

March 9, 2001

## **BACKGROUNDER – FIRST NATIONS CREATIONS ARTISTS COOPERATIVE**

### **First Nations gallery builds opportunity for local artists**

The First Nations Creations Artists Cooperative will set up a gallery-workspace in or around Gastown using a grant of \$100,000 provided by the federal and provincial governments through the Western Economic Partnership Agreement (WEPA). The artist-run gallery will primarily focus on First Nations artists in the DTES and will include mentoring and training opportunities for First Nations youth.

Vancouver Agreement partners identified the creation of an Aboriginal artisan centre as an important priority for the DTES. There is strong interest among local First Nations artists in undertaking a cooperative venture that provides artists with a fair price for their work.

The project arose from a six-month long process that included learning how to form a cooperative and develop a business plan. It is an initiative of First Nations artists themselves and is supported by the larger Aboriginal community. The gallery intends to develop relationships with other galleries and artist-run centres as appropriate.

The gallery will target local shoppers and tourists who buy First Nations art in the Gastown area. Operating costs will be covered by revenue generated from sales.

Western Economic Partnership Agreement is a joint federal-provincial agreement to encourage economic development and job creation in BC. Western Economic Diversification Canada and the Ministry of Employment and Investment are the lead agencies for WEPA. Federal funding for these projects was provided for in the Feb. 2000 budget and is therefore built into the existing financial framework.

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## **BACKGROUND – INTERURBAN GALLERY**

### **Renovation and revitalization at the historic hub of Downtown Vancouver**

With more than \$400,000 already in place to renovate the heritage building at 1 – 15 East Hastings Street, the Western Economic Partnership Agreement (WEPA) will provide operational funds for the Interurban Arts Project to support the development of an arts and cultural centre in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

New program funding for arts and culture from WEPA will total \$270,000. These funds are operational seed money to assist the project in creating work and gallery space that can be financially supported through leasing offices and retail space to non-profit and for-profit companies.

The Interurban is named for the former tram line station at Hastings and Carrall Street called the British Columbia Electric Interurban Station. At the turn of the century the Hastings and Carrall Street intersection was a powerful symbol of local pride and bustling activity; the Interurban Project is intended to help restore the area to its former stature.

The building at 1-15 Hastings Street, now called the new Interurban, is an important heritage building in its own right and will be restored. The City of Vancouver, the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia provided funding for renovations to the new Interurban building.

The Interurban project will include a public lecture series, musical performances and arts events as part of its programs. The Portland Hotel Society will manage the project with the Interurban Community Artistic Society. The organizations have secured capital monies and have signed a lease for the new Interurban building. Asset ownership and responsibility will rest with Interurban Community Artistic Society and the Portland Hotel Society.

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## **BACKGROUND - BEACON PROJECT**

### **Humanities courses and Fine Arts foster citizenship and community strength in Downtown Eastside**

Building on the success of Humanities 101 and Women's Humanities Year (WHY), a storefront learning centre in the Downtown Eastside will help local residents continue their pursuit of higher education by helping them gain the skills they need to enter traditional universities and colleges. The project promotes increased access to advanced education and information technology in order to build individual and community capacity.

BEACON (Building Education and Culture in Our Neighbourhood) received \$160,000 in funds to establish the learning resource centre from the federal and provincial governments through the Western Economic Partnership Agreement (WEPA).

Humanities 101 and WHY offer barrier-free, academic non-credit, university level courses. Humanities 101 courses are offered in partnership with University of British Columbia. The courses are equivalent to a first year liberal arts class and introduce students to a variety of subjects: Philosophy, Poetry, Literature, History, Cultural Studies and Political Science. The central premise is that the study of the humanities enhances an individual's ability to represent themselves and their own interests as citizens.

BEACON will employ two facilitators to achieve its objectives. One facilitator will work to develop a barrier-free post-secondary presence in the Downtown Eastside; the other facilitator will work on a Fine Arts pilot project.

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