

City votes against rehashing museum decision

Justin Beddall / North Shore News

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Waterfront museum project supporters – including Peter Miller (fourth from left) and John Gilmour (far right) – spoke during public input period at Monday's council meeting. photo Cindy Goodman, North Shore News

A consultant's financial feasibility report that effectively sunk the proposed museum at The Shipyards will not be reviewed at a public council meeting.

City of North Vancouver Coun. Don Bell's motion for a meeting to allow a thorough public review of the BDO report on the proposed business plan for the waterfront museum was defeated 4-3 Monday.

Bell's motion noted the BDO report and museum's response to the report were discussed in camera (behind closed doors) and never fully articulated in open council and should be discussed publicly "in the interests of transparency of the process."

Bell, along with Couns. Pam Bookham and Rod Clark voted in favour of the motion, while Mayor Darrell Mussatto, and Couns. Craig Keating, Linda Buchanan and Holly Back voted against it.

"I just think the public and those that supported it deserve the benefit of that discussion," Bell said.

On Jan. 25 council voted down plans for a new museum inside the Pipe Shop.

The decision came after an in-camera session with North Vancouver Museum and Archives capital campaign organizers who were unable to meet a Dec. 31, 2015 deadline to raise \$5 million.

At the time, Clark made a motion to defer a museum decision until after campaign fundraisers could make a public presentation to council. "Far too much has gone on in the back room there and it needs to come out in the public," said Clark.

His motion was defeated, with Bookham and Bell voting in favour of the delay and Mussatto, Buchanan, Back and

Keating voting against it.

"I think we have heard in response to the decision that was made by council to not move forward on the museum in the Pipe Shop considerable dismay not only with the decision but how that decision was made," said Bookham. "I think it's very important that we talk about what it was in the BDO report that weighed so heavily on some members of council that they would choose to just basically undercut what had been a tremendous two-year effort on the part of our community."

Clark called the museum decision "extremely puzzling."

"A new museum in the Pipe Shop, we campaigned on it, we promised the community that amenity ... now we don't have it, with very suspect logic as far as I'm concerned. Now the community has risen up and by letters to the editor, by petitions circulating, by phone calls, by emails, they are saying this is the wrong decision."

Coun. Keating took umbrage with the inference that council made a concerted attempt to not be transparent and discuss the museum proposal in camera.

"Members of council will know, in fact, that it was the museum and archives fundraising crew themselves who did not want the BDO report released, who did not want to have that out in open council. We respected that request."

Keating said it was important to discuss "the kind of museum that we want to have," referring to a 2013 presentation that called for a mass market attraction at the museum that would charge \$7 to enter. "That's not my idea of a municipal museum. I like the model we've had for the longest while ... a museum that's free, open to kids, open to anybody who wants to walk in."

Keating said the waterfront museum proposal had a major commercial component and sought to generate \$700,000 annually through gate receipts, gift shop sales and other revenue sources.

"Something that says we need to raise \$700,000 in commercial and gate receipts and other kinds of receipts and would still in fact run a deficit at the end, that's a huge concern," said Keating. "And so people wanted my reasons, people wanted to know what was in the BDO report for me, that's what's in the BDO report for me."

Buchanan agreed that heritage is integral to the community, but said she's had concerns about the project from the start.

"The BDO for me actually reaffirmed the concerns. It also talks to the projection in deficits, so for me that report reinforced my original concerns. It is the long-term financial sustainability of this project that is troubling. It is weak. And the fallout will come back to the taxpayers of the city. So, do we need to reflect the history of our community? You bet we do, we absolutely need to. We will have a museum. We are not dropping the museum."

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