



# City of Richmond

## Report to Committee

**To:** Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee      **Date:** January 9, 2024


**From:** Marie Fenwick, Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services      **File:** 11-7141-01/2023-Vol 01


Martin Younis, B. Eng., M. Eng.  
Director, Facilities and Project Development

**Re:** **First Nations Bunkhouse Interpretive Program and Level of Service**




### Staff Recommendation

That the First Nations Bunkhouse Interpretive Program and Level of Service as detailed in the staff report titled "First Nations Bunkhouse Interpretive Program and Level of Service", dated January 9, 2024, from the Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services and Director, Facilities and Project Development be approved.

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

  
 Martin Younis, B. Eng., M. Eng.  
 Director, Facilities and Project Development  
 (604-204-8501)

Att. 6

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
<b>ROUTED TO:</b>	<b>CONCURRENCE</b>	<b>CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER</b>
Finance Department Parks Services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>SENIOR STAFF REPORT REVIEW</b>	<b>INITIALS:</b> 	<b>APPROVED BY CAO</b> 

## Staff Report

### Origin

On February 28, 2021, Council endorsed a program plan to guide future planning and a capital submission for the First Nations Bunkhouse as detailed in the staff report titled "First Nations Bunkhouse Program Plan," dated October 14, 2020, from the Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services to guide future planning and a capital submission for the First Nations Bunkhouse.

On December 11, 2023, Council approved \$6.5 M in capital funding to construct a replica First Nations Bunkhouse building as part of the 2024 budget process.

The purpose of this report is to provide information, including capital costing for the facility construction, and to seek Council approval of the interpretive program and the associated service level for the First Nations Bunkhouse.

This report also responds to the January 30, 2018, referral from Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services Committee:

*That staff examine removing the caretaker suite from Point House at Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site and install exhibits and display First Nations' stories and report back.*

This report also responds to the January 26, 2021, referral from Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services Committee:

*That staff be directed to investigate the inclusion of First Nations welcoming totems at the front of the building.*

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.*

This report supports the *Steveston Heritage Sites Interpretive Framework*, endorsed by Council on November 14, 2023, which identified the following interpretive goals for the Britannia Shipyards:

- Create authentic and immersive experiences of the daily life of the people who worked in West Coast fishing and boatbuilding;
- Foster greater understanding of the cultural diversity of people that supported West Coast fishing and boatbuilding;
- Encourage discovery of the complex workings of West Coast fishing and boatbuilding industry; and
- Inspire connections to and stewardship of West Coast maritime heritage and Fraser River.

The *Steveston Heritage Sites Interpretive Framework* identified interpretation of Indigenous Peoples in Steveston as a gap in the stories currently shared at the heritage sites in Steveston.

This report supports the following objectives set out in the *Richmond Cultural Harmony Plan*:

Strategic Direction #1: Intercultural Connections

- 1.1 Continue to recognize and celebrate Richmond's diverse cultures and unique heritage through intercultural celebrations and events.
- 1.2 Develop and implement a neighbourhood approach to facilitating positive intercultural exchange and understanding between Richmond's diverse cultural communities, such as community-based dialogues, storytelling, and sharing of art, food, and music.

Strategic Direction #5: Programs and Services

- 5.4 Strengthen relationships with various cultural and ethnic communities in order to integrate their arts, cultural and heritage practices into the City's programs and events.

## Analysis

### Background

The building currently referred to as the First Nations Bunkhouse at the Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site (Britannia Shipyards) is a place of historical significance and is one of the site's last buildings to be made operational (Attachment 1).

The building was constructed in the 1890s and it is believed to be the only structure of its kind remaining on the BC coast. In the *1991 Agenda Paper* produced by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, the building was considered of significant heritage value. The Statement of Significance indicates, "...the First Nations Bunkhouse is important for its historical, aesthetic, cultural, and social values, particularly for its association with First Nations working in the fishing and canning industries"(Attachment 2).

Measuring 31' x 116', the building provides approximately 3,300 square feet of usable space. It originally had a cedar shingle roof, plank flooring inside, eight small square windows, and one central doorway on the south face. The character defining elements of the building include:

- Simple rectangular building form and horizontal massing;
- Gable roof with wood shingle and remnants of wood gutters;
- Weathered vertical board and batten cedar siding on the exterior;
- Wood door; and
- Visible indication of former window and door openings.

Like many buildings used in the fishing and canning industries, the First Nations Bunkhouse had multiple functions over the years. Due to its resemblance to Indigenous housing at other BC canneries and similarities to traditional Indigenous dwellings, it is believed this building was originally built by a cannery company as a residence for Indigenous seasonal workers

(Attachment 3). It is likely the building was 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.

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

Currently, the structure is heavily deteriorated, with temporary measures having been previously implemented to stabilize the structure from collapse. The building is not safe to occupy and is surrounded by a chain link fence to ensure public safety.

To support the conservation/reconstruction and future interpretation of the building, an investigation of the historical background and reconstruction options was undertaken throughout 2023. This work included a research report by heritage architect, Don Luxton, investigating the building's history and construction. A structural feasibility assessment was done by a structural engineer and constructability analysis by a Construction Management firm to see if conserving the building was possible. Findings indicated that the current structure is not salvageable without exposing the project to unreasonable risks. It was concluded that the construction of a replica is the best approach.

#### Facility Construction

On December 11, 2023, Council approved the 2024 capital budget which included \$6.5 M for the construction of a like-for-like replica of the First Nations Bunkhouse which honours the character-defining elements outlined above. Included in the capital costs are:

- Deconstruction of the existing building and salvage what is possible of the materials;
- Construction of a replica building;
- Interior fit out including interpretive exhibits and furniture, fixtures and equipment required to deliver the proposed program;
- New exterior landscaping to support programming; and
- Funds for planning and engagement with Indigenous communities.

#### **Reconstruction**

The replica will be constructed utilizing a similar methodology to the existing building, consisting of a modern structural framework and clad in materials matching the original building. It will have the same dimensions and exterior aesthetic as the original building. As much of the original building materials as possible will be salvaged for reuse.

Since the original First Nations Bunkhouse was not built as a traditional Indigenous structure, staff do not recommend incorporating a house post or welcome figure into the building's construction. Background on the cultural significance of house posts and welcome totems is provided in Attachment 4.

## **Building Fit Out and Landscaping**

To support the future program, the new building will include climate-controlled washrooms, a kitchenette, and storage. The remainder of the building would remain uninsulated with spot heating to provide a truer interpretive experience of the space similar to what is found elsewhere at Britannia Shipyards.

Approximately 2,000 square feet of the overall 3,300 square feet will be used for exhibits. This space will include both museum-style displays as well as re-created historical displays, providing flexibility to tell Indigenous stories in a variety of methods. This style of exhibit is in keeping with the other displays at Britannia Shipyards and may include a mix of the following elements:

- artifact cases;
- audio/visual elements;
- digital displays;
- custom made props;
- text panels; and
- re-created living quarters offering visitors a glimpse into the life of the buildings original occupants.

By utilizing a range of display methods, the exhibit will support telling the stories of how the original building was used and the people who used it, as well as the broader context of Indigenous peoples and the fishing industry. Attachment 5 provides a sample floor plan with reference images of exhibit elements.

New landscaping elements, including native plantings, will support displays and programming related to Indigenous cultural heritage to the west of the building. Attachment 6 provides a concept of what this may look like. The creation of this space will allow flow between the interior and exterior of the building similar to its historical use. This space would be one of the first impressions of Britannia Shipyards that visitors have upon arrival.

The other location where Indigenous stories are currently told at Britannia Shipyards is the Point House. The Point House currently provides both exhibition space and a caretaker's suite. At this time staff do not recommend altering the interpretive displays or removing the caretaker's suite. The caretaker actively provides valuable services to the site including a presence during early morning, evening and overnight times that enhances site security, prevents property misuse, and supports after hour rentals. The stories told in the Point House can be considered as part of the engagement done with Musqueam for the First Nations Bunkhouse. Should the outcome of this engagement recommend changes to the exhibits in the Point House, this can be done at a future time in a manner complementary to the stories told in the First Nations Bunkhouse.

## **Proposed Interpretive Program**

The proposed program for the future First Nations Bunkhouse is to interpret Indigenous stories through exhibits and programming. This interpretation will create a broader understanding of Indigenous cultural heritage by sharing the lived experiences of those working in Steveston's fishing industry and the impact of colonization by the fishing industry on local Indigenous communities with visitors to Britannia Shipyards. This robust interpretive program will honour the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action by shedding light on the

seldom-told stories of First Nations and the fishing industry and by telling these stories through words of First Nations peoples. Sharing these stories will help the public better understand the systemic racism found within Canada's fishing industry and the resulting displacement from the industry's growth.

In-person interpretative programming can help bring to life these sensitive stories, facilitate hands-on experiences for public, and give visitors an opportunity to interact with locals to have their questions answered. Having a person available to speak with visitors is shown to greatly improve a visitor's experience of a museum or heritage site. For public programming, which would serve both local residents and visitors, staff would provide in-person interpretation to general visitors during the Britannia Shipyards' high season (Victoria Day to Labour Day) and for occasions such as National Indigenous Peoples Day. Prior to the completion of permanent exhibits, which is expected to take several years, in-person programming would be the primary method of interpretation offered in the First Nations Bunkhouse. Programming will include a variety of different activities for both residents and visitors, such as:

- Curriculum-linked school programs;
- Guided tours;
- In-situ interpretation;
- Demonstrations or workshops;
- Story-telling or performances; and
- Special/Seasonal programs, including National Indigenous Peoples Day.

#### Level of Service

The development and delivery of each of these type of programs requires special skills and attention to ensure they are done in a purposeful and respectful way. To effectively deliver new in-person interpretive programming in this new facility, additional staff will be required. Currently, Britannia Shipyards has 0.5 FTE budget for a School Program Coordinator.

The staff required to support this level of service includes:

- RFT Educational Program Coordinator;
- RFT Community Facilities Programmer; and
- Heritage Interpreter auxiliary hours.

The First Nations Bunkhouse is part of the overall operation of Britannia Shipyards. The site is open to the public February to December each year, with longer hours during the summer season. The First Nations Bunkhouse will be the ninth building at the Britannia Shipyards to open to the public. As such, existing site operations will support the general administration, marketing and promotion, and space rentals for the First Nations Bunkhouse.

Council approved an Operating Budget Impact (OBI) of \$185,824 for the First Nations Bunkhouse facility as part of the 2024 capital budget. The on-going costs and revenues for the proposed interpretive program are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Operating Budget Impact (OBI)

	<b>Base Facility</b>	<b>School Programming</b>	<b>Public Programming</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Revenue</b>	\$1,620	\$7,350	\$12,400	\$21,370
<b>Expense</b>	\$43,838	\$58,388	\$104,968	\$207,194
<b>Net Cost</b>	<b>\$42,218</b>	<b>\$51,038</b>	<b>\$92,568</b>	<b>\$185,824</b>

The annual base facility cost (without any program) of \$42,218 includes utilities, cleaning, security, Wi-Fi, building maintenance, and maintenance of new park infrastructure. The total OBI includes staffing costs for the proposed interpretive program.

The benefits of the proposed First Nations Bunkhouse Interpretive Program include advancing Truth and Reconciliation in Richmond, filling a gap in the interpretive stories and programs offered at the heritage sites in Steveston, offering teachers the opportunity to enhance their teaching of Indigenous cultural heritage and supporting tourism destination development by offering new experiences related to Indigenous cultural heritage.

**Next Steps**

Should Council approve the interpretive program and service level as outlined, staff will move forward with the project as outlined below.

**Engagement**

As outlined in the October 14, 2020 report, “First Nations Bunkhouse Program Plan,” detailed planning on the interpretive program will be done in collaboration with Indigenous knowledge keepers. Preliminary engagement with the Musqueam Indian Band around the First Nations Bunkhouse began in 2018 and Musqueam representatives have expressed an interest in participating in the development of interpretation in this space. Staff have informed Musqueam of the status of the project and will continue to seek their input. Staff will also engage with the many Indigenous communities who historically came to Steveston to participate in the fishing industry to provide an opportunity for them to share their stories.

Local community groups will also be invited to participate in further program development. The Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site Society has been informed of the project and will be given the opportunity to provide regular input as the development of the interpretive program takes shape. Additionally, representatives from the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society, Richmond School District No. 38, Tourism Richmond, and the Richmond Intercultural Advisory Committee will be offered an opportunity to provide input. Additional groups may be identified through the planning process.

Engagement with all of the identified groups will begin in 2024.

**Planning and Design**

Detailed design for the construction of a replica will take place in 2024. These designs will be part of a future Heritage Alteration Permit. Deconstruction and construction will be coordinated

with the ongoing structural and envelope renewals in the Seine Net Loft and Shipyard Building which is scheduled for late 2025 with completion anticipated in early 2027.

Following initial engagement with Indigenous communities, concept designs for the interpretive program will be developed with input from the communities who wish to participate. This process will include concepts for exhibits, landscaping and programming.

Staff will continue to look for grant opportunities to support the development and implementation of exhibits and programming in the First Nations Bunkhouse.

### **Financial Impact**

None.

### **Conclusion**

The First Nations Bunkhouse is an important part of the Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site and is deemed to have significant heritage value due to its age and uniqueness. The construction of a replica building with surrounding landscaping will help complete the experience of Britannia Shipyards and support important interpretation of Indigenous Peoples. This report seeks Council approval of the interpretive program and level of service to serve schools and the general public as outlined to enhance the visitors' experience of the First Nations Bunkhouse and help achieve the goals of Truth and Reconciliation.



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- Att. 1: Current Image of the First Nations Bunkhouse
- 2: Statement of Significance for the First Nations Bunkhouse
- 3: Archival photo of Indigenous cannery dwelling
- 4: Background on house posts and welcome figures
- 5: Concept floor plan with reference images
- 6: Concept landscape plan



**Current Image of the First Nations Bunkhouse**



First Nations Bunkhouse at Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site, 2021

**First Nations Bunkhouse  
 Britannia Heritage Shipyard National Historic Site  
 Statement of Significance**

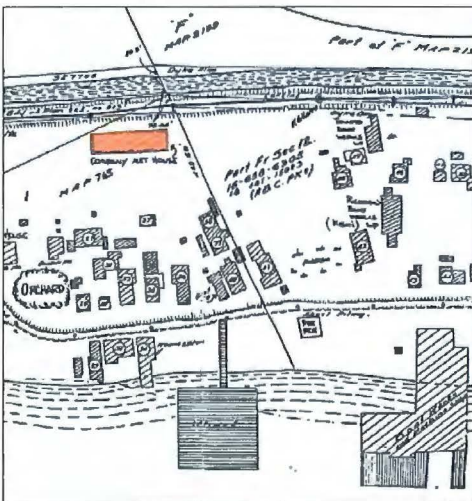
c.1895

5180 Westwater Drive, Richmond, BC

**Description**

The First Nations Bunkhouse is a one-storey, long, narrow wooden structure with a gable roof, wood gutters and board and batten siding, situated north of and parallel to the boardwalk at Britannia Shipyard.

The First Nations Bunkhouse is part of Britannia Heritage Shipyard National Historic site, which was declared a National Historic Site in 1991 and opened as a city park in 1995.



Waterworks Atlas Map showing the original location of the First Nations Bunkhouse on the Phoenix Cannery property, 1936. (Richmond Archives 1997-15-9)



**Values**

The First Nations Bunkhouse is important for its historical, aesthetic, cultural and social values, particularly for its association with First Nations working in the fishing and canning industries, and for its potential to interpret this history.

The First Nations Bunkhouse is important for its early construction date, around 1895, as a dwelling for First Nations workers employed by the Phoenix Cannery, and as a rare example of this type of communal dwelling, likely the last surviving First Nations residence associated with the Steveston canneries.

The First Nations Bunkhouse is significant for its association with First Nations working in the fishing and canning industries, where they initially comprised the majority of the work force. Traveling by canoe

## First Nations Bunkhouse Statement of Significance

early in the season from areas up and down the BC coast, First Nations followed a seasonal work pattern that brought them to the canneries, to farm fields, and back to their traditional territory in the winter off-season. First Nations men were fishermen, while Native women were sought for constructing and mending nets and working on the salmon canning lines.

Accommodation according to racial divisions was part of life in the canneries, and this is reflected at Britannia. Canneries had separate living quarters for First Nations, Japanese, Chinese and Europeans. As with many in the work force, First Nations cannery workers lived communally, first in village sites and later in housing provided by the canneries.

Considered to have a similar appearance to First Nations longhouses, the building form is important for its ability to communicate the communal living conditions and lifestyle common to First Nations, seen in its long, low rectangular form with evidence of multiple door and window openings. First Nations huts had openings for indoor fire ventilation and smokehouses for salmon and eulachons. Constructed of common materials including vertical red cedar board and batten siding and originally secured with square cut iron nails, the building is rare and intact example of First Nations cannery housing.

Ongoing relocation and re-purposing of buildings was common in the fishing and canning industry. The First Nations bunkhouse was originally located on pilings further north along the main dyke, near a previously existing slough, and later used for net storage. Some time between 1942 and 1946, it was moved forward to its present location.

The structure is an integral part of the Britannia site as it helps to tell the complete story of the fishing industry on the west coast.

### Character-defining Elements

#### Site and setting

- Location north of and parallel to the historical boardwalk

#### Building

- Remnant of original building cluster pattern
- Simple rectangular building form and horizontal massing
- Gable roof with wood shingle and remnants of wood gutters
- Weathered vertical board and batten siding on the exterior
- Wood door
- Visible indication of former window and door openings

#### Intangible cultural features

- Oral histories

**Britannia Shipyard** Selected References  
Statement of Significance

- Bannister, Marie and Marilyn Clayton, eds. *Steambox, Boardwalks, Belts and Ways: Stories from Britannia*. City of Richmond, 1992.
- Christopher Phillips and Associates. *Britannia Heritage Shipyard Park Concept Plan*. 1993.
- Foundation Group Designs. *Richmond Heritage Inventory Phase II*. 1989.
- Ham, Leonard C. An Archaeological Heritage Resource Overview of Richmond BC. Richmond Heritage Advisory Committee, Richmond Museum, Department of Leisure Services, 1987.
- Lee, David. *Buildings on the Britannia Shipyard Property, Richmond BC*. Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada Agenda Paper, 1991.
- Miller, Gerry. Oral History Interview July 17 and September 24 1991.
- Meggs, Geoff and Duncan Stacey. *Cork Lines and Canning Lines*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1992.
- Reid, David J. *The Development of the Fraser River Salmon Canning Industry, 1885 to 1913*. Federal Department of the Environment, 1973.
- Robert Lemon Architecture and Preservation and Judy Oberlander Preservation Consultant. *Britannia Documentation Summary Report*. City of Richmond, 1989.
- Ross, Leslie. *Richmond, Child of the Fraser*. Richmond BC: Richmond '79 Centennial Society, 1979.
- Stacey, Duncan. *Salmonopolis: The Steveston Story*. Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 1994.
- Stacey, Duncan. *Steveston's Cannery Channel: A Social History of the Fishing Community*. Corporation of the Township of Richmond, 1986.
- Steveston Recollections: The History of a Village. <http://www.museevirtuel-virtualmuseum.ca>
- Steveston Museum. <http://www.steveston.bc.ca/online/museum.html>
- Yesaki, Mitsuo. *Steveston Cannery Row: An Illustrated History*. Richmond BC: Lulu Island Printing, 1998.



**Archival photo of Indigenous cannery dwelling**



Indigenous housing at Star Cannery in Steveston, circa 1900

### Background on House Posts and Welcome Figures

While the First Nations Bunkhouse is believed to have served as a residence for Indigenous Peoples who worked for the canneries during the summer season, it cannot be considered a traditional Indigenous living space, such as a “longhouse”. These traditional residences are central elements of Indigenous communities and are built as lasting structures for specific family clans or communal use. House posts are sacred poles carrying the crest images belonging to the heads of a House and are typical elements at the entrance to longhouses. Longhouses and house posts play an important role in First Nations cultural heritage, not only to provide shelter, but as a means of preserving and passing along traditional knowledge and practices and recognizing family ancestry.

A “welcome post” or “welcome figure” is generally a single, larger-than-life carved human figure that often stands at an arrival point (traditionally near the beach) in Northwest Coast communities to welcome visitors. These posts are stand-alone figures and not incorporated into a building structure.

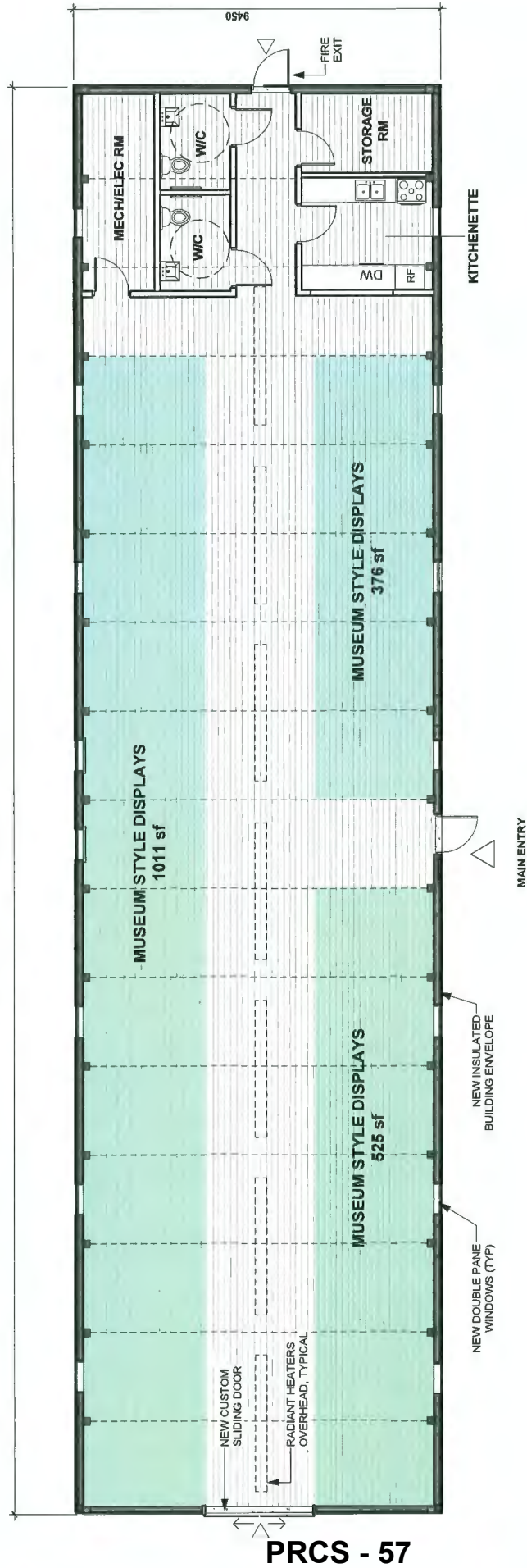


Musqueam welcome figures at YVR, 1996  
(YVR)



Musqueam poles and new house, 1915  
(BC Archives)

Concept Floor Plan with Reference Images



PRCS - 57

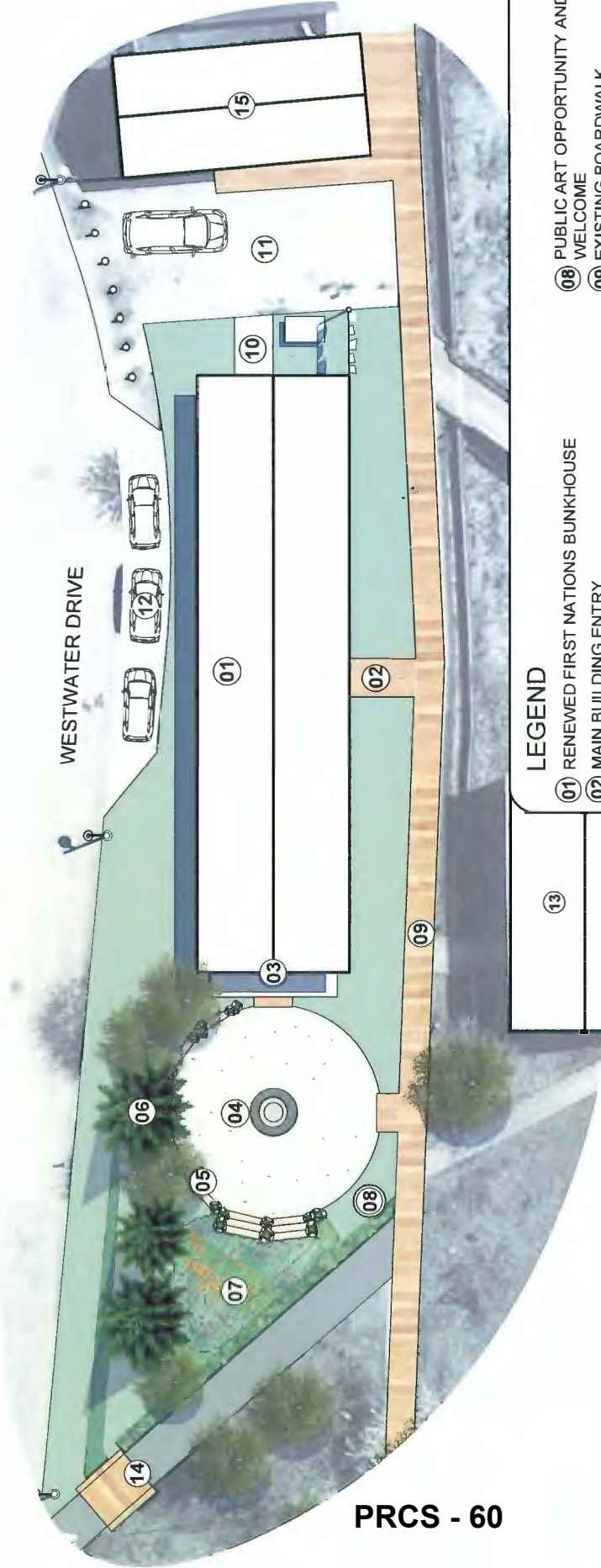








SITE PLAN VISION: TO CREATE A VIBRANT AND WELCOMING SPACE THAT IS ALIVE WITH **LEARNING, CELEBRATION, CEREMONY, AND CULTURE.**



PRCS - 60

**LEGEND**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>01 RENEWED FIRST NATIONS BUNKHOUSE</li> <li>02 MAIN BUILDING ENTRY</li> <li>03 SLIDING DOORS AND PRIMARY ACCESS TO OUTDOOR SPACE</li> <li>04 GATHERING CIRCLE FOR FLEXIBLE PROGRAMMING AND INTERPRETATION</li> <li>05 INTEGRATED INFORMAL SEATING</li> <li>06 ADDITIONAL NATIVE TREE PLANTING AND SCREENING</li> <li>07 NATIVE PLANTING, POTENTIAL FOOD AND MEDICINE GARDEN.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>08 PUBLIC ART OPPORTUNITY AND SITE WELCOME</li> <li>09 EXISTING BOARDWALK</li> <li>10 SERVICE AND STORAGE ACCESS</li> <li>11 SERVICE VEHICLE ACCESS</li> <li>12 EXISTING STREET PARKING</li> <li>13 JAPANESE DUPLEX</li> <li>14 EXISTING BRIDGE AND PATHWAY</li> <li>15 MURAKAMI BOATWORKS</li> </ul> |
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**BRITANNIA SHIPYARDS  
FIRST NATIONS BUNKHOUSE RENEWAL  
SITE PLAN**



SCALE 1:250  
DATE: DECEMBER 19, 2023







WESTWATER DRIVE

**PROCS LEGEND**

- 01 SLIDING DOORS FOR INDOOR-OUTDOOR CONNECTION
- 02 GATHERING CIRCLE FOR FLEXIBLE PROGRAMMING AND INTERPRETATION
- 03 INTEGRATED INFORMAL SEATING
- 04 INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE AND DISPLAY OPPORTUNITIES
- 05 PACIFIC NORTHWEST NATIVE PLANTING - POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITY FOR A FOOD AND/OR MEDICINE GARDEN
- 06 ADDITIONAL NATIVE TREE PLANTING AND SCREENING
- 07 CONNECTION TO EXISTING BOARDWALK
- 08 PUBLIC ART OPPORTUNITY AND SITE WELCOME
- 09 EXISTING PATHWAY CONNECTION TO SITE PARKING AND IMPERIAL LANDING
- 10 EXISTING DRAINAGE SWALE



**BRITANNIA SHIPYARDS  
FIRST NATIONS BUNKHOUSE RENEWAL  
CONCEPT PLAN FOR OUTDOOR GATHERING CIRCLE - ENLARGEMENT**



SCALE 1:150  
DATE: DECEMBER 19, 2023

