

TO: MAYOR & COUNCILLORS
FROM: GENERAL MANAGER PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURE
SUBJECT: **KAMUI MINTARA (PLAYGROUND OF THE GODS)
CONSERVATION**
PURPOSE: To update Council on condition concerns with Kamui Mintara and share immediate steps to further assess and develop options for the future of this artwork.

1.0 POLICY SECTION

The City of Burnaby Public Art Policy provides direction for the care and maintenance of the City's Public Art Collection.

2.0 BACKGROUND

The monumental artwork Kamui Mintara (Playground of the Gods) was created in 1990 by Japanese sculptors, Nuburi and Shusei Toko. Since 2014 it has been held within the City of Burnaby's Public Art Collection. The work commemorates twenty-five years of goodwill between the sister cities of Kushiro, Japan and Burnaby and expresses the east-west connection between the two cities. The work is representative of Indigenous Ainu culture of Hokkaido, where Burnaby's sister city is located.

Kamui Mintara consists of 29 hand-carved bare wood poles in 12 groupings. The chosen bare wood material means the artwork is vulnerable to weather, water penetration, insects, and is also impacted by stability and drainage conditions in the landscape. Some of the poles were installed in concrete pads, but these were removed and replaced with gravel and sand after it was found that moisture retention in the concrete was contributing to rot. End-grain caps of zinc metal on tops of the principal poles were installed in 2007 and 2008. A 2007 windstorm caused the collapse of one section. Salvageable parts of the sculpture were placed in storage, and in 2017 replica pieces were created and installed. Deterioration has resulted in the removal of an additional piece in 2021. This piece remains in storage.

It is not clear whether the lifespan and conservation requirements of Kamui Mintara were well understood at the time of installation. Current best practice for public art is to provide transparent documentation of the expected useful life, maintenance requirements and special considerations around de-accessioning or renewal at the time of commission.

Regular maintenance has been undertaken since 2004 by Andrew Todd Conservators Ltd. In a comprehensive maintenance report in 2024 (**Attachment 1**), the report notes that while maintenance efforts to date have kept the piece stable, “as time continues to pass, levels of deterioration have increased and steps to counter the wear and weathering of the surfaces and structures have become more challenging”. Further assessment and a new approach are required with some urgency.

3.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

The report delivered in October 2024 by Conservator Andrew Todd notes three areas of findings: 1) surface deterioration of the wood; 2) structural weakening and movement of the wood; and 3) landscape effects on the individual units.

Todd’s recommended comprehensive assessments with engineering input have been completed, alongside immediate maintenance interventions to slow deterioration and address any structural concerns that could pose immediate risk to the piece or members of the public. Work is planned for the summer of 2025, with exact timing to be confirmed. The project will require scaffolding and restricted access to the site while work is underway.

Some of the issues identified may signal that the piece is nearing end of life, and the assessments planned will support greater understanding of options for renewal, replacement or decommissioning of the piece.

4.0 COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A plan for resident, stakeholder, and host Nation engagement will be developed alongside other technical assessments in 2025. An important consideration within this plan will be the engagement of both Ainu advisors and local host Nations to ensure this work proceeds in a culturally appropriate way. Kamui Mintara is one of only a few large-scale examples of Ainu sculpture in the world. As such, it is both a significant artwork for Burnaby and a piece of cultural heritage with broad resonance locally and abroad. At the same time, the significance of the artwork’s location to host Nations must also be understood and respected. In evaluating options for renewal of the piece, the willingness and availability of Ainu artists to participate or provide guidance, and the support and collaboration of host Nations, will be critical.

5.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Funding for the required work to address any immediate concerns will be prioritized and accommodated within PRC’s existing operating budget. Cost implications of longer-term options will be provided in follow-up reporting. Depending on Council’s direction to proceed with any further work, funding will be identified through the 2025 – 2029 Financial Plan process.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Morrison-Clark, General Manager Parks, Recreation and Culture

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – 2024 Conservators Report Kamui Mintara

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

This report was prepared by Jennifer Cane, Coordinator Visual Art, and reviewed by Emmaline Hill, Director Culture, and Mikelle Sasakamoose, Director Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.