



Daphne Bramham: \$4.7-million boost for North Van's waterfront rebirth

North Vancouver's historic waterfront, once home to some of Canada's biggest and busiest shipyards, is on the brink of a renaissance.

The transformation from abandoned, heavy industrial site to an artistic and cultural hub may be completed in time for Canada's 150th birthday after getting a multi-million-dollar boost Friday.

In the Conservative government's pre-election announcement frenzy, MP Andrew Saxton handed over a cheque for \$2.2 million to the North Vancouver Museum and Archives in the afternoon.

In the morning, wearing his hat as parliamentary secretary to the finance minister, Saxton announced that the federal government will match the \$2.5 million already provided by the province and North Vancouver city for a \$15-million art gallery.

Construction is set to begin in early 2016 on the Polygon Gallery, so named because well-known art collector and philanthropist, Michael Audain, donated \$4 million through his company Polygon Homes Ltd. and the Audain Foundation.

The gallery will continue its impressive schedule of mainly photographic art exhibitions, which have included major shows by artists such as Stan Douglas, Rodney Graham, Fred Herzog, Ian Wallace, Ansel Adams and Diane Arbus.

The museum and archives remains \$2.8 million short of the \$10 million needed to transform the former shipyard Pipe Shop into its new high-tech home. But its campaign director, Nick Locke, is confident that the money will be found in time for construction to start in early 2016.

Both the city and district of North Vancouver have committed \$5 million to move the museum and archives into the restored, industrial building.

Already, just outside the building, there's a piece of public art — oversized, metal copies of time cards of the men and women who once worked at North Vancouver's shipyards in an over-sized filing cabinet.

The museum, which is projected to attract 60,000 visitors annually, will be unique in Metro Vancouver. The closest thing to what the planners have in mind is Seattle's Museum of History and Industry where the focus is on bringing people's stories to life using interactive technology and augmenting those stories with carefully curated artifacts.

The museum will also focus exclusively on the North Shore communities' heritage both pre- and post-contact, concentrating on the two First Nations who live there, the rich mountaineering tradition, its early settlement, and, of course, its shipbuilding.

The two cultural centres will help draw visitors to the recently opened restaurants, farmers market, buskers and festivals on Shipbuilders' Square and will provide a link between the Lonsdale Quay market and a focal point along the Spirit Trail that is eventually going to run from Deep Cove to Horseshoe Bay.

The transition from industrial to hipster-friendly hasn't always been smooth. Two shipyard cranes were restored to mark the site. But late last year city council agreed that in exchange for a \$500,000 payment from the developer it would demolish one crane that would block the views from the new condos.

Last year, council deep-sixed a plan for a ferris wheel and much of the rest of a \$30-million proposal for the waterfront revitalization that included a skating rink, water features and an amphitheatre.

Council also refused to spend the money needed to decontaminate and scrap the stern of the Flamborough Head to the dismay of heritage preservationists.

What remained of the Victory ship built in 1944 at the Burrard Dry Dock had been a landmark on the waterfront since 2001 and was intended to anchor a National Maritime Museum. But funding and support for that museum never materialized even though the North Vancouver shipyards churned out half of the Canadian naval fleet.

Revitalizing and repurposing the waterfront won't bring back the high-paid industrial jobs of the shipyards' past. But as a people-friendly place, it may just be able to generate economic benefits similar to Granville Island by attracting both residents and tourists.

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Rendering of the proposed Polygon Gallery, the new North Vancouver art gallery to be built in © Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun the old shipyard area at the base of Lonsdale Avenue, starting in 2016.

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