

# Jilted museum lovers get the cold shoulder

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One of my very favourite places on earth is the Museum of London. I'm still relishing my visit to the 2014 exhibit Sherlock Holmes: The Man who Never Lived and Will Never Die, which featured everything from a Turner landscape of Reichenbach Falls, the location of the epic battle between Holmes and Professor Moriarty, the Napoleon of Crime, to the blue coat and scarf worn by Benedict Cumberbatch (the latest Holmes incarnation) in The Reichenbach Fall, the literal cliff-hanger ending season 2.

The Museum of London is always pulling off tricks like this: applying imagination to the study and celebration of its own backyard. Of course, it's one of Western civilizations most significant backyards, but wouldn't it be nice if we would study and celebrate our own backyard with the same panache?

Imagination and panache were dealt a severe setback a couple of Mondays ago when North Vancouver City council said "no" to locating a new Museum of North Vancouver at the Pipe Shop on the waterfront. This despite the fact that the federal government and private and corporate donors had already committed \$4 million to the project. A majority of councillors, including Mayor Mussatto, were convinced by a consultant's report that said: "the venture as currently modelled is too risky to contemplate."

Council was concerned that the donation target had not been reached, and that ongoing costs and upkeep would eventually sink the museum.

Fine, then, no museum for you.

Cue the outrage. One source close to the story wonders if council has a secret option for the Pipe Shop it's not sharing with anyone just yet, because the decision makes no sense.

"We'd already raised 80 per cent of the target. With approval, it would have been a slam dunk."

The deadly consultant's report, which studied the now-defunct Storyeum and the Museum of Vancouver, concluded that "It is very difficult to get a historic museum profitable within Vancouver." Nancy Kirkpatrick, the museum's director retorts that the North Vancouver Museum and Archives "is a bimunicipal agency that is not intended mandated or designed to generate a profit."

Oh.

John Gilmore, president of the Friends Society of the North Vancouver Museum and Archives, came back to council with a letter dated Feb. 1 stating what is becoming increasingly obvious: "It would be a shame to kill this project

based on a flawed report.”

If jilted museum lovers are hoping to go to the District of North Vancouver to find a friendlier jurisdiction, they're destined to be disappointed. The city and district have a partnership where the city is responsible for the museum and the district for the North Vancouver archives. But district Coun. Roger Bassam is not concerned that the city killed the project without consulting the district, and in fact says the district “respects the process of decision-making at the city”, which may be newsworthy in itself, considering the squabbling that often goes on between the two.

But Bassam says he and his colleagues are more interested in the idea of a “distributed museum,” in which displays are installed in libraries like Parkgate or Capilano and community centres. “That way, our heritage will get tens of thousands of visits. People are already coming here already. We don't have to force them to go to a museum.”

Bassam hopes that when the new Delbrook rec centre opens a year from now, there will be a display celebrating North Vancouver's historic athletic highlights. Did you know, for example, that North Vancouver's Bill Parnell held the British Empire Games record for the mile, four minutes and 11 seconds, before Bannister and Landy broke four minutes four years later? Either did I.

Bassam hopes the Delbrook gym will be named after Parnell, and so do I as I plod along on my 10-minute mile. “We don't do a very good job of celebrating our heroes,” he says.

Well, exactly. And I know just the thing...a museum!

There's a passage in Gilmore's letter I find quite insightful: “No place really becomes a community,” he writes, “until it is wrapped in human memory, family stories, tribal traditions and civic memories.” Connections and commitment to each other are made stronger when a space is provided to create new stories and experiences. “The museum with its location in the Pipe Shop was designed to do all of that.”

Gilmore is hoping for a third-party, independent review, agreed upon by both the city and the museum, to review the consultant's report. Hopefully, we haven't heard the end of the museum of North Vancouver.

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