



Na-Cho Nyak Dun Cultural Centre

A vision for the future...

June, 2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. WHY A VISION?	1
Community Meetings	1
2. THE VISION	2
3. ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS	2
Living Culture, Learning Skills	2
Telling Our Stories.....	2
Self-Sustaining.....	2
Flexibility	2
4. WHAT HAPPENS INSIDE...	4
Activities.....	5
Facilities	5
Tourism	6
5. OTHER CULTURAL CENTRES - LESSONS LEARNED	7
Da Ky - Haines Junction	7
Danoja Zho - Dawson City.....	7
B.C. Centre Joella and Mille visited.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
6. GOING FORWARD	8
Location.....	8
Conceptual Design	8
Cost-Benefit Analysis	8
Community Participation	8

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1. WHY A VISION?

The Na-Cho Nyak Dun have dreamed of having a cultural centre in their community for several years. This centre would be a place to celebrate and live our culture, and to ensure that it is passed on to future generations. The building could also be used to house our cultural materials and artifacts, display and sell arts & crafts, and to provide work space for our staff. There are many possibilities, and before we design the building, we need a common vision about its purpose and what we want to happen there.

A shared vision is essential for ensuring that the purpose of the centre is clear before designing it. We need to make sure that the building, once completed, is equipped to do what the community wants. So it is important to be clear at the start what kinds of activities will happen at the centre, and what kinds of facilities it needs. It is also important to know what kinds of cultural activities might happen at other places instead, either on the land or at different buildings in Mayo. And this all needs to be balanced with the realities of costs to build and operate the centre.

Community Meetings

The NND Heritage Dept. worked with Cambio Consulting to host several community meetings in Mayo during June of 2015. These included meetings with Elders, NND Citizens¹, NND Council. plus the Village of Mayo and Silver Trail Tourism Association.

At these meetings, people were asked some key questions about their vision of the cultural centre, such as:

- What do you think is the **purpose** of the centre?
- What kinds of **activities** do you want to see there?
- What kinds of **facilities** should be there?
- Is there anything you **don't want** to see at the centre?

¹ NND Heritage hosted a meeting for Whitehorse-based Citizens during an earlier stage of cultural centre planning in 2014.

2. THE VISION

Provide the community with a gathering place that we take pride in which instills the appreciation of the rich, long history of the Northern Tutchone people and reflects our diverse cultural backgrounds. The cultural center will be place for citizens to learn traditional skills and knowledge to live their lives in a good way. It will be a welcoming place for the broader community to learn about our heritage and culture. We acknowledge our past while moving forward as a community.

3. ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Through the various community meetings, several elements emerged that NND people and leaders consider essential for the cultural centre:

Living Culture, Learning Skills

People want to see our culture being lived and practiced at the cultural centre. It is not just a museum to display and talk about “old ways” - it is a place to bring our old ways into life today, and to foster the pride and joy that comes with them. Skills like sewing, working with hides, making medicines, drumming and singing, and making tools could all be taught and learned at the centre. In this way, the main focus of the centre is on serving the community’s cultural growth, with other visitors being a secondary consideration.

Telling Our Stories

The community wants to make sure that the cultural centre includes the stories of the Na-Cho Nyak Dun. These stories start from the legends of the long-ago time, to the stories of life on the land and in the Old Village, through residential schools and land claims, and right up to modern self-government. These stories would be for both community members and vistors to learn about the history, and to understand the importance of the country and the culture to the Na-Cho Nyak Dun.

Self-Sustaining

NND as a government does not have infinite financial resources, and a new cultural centre needs to be able to pay for its own operations and maintenance (O&M). There are several possibilities for doing this, but the most likely is office or facility rentals to other agencies like Yukon government, Village of Mayo, or YESAB. Tourist activity in Mayo is not strong enough to generate the kind of revenue needed to operate the centre, and would make only a modest contribution to the overall costs.

Flexibility

Citizens recognize that they may not be able to have everything they would like in the building, at least to start. It may also not be possible to have specialized facilities fro every activity (e.g. hide tanning, sewing, cutting meat). So people want to see the cultural centre designed with flexibility in mind. This means rooms that can be adaptable for several uses, and the ability to add on if the

community wants to. NND would need to work with the building design to consider the possibilities here. This would likely require some sense of what the future options might be (e.g. theatre, large hall, etc.).

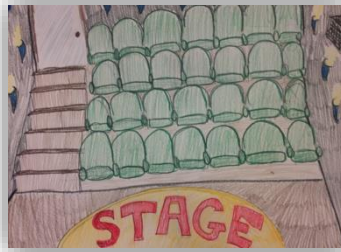
4. WHAT HAPPENS INSIDE...

The vision for the centre speaks to its overall purpose, and what we hope the centre will do for the community. This vision is based on the kinds of activities and facilities that people want to see happen at the centre. Many different options were explored and discussed², such as:

Multi-Purpose/Crafting Room?



Theatre?



Gift Shop?



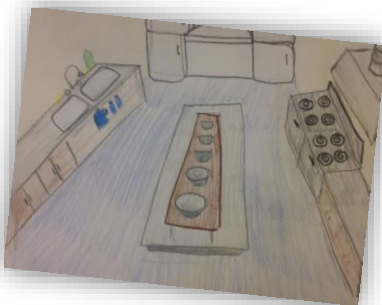
Smoke House?



Camp Fire Pit?



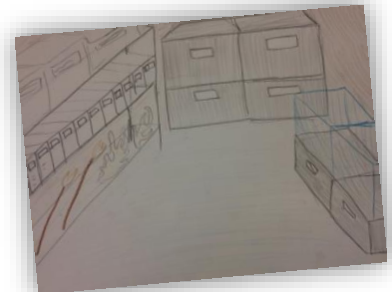
Big Kitchen?



Sacred/Prayer Space?



Artifact/Archival Storage?



Illustrations by Nicole Hutton, NND Heritage department

² It is assumed that the cultural centre would include office space for the NND Heritage department, and potentially offices for rental revenue as well.

Activities

Learning Cultural Skills

- Sew together, help each other
- Workshop - knife making, snowshoes, carving, bow and arrow, willow fish hooks, baby pack

Stories

- From legends, dooli stories, to old life on the land, how brought up, gold rush (our perspective), residential school, land claims, self-govt, Peel issues

Language

- Learning together with fluent speakers
- Individual learning (at workstations or “pods”)

Singing, Drumming & Dancing

- Learning and teaching, performances

Traditional Foods & Medicines

- Learning how to prepare
- Sharing with community

Facilities

Participants at the meetings discussed what kinds of facilities would be needed to support the kind of activities they want to see at the centre. There was general support about some kinds of facilities, while there was more difference and caution about other kinds of facilities:

General Support

- Flexible multi-purpose room
- Workshop, including tools
- Kitchen - large enough to serve largest capacity room, with an outdoor part included
- Walk-In Freezer
- Smoke house
- Display area and gift shop for local artists and crafts-people
- Storage for cultural objects and archival materials
- Library of First Nations books, Peel watershed info centre
- Lesson stations (for individual learning)

Differing Support /Caution

- Theatre - could be valuable, but expensive
- Potlatch hall - some desire for NND to have a hall of its own, but concern about duplicating community centre and the costs of heating and maintaining such a large space; also concern about having human remains at the centre
- Dedicated prayer/ceremonial/sacred - prayer and ceremony could be part of the centre as a whole, and may not require a special space
- Class A archival storage - requires complex temperature and humidity controls that can be expensive and difficult to service.

Tourism

While Mayo does not see a large number of tourists, the cultural centre can expect some visitors to come. During meetings with the Silver Trail Tourism Association and Village of Mayo, people emphasized how much tourists want to have *experiences and relationships* rather than simply consuming information or products. They want to feel that they have been involved in something special, and that they have a story to tell from their travels. There is certainly the potential to provide for this at the cultural centre. However, NND should not expect tourism to provide a significant source of revenue for the centre, either through user fees or sales of artwork and crafts.

5. OTHER CULTURAL CENTRES - LESSONS LEARNED

Da Ku - Haines Junction

Details - complex heating/humidity control system for archival preservation; managing use of large hall takes effort, etc.

Big beautiful building

First Nation owned building, partnerships with Yukon Government and Government of Canada (rental income)

Danoja Zho - Dawson City

Details - limited space for cultural activities and teaching; usage of theatre by community, etc.

Lack of storage space

Pivotal location in the community

Making use of outdoor space

Has become a cultural space in the community

Kwanlin Dun Cultural Center- Whitehorse

Focus is on conference center

Location is key

Has become “the” location for events in Whitehorse

Small exhibit space

Challenges employing KDFN members and First Nation employees

Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre- Whistler, BC

Beautiful outdoor space for community events

The purpose is for tourists first, community second

Simple yet stunning exhibits

Gift shop with items from all over, not just their members

6. GOING FORWARD...

While there is no specific work plan in place yet for developing the centre, there are a few key steps that need to be taken and decisions made no matter what:

Location

In 2009, Chief & Council set a policy direction that NND would focus its infrastructure within the C-6 settlement land parcel. This started with building several houses there, and then the NND Government House. This choice stems partly from the permafrost issues experienced in downtown Mayo, and partly from the potential for efficient geothermal heating, drinking water, and waste water disposal. The intention is to build the NND cultural centre somewhere within the C-6 parcel. The exact location will be determined by a number of factors, such as:

- Access to utilities like heating, water systems, and sewage disposal
- Aesthetic factors (view, visibility)
- Proximity to community places (NND Government House, homes, other facilities)

Conceptual Design

NND will need to hire an architect to do a general conceptual design of the centre. This will give people their first visual of what the centre could look like. It will also include estimates of construction costs, which will give some sense of the on-going O&M costs.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Council will need to make decisions about what can be included in the centre, and what must be set aside (at least for now). This means weighing the costs of things like workshops, theatres and kitchens against the amount of benefit they will have over the long term. Plus, the Council will need to know how much income they can expect from the centre through office rental and fees, and make sure this balances with the anticipated O&M costs.

Community Participation

Along the way, NND intends to make sure that the citizens are involved in the discussions about the centre. It will eventually be up to the Council to make final decisions about the centre's design and construction, and to do this, they want to make sure they have good information from the community. While it is not possible to use every idea, it is possible to make sure that the most important needs of the community are part of the centre.