

Streetcar on track for North Van museum debut

Design taking shape for 2019 W. Esplanade opening

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SEPTEMBER 13, 2017 07:15 AM



Construction is underway on a 14-storey condo development at 131 West Esplanade, which will house North Vancouver's new museum. photo Cindy Goodman, North Shore News

After 70 itinerant years, North Vancouver's last streetcar has finally found a home.

Officially taken off the tracks in 1947, the streetcar will soon begin its new job transporting museum-goers to the past from its spot in the lobby of North Vancouver's forthcoming museum, according to Juan Tanus.

"I think it'll be a great billboard," notes Tanus, the principal of Kei Space Design.

Tanus is set to host a discussion on the museum's design Thursday at the Community History Centre in Lynn Valley (3203 Institute Rd.).

The new museum is slated to be part of a 14-storey condo development at 131 West Esplanade. The 16,000-square-foot museum is tentatively set to open its doors in 2019.

Having worked on a concept plan since the Pipe Shop days, Tanus envisions visitors following a corridor to the museum that feels a bit like a hiking trail. The clearing at the end of the path is the museum, he explains, which is slated to include exhibits meant to appeal to young children, teens and adults.

Part of the strategy is for entrants to feel a sense of wonder at the mountains and forest of the North Shore before understanding a little bit about how the history of the place was forged.

“There is this beautiful place, but over our past we have made some mistakes,” he says. “We’ve hurt people, we’ve hurt the First Nations.”

Tanus mentions St. Paul’s Indian Residential School. Approximately 2,000 First Nations children were taken from their families to attend that school between 1898 and 1959.

“We’re recognizing our past; we’re not hiding away from it,” Tanus says.

But part of the museum is also to examine the ways our mentality has changed, he says. There should be a “reverential and respectful place in the centre of the gallery,” to honour the environment and the first people who lived on the North Shore, Tanus says.

“The First Nations stories are woven throughout,” he said. “It’s not like there’s a First Nations gallery and then everything else.”

Among the museum’s three thematic areas, Tanus says the museum will likely include a segment dealing with the connections between different philosophies and ways of living, connections between European settlers and Indigenous people as well as connections between the City and District of North Vancouver.

While the museum will be located in the City of North Vancouver, the history inside will transcend municipal borders.

“It really speaks to the district just as much as it does to the city,” Tanus says.

The museum will also examine enterprise and industry, from fur traders like Sewell Prescott Moody and Julius Fromme to today's innovators like deep ocean explorer Phil Nuytten.

The museum should include a variety of media and a variety of North Shore contributors. "It's not a clashing of only two cultures, it's a clashing of multiple cultures," Tanus says.

And while it's meant to be engaging and participatory, the museum should also exist as a reminder to people to be responsible stewards for this land.

"There's also a call to action," Tanus says.

The complete museum design is slated to be completed by May 2018. Tomorrow's design discussion event begins at 7:30 p.m.