

# With eviction looming, Arts Post in search of home

CHRISTOPHER SUN  
ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

Time is ticking for the Arts Council to find alternative office space as their present location has an expected date with the wrecking ball.

The Arts Council and a local pottery group are looking for a new home as their present location, in the back of the Sew it Yourself building on 102 Street and 101 Avenue, has recently been sold by the City. A \$70 million mixed commercial and residential project with two 10-story towers is planned for that area. The sewing store vacated its space last month and the council's Arts Post office is expecting an eviction notice soon, but they are having problems finding an affordable space that is suitable for them and the potters.

"The cost of rent is very high right now in Fort St. John," said Fort St. John Arts Council executive director Laurie Petrucci. "And we're not finding a large enough space."

The properties Petrucci has seen have ranged in price from \$2,000 to \$4,000 a month, which would be fine, she said, if there was enough space for the council to share it with other groups such as the potters.

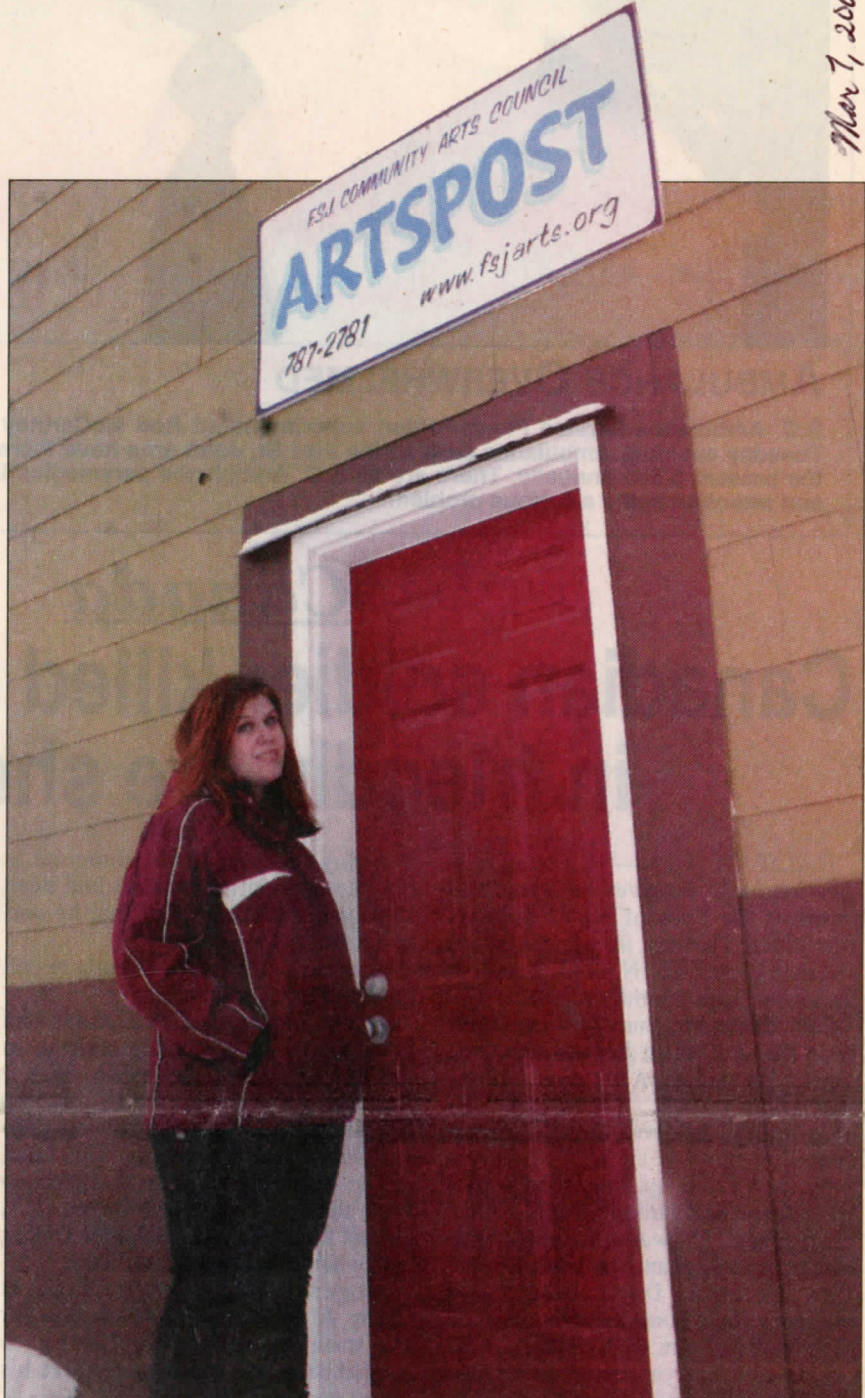
The Arts Council is looking for ample space so they can continue overseeing events such as the annual High on Ice competition, the decoration of Christmas trees for the Elves Christmas and the maintenance of the large flower pots that are placed throughout downtown each spring.

"It was so nice to have a location to do things," Petrucci said, as both the Arts Council and potters operated in individual homes before the City provided space about 18 months ago. "It's been wonderful. But now to lose that space is like taking a step backwards."

Arts Council director Sue Popesku said the space was always meant to be temporary, but it's a struggle to leave as no suitable replacement space has been found.

"The potters have had no space for 15 years," Popesku said, explaining they used to be housed at the college along with theatre. "It's very difficult to find a place affordable for non-profit organizations that's not (renting at) commercial value."

City manager John Locher said no eviction notice has been issued yet to the Arts Council and potters but



Christopher Sun photo

**Arts Council executive assistant Aleisha Hendry stands outside the Arts Post, which is currently home to the Arts Council and a pottery group. The City has sold the property located on 102 Avenue and 101 Street, along with property on 100 Street, for the construction of a \$70 million mixed commercial and residential project that will see two 10-story towers built.**

they should be prepared to move with 30 days notice. He said the City is working with the Arts Council for a long-term solution, but at this time has no temporary space to offer except the portable on 106

Avenue, which used to be the homeless shelter.

According to a letter sent through the Arts Council mailing list, the building they occupy could be torn down as early as next month.



# ArtsPost finds temporary home, but still needs space for all artists

APR 20, 2007

CHRISTOPHER SUN  
ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

The Fort St. John Arts Council's ArtsPost has found a new home, but it will be temporary as the council can barely afford it.

The ArtsPost has been looking for new space since the City of Fort St. John sold the former Frontier Inn property and Sew It Yourself building – where the ArtsPost is currently located – between 100 and 101 Ave on 102 Street. A \$70-million mixed commercial and residential project with two 10-storey towers is planned for that site.

“We did find a place that's appropriate for us and for the potters but it has no growth potential,” explained Arts Council treasurer Sonya Butts. “And it's commercial rent we will be paying; we're not getting a break.”

The new location is at 10320 94 Ave, behind Hillcrest Water. The Arts Council will be pursuing grants to ease the financial strain of the high rent, but if those applications are unsuccessful, it will be broke within a year.

“It will deplete our savings if we can't work out a grant,” Butts said. “But we also don't want to go back to working out of houses on kitchen tables.”

However, the group has not

received an eviction notice yet from the new owners of the Sew It Yourself building, Pilot Pacific Group of Companies, and will continue to work out of there until then. However, the longer the artists wait, the greater the possibility of losing that new space as nothing has been signed yet.

The new location can only accommodate the ArtsPost office and potters. Ideally, the Arts Council would also like to host the spinners and weavers, quilters, Stage North and the Literacy Society under one roof.

Another option the council looked at was moving into a vacant church on 79 Street and 96 Ave. But the basement space for the potters wasn't adequate as the ceilings were low and access was difficult. The rent reportedly would have been at market value as well.

According to a City report, the environmental review on the site and Pilot Pacific's financing negotiations have been completed. The purchase agreement is expected to close within the next couple of weeks. The Arts Council expects that when that occurs, the ArtsPost will get an eviction notice.

In other related Arts Council news, Chandra Wong will take over the executive director position from Laurie Petrucci, who is returning to work for the school district.

