



Kwanlin Dün CULTURAL CENTRE



A newsletter about the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre

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The site of the proposed Kwanlin Dün First Nation Cultural Centre – on the banks of the Yukon River – is of immense significance to the Kwanlin Dün First Nation. The riverfront was the traditional home of the Kwanlin Dün and this 6.47-acre site represents a symbolic return to Kwanlin Dün’s ancestral communities. The centre, situated along the waterfront, will reinforce Kwanlin Dün as a strong presence in the community of Whitehorse, expand the Yukon experience for tourists, and provide a focal point for KDFN members.

Cultural Centre Overview

The vision for the cultural centre is the result of much consultation with the Cultural Centre steering committee, elders, community members and Chief and Council.

The cultural centre will contain a 1,200-person longhouse and a 250-person multipurpose space for community and cultural events, and conference and convention activities. There will be multipurpose spaces for classrooms and meeting rooms, and workshop and artist spaces. An elders’ lounge close to the entrance will offer a highly visible location for elders to informally gather. A gift shop will feature local arts and crafts. There will be a display gallery along the spine connecting all the components. As well, there will be a spiritual space, ceremonial fire pit, canoe house, kitchen and catering space, washrooms, administration offices, storage, coatroom and maintenance areas. Finally, there will be the KDFN community archives and the Whitehorse Public Library.

RETURNING TO THE RIVER

For generations, the people of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation lived and thrived along the Chu Nínkwän, today’s Yukon River. “Kwanlin” means “water running through canyon” and refers to the length of the river stretching from Miles Canyon to the Whitehorse Rapids. As final plans for the cultural centre progress, Kwanlin Dün looks forward to having a centre where its citizens will be able to share their culture and history with Yukoners and visitors from around the world.

In recent decades, aboriginal people living along the Whitehorse waterfront were repeatedly moved further and further away from the river due to the emerging and growing development of the city.

But, Kwanlin Dün has always strived to return to the waterfront. Throughout the land claims process, KDFN’s vision for the waterfront has been to construct a cultural centre to celebrate Kwanlin Dün’s languages, culture and traditions. It will provide economic opportunities for the First Nation and be a place where artists can work and display their work — a vital link in reconnecting the Kwanlin Dün people to the river.

The cultural centre will be a gathering place for Kwanlin Dün First Nation citizens, but will also be an information source for the many visitors who travel through Whitehorse. In this respect, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation will be able to maintain our tradition of diversity and of welcoming others to experience, respect and enjoy the Chu Nínkwän and the many territories it crosses.

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The longhouse will be the most prominent space in the centre, welcoming large ceremonial events, performances and exhibits. Facing the Yukon River, with views of the bluffs on the opposite side of the river, it will serve as the essential element reconnecting Kwanlin Dün to the banks of the Yukon River.

One of the first major art pieces to go into the centre is a 30-foot dugout canoe. This “healing canoe” has been a major project undertaken by 18 senior carvers in the Sundog Studio & Gallery carving program. They have spent the past two months living on an island on the east side of the Yukon River and carving the canoe.

The architects have proposed to build a separate canoe house. This glass building will house the canoe and allow for maximum visibility, as well as secure storage and accessibility to the river. The canoe will be used for ceremonies.



Sustainable Design

Living in harmony and balance with the natural environment is a fundamental principle of Kwanlin Dün culture. Reflecting this, the proposed design incorporates a large number of sustainable design elements.

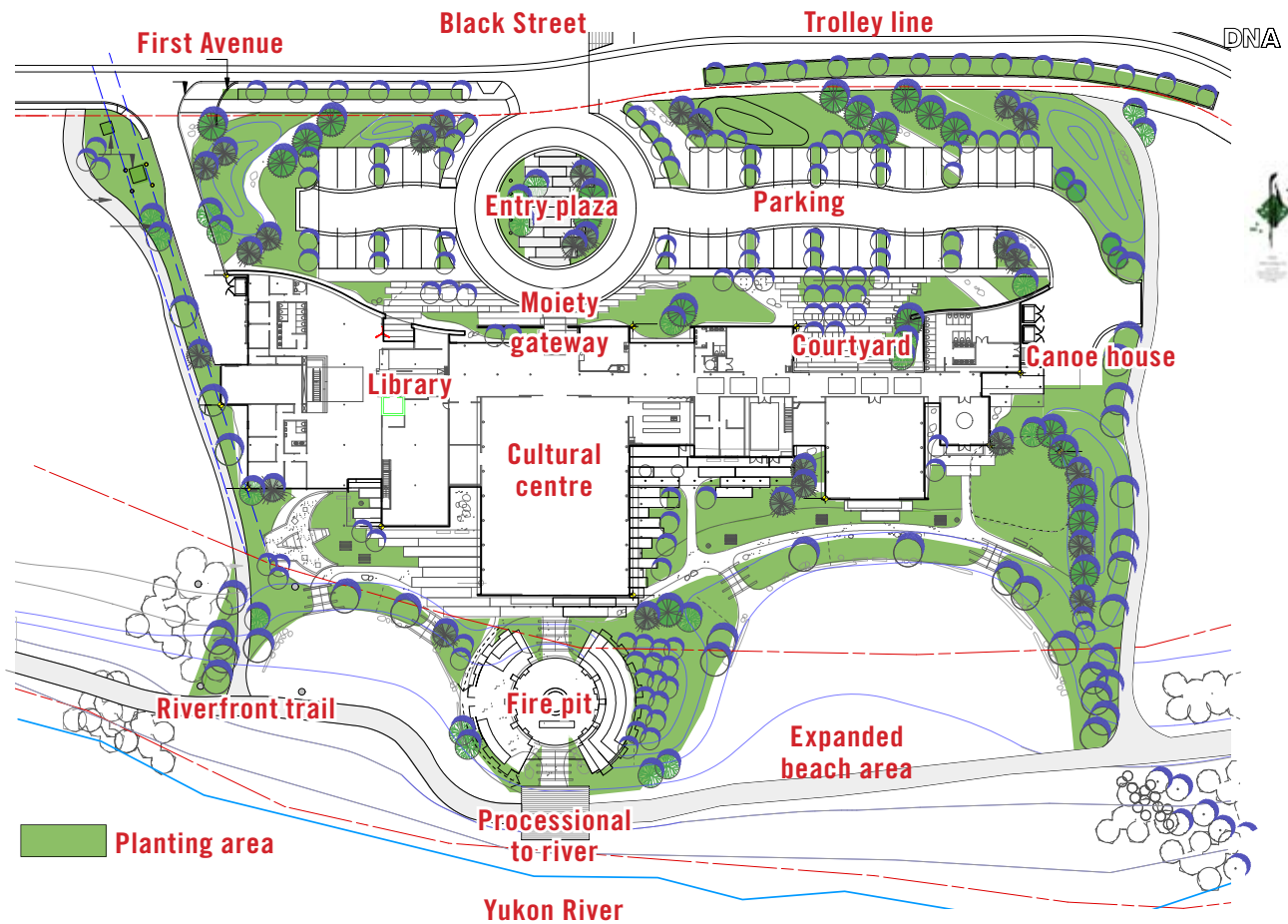
The buildings will use renewable energy (geothermal) for heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems. At least 50% of construction waste will be diverted from the landfill and, where possible, materials with recycled contents will be used. Indoor air quality will be monitored during construction and afterwards.

Included will be a storm water management system designed to minimize water run-off from the site; water efficient landscaping; and a reduction of waste water by at least 20%.

Daylight will be used for lighting in at least 75% of all interior spaces and up to 95% of the interior will have views of outside.

Architectural Concept

The exterior of the cultural centre will be designed to reflect the longhouse tradition of the Tagish Kwan people. The building will be laid out along two major axis. The primary axis takes visitors from the entry point at Black Street and First Avenue, across the plaza, through a gateway representing the two moieties of the Kwanlin Dün. From the entry, visitors will then go through a large gathering space, onto a deck which connects to a covered fire pit, and down a path to the waterfront square.



SUNDOG CARVERS REVIVE A TRADITION

This summer, 18 senior carving students from the Sundog Carving Program are making history on Egg Island, on the east side of the Yukon River. The students, working under the tutelage of Haines, Alaska Tlingit master carver Wayne Price, are reviving an ancient tradition by turning a 400-year-old B.C. red cedar into the first dugout canoe to be carved in the Yukon in generations.

This healing canoe will be gifted to Kwanlin Dün at the ground-breaking ceremony for the cultural centre scheduled for early fall. It will be stored at the cultural centre in a specially built canoe house accessible to the river and visible to all visitors.

The carvers are living on the island for the 10-week program and learning the traditional techniques of carving a dugout canoe. The canoe project is part of a holistic program in which everyone has committed to live on the land free of drugs, alcohol, cell phones and iPods.

The project began in mid-June with the arrival of the 5,900 kilogram (13,000 pound) log. It was transported

across the Yukon River to the island on a raft, which now serves as a dock for the camp. On day two, the carvers spent 15 hours winching the log up from the shore to the covered cradle where it is being carved.

Price and assistant carver, Tim Ackerman, are guiding the students through the process of creating a traditional dugout canoe. Price says the program is about the carvers getting back to the land and using what is available to them as people and as artists.

The carvers used chainsaws to shape the bow and stern of the boat. After that, all work has been done by hand. “By using the chainsaw to shape the ends, the carvers will have larger pieces of wood with which to make seats,” Price explained.

Traditionally, Price says, the tree would be carved where it was cut — at the stump — until it was light enough to move. Adapting old traditions to today’s reality is a constant theme. “The canoe will be the same,” Price says. “As we learn about the wood, we change what we are doing.”

Andrew Finton, director of the Sundog Carving Program, says, “The canoe will likely be the finest piece of handmade artwork in the Yukon.”

During the 10 weeks, carvers are rotating between three-hour shifts carving and working on other projects. “You gotta stop after a couple of hours,” Justin Smith says “Otherwise, your muscles are gonna bust right out of your skin, that’s how it feels.” They also spend time with elders who regularly visit the camp to share stories about the cultural significance of the land and the historical relevance of canoes in Yukon First Nations.

Talking circles, drumming, fish netting and moose hunting are also taking place. The carvers are thrilled with the



amazing food prepared by camp cook and artist, LeeAnn Dorval. Drug and alcohol counsellor and mentor, Kevin Barr, has built a sweat lodge with the carvers.

In addition to creating a magnificent piece of art, the project is providing the carvers with artistic and professional skills, personal wellness and health, cultural learning and on-the land experience. As well, they will be able to pass this learning onto junior carvers.

The canoe carving project was the dream of the recently formed non-profit society, Northern Cultural Expressions Society, which grew out of the mission of Sundog to empower youth through art and creativity.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The KDFN Economic Development Department is in the final stages of negotiations with the Yukon government regarding a long-term lease agreement for the Whitehorse Public Library, to be located within the cultural centre.

“The KDFN cultural centre steering committee has been meeting regularly with the architects to arrive at a design that meets the needs of the community and has the approval of both the community and the Chief and Council,” says Saskia Bunicich, Director of Economic Development.

Recently, a glass canoe house near the longhouse was added to the site. This will house the dugout canoe being carved this summer by Sundog carvers. The canoe will be gifted to Kwanlin Dün First Nation and be available for ceremonies.

After much negotiation, KDFN and the Yukon government have agreed that the cultural centre will be constructed under a construction management contract through the Dominion- KDFN Joint Venture. This will allow for the public tendering of construction components in small packages.

“Breaking up the construction into smaller tender packages is a good idea,” says Gary Bailie, Director of Community Services. “It allows Yukon, and especially First Nation, businesses to bid in areas of their own expertise, such as the foundation, electrical, plumbing and flooring. This would not be possible if the bid for construction were let as one massive construction bid,” adds Bailie.

The next steps for the steering committee include the considerable task of developing programming, collecting art work and artifacts, creating displays and exhibits, and training KDFN citizens to staff the centre. The committee hopes to get community input from family members on Kwanlin Dün heritage artifacts and items, artwork and spoken histories to be included in the centre.

A community meeting is slated for early October at NaKwaTaku. If you would like more information about the project, contact Saskia Bunicich at 633-7869 or sbunicich@kwanlindun.com



“They call it *Kwanlin*. That’s what they call it long time ago because when people came into town they would *Kwanlin*. They would go to Whitehorse. That’s what they would say they were going, *Kwanlin*.” Annie Smith, 2003.



KDFN cultural centre steering committee members (left to right) Anne Smith, Kim Cholette, Elaine Shorty, Saskia Bunicich and Bill Webber.



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