

Showcasing our past and future

By **Contributed - North Shore Outlook**

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When I was a kid I thought that Canadian history was boring and that North Vancouver local history was a joke. Our history did not compare with the sumptuousness of Europe's past or to the self-indulgent historic recollections of our American cousins. I didn't think of Canadian or local history as important or even worthy of being called history; rather I thought it a dull explanation of my present existence.

I love history and I have ticket stubs from many of the world's best museums to prove it; the British Museum, New York's Met, the Smithsonian, and Mexico City's Museum of Anthropology to name but a few. I've spent many days if not months of my life treating myself to world history by visiting ancient sites, museums, art galleries and castles throughout the world.

When I was growing up in Lower Lonsdale in the '50s and '60s, some of today's greatest historical memories in North Vancouver were still alive; Burrard Dry Docks was a vibrant industry, the railway company was then named Pacific Great Eastern and Squamish chief August Jack Khatsahlano and his wife Mary Ann could still be seen walking the North Shore streets.

Moodyville was a park I played in as a child, not some distant historic village on the side of an inlet or celebrated as the first west coast community to have electric lights north of San Francisco.

Many years later as a City of North Vancouver councillor, I started to realize the importance of our local historical past as I ironically participated in the destruction of so much history — some of it out of necessity and some out of a lack of vision.

The wrecking ball was king in the '90s as historic structures like the St. Alice and Olympic Hotels were replaced by concrete condos. Celebrated ferries like the Seven Seas No. 5 were deemed too costly to save and repeated attempts by me and former councilor Stella Jo Dean to preserve some of our shipbuilding history were often mocked as a colossal waste of taxpayers' dollars.

To be fair to our municipal leaders and staff, saving history often comes with a big price tag. Past and present councils have done their best to preserve our history in innovative and cost effective ways but in the end council's major focus by its very own nature is on the future. The vast majority of work is based on what North Vancouver will look like in 10 to 20 years. It determines what tomorrow's buildings, parks, recreational facilities, sewers and roads will be.

But today, North Vancouver city council has a chance to merge the future with the past. It has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to utilize a historical prime location as a showcase to preserve its historical past and to be an integral and vital part of a dynamic future.

A contemporary styled museum for the North Shore with the proposed location at the 'Pipe Shop' on the Shipyards would bring our history to life. The new museum will be a lively, interactive gathering place for all ages and attract both locals and tourists in this prime visible location. A concept plan by KEI SPACE shows that it can be done without costing the taxpayers huge dollars in Capital and ongoing operating costs. Here is what the study says:

“A place where our children and grandchildren can discover their community’s past and explore its present: Two floors of innovative exhibits and interactive displays will encourage visitors to return again and again.

“A new source of tourism value in our community: Economic benefits will be enjoyed by area restaurants and retailers. Spill-over attendance will spark visits to community events and cultural attractions. Outreach programs will help animate public spaces.

“A plan to create a 21st century museum for North Vancouver: Exhibit design and business plans will soon be presented to CNV council. If the go-ahead is granted, it will bring life to a vision that makes our museum a valued community gathering place for years to come.

“Funding plans that will make it all come together. The cost is expected to be approximately \$10 million — with some coming from the municipality. With other sources of operating revenue made possible by the new museum, annual municipal grants are targeted to remain the same as now.”

This council has shown boldness in determining our future. We need the same bold leadership to showcase our past and present spirit through this museum and proposed location to declare our importance as a community on a big stage. Its history is not only worth saving, it is worth showcasing to the entire world.

—Bill Bell is a former CNV councillor

Discover more. Tonight (June 6) the Friends of the North Vancouver Museum & Archives Society will be hosting a free public presentation entitled “A New-Style Museum for North Vancouver - Sharing our Community’s Stories” at 8 p.m. at the Community History Centre (3203 Institute Rd.)