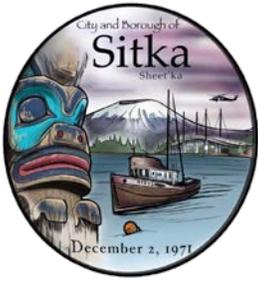


**Discussion / Direction / Decision**  
on final placement of the Benches and Birds Project  
at Harrigan Centennial Hall.



# City and Borough of Sitka

PROVIDING FOR TODAY...PREPARING FOR TOMORROW

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*A Coast Guard City*

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Mayor Eisenbeisz and Assembly Members

**From:** John Leach, Municipal Administrator

**Date:** September 2, 2021

**Subject:** Elizabeth Peratrovich Bench Proposal

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### **Background**

Following a vote of the Assembly in October 2020, the Alexander Baranof statue was removed from the courtyard in front of Harrigan Centennial Hall (HCH). The removal and pending relocation of the Baranof statue to the Sitka History Museum was funded by the Sitka Health Summit and Sitka Counseling.

On June 15, 2021, the City and Borough of Sitka (CBS) received correspondence and a project proposal (attached) from the co-chairs of the Benches and Birds Work Group of the Sitka Decolonizing Dialogue, Paulette Moreno and Loyd Platson. The Benches and Birds Project is a proposal to place up to three benches in front of HCH in the area of the courtyard.

The project was presented to both the Historic Preservation Commission and the Parks and Recreation Committee, where it received a recommendation for approval.

### **Analysis**

The attachment to this memo outlines the project overview and project details. Zach LaPerriere is the local artisan chosen to design and build the Elizabeth Peratrovich bench.

Maintenance and upkeep responsibility for the benches has not been identified, and a maintenance agreement should be developed.

There has been some discussion of adding a QR code to the bench, but CBS has expressed concerns over the website that any QR code may point to. CBS should proceed with caution before approving any usage of a QR code on municipal property to ensure there is no actual or implied endorsement of the content displayed when a user scans the QR code. The CBS should also be aware of the liability if the website associated with the QR code is compromised and places the scanner of the QR code at a cyber risk.

**Fiscal Note**

The CBS has no identified funding for this project, but the proposers have received donations to support the funding for the first bench.

The CBS has no identified funding to support maintenance and repair of the benches from normal wear and tear or instances of vandalism.

It is recommended that a funding and maintenance agreement be established if this project were to proceed.

**Recommendation**

Consider the attached project proposal and information contained in this memorandum and direct the Administrator to proceed accordingly.

Encl: Benches and Birds Project Proposal

# BENCHES AND BIRDS

## City of Sitka Assembly

Loyd Platson  
907-747-3636  
lplatson@scpsak.org

Paulette Moreno  
paulettemoreno@gmail.com

**June 15, 2021**

**Dear Mayor Eisenbeisz and Assembly Members,**

As co-chairs of the "Gathering of Peoples: Benches and Birds Project" we are seeking your support for placing up to three benches honoring individuals who have contributed to social justice, well-being, health and progress in our community. Our first bench will honor Elizabeth Wannamaker Peratrovich.

These proposed Centennial Hall benches would be a part of a larger system of benches placed throughout our community and linked by common designs, themes, and QR Codes. The intent of this project is to create inviting, dynamic opportunities for education in the physical and social space of our community; when students, residents, and visitors congregate near the benches, they are able tap into the QR code to learn about our community, its people, plants and animals, and their collective significance to this place we call 'home.'

This system of benches would encourage people to walk, rest, take pictures, and enjoy our community. The benches would be intentionally placed at locations which highlight various scenic views of our community and/or provide for picture taking opportunities with beautiful backdrops. This is intended to enrich the experience of those that engage with the benches, and increase the positive social media representation of the Sitka community.

We have had an initial meeting with Michael Colliver: Building, Grounds and Parks Supervisor, to discuss his concerns and recommendations as a first step in the process of obtaining permission for bench placement, and look forward to further community outreach while pursuing this project.

As part of this request, we have provided short descriptions of how the projects are being funded as well as our preferred placement of the benches (as described above), Aspect of the design, construction, and maintenance of the benches are outlined by the artist creating the first of the benches, Zach LaPerriere (see attachment A).

Supporters of the Project include Sitka Counseling/HOPE Coalition, Sitka Salmon Shares, Sitka Health Summit, Rotary Club of Sitka, Shee Atica Inc., the Sitka Tribe of Alaska, and Alaska Native Brotherhood. Several individuals have also donated funding for our first bench.

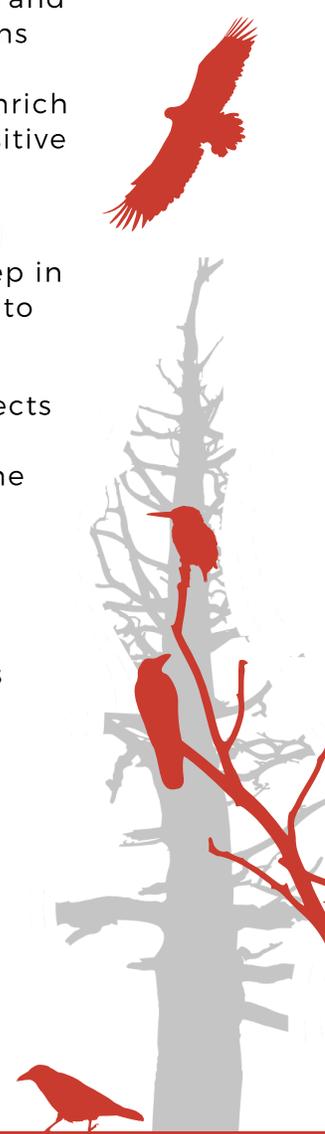
Please do not hesitate to reach out with any additional questions or comments. We look forward to working with your committee on this important project.

**PAULETTE MORENO**

**LOYD PLATSON**

(CO-CHAIRS)

**GATHERING OF PEOPLES BENCHES AND BIRDS PROJECT**





SITKA GATHERING OF CULTURES

BENCHES  
AND BIRDS  
PROJECT

**PROPOSED BY**

THE BENCHES AND BIRDS WORK  
GROUP OF THE SITKA  
DECOLONIZING DIALOGUE

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

**Benches and Birds** aims to create a series of yellow cedar benches and artistic bird sculptures placed throughout Sitka as cultural and historical trail markers. Each bench and bird installation will feature some common design elements and a QR code that links them to each other, and to information about Sitka's people, plants, animals, and their collective significance to this place we call 'home'. Each bench and bird would also honor a leader of social justice, progress, and healing in Sitka and beyond.

The Benches and Birds working group has successfully raised money to create the first of these benches, and undertakes to maintain and fund any of the works that are approved to become a part of Sitka's many attractions. Contributions are being managed by Sitka Counseling and Prevention Services Alaska.

The benches and birds would be placed at locations which highlight Sitka's scenic beauty, and historical or culturally significant spaces. They will create interest and add to the photographic opportunities for residents and visitors. We believe that the project will help create what are known as 'photo spots' and that this will increase positive social media representation of Sitka.

## BENCHES

Locally harvested yellow cedar benches created by local artists and community members will highlight local/state/national community builders and their contributions to social justice, racial equity, cultural restoration and other related areas.

**Current progress:** The first of the benches is dedicated to Elizabeth Peratrovich and this work has already begun using funds donated by community members and organizations.

## BIRDS

The "**Bird Sanctuary**" element of the **Benches and Birds** project is an installation of beautiful, durable, hand-crafted sculptures of the many birds that make Sitka their home. This part of the project aims to highlight the "Gathering of Cultures" that is underway in Sitka. The sculptures will show the diversity of Sitka's birdlife in a creative way, and express the idea of connections between all things, including the community of humans.

**"THE LEFT WING AND THE RIGHT WING BOTH BELONG TO THE SAME BIRD"**

This quote is the inspiration for the sanctuary and represents the fact that we are all connected. Each sculpture would be securely mounted on a pole and be accompanied by a QR code that provides more information about the bird and the artists vision of this connection.

**Current progress:** This project is in early stages of development.



# PROJECT DETAILS

## LOCATIONS

We envision the first three benches occupying spaces in front of Centennial Hall, in the area adjacent to the flagpoles. Other benches would be placed around town. Additional areas where benches could be located are areas such as Totem Square (State Land that is managed by the Pioneer Home).

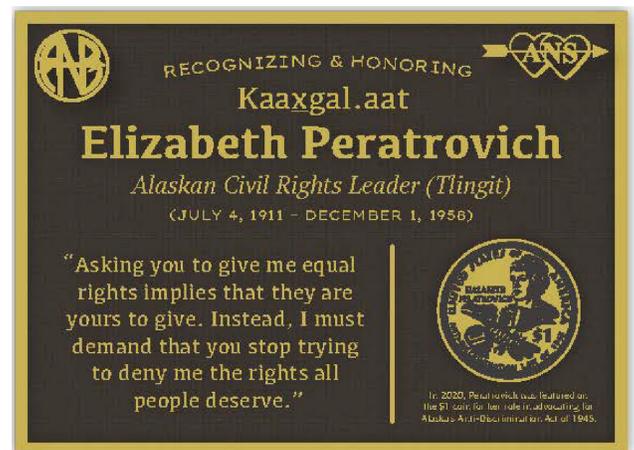
We would also like to place a number of birds in garden areas surrounding Centennial Hall. As with the benches project, additional areas could be considered to create a walking tour or trail that encourages walking and enjoyment of Sitka's areas of natural, cultural and historical interest.

PROPOSED BY

THE BENCHES  
AND BIRDS  
WORK GROUP  
OF THE SITKA  
DECOLONIZING  
DIALOGUE



See bench design details below.



In 2020, Peratrovich was featured on the \$1 coin due to her role in all resulting for Alaska's Anti-Discrimination Act of 1945.

# ATTACHMENT A: DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE

**The following narrative was written by Zach LaPerriere, a local artisan chosen to design and build the Elizabeth Peratrovich bench.**

**DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION:** *The Elizabeth Peratrovich and future benches will be made from local Alaska yellow cedar, a species of wood that is famous around the world for its durability and rot resistance. Yellow cedar left unfinished is weather resistant for decades. The bench seat and backrest have been finished with two coats of Daly's Ship & Shore, a wood hardener; and five coats of marine grade Daly's Teak Oil. The bench can either be left to weather to gray, or the Teak Oil can be reapplied to maintain the brilliant golden yellow color.*

*The bench will be fastened to the underlying concrete slab through a concealed fastener system of my design that has already been used on three other benches approved by the City of Sitka. The bench is attached by four high strength 5/8" galvanized bolts, similar to a free-standing newel post connection on stair landings. Furthermore, all connections between concrete/wood and wood/wood are sealed with either tar or marine grade 5200 adhesive. The seat and backrest are connected with Simpson Stronghold Screws that are used in the construction industry to hold up deck ledgers that ultimately hold up residential decks with heavy loads. To further enhance the natural rot resistance of the cedar, I have drilled and concealed about 30 borate rods inside of the slabs. These 1/2" x 2" borate rods slowly dissolve inside of the wood and make the wood considerably more rot resistant. These same borate rods are widely used in log home construction, and are considered benign and close to food safe.*

**SAFETY:** *Yellow cedar is naturally antimicrobial, and though there are rare cases of sensitivity to the wood, these are almost exclusively in indoor settings where large square footages of cedar paneling occur. Yellow cedar is often specified for handrails in exterior settings where treated lumber cannot be touched due to sensitivities of the chemicals used to preserve treated lumber.*

**MAINTENANCE:** *A similar yellow cedar bench (located on the Cross Trail) built to honor former City of Sitka Assembly member John Sherrod has been in place for three and a half years with no finish and shows no signs of wear, despite thousands of people sitting on it and hundreds of pets jumping on the bench. We anticipate that the Elizabeth Peratrovich bench will grow less algae due to greater sun exposure than on the Cross Trail. A once or twice-yearly light scrub will keep it clean. Members of the group are committed to bench upkeep.*

**VANDALISM:** *A general philosophy on vandalism and graffiti is this: if it's beautiful, it is usually respected. This has been the case with the John Sherrod bench on the Cross Trail, which is of course much further from the public eye. Many other examples of wood in public areas, such as numerous totem poles throughout our area have also remained largely vandalism free. If vandalism were to occur, there are multiple options. If the vandalism is light, the bench is made of heavy slabs and could be sanded with an orbital sander, provided it is done right by qualified personnel. If the damage is a little deeper, the area could possibly be planed and then sanded. If damage is more severe, the bench is built such that a slab could be replaced without removing the entire bench. All fasteners are concealed and plugged with matching yellow cedar bungs sealed with marine grade adhesive. Thankfully cedar grows abundantly here, and a new slab would not need to season before installation, as the wood is for outdoor use.*

*The bench is very sturdy; designed & built by me, a retired contractor and woodworker with over three decades of building experience. Feel free to contact me directly with any questions on the bench design or construction.*

Zach LaPerriere. 738-1328

