

City of North Vancouver cautiously approves museum in Lower Lonsdale

Beleaguered NVMA finds conditional home at Polygon's Site 8 after failed Pipe Shop bid

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The North Vancouver Museum and Archives has found a new home in Lower Lonsdale – with about 12 storeys of condos on top.

City of North Vancouver council voted unanimously Monday night to approve Polygon Homes' proposal for a 14-storey mixed-use tower containing 117 one-, two- and three-bedroom units and 14,700 square feet of commercial space at Site 8, the plot of land that is mostly a surface parking lot between West Esplanade and Carrie Cates Court.

In exchange for a boost in density and height and the city owned parking lot, Polygon will give the city the 16,000-square-foot first-floor space (estimated to be valued at \$11 million) to be

turned into a new home for the museum as well as \$3.6 million in cash, a 40-foot wide public mews linking Esplanade with Carrie Cates Court and public art and lighting to beautify the ICBC underpass linking the site with the bus loop.

But, while every council member supported the museum moving into the space on a 10 year-lease, it came with a lengthy list of conditions. In order to move in, the museum must apply for and receive a federal grant of at least \$2.5 million, organizers can't come back to the city or the District of North Vancouver asking for any more operating funds above annual inflationary increases, and the museum must consolidate its off-site storage space and confirm that it will operate under its business plan.

Previously, council rejected a long-held plan to move the museum into the Pipe Shop at the Shipyards because the museum commission fell short of its \$5 million in fundraising, as required by the city.



An artist's rendering of the new North Vancouver Museum and Archives at the base of Polygon's new residential/commercial tower between West Esplanade and Carrie Cates Court.

During a three-and-a-half hour public hearing Monday night, a swath of museum supporters came out to urge council to approve the project.

“By helping residents understand our evolution, our strengths and our opportunities, it can help our community to excel. And by helping the residents understand what’s special about this community, it can help us discover our essence – our soul if you will,” said museum commission chairman Sanford Osler.

Osler said the commission is “very confident” it could meet the city’s conditions for the space. Others praised the project for how it would transform the public realm at street level. “It’s creating a people place – a people place where, for years, we saw a nothing place. A parking lot. A concrete wall. A dark hole called a bus depot. This is all coming together now with this development in such a way that it’s truly going to be a people place,” said Gerry Brewer. A smaller contingent of Lower Lonsdale residents turned out to lambaste the project for exceeding the official community plan’s 75-foot height limit for the site, thereby spoiling their views of the waterfront, downtown Vancouver and Stanley Park.

“When I bought my apartment, I did diligent research and went back and forth to city hall many times being reassured each time of the height restriction of a building no higher than seven to eight storeys. I bought because of this reassurance.” said Sharon White, a West First Street condo owner. “To use the museum as a bargaining tool for extra height is a slap in the face to the citizens that already live here who will lose their views and equity. In my case, it’s about \$150,000.”

Most of council, however, agreed it was the right place to put a high-density building, given that shopping, restaurants, the Shipyards district and Spirit Trail, entertainment options, the SeaBus and bus loop are all just metres away. And while not every Lower Lonsdale resident would keep their Burrard Inlet vistas, other iterations of the plan for a shorter, wider building were even worse view spoilers.

“I think it makes more urban planning sense,” Coun. Craig Keating said.

Coun. Linda Buchanan, called the project a “critical one” for Lower Lonsdale, but she also

warned the museum's supporters that moving into the site will now depend on their efforts. "It is my full intention to support the museum in this location but the museum has work to do," she said. "We are allowing the opportunity to move forward. They need to meet the conditions. I implore you to please meet these conditions. I want the museum in this space. I think it absolutely will add to the vibrancy of what's happening there. I want this to be successful."