



STEVESTON
CULTURAL CENTRE

May 24, 2017

To: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee

From: Steveston Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre
Advisory Committee/Nikkei Memorial Project Committee

Re: Nikkei Memorial Project

2017 marks the 75th anniversary of one of the most significant events in Richmond history. In April 1942 over 2500 Richmond residents of Japanese ancestry were removed from Steveston/Richmond and relocated a minimum of 100 miles from the B.C. Coast.

Most of these residents departed via train at the Steveston tram station and headed for Hastings Park for eventual relocation to internment camps in Tashme, New Denver, Slocan, Greenwood, Sandon and Kaslo to name a few. Others relocated to "self supporting centers" such as Bridge River, East Lillooet and McGillivray Falls near Tashme.

Families, wanting to remain together, relocated to Alberta and Manitoba to work in the sugar beet farms while others moved to other Provinces .

Some were deemed to be a threat and were imprisoned in POW Camps in Ontario despite the fact that many were born at the Japanese Fisherman's hospital in Steveston.

Approximately 21,000 Japanese Canadians were eventually evacuated from other towns and cities along the Coast.

Life continued for these exiled Japanese Canadians over the next seven years and their philosophy can sometimes be reflected in the Japanese phrase "shikata ga nai" or "it cannot be helped".

In April 1949, the Canadian government finally agreed to allow the Japanese Canadians the right to return to the West Coast. Prior to that, upon the war ending, the Japanese Canadians were given the choice of returning to Japan, or remaining east of the Rockies.

Though not all of the Steveston Japanese Canadian residents returned, approximately a third of the 2500 previous residents eventually came back.

Today we find a thriving community that is a shining example of Canada's multicultural policy. Currently in Richmond we express concerns about the issues raised by our cultural diversity, yet I suggest that you only have to look to Steveston and see how different ethnic groups can come together to build a community.

Philosopher, George Santayana is quoted as saying "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." By the construction of memorials such as the one being proposed, and the constant diligence against discrimination and xenophobia we strive to ensure that injustice such as perpetuated on the Japanese Canadian community is never repeated. Unfortunately we see racism and xenophobia raising its ugly head in the United States with the thinly veiled "Muslim ban" and the proposed "Muslim registry" and we feel our memorial project is timely.

Though our parents and grandparents suffered prejudice and injustice, they returned and began immediately to contribute to the community. The separate Japanese Canadian and Caucasian United Church congregations voted in 1953 to come together as one congregation and became the first integrated United Church in Canada. In 1955, the Japanese Canadian community joined together with the rest of the community to build a community center. \$15,000 was donated to the building fund in exchange for a room to be designated for use by the judo club and the kendo club could utilize the gymnasium. In the minutes of the February 14, 1955 Steveston Community Society minutes, it is recorded that "... the JCCA (Japanese Canadian Citizens Association) had approximately \$15,000 and wished to build a hall. But rather than build a small one of their own they were interested in joining with the Community Society in their endeavor toward a community center." At the April 11, 1955 Society meeting, it was reported that the JCCA had agreed to combine their trust account with the Society's for the purpose of building the Steveston Community Center.

This initial collaboration led to the future construction of the Steveston Martial Arts Center in 1972 that at the time was the first purpose built dojo outside of Japan and later in 1992 the Steveston Japanese Canadian Cultural Center was erected to provide a venue to promote the history, culture and tradition of the Japanese Canadian community. This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of this building and in 5 more years we recognize the 50th anniversary of the Martial Arts Center.

Other examples of the imprint made by these Japanese Canadian pioneers and their descendents include the Steveston Buddhist Temple, Kuno Gardens, Maple Residence plaza (commemorating the site of the first Japanese Fisherman's hospital) and the Nikkei Fisherman's statue near Britannia Shipyards (recognizing the contribution of the Nikkei fishermen to the fishing industry). The City has also contributed on many of projects as well, specifically the development of Murakami House, the Japanese gardens and suikinkutsu next to Steveston Museum, the

refurbishing of the Nikkei Fisherman's building and the "Nikkei Stories of Steveston" video series.

It is not enough to state that our parents, grandparents and in some instances great-grandparents that came before us laid the foundation for the success of the subsequent generations and that we owe a debt of gratitude to these pioneers. Their story not only encompasses the last eight decades but goes further back in history to the late 1800's and early 1900's when the Nikkei built the first school for the Japanese Canadian children as they were denied access to the public school system because their parents were not property owners. The first permanent hospital using the principle of "socialized medicine" was also built in Steveston by the Nikkei community and was open to anyone in the community regardless of race or religion.

To commemorate the resilience, perseverance and community building of the first (Issei), second (Nisei) and third (Sansei) generations of Japanese Canadians (Nikkei) we ask for the approval and support of City Council to build an appropriate memorial to these Nikkei pioneers in surmounting the injustice and racism they suffered during WWII but more importantly their return to Steveston to become contributing members of society.

If we receive Council's approval to proceed it is our intent to put out an "artists call" for design submissions that reflect the vision for a suitable memorial. We have already been in discussion with City staff regarding the process required to initiate this call-out and will work closely with staff during this process.

Maya Lin, designer of the Vietnam War Memorial Wall, is quoted "To me, memorials represent a stepping-off point. We cannot do anything about what has already been lost, but can we learn enough from the past to rethink a different and better future."

We feel that this is what our elders thought when they returned to Richmond and through their actions and deeds, showed that they did "rethink a different and better future."

We anticipate that the budget for our project will be in the range of \$300,000 based on the discussions with sculptor Norm Williams creator of the "Steveston Legacy" in front of the Gulf of Georgia Historic Cannery.

We request that City Council assist us by making an initial contribution towards this project so that we can immediately commission this memorial. We anticipate that whomever is commissioned for this project will need a minimum of one year to complete the design and construction phases and this will allow the community the time to complete its fundraising activities.

If approved, our committee will regularly report back to Committee and Council on our progress

Previous City Councils have collaborated with us on many projects in the past but we think this project will be the most significant as it will be a symbol against racism and xenophobia and recognizes the unfailing "human spirit" of our citizens. It will also recognize the fulfillment of the Canadian multicultural policy and stand as a testament of one group of Canadians to persevere to become a part of the Canadian mosaic.

We will also be submitting letters from the non- profit groups in Steveston representing the community support for this project and confirms our commitment to a transparent and engaged community process.

Respectfully submitted

Kelvin Higo
Chair
Steveston Japanese Canadian Cultural Center
Advisory/Nikkei Memorial Committee

Members:

Bud Sakamoto	Dan Nomura	Don Mukai
Shioko Mukai	Roy Matsuyama	Julie Matsuyama