



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services
Committee

From: Marie Fenwick
Director, Arts, Culture and Heritage Services

Re: **First Nations Bunkhouse Program Plan**

Date: October 14, 2020

File: 11-7141-01/2020-Vol
01

Staff Recommendation

That the proposed program plan 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 be endorsed to guide future planning and a capital submission for the First Nations Bunkhouse.

CM Fenwick

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

Att. 2

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Intergovernmental Relations & Protocol Unit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<i>Sevener</i>
Community Social Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Facility Services & Project Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Policy Planning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
SENIOR STAFF REPORT REVIEW	INITIALS: <i>CF</i>	APPROVED BY CAO <i>[Signature]</i>

Staff Report

Origin

On June 22, 2020 staff received the following referral from Council:

That staff be directed to propose by November 1, 2020 an implementation plan to include timelines, cost estimates, and cultural heritage value for the restoration of the First Nations Bunk House located at the Britannia Heritage Shipyards site being an opportunity pursuant to item #3 of Strategic Direction One of the Richmond Cultural Harmony Plan 2019-2029 report.

On January 30, 2018 staff received the following referral from Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services Committee:

That staff examine the potential to incorporate First Nations' house posts at the entrance of the First Nations Bunkhouse at Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site and report back.

The purpose of this report is to respond to these referrals and present a proposed program plan for the First Nations Bunkhouse at Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site.

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022 Strategy #3 One Community Together:

Vibrant and diverse arts and cultural activities and opportunities for community engagement and connection.

3.2 Enhance arts and cultural programs and activities.

3.4 Celebrate Richmond's unique and diverse history and heritage.

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022 Strategy #6 Strategic and Well-Planned Growth:

Leadership in effective and sustainable growth that supports Richmond's physical and social needs.

6.4 Recognize Richmond's history and heritage through preservation, protection and interpretation.

Restoring and interpreting the First Nations Bunkhouse also 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

First Nations Context

For thousands of years, First Nations up and down the BC coast celebrated a rich cultural heritage with fishing being a central element. Supported by harvests from the sea and rivers, First Nations people developed highly technical skills for fishing and boat construction.¹

During the late 1800s and early 1900s much of this rich cultural heritage was lost due to the impacts of European settlement and colonialism. Populations decimated from sickness, outlawed potlaches, the introduction of residential schools, restricted fishing rights, banned Indigenous fishing methods and the rapid growth of the commercial fishing industry created significant losses of First Nations cultural heritage and limited First Nations peoples' capacity to sustain their communities.²

First Nations participation in BC's fishing industry is set against this backdrop. With limitations on means of sustaining themselves, First Nations people were forced to find other means within growing colonial industries. Fishing companies employed First Nations peoples as fishermen or cannery labour at low wages.³

In the early 1900s, the fishing industry of Steveston relied on a uniquely diverse workforce that was divided on the basis of gender and ethnicity. Individuals of European descent were generally in positions of greater authority and greater pay. Men of Japanese background were valued for their fishing and boat building skills and, along with their wives and children who often worked in canneries, played an important role in the industry. Chinese men provided essential cannery labour at low wages. These people, along with First Nations, made up the community built to support the fishing industry in Steveston. Over time, this diverse community developed unique ways of working together and built relationships that supported each other through difficult times.

¹ *Aboriginal Fisheries in BC*, UBC First Nations and Indigenous Studies, 2009
https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/aboriginal_fisheries_in_british_columbia/

² *Aboriginal Rights: Fishing*, BC Treaty Commission, 2020
[http://www.bctreaty.ca/fishing#:~:text=In%201894%2C%20Fisheries%20regulations%20were,%E2%80%94%20with%20seeking%20permission'](http://www.bctreaty.ca/fishing#:~:text=In%201894%2C%20Fisheries%20regulations%20were,%E2%80%94%20with%20seeking%20permission)

³ *Aboriginal Fisheries in BC*, UBC First Nations and Indigenous Studies, 2009
https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/aboriginal_fisheries_in_british_columbia/

Fraser River canneries drew large numbers of First Nations workers from the north and south coast of BC and Vancouver Island. A recent research report by the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society shows that families from more than 16 First Nations came to the south Fraser River area to participate in the fishing industry. In the report, Edward Debeck describes the working and living conditions in the early 1900s at the Scottish Canadian Cannery in Steveston noting, “great canoes 50ft and over, spread to an 8ft beam, each with 4 sails, wing and wing. Some came all the way from the Skeena and Queen Charlottes...”⁴

First Nations people generally worked for fishing companies as house groups, with significant populations of First Nations migrating to canneries during sockeye fishing season in July and August.⁵ Canneries provided seasonal housing where, in addition to working for the cannery, people could harvest and preserve local food items, for home and winter use and for trade⁶ (Attachment 1).

First Nations Bunkhouse at Britannia Shipyards

The building currently referred to as the First Nations Bunkhouse is considered to be the only structure of its kind remaining on the BC coast (Attachment 2). It measures approximately 31' x 116', has a unique gable roof, wooden drainage gutters, and is constructed of vertical red cedar board and batten siding secured with square cut iron nails. It may have originally stood on 3' pilings before the land was in-filled and had a cedar shingle roof, plank flooring inside, eight small square windows, and one central doorway on the south face.⁷ Dendrochronology testing concluded that the building materials date to 1885.⁸

Like many buildings used in the fishing and canning industries, the First Nations Bunkhouse was used for multiple functions over the years. It is believed it was originally used as a residence for First Nations cannery workers because of the resemblance to First Nations housing at other BC canneries. It is unknown which First Nations peoples may have used this specific building and it is likely that it was used by different groups over time (Attachment 2).

Since one canning company often owned several canneries, it was regular practice for companies to move and re-use buildings between canneries as the need arose. The original location of the building was on a slough farther inland, south of Dyke Road in Steveston. In the late 1940s, the Anglo-British Columbia Packing Company relocated the building to the current Britannia Shipyards site, likely to support its Phoenix Cannery operations. However, it is not known who originally built the structure or which cannery it may have been associated with at the time of First Nations use.⁹

⁴ *Report on First Nations Involvement in the Fishing and Canning Industry in the Steveston Area*, Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society, 2020

⁵ *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries*, Dianne Newell, 1993

⁶ *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries*, Dianne Newell, 1993

⁷ *A Heritage Overview of "Area E" of the Britannia Waterfront*, Leonard Ham, 1988, p. 15

⁸ *Some Tree-Ring Dates for Buildings at the Britannia Heritage Shipyard*, M.L. Parker, 1992

⁹ *A Heritage Overview of "Area E" of the Britannia Waterfront*, Leonard Ham, 1988, p. 15

After its relocation and during its remaining years of operation, the building was used primarily for gear and net storage, divided into eight storage lockers with added partition walls inside and eight sliding square doors for access.¹⁰

In the 1991 Agenda Paper produced by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, the building was considered of significant heritage value and was included in the National Historic Site designation for Britannia Shipyards. The 2016 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, and for its potential to interpret this history." Additionally, the building is important for its early construction date, and as a possible rare example of this type of communal dwelling, likely the last surviving First Nations residence associated with the Steveston canneries.

Currently, the structure is heavily deteriorated, with temporary measures having been previously implemented to stabilize the structure from collapse. The building is currently unsafe to occupy and is surrounded by a chain link fence to ensure public safety. It was identified within the previous condition assessment, that none of the existing elements of this building are suitable to be reused within a rehabilitated structure, however some key elements could be retained for the purposes of an interpretive exhibit.

Facility Name and Architectural Cultural Heritage

Over the years, the building has been called many names. Recently, it has been referred to as a "bunkhouse." A "bunkhouse" is similar to a barracks with multiple individuals (often unrelated men) using it for sleeping quarters. It is unlikely this building would have functioned as a bunkhouse, because First Nations people who worked for the canneries during the summer season generally came in groups and would have lived together.¹¹

While the building cannot be considered a "bunkhouse", it can neither be considered a traditional First Nations living space, such as a "longhouse" or "smokehouse". These traditional residences are central elements of First Nations communities and are built as lasting structures for specific family clans or communal use. Houseposts are sacred poles carrying the crest images belonging to the heads of a House and are typical elements of longhouses.¹² Longhouses and houseposts 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.

According to staff's research findings and advice from the Heritage Manager at the First People's Cultural Council, it is important to understand that the First Nations building at the Britannia Shipyard site was built to support cannery company work and not as part of a First Nations traditional community. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to refer to the First Nations Bunkhouse as a longhouse nor to add a housepost to the structure.

¹⁰ *Buildings on the Britannia Shipyard Property Richmond, British Columbia*, David Lee, 1991 p. 591

¹¹ *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries*, Dianne Newell, 1993

¹² *Background Information, First Nations of British Columbia*, Museum of Anthropology, 2014

At this time, staff recommend continuing to refer to the building as the First Nations Bunkhouse for planning purposes. Through the program planning process and engagement with First Nations communities, a more suitable name may emerge and will be brought forward for Council's consideration.

Proposed First Nations Bunkhouse Program Plan

Interpretative Use

Currently, within Richmond and across BC, few experiences offer the public an opportunity to learn about the history and heritage of First Nations in the fishing industry. The First Nations Bunkhouse offers a unique opportunity to address this gap. For this reason, it would be ideal for interpretive use, complementing the existing experiences at the Britannia Shipyard.

The First Nations Bunkhouse is well suited to offer interpretation of First Nations lived experiences in cannery residences and working in Steveston's fishing and canning industries. In addition to colonial First Nations fishing stories, the space offers opportunities to share traditional cultural practices to create a broader understanding of First Nations heritage. Sharing these stories should be done in a manner complementary to existing interpretation at the Britannia Shipyards such as that presented in the Chinese Bunkhouse, Men's Bunkhouse, Manager's House, and Murakami House. Sharing these stories would tell a more complete story of early Steveston and provide a fuller visitor experience at the Britannia Shipyards site.

First Nations interpretation in the First Nations Bunkhouse would greatly add to the experience of the Britannia Shipyards, drawing new visitors and attracting tourists. Additionally, this interpretation would provide a rich opportunity for educational programming to compliment the BC school curriculum. These support the goals of the *Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site Strategic Development Plan*, endorsed by Council July 2018, to enhance the quality of the visitor experience, and continue heritage restoration and interpretation.

In alignment with current best practices in the museum and heritage field, staff will work with First Nations communities who historically came to Steveston to participate in the fishing industry to provide an opportunity for them to share their own stories.

The development of exhibits and programs will be done in collaboration with First Nations knowledge keepers. In addition to or in place of traditional text panels and display cases, exhibits and programming in and around the First Nations Bunkhouse building might include artistic pieces, oral story-telling in-person or through digital technology, demonstrations of canoe carving or salmon drying, among others.

Preliminary engagement with the Musqueam Indian Band for interpreting this space has begun and they have expressed an interest in participating in the process. In addition to the Musqueam Indian Band, First Nations identified as participating in the Fraser River commercial fishery will be engaged. Those who self-identify as having an association with Steveston canneries will be invited to participate in the interpretive planning process. It is expected that engagement may take longer than usual, in light of COVID-19 restrictions and First Nations organizations capacity to participate in this process.

In addition to First Nations peoples, local community groups will be invited to participate in this process. Specifically, the Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site Society, the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society, the Richmond Intercultural Advisory Committee, and Richmond School District. Additional groups may be identified through the planning process.

Supporting the *Richmond Cultural Harmony Plan*

As stated in the 2019 *Richmond Cultural Harmony Plan*, its purpose is to, “identify innovative and collaborative approaches to strengthen intercultural connections among Richmond residents.” Additionally, the intention of the Plan is to “demonstrate the City’s leadership in building on its social inclusion practices” and “respond to the evolving needs of Richmond’s increasingly diverse population, which includes long-time residents, immigrants, newcomers, and Indigenous peoples.”

The proposed program plan for the First Nations Bunkhouse and associated engagement with First Nations peoples in its development, would support the intentions of the *Richmond Cultural Harmony Plan* by:

- 1) building bridges with First Nations communities;
- 2) helping Richmond residents better understand the context of First Nations history and heritage in BC; and
- 3) offering new opportunities for anti-racism education in Richmond.

Restoring and interpreting the First Nations Bunkhouse would 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 can help the public better understand the systemic racism that was part of Canada’s fishing industry and the current fishing rights of First Nations peoples.

Additionally, both the process around and results of interpretation of the First Nations Bunkhouse would support recommendations made by the First Peoples’ Cultural Council in their 2019 Policy Paper, *Recognizing and Including Indigenous Cultural Heritage in B.C.* and the *Report on the First Peoples’ Cultural Council Indigenous Cultural Heritage Forum* published in 2020. In seeking to advance First Nations peoples’ cultural heritage in BC, both of these reports stress the need for anti-racism education, providing opportunities for First Nations peoples to tell their own stories, and “working with Indigenous Peoples and all federal, provincial, and municipal agencies to revise narrow, inaccurate, and harmful interpretations of Indigenous Peoples and histories.”

Implementation Costs and Timeline

Order of Magnitude costing (2021 dollars) for this project is estimated at:

Like-for-like reconstruction of the First Nations Bunkhouse building	\$1,600,000
Building improvements to suit a future program (HVAC, plumbing, electrical, building envelope, etc.)	\$ 450,000
Implementation of interpretive programming	To Be Determined
Total Building Costs	\$2,050,000 plus implementation of interpretive programming

Facility and program related annual operating costs will be determined once a program is confirmed.

Funding for interpretive program planning and First Nations engagement is available through existing budgets.

External funding for this project may be available through two heritage funding programs, the Heritage BC's Heritage Legacy Fund which offers matching funding up to \$25,000 and Parks Canada's National Cost-Sharing Program for Heritage Places which offers matching funding up to \$100,000.

Pending Council approval of this report, staff anticipate refining the interior space program throughout 2021 in order to prepare a capital submission, including operating budget impact, as part of the annual budget process. This timeline will be dependent on the availability and participation of First Nations communities.

Following the approval of an interior space program, the estimated duration of construction, exhibit design and development is approximately two to three years.

Financial Impact

None.

Conclusion

The First Nations Bunkhouse building is unique in Canada and is of significant heritage value because of its association with First Nations peoples who worked in the fishing industry. Offering interpretation of First Nations stories in the space will not only enhance the visitor experience at the Britannia Shipyards, but also bring to light lesser-told stories of First Nations participation in Steveston's fishing industry. Bringing to light these stories and working with First Nations peoples to do this work can contribute to First Nations reconciliation and advance anti-racism education.



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- Att. 1: First Nations Camp at Imperial Cannery, 1913
- 2: First Nations Bunkhouse Statement of Significance, 2016



Cameras, Hawaiian Quarters. 704

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

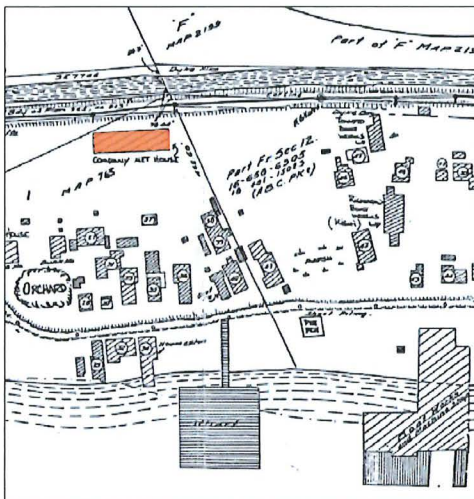
c. 1895

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.
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