



Victoria's New Spirit Square Breaks Ground

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For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC — This morning, Mayor Dean Fortin was joined by the Honourable Ida Chong, Minister of Small Business, Technology and Economic Development, Chief Robert Sam of the Songhees Nation, and Coast Salish artist Butch Dick, to celebrate the groundbreaking of Victoria's Spirit Square.

"We are re-energizing the Square," said Mayor Dean Fortin. "We are moving ahead to create a space downtown that is beautiful, fun, and inviting for everyone."

Designed to make Centennial Square more welcoming to the general public and increase opportunities for celebrations and events, Victoria's Spirit Square will include three key components: Spirit Beach, a canopied turn-key performance stage which will accommodate small and medium size events and markets; Spirit Garden, a restful place to experience two First Nations Spirit Poles and a sculptured ladle water feature; and Spirit Plaza, the area in between that will be enhanced by improved lighting, landscaping and outdoor furnishings.

The Square's open design and new lighting will encourage pedestrian use and make it safer and more visually appealing. Site improvements and additional infrastructure will encourage greater use of the venue for outdoor festivals and help support Victoria's arts and cultural community.

The project is made possible by the BC Spirit Square program, launched by the Ministry of Community Services (now Community Development) in 2006, to support the creation or improvement of town squares or open spaces in communities throughout British Columbia. The Province contributed the maximum amount of \$500,000, which the City matched with additional funds to meet the vision of the design, for a total cost of \$1.65 million.

"Through the Province's BC150 Spirit Square program, we've been able to see the benefits of a range of gathering places in more than 60 BC communities," said Minister of Small Business, Technology and Economic Development Ida Chong. "These First Nations Spirit Poles will stand as a terrific example of the legacy of the 150th anniversary of the Crown Colony of British Columbia."

Butch Dick was nominated by Chief Robert Sam of the Songhees Nation and Chief Andy Thomas of the Esquimalt Nation, to design and carve two, 5-metre (16-foot) cedar Spirit Poles to serve as a gateway to the Square's native plant garden. Titled *Two Brothers*, one pole was designed and carved by Butch Dick, and the other was designed and carved by his son Clarence. Both poles are fashioned after traditional Coast Salish house posts.

“The Spirit Poles will be a legacy of our collaboration with the municipality and the citizens of British Columbia,” said Butch Dick, Coast Salish artist and member of the Songhees Nation. “The *Two Brothers* will symbolize the rich and beautiful cultural ways of our ancestors and will let everyone know this is the traditional territory of the Lekwungen people.”

Years ago, Cormorant Creek ran through what is now Centennial Square and served as a water source for the traditional Songhees community. Known as *Big Dipper*, a large sculptural ladle will offer drinking water to both the citizens of Victoria and to the new garden which will surround the Spirit Poles. The First Nations inspired ladle is a cross-cultural symbol of generosity. Three playful sculptured pebbles in the basin of the ladle’s bowl will send sprays of water down the handle.

Spirit Beach, the canopied multipurpose stage to replace the Knot Garden, will be able to accommodate amphitheatre style seating, increasing visibility and access to the Square. Non-slip, stainless “pebble” platforms can be used during performances or as safe, fun surfaces for children to climb. Under-lighting and a fine spray mist can be programmed to create a luminous fog-like setting during a performance or when the space is not in use. Spirit Beach is positioned in a sunny corner, far enough from the road for families to rest, enjoy a snack, or play.

Local architect Bill Pechet of Pechet and Robb Studio, and landscape architect Joe Daly, collaborated to create the artistic and unique design for Victoria’s Spirit Square.

Farmer Construction has been awarded the construction contract and work will begin in April and be completed before the end of June. An opening ceremony and First Nations blessing and unveiling of the Spirit Poles will kick-off this exciting new venue just in time for summer holidays.

— 30 —

BACKGROUNDER ATTACHED

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CITY OF VICTORIA

Backgrounder

Victoria's Spirit Square - Spirit Poles

Brother #1 – by Butch Dick, Lekwungen Master Carver

This Spirit Pole features an eagle figure at the top, which Coast Salish ancestors believed to watch over them and provide guidance. The figure in the middle of the eagle represents the human side of the animal.

The wolf is a powerful, matriarchal animal within First Nations culture and has many powerful teachings within an extended family.

Sea otters were often part of traditional house poles and symbolize strength for those who are in need of spiritual guidance. The Grandmother Moon, encompassed by the otters, constantly watches over us and is a reminder to all to conduct themselves in a respectful manner that is fitting to their family and community.

Brother #2 – by Clarence Dick Jr., Lekwungen/Mamalilikulla Carver

The top figure of this Spirit Pole is Xe'els – the Transformer, who was the epicentre of cultural knowledge, travelling throughout the Lekwungen lands bestowing each community with cultural roles, responsibilities and economic opportunities. Xe'els was the knowledge, the teacher and the creator of teachings and understandings, and was able to transform into anything, man or woman. It is believed we still have much to learn from its mysterious ways.

Each west coast blanket had its own teaching and understanding behind it and was often attached to a significant event. Made of mountain goat wool and dog fur, blankets were given to individuals who had earned the right to wear them - disciplined and acknowledged as leaders by the communities. Xe'els wears a blanket to signify his accountability to the community.

The raven played an important role in how the world was shaped in the north western First Nations communities. Also known as a trickster, the raven wove his teaching throughout the lands and history. Ravens were highly intelligent beings and were mischievous, often finding their ways into other creatures' worlds.

The bottom figure is a mink, which shared the same attributes as the raven. Mink travelled throughout what is now known as Vancouver Island, teaching and showing what valuable resources each community was connected to and what their responsibilities were.

— 30 —

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