continued to make masks used in ritual life at the time the longhouse in question here was constructed. I mention this to point out that in my opinion, when Coast Salish people occupied the building as part of early commercial fisheries, **there is no doubt that they were conducting ritual/ceremonial practices in the building.** These practices, some of which I named above, were and are essential to social cohesion, relationships with spirit beings, passing on family non-material possessions such as ancestral names, and so on.

Second, in a February 2025 visit to the longhouse with Harold Steves, Chief Jim Hornbrook, and my colleague, Dr. Michael Blake, an archaeologist and professor emeritus of the Department of Anthropology UBC, we examined the building and discussed the work of Dr. Ham. Blake, who knew Ham professionally for several decades, was able to confirm what we already knew, namely, the quality of Ham's work and the reliability of his conclusions. In brief, Dr. Ham is a credible and important source. Dr. Blake is a major scholar of Coast Salish archaeology. I have been a scholar of the Coast Salish world since 1976 and I am the author of several books and many journal articles concerning the Coast Salish. I have been accepted on a number of occasions as an expert on Indigenous and Coast Salish culture and history in local and national courts and tribunals in Canada and the United States.

It is my opinion that Dr. Ham was correct in his view that the building in question was occupied and used by Indigenous people, Coast Salish, in the late 19th century and in to the 20th century. This building should be understood as an early transitional building type, neither identical to historic longhouses or to the contemporary longhouses such as the one I lived in. The size of the structure is sufficient for Indigenous ritual activities to have taken place there. And note; **the longhouses in which Coast Salish lived were also the location of the activities I have mentioned; there were not separate buildings. I know of no other such transitional buildings in the Coast Salish area. The historic buildings are gone** (except in an archaeological sense of post holes and features in the ground). Because of this, the building has great importance in understanding the difficult period that Indigenous people faced in the 19th century with loss of control of much of their resource base, movement to reserves, population decline, entry into commercial fisheries, and so on. It is not significant whether Coast Salish people themselves constructed the building, but rather, what we can understand took place there and how Coast Salish people adapted to their changing circumstances.

This building should be protected and Coast Salish people along with city staff engaged in developing interpretations available to the general public.

Sincerely,



Bruce Granville Miller, PhD
Professor Emeritus

Designations of National Historic Significance

Britannia Shipyard National Historic Site of Canada

Richmond, British Columbia



General view

(© Agence Parcs Canada/Parks Canada Agency,(NHS-images), 2004.)

Address : 5189 Westwater Drive, Richmond, British Columbia

Recognition Statute: Historic Sites and Monuments Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. H-4)

Designation Date: 1991-06-10

Dates: 1890 to 1955 (Construction)
1890 to 1980 (Significant)

Other Name(s): Britannia Shipyard (Designation Name)
Britannia Shipyard Property (Plaque name)

Research Report Number: 1991-030

Plaque(s)

Existing plaque: 5180 Dyke Road, Richmond, British Columbia

The buildings on this site are important components of a large complex of workshops and dwellings that served the shore-based salmon fishery during its boom years (1890-1913). The historic property included the Britannia Shipyard building itself and two boatworks operated by

Japanese-Canadians. Labourers and craftsmen of diverse cultural origins lived in houses on site, and worked in salmon canneries, on the fishing boats, and in the boatworks. They built and serviced wooden fishing vessels for British Columbia's coastal salmon fleet.

Description of Historic Place

The Britannia Shipyard Property National Historic Site of Canada is a historic park located along the south arm of the Fraser River in Richmond, British Columbia. The site relates to the area's long involvement with the salmon fishery. Built out over the water, the shipyard is part of Steveston's historic "Cannery Row" extending from Garry Point and the Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site of Canada on the west end to London Heritage Farm in the east. The designation refers to the 3.3-hectare site located along the Steveston Channel of the Fraser River. The historic park includes several wooden structures used for cannery and boat-building purposes between 1890 and the mid 1950s which are not included in the official recognition.

Heritage Value

Britannia Shipyard Property was designated a national historic site in 1991 because its extant boatworks and shipyard are representative of fishing boat construction and repair activities in Canada's Pacific Coast salmon fishery.

Originally, the Britannia Shipyard Property was constructed as a cannery (1890), a function it retained until 1918, after which it was adapted for use as a boat repair yard. This use persisted until 1980, with individual buildings within the complex functioning both as part of the cannery and the boatyard. The yard is representative of the once more numerous workshop complexes involved in the construction and repair of shore-based salmon fishery vessels. The heritage value of the national historic site resides in its historic association with the construction and repair of salmon fishery boats as illustrated by the 3.3-hectare site, its location and spatial relationship to the fisheries-related activities along the Fraser River.

Sources: Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, Minutes, June 1991, July 1995.

Character-Defining Elements

Key elements contributing to the heritage value of this site include: the site's location in the settlement of Steveston and its historic spatial relationship to the fisheries-related activities along the Fraser River; the siting of the shipyard, built out over the river on reclaimed land; the extensive site accommodating a complex of buildings associated with the production of fishing vessels; the typicality of the yard with its informally sited, vernacular buildings.