



Press Release

INNOVATIVE CULTURAL CENTRE PLANNED FOR PORT COQUITLAM

Port Coquitlam, BC, January 16, 2004 . . . City Council approved plans to create a downtown arts and cultural facility within the City's central plaza, Leigh Square, at the January 12 Council meeting.

The proposed Leigh Square Community Arts Village is the outcome of a comprehensive study undertaken to develop a strategy for the creation of a grassroots, community-driven cultural focal point for Port Coquitlam. The adopted vision for the "Village" is not only innovative and progressive in its scale and scope but also because of its community development management approach.

Mayor Scott Young stated, "The Village will have a positive impact on the downtown core – I expect it will become a hub for community gatherings, contributing to the vitality of the adjacent business district and enriching residents' experience of this downtown neighbourhood."

Throughout the Study process representatives of the community participated in conceiving the plans and related goals for the Arts Village. The desire is to create a welcoming, informal atmosphere in which community members and artists alike can join to work, play, explore and imagine together. The Village will be operated using a collaborative model with shared responsibilities between the City's Parks and Recreation Department and community groups. This approach emphasizes the value of partnerships, community-initiated programming and participation.

The Study, entitled "Growing the Arts", outlines a plan for a group of three, intimately-scaled buildings that surround the inner courtyard to form an interactive space including art studios, rehearsal space, a "community living room", a ticket outlet, display centre, community archives and resource centre, a community arts workshop and an outdoor workyard as well as an artisans co-op for marketing the works of local arts and craftspeople, and space for related arts retailers to move into.

According to Councillor Michael Wright, current Chair of the City's Parks and Recreation Committee of Council, "What has been needed was a central focal point from which to nurture our valuable resources and provide regular public access to arts, cultural and heritage opportunities – opportunities that will not only benefit individuals personally but that will also contribute to a shared, collective sense of our rich cultural community. The Leigh Square Community Arts Village does just that."

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The connecting courtyard already has an impressive outdoor performing stage, a sculpture courtyard, two public murals, seating areas and nearby eateries and shops to support the introduction of festivals, an open-air market, noon-hour concert or a craft fair.

The image of a mini Granville Island comes to mind. Indeed the Leigh Square Community Arts Village Development Study was conducted by the architectural firm of Hotson Bakker (Boniface Haden) whose company was involved in re-development of Granville Island. The charm and energy that defines the Island's mix of commerce and cultural activities, creating an exciting community destination is the concept behind the Leigh Square Community Arts Village as well.

The adopted approach to programming the Village is also an innovative one and follows the growing trend among cultural centres world-wide by focusing on in-depth experiences between practicing artists and community members, facilitated through Artist in Residency and Community Public Art programs as well as an emphasis on community art practices in which non-artists and artists work together on exploring social issues relevant to the community through artistic expressions.

The possibilities are many and varied: a community play, coffeehouse concerts showcasing local musicians, poetry readings, a philosophers' corner, after-school programs for young people, an exhibition of historical quilts, a public lecture on graffiti art – whatever the community's collective imagination contributes!

The City of Port Coquitlam is demonstrating leadership and vision in adopting this creative project and is mindful of environmental sustainability impact in its development as well. In addition to proposing to recycle two older buildings for Village use, the third building in the Village, as a new construction, will be designed and constructed to meet LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) silver accreditation standards.

In keeping with the desire to make this a destination embraced by the community at large, public information and input sessions will continue throughout the detailed design and development process. Anyone interested in obtaining a copy of the development study, "Growing the Arts" or to sign up for a community workshop can contact the City's Arts and Culture Program Coordinator, Susan Hull, by phoning 604 927-7906 or email hulls@city.port-coquitlam.bc.ca.

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