

DEEP COVE CRIER JUNE 2016

Crier Comment

Considering the cost of preserving the blue cabin

It's a tiny, dilapidated blue cabin with huge historical value.

Last month the District of North Vancouver voted 5-2 in favour of taking \$10,000 from its contingency fund to assist with the remediation costs of the "Blue Cabin."

Home to artists Al Neil and Carole Itter for nearly 50 years, the small cabin was one of many squatter's shacks along Dollarton's mudflats in the 1930s that were inhabited by other artists and writers, including Malcolm Lowry, author of *Under the Volcano*.

By the 1960s most of the cabins had been razed but the Blue Cabin had immunity. It was located on the McKenzie Barge site.

But in 2015 the private piece of land was sold to developers. The cabin is stowed away in temporary storage but its future remains uncertain. Vancouver's Grunt Gallery and other partners, including the North Vancouver Museum and Archives, are trying make sure the 80-year-old cabin is saved and restored. They envision creating a floating residency for artists on the Burrard Inlet.

District of North Vancouver Coun.

Lisa Muri strongly favours preserving the cabin and the history it represents.

"It's important to be able to have something tangible that you can look back on and remember what life used to be like," she said during last month's meeting. But not all council members agreed. Coun. Robin Hicks, who along with Coun. Roger Bassam voted against the motion, isn't convinced the cabin should be a priority for municipal funds.

"How much do we as a society spend on a dilapidated hut?" said Hicks. "I think \$10,000 is not an insignificant

amount and it could be used to help the homeless or more charitable endeavours within the district."

So should preserving a decades-old cabin be a priority?

Others weren't so quick to dismiss the importance of historical connective tissue. Reid Shier, director of the Presentation House Gallery, noted in a letter to council: "The Blue Cabin is one of, if not the last, foreshore cabin 'squats' that once proliferated on the intertidal zone of North Vancouver and Burrard Inlet. The history is an instrumental and vital part of our region, and the preservation of the Blue Cabin presents the last opportunity to save an especially important part of our shared past for our future generations." We agree.

The historical significance of the artistic community that lived on the shores of the Burrard Inlet is captured in a National Film Board's short documentary entitled *Idkonef mhchgj* and there's also an incredible installation by artist Kevin Lum featuring replica shacks at the Maplewood conservation area that also features storyboards that pay homage to the historical significance of the creative community by the sea. But, as Muri noted, to have something tangible matters.

The little blue cabin is a real piece of history that you can see and touch, which makes it a powerful storytelling device for sharing a long-lost history with future generations. It's priceless. *i*