

A HOME DESIGNED FOR HEALING



Membertou Recovery Project
Phase 1 – Design Report

Prepared by
Jody Nelson,
Misewa Collaborators

Community Co-Design:
Sober Living Home

In Collaboration With
Amanda Rae
Catalyst & Consulting

July 2026

Prepared for
Membertou
First Nation

Cover Art: "Summer Spirit", and artistic rendering of the community vision for the Sober Living Home, created by River Stevens

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PROJECT OVERVIEW



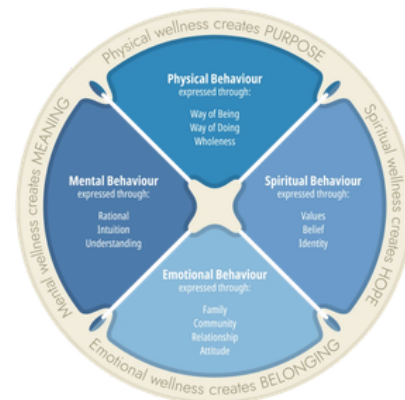
Background

A recent survey suggests up to 80% of people in Membertou have been touched by addiction. Membertou has been sending many community members who request treatment to centres as close as Eskasoni and as far away as British Columbia. When people access treatment supports out of town they may become disconnected from their family, community and cultural support system. If relapse occurs they are in an unfamiliar setting. Sometimes community members opt to not return after treatment because they are returning to the same environment and are worried about relapse.

To address this lack of a community-based culturally appropriate treatment continuum, Membertou is building a modular 24-bed Addiction Recovery Centre and a 28-bed accompanying Sober-Living Home that includes Mental Health supports on the main floor. Amanda Rae Catalyst & Consulting was contracted to conduct a Needs Assessment and Feasibility Study and to guide the design of the spaces and services through a community-engaged process (as outlined in this report).

The design process explored with community: **What would it look like if connection to culture and community were centered in the recovery approach and augmented by western treatment methods?**

The Membertou Recovery Project will create safe and welcoming places where people encountering addiction on their journey through life can begin and continue healing. The design of the spaces and program is guided by the Indigenous Wellness Framework, weaving together spiritual, emotional, mental and physical wellness.



Indigenous Wellness Framework,
Thunderbird Partnership Foundation

Project Team

Community Engaged Design:

- Amanda Rae Catalyst & Consulting
- Membertou Health Centre
- Jody Nelson, Misewa Collaborators
- Mike Targett, Engagement Strategist

Artists:

Kelsie Francis, River Stevens, Skyla Paul

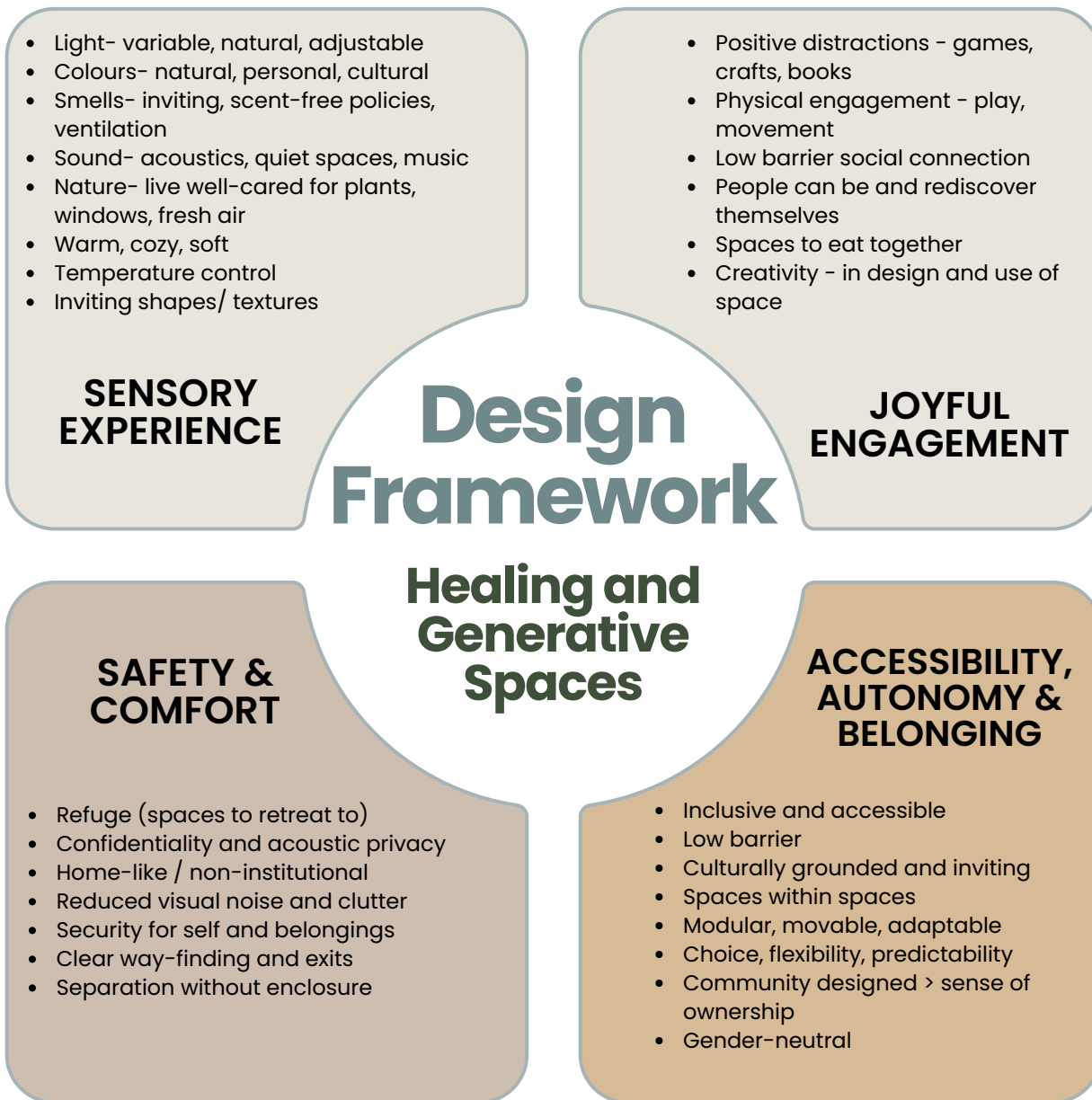
Architecture: 9 Yards

Construction: 720 Modular

Project Management:

Amanda Rae Catalyst & Consulting

DESIGN JOURNEY



Our spaces are our interface with the world and a source of information that our bodies are constantly reacting to at a subconscious and sensory level. In bodies that hold trauma and its response strategies, this includes a scan for threats or signals of safety. In trauma-sensitive spaces, design seeks to prevent trauma-based triggers, and moving beyond this, to create positive nervous responses. The opposite of triggers has been called glimmers: moments which spark joy and peace, calming the nervous

system. These experiences cue feelings of trust, allowing people to let their guard down, which can create the conditions for new neural pathways and behavioural responses. This is healing.

Designing spaces for healing means allowing form to follow feeling, then weaving in the function. What does a healing space look like for Membertou Recovery Project? How can we create a space people feel welcome in and in which they can let their guard down?

Early Community Guidance

HOW WE LISTENED

7

public sessions

215

survey responses

15+

internal sessions

15+

partner agencies

1:1

confidential talks

"The opposite of addiction is connection."
...and a community that walks beside them the whole way.

WHAT PEOPLE ASKED FOR

- Culture as the foundation — Elders, ceremony, land-based programming
- Two-eyed seeing — culture-centered with clinical supports to address trauma
- Longer stays & 6–24 months of sober living (28 days is too short)
- Peer support, lived experience, Indigenous and Mi'kmaq staff

EVERYONE IS AFFECTED

22%

personally affected by addiction

26%

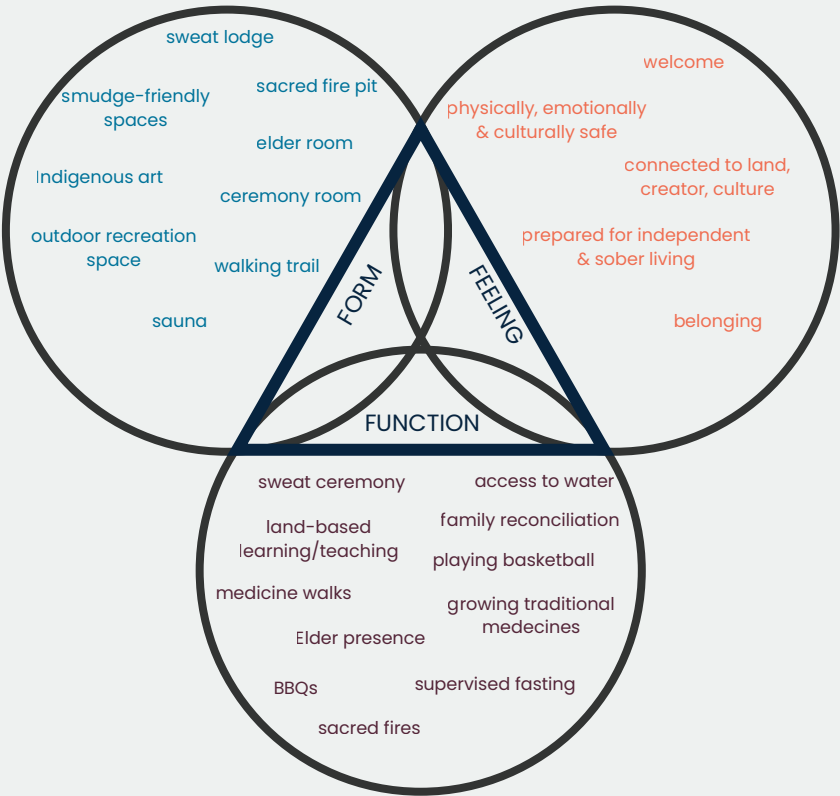
addiction in their household

34%

a close friend or relative affected

Not an individual problem — a family and community story, carried across generations.

What is vital to the success of these recovery facilities in Membertou?



Advisory Circle



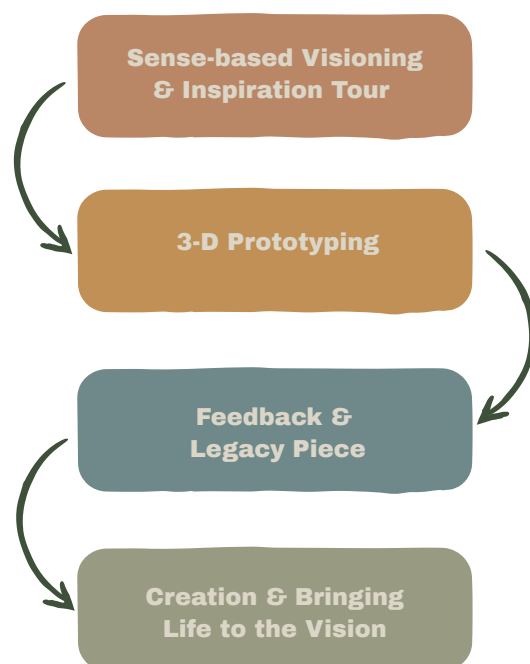
Following the series of community engagement sessions, an open call for Advisory Circle members was put out to the community through Membertou communications channels. Subcommittees include:

- Membertou Health Centre Staff
- Lived Experience (with addiction)
- Family and Caregivers (of those experiencing addiction)
- Elders

The role of the Advisory Circle is to guide the design process, ensuring the spaces are culturally grounded and meet the unique needs of Membertou's recovery community and their caregivers.

the initial space design session was hosted as a series of gatherings with each subcommittee. As the process and the space design took shape, subcommittees came together as one Advisory Circle to revise, reimagine and validate the various components of the space.

The design journey with the Advisory Circle included the following engagement activities:



Sense-Based Visioning

Advisory Circle engagement began with sense-based visioning. The goal was to focus on how people wanted the place to feel rather than going directly to the practical components of the space. We grounded into this approach with the question, “Think of a time when you let your guard down?” with sensory prompts, “What did it look like, smell like, taste like, feel like?” These questions surfaced many emotions and insights.

This framing flowed into a visioning activity. Advisory participants were oriented to the design framework, then provided with scrapbooking materials to help them imagine what they wanted the space to look like, sound like, taste like, smell like, and feel like.

Advisory members then took part in an Inspiration Tour – a collection of images from other community spaces for participants to react to using emoji stickers. This activity was followed by discussions around what they liked or didn’t like and why. This phase of the design went from intangible to tangible and gave the design team a lot to work with and reference over the course of the project.



3D Prototyping

The second session brought the Advisory Circle together across perspectives – people with lived experience, family, caregivers and Elders were all in the same session. The group was presented with 3-D models of different rooms or spaces throughout the buildings and provided with mixed media with which to create their vision. Interior Designer, Kelsie Francis, guided their considerations for the space and translated these into mood-boards for key spaces. Two artists also listened for the essence of the vision, which they later translated into art pieces which will live within the recovery spaces.

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Feedback & Legacy

The design team worked to create a mood-board for each space that had been dreamed up by the advisory participants. These and other design decisions were presented back using Mentimeter. This allowed for live feedback which could then be discussed and clarified. Participants could type in reactions (see examples to the right).

The word cloud (below) was generated in response to the question, *"how do you want people to feel when they walk in the door of the Sober Living Home?"*

Craft supplies for beading, painting, etc

Will labeling be in Mi'kmaq and English?

Birch woven wall is amazing

Basket weave isn't mikmaq. Eight pointed star needs to be in right order. Name of building on front of desk.

I love the art piece and wood like structure. Maybe more color, otherwise looks incredible ! :)

I love the color. No longer institutional. Add the clouds to reflect the original art piece. Add birds on the empty wall on right. Name the building asap!

Photos of Membertou back in the day playing sports, practicing culture, drumming, socializing

REAL plants, no temu

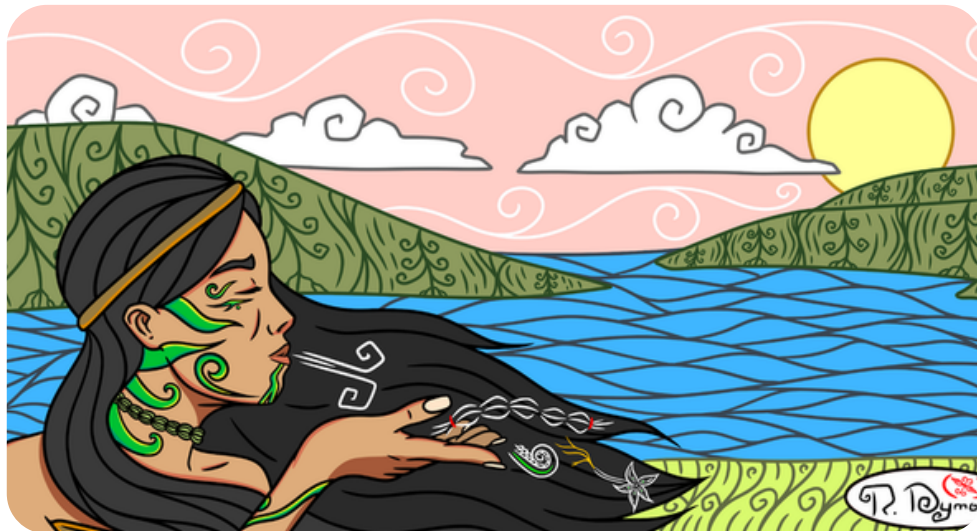


Artistic Rendering of Community Vision

Through a public 'Call for Artists', two young, Mi'kmaq artists were selected. They were asked to listen deeply to conversations with advisory groups and translate the essence of their ideas, hopes, values, and vision into an artistic form. The goal was to help bring the emerging vision for the space to life in a meaningful and respectful way.



Skyla Paul, age 15, created this piece of digital art - an intimate sense of love and belonging grounded in family and culture.



River Stevens also works with digital art. He captured the essence of healing through the lands and waters of Unama'ki and the Summer Spirit sharing medicines.

What We Heard



Overall Feel

The Membertou Sober Living Home will be a model for others. It is crucial that the space feels like home: culturally grounded, non-institutional and welcoming by design. Working within the constraints of a modular build, the space will be natural and earthy with pops of colour and a soft feel, eg. no bright white walls.

There will be a balance between soft, comfortable furnishings and the need for things to be durable and cleanable. The priority is that tenants and guests feel at home in the space. They don't want a space that feels corporate or rigid.

There is a need to feel connected to nature through plants, fresh air, wood, colour choices, etc. The space should be beautiful and authentic, with real art and natural materials that invite sensory connection.



Nature & Culture

Four Elements: The space will be grounded in the four elements through colours and design features. For example, there will be a fireplace in the corner of the Tenant Lounge.

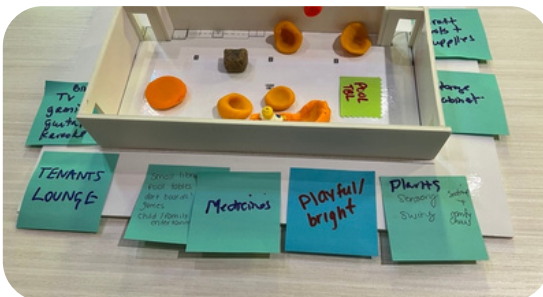
Culture: Authentic Mi'kmaq art will be incorporated into each common room, with prints in apartments. Ceremony will be part of life – the main floor has been designed with smudge friendly ventilation and there will be a room for hosting ceremony or group recovery gatherings. The building and common rooms will have Mi'kmaq names created by the Advisory Circle and community. The Advisory Circle will continue to take part, guiding program development.

Lighting: Wherever possible, there will be open, bright spaces with natural light from large exterior windows and interior windows that allow the light to move into the corridors. All light switches will be dimmable. There will also be lamps and area lighting throughout for changeable, cozy lighting options.

Connection to Nature: "No Temu plants!" The Advisory Circle shared a strong request for real plants and real wood. These things are more than decoration – they offer a connection to nature and the healing made possible through this relationship. The Sober Living Home does not offer a lot of outdoor space, but the Advisory Circle made many contributions to the potential design of the extensive outdoor area of the Recovery Centre.

Sense of Belonging

As new spaces, the Recovery Project will need to continue learning along the way, with the support of the Advisory Circle and community. The design team listened closely to their guidance on how to make the spaces feel like home, a place where people can experience a sense of belonging. For the Advisory, this looks like culturally-grounded design and inclusion throughout, from accessibility, to gender-friendly washrooms, to seating options that are comfortable for different body types and abilities. The Advisory described recovery as, “a journey of finding yourself,” which benefits from exposure to new activities and skills. The spaces will make games, craft materials, and learning opportunities available to support this journey.



SPACE VISUALIZATION



The Advisory Circle provided rich and heartfelt input on the needs for a space that is healing and generative; a space in which form follows feeling, and creates the conditions for a variety of functions. Throughout the engagement process, there was a lot of alignment, and some differences that helped us to imagine what a 'Home Designed for Healing' looks and feels like, knowing that not everyone has the same wishes or needs. This is reflected through a diversity of spaces and furnishings that are designed to meet different needs. Through the earthy flow of colours and textures and variety of lighting and seating options, we have aspired to create a home where people at different stages in their healing journey can feel a sense of belonging.

Colour Palette

You will see the Sober Living Home colour palette used throughout the graphic design of this report. The corridors will be painted a warm, natural cream anchored by pine wainscotting. The other colours will appear in feature walls, furnishing and accent colours. The dark green used in this report will also be used to create depth and contrast in a few key areas. Light, oak cabinetry will be constructed throughout the building.

Taking inspiration from Eltuek Art's Centre, which was designed with the support of an Elder's Advisory, each floor will have a feature colour that echos the layers of the Land - Potter's Clay on the main floor, Mexican Sand on the second floor, moving up to green for forests and life, then blue for sky and water, and finally yellow for sun and hope.

F8F8F9	F9F4EE	F9F3F3	F8F3F0	F9F5F3	F7F5F3
F8F8F4	F3E9D0	E2E7E8	F7E7E0	E8E8E6	E7E4E6
F4F2EE	E0E6CD	D4D8DC	EAD8D1	E0E1DA	E7E0DA
F1EEEB	E8D3BC	C8CFD6	E3CFD2	D6D7CD	D9D6CD
EDF8E3	E0C8AB	E7C3C4	DCC3B2	CCCDC1	D7CCD1
EAE1D0	D4B0B4	A9B7B9	D9B7A3	C2C3B4	CFC3B4
E8E1D7	D4B2B4	9CACAD	CEA8B3	B8B8A8	C7B7A8
E3D0D2	CD4779	8D4D41	C9F8F4	ADAF88	8FAD88
D9D8C0	C79C84	769496	BF9275	A3A58F	87A38F
DGDAC7	C7D2C7	70E7B9	B8B6B5	99B8B2	A798B3
CCC0AD	B8B4A4	657A7C	A77752	8C8E73	A8B870
B8AD93	A4753D	5ABC6E	9D6A48	7D7766	957A5F
A89879	8F6735	475F60	89D23F	6C6F59	83A554
9A8561	785A2D	43B162	754F36	5E5F4C	705A48
89F851	664926	3A4A43	63422D	4E4F40	5D4C3C
875840	523816	2D3637	4E3524	3E3F33	4B3C30
4D4330	3D2C1F	222828	3E2818	2F3C26	3A2E24
332C20	292D0F	1E1818	271A12	1F2D18	251E18
1A1810	1A1808	0B0E0E	1A0D09	10100D	130F0C

**Natural
Cream**

Bosc Pear

Aegean Teal

Potters Clay

Green Onyx

**Mexican
Sand**

The floor plan illustrates the layout of the second floor, featuring a central corridor and several functional areas. Key rooms and their details include:

- GROUP ROOM (104):** Located on the left side, featuring a large table and chairs. Notes specify "SURROUNDING WALL COLUMN SURROUND AND INTERIOR WALL ALL TO BE FLUSH W/ ABOVE FACE EXTERIOR WALL THIS SIDE".
- LOUNGE (103):** Adjacent to the Group Room, containing a sofa and coffee table.
- RECEPTION (101):** Centrally located, featuring a reception desk and seating area.
- VESTIBULE (102):** Located near the reception area, providing access to the building.
- STAFF OFFICE (105, 106, 107, 108, 109):** Multiple offices along the right side, each with desks and chairs.
- MANAGER'S OFFICE (104):** A larger office space with a desk and seating area.
- STAIRS (101, 102, 103, 104, 105):** Multiple staircases throughout the floor, including a main staircase near the reception area.
- ELEVATOR (101):** Located near the main staircase.
- MECHANICAL (101):** A room for mechanical equipment, located near the stairs.
- LABORATORY (101):** A room for laboratory work, located near the mechanical room.
- NOTE - OFFICE DRIVING WALLS TO BE CENTERED ON GRID LINE (TYP):** A general note for the office spaces.

The plan is annotated with dimensions (e.g., 11'-0", 12'-0", 14'-0") and room numbers (e.g., 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109). A north arrow is located in the upper right corner.

Exterior

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Modular construction involves factory built 'boxes' that get assembled on site. There are many cost and quality advantages to this approach, alongside constraints in shape and structure. Curved or dynamic forms and features are less attainable, but 9 Yards Architecture has worked with materials and colour to respond to the community vision.

The exterior will be clad in alternating textures of clapboard-like metal. The goal is to offer a natural, wood feel while complying with fire safety requirements which limit flammable materials on the exterior.

The building will be grounded by deep orange cladding around the ground level with a basket-like weave of real wood at the entrance. The name and identifier of the building will be on this wall. Note that the 8-pointed star in the image to the right is a placeholder. This identifier will need more community input, as will final cultural considerations.

Around the stairwell section of the building, the community vision, as represented by River Stevens, will be painted onto the building, bringing the healing medicines of the *Summer Spirit* to all who visit or call this home.



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Reception Area



As you enter the Sober Living Home, a reception desk will greet you. The intention is to add custom tiles with petroglyphs to the front. Behind the desk there will be a basket-weave wall finishing where the name of the space will eventually be added.

Overhead, scalloped linen pendant lamps will offer warm lighting. Beyond the desk to the right is an elevator and a cozy seating area. Digital signage, wayfinding and a bulletin board will let tenants and visitors know what is happening in the spaces and where to go. A water fill station will also be available.

Straight ahead is a bench for waiting, just outside of the group room. Windows into the hall from this room will let natural light through, with privacy blinds for choice.

The hallway to the left takes you to the tenant's lounge and 3 washrooms.

As you enter the building, a left turn before the reception desk takes you through a multi-use space we are currently calling the 'Co-Working Space', off of which are 6 staff / counsellor offices, an Elder's office and a staff lounge.



Group Room



The Group Room is the largest common room in the building. A circular carpet anchors the room visually and invites seating in circle for gatherings. Large windows with blinds let in natural light.

This room will serve many forms of gathering: ceremony, fellowship group meetings, group therapy, and learning activities and more. The room is equipped with a glass board, tack board and generous storage to support these many functions. There will also be a 100" TV and sound system.

The group room has a stocked kitchenette for ease of hosting gatherings. Seating has been selected to be comfortable, natural, and versatile. See chairs to the right - both are commercial grade with wooden legs and soft cushioned seat (available in colours to match our palette). The bottom one is stackable, allowing for larger groups from time to time. These will be paired with flip-up tables with green legs and castors. They can be stored along the wall or brought to the storage room if need be.

A large cabinet with glass doors will display cultural and ceremonial artifacts. Open shelves will hold medicines available and accessible for guests. A collection of historical photographs depicting the long history of Alcoholics Anonymous in Membertou will be displayed on the wall.





Tenant Lounge

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The Tenant's Lounge will be an important space for maintaining social connection in a sober setting. This will be a room for playing games, sharing a meal, crafting, movie nights, or just curling up with a good book.

The circular, electric fireplace is the heart of the space. There will also be a TV zone, pool table, and some round tables with chairs. The seating will not look like the renderings here, but the space will include a variety of options – sofa, ottoman, rocking chair, stacking chairs, and even hanging hammock chairs!

The bookcase that divides the room will have a collection of books recommended by the Advisory Circle and community, and the large storage cabinet will have various board games, including Waltes. A range of craft materials will also be available.



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Co-Working Space

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The Co-Working Space will be an active, versatile zone for working, training, waiting for appointments and more. Two desktop computers will be available. Windows facing the front of the building will bring in natural light for the plants that will create separation between work zones. Tables with castors will allow the space to be reconfigured in a multitude of ways. The plant dividers will also be on wheels so they can easily be relocated as needed.

This space is work ready; it has a glass board and tack board, a colourful kitchenette for refreshments, and a TV and seating zone for collaboration or just waiting in comfort. The seating in this zone is plush, modular and available in many complimentary colours. The work zone will have stacking wooden chairs with a cushioned seatpad for comfort.

Off of this room there are two guest offices for partners to offer programs and services. Beyond the Co-Working Space is a small staff lounge with similar design features. This room will provide staff with a place to decompress when needed, away from clients and other users of the Co-Working Space.





Offices & Counseling



The main floor of the building will have 7 mixed use staff rooms. One will be designated for the Elder in residence, and another as a visitor's office. Each room will be set up for mixed use, including lounge chairs for counseling session and sound insulating walls for privacy. Each workspace will have a sit-stand desk, locking file storage and a bookshelf for additional storage and display of personal items. Glass boards and TVs will support meetings. Wall colours will vary from room to room.



Tenant Gym & Sauna

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A gym will be located on the second floor. The Advisory Circle imagined a healing feel to this room - green walls, real plants, and a range of physical activities to support each person's individual healing path. Off the gym is an infrared sauna and shower room

At the entrance, cubby storage provides a place to store personal items. One wall will house a row of equipment. The walls will have mirrored sections to monitor form, a TV, and a water fill station. Behind the storage wall will be a small 'zen zone' for yoga and other floor work. All equipment, including yoga mats, will be supplied.



Typical Apartment

The Sober Living Home will have 28 apartments: 14 1-bedroom, 7 studio, 6 barrier-free, and 1 life skills apartment. All are fully furnished and equipped. Contents and layout will vary slightly with each layout and purpose, but will generally look and feel as described here as a 'typical apartment'.

Tenants will be welcomed home by a coloured door. As illustrated by the floor plan for a 1-bedroom on the following page, they will enter into a foyer with storage closet across from the entrance to a bathroom with a bathtub. This area flows into the kitchen.

Beyond the kitchen, there is space for a small dining area and a living room, which will include a seating area and a TV. The bedroom has storage closets and ample space for a queen size bed. Studio apartments will not have a separate bedroom.

Renderings of the apartment illustrate furniture samples, not final selections, and Mi'kmaq art prints will be provided rather than those in the images.





Life Skills Apartment

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The life skills apartment will serve multiple purposes and may evolve over time, and may be converted for emergency housing use if needed. The kitchen will be fully stocked for hosting cooking classes, with an island providing extra storage and a prep zone.

The area that is typically the living room of the apartment will instead house a larger dining area for sharing meals prepared together. There will be a rocking chair for rocking or nursing small children.

The bedroom will be repurposed as a family room. This will include a comfortable sofa, mixed age toys and sensory supports for family visits. Play items will include:

- child sized furnishings and storage
- plush cushions and blocks
- magnetic tiles and wooden block sets
- Mi'kmaq books
- Canvas play Teepee
- Egg swivl chair, sensory swivel, and balance board
- play silks
- solar system projector
- music
- and more!



BRINGING LIFE TO THE VISION

How do we bring the Membertou Sober Living Home to life? Procurement has taken into consideration the values of culture, nature, trauma-sensitivity, beauty, and longevity. The goal has been to design a home for healing that supports each tenant's unique recovery journey.

Reflective of their care and commitment, the Advisory Circle suggested a land blessing to begin the Sober Living Home build project in a good way: Thanking the land for its service hosting the former Band Office, and seeding positive intentions for those who will build and those who will eventually live in the Sober Living Home. Guided by 3 generations of ceremonial leaders and drummers, the land blessing, pipe ceremony and drumming took place July 8, 2026. There were 70 in attendance leaving their prayers, good intentions and tobacco ties as thanks to the land.



Additional Considerations

Art and Culture: It is important that art and culture are treated as essential parts of the procurement process. Many buildings that rush to get the doors open, never get around to adding art pieces. Mi'kmaq art is more than decor, it is medicine for those who live, work and visit in this space. Art and cultural items can include paintings, prints, drums, waltes sets, baskets, and more. One recommended project to add colour and life to the communal spaces is a workshop by Steven Francis to create wooden 8-pointed stars. Medicines and smudge kits should be openly available on the main, smudge-friendly floor (which has appropriate ventilation).

Language: The Advisory Circle recommended that the building be named soon so that it has life. They suggested a community contest to identify a name. This name should be beautifully shared at the entrance and at the reception area. The common rooms should also be given Mi'kmaq names.

Plants: It is important that the space has many real, well cared for plants to maintain a connection to nature and the healing that it offers. Again, this should be treated as an essential procurement activity, not an after-thought. Landscaping and outside gathering space will also need prioritization.

Activities: The Advisory Circle said the recovery 'journey to find yourself' requires opportunities to try new things, like crafts, games, ceremony and physical activities. It also benefits from training, acts of service and work. These will be important considerations both in procurement and in service delivery in the Sober Living Home.

Legacy Project

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Mi'kmaq artist, River Stevens, guided a legacy project. Advisory Circle members were invited to leave their mark on a woven ash mat, which will live in the Sober Living Home and honour those who contributed their time and care into guiding this initiative.

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Beyond Design

Thoughtful community engagement and procurement create spaces that are more than materials. The space has life and community ownership before the walls even go up. Continued involvement of the community and opportunities for course correction will ensure that the space truly meets the needs of finding home on each tenant's recovery journey.

It is recommended that after 3-4 months of use, the Advisory Circle and users of the space are reconvened to explore ways we can continue to bring feeling, form and function into alignment.



Questions?

Jody Nelson
jody.misewa@gmail.com
902-489-5634

Amanda Rae Storteboom
connect@amandaraestorteboom.com
403-604-7615

