



Esquimalt Nation



The Maritime Museum of BC



Songhees Nation

A New Vision for Sharing BC's Rich Maritime Heritages and Cultures: Lekwungen Peoples and the Maritime Museum of BC Embark on Joint Project

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Victoria, B.C. – After years of searching for a new home, the Maritime Museum of British Columbia (MMBC) is exploring an exciting new opportunity to return to Victoria's iconic Inner Harbour. In collaboration with the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations, a proposal has been put forward to create a new, dual-purpose historical site that would reshape how coastal history is presented.

The Future of History Project

The proposed project, tentatively called "*The Future of History*," envisions a two-part experience. The Steamship Building, a striking heritage landmark on the Inner Harbour, would house a re-imagined maritime museum. Alongside this, a floating structure adjoining the Steamship Building would be dedicated to the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, offering a Lekwungen welcome centre and exhibit space. This new space would emphasize the local Nations' presence and deep connection to coastal waters, which dates back thousands of years.

"By including Lekwungen maritime history, we can show that settler and First Nations people have shared experience and intertwined histories," says Songhees Nation's Chief Ron Sam.

The idea behind the project is to present a more comprehensive account of Victoria's history, where the narratives of Lekwungen and settler experiences stand side-by-side.

With an Inner Harbour facility for Lekwungen Peoples to tell their own story, the exhibit will offer visitors two distinct, yet interconnected, perspectives on the region's past.

Although still in development, *The Future of History* project could become a tangible symbol of reconciliation in Victoria, aligning with broader cultural and historical initiatives in the city. It would also be an exciting first-of-its-kind attraction for Victoria's four million annual visitors.

"Today, history is predominantly known and told through a colonial perspective in places like museums," shares MMBC's Board Chair Jamie Webb. "The current significant imbalance will be addressed over time as the public experiences the work of reconciliation through *The Future of History* project."

A Joint Project and Working Group

The Nations and MMBC have established a joint working group to advance the project. At this time, no official agreement with the province has been reached, however negotiations will be completed with the government. The cost of the project is estimated at \$38 million, with potential funding sources including private philanthropic and corporate sponsors, as well as contributions from the federal government.

"This opportunity returns the Lekwungen Nations to a place of prominence here in our traditional territory, where residents and visitors will be welcomed and come to understand our proud history," says Esquimalt Nation's Chief Jerome Thomas.

The Steamship Building Site

The Steamship Building and the associated water lease are provincially owned, and their future use remains part of ongoing discussions. The project's vision aims to restore this prime waterfront location to the public, creating a vibrant cultural precinct for both residents and visitors alike.

The Future of History project is expected to open in 2029, coinciding with the completion of the Belleville Ferry Terminal redevelopment next door.

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The Future of History Project

Community Supporters say...

Tourism Sector

Greater Victoria requires new experiential opportunities for both visitors and residents. As a vital maritime community, since time immemorial, there is an essential story to be told.

Paul Nursey, CEO, Destination Greater Victoria:

"At Destination Greater Victoria we are pleased to see steady progress towards a bold vision that partners our local indigenous communities and the Maritime Museum of BC from the outset. In the months and years ahead, Destination Greater Victoria will be speaking more about the need for investment and re-investment in critical tourism experiences. Today's announcement aligns well with that principle and brings new energy to Victoria's iconic Inner Harbour."

Christina Clarke, Executive Director Indigenous Prosperity Centre:

"I am thrilled to hear of the progress made by the Lekwungen Nations and the Maritime Museum for a new attraction in Victoria's Inner Harbour. Recently, the Indigenous Prosperity Centre hosted an Indigenous Tourism Workshop with Destination Greater Victoria and Indigenous Tourism BC at the Songhees Wellness Centre. The workshop was attended by First Nation economic development representatives, Indigenous Tour operators, food service providers and artists. There is excitement and momentum to grow the Indigenous tourism sector in our region. Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations are well positioned with Victoria as the gateway to Indigenous tourism experiences on Vancouver Island."

Dave Cowen, CEO The Butchart Gardens:

"Congratulations to the Lekwungen Peoples and the Maritime Museum of B.C. on the announcement of their wonderful collaboration. This project is an innovative opportunity

for accurate recognition of the long maritime history of the Lekwungen, and when shared alongside B.C.'s more recent maritime narrative, will provide the complete seafaring history of our region. Such authentic interpretation will be well received by our community and by visitors from around the world. Clearly, this is a project worthy of broad community support, and we wish the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations and MMBC much success as this project moves forward."

Starr McMichael, Co-Founder IMPACT Sustainability Travel & Tourism:

"It is fair to say that a successful tourism destination needs to do more than attract visitors in this age of sustainable and regenerative tourism. More and more, visitors look for experiences that are meaningful and respectful, of the regions and communities they want to explore.

The Future of History project exemplifies collaboration while celebrating the land, water, our collective maritime histories and most importantly the Lekwungen Peoples who are the original guardians and stewards of Victoria's Inner Harbour. This partnership between the Lekwungen Peoples and the Maritime Museum will present the history of the coast in ways that respects the past, explores the complexities of the present and defines our future.

This region needs new and innovative attractions but equally as vital to the discerning traveller is the foundation on which those attractions are built.

Equally, if not more essential, this is an experience that the local community can embrace and make part of their traditions for many years to come."

David Roberts, Senior Director Cruise and Transportation – Victoria, SSA Marine:

"As an organization who cares deeply about the communities we operate in, as well as the significance of our harbours, and waterfronts, SSA Marine supports the efforts of the leaders of the Maritime Museum of BC, and the First Nations, to create an iconic waterfront experience for our city. This attraction will bring both locals and visitors together and immerse them in an experience that will tell the story of our shared history. The history and importance of our waterfront is of paramount importance to us all in understanding where we have come from and how we chart our course forward. We look forward to seeing how this partnership progresses and being part of a collective of partners in our city who are so passionate about making this attraction a success."

Robert Lewis-Manning, CEO Greater Victoria Harbour Authority:

"The Greater Victoria Harbour Authority is supportive of all work involving X^wsepsəm (Esquimalt) Nation and the Songhees Nation that furthers reconciliation and economic development. GVHA is also committed to building a vibrant and harmonious working harbour and we are excited to learn more about this project as its plans progress."

Business Sector

Revitalizing economic activity around the Inner Harbour, year-round, and introducing a new self-sustaining, cultural business, generating \$7.2M in direct revenues annually.

Bruce Williams, CEO Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce:

"This project respects the leadership of the Lekwungen Peoples and is a tangible action toward economic reconciliation that benefits everyone in Greater Victoria. This is an excellent example of Indigenous collaboration that serves our region well. We are honoured to have more than 40 Indigenous businesses among our Chamber membership. The Future of History project will build on that success."

Jeff Bray, CEO Downtown Victoria Business Association:

"This is a delightful project which highlights the history of Victoria and paves the way for future progress. In the spirit of reconciliation, it centres the Lekwungen Peoples' history of the region and then adds in the more recent history preserved by the Maritime Museum. As so many visitors to downtown Victoria enjoy learning about our shared heritage, this will be a delightful addition to our community. I believe it will add to the vitality of downtown Victoria."

Cultural Sector

The opportunity exists to establish a compelling downtown cultural precinct anchored by this project, RBCM, the Victoria Chinatown Museum and the Art Gallery of Victoria.

Ryan Hunt, Executive Director BC Museums Association:

"An overwhelming 94% of Canadians agreed that museums and cultural organizations have a critical role to play in addressing reconciliation, racial justice, and gender inequality. The announced partnership between the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations and the Maritime Museum of BC to establish a floating cultural centre and a new-era museum in the Steamship Building is transformative. Establishing a permanent space for ləkʷəŋən-speaking Peoples in the Inner Harbour alongside the museum will help millions of BC-based visitors and international tourists each year better understand the rich history and ongoing culture of communities who have stewarded these lands from time immemorial. Each time we expand our cultural infrastructure, residents and visitors alike have new opportunities for cultural expression, community-building, and cross-cultural exchange, and we take one step closer to an equitable, informed, and vibrant future."

Reconciliation

In many respects this project is about tangible evidence of the work of reconciliation presented in a way that everyone who visits will learn and become personally involved.

Hamar Foster KC – Professor Emeritus, University of Victoria:

“The Truth and Reconciliation Commission called upon government, museums, Aboriginal organizations and the arts community to "develop a reconciliation framework for Canadian heritage and commemoration." This means a framework that incorporates both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives.

In that spirit, *The Future of History* project represents a unique initiative, in that it envisions two narratives, side by side, in dialogue.

The Inner Harbour is part of Lekwungen territory and is a perfect place for the Lekwungen people to present their maritime history of the Coast, which stretches back millennia. It is also the perfect place for the Maritime Museum to do what it has done for decades: showcase the 250 years of settler maritime history on this same Coast.

In short, it is an ideal location for sharing these two histories and perspectives, with respect and empathy.

Just as English is the *lingua franca* of our province in the 21st century, the Chinook Jargon had that role in the 19th. My hope for *The Future of History* project is therefore: *Kloshe Kahkwa*. Let it be.”

Community Philanthropy

Murray Farmer, Chair MMBC Council of Navigators:

“This is a project of reconciliation that will have immense community appeal. Located in the heart of the inner harbour, where it belongs, near the traditional Lekwungen village sites, where they dwelt and prospered for over 10,000 years, it will complete the story of maritime life on the coast that we now all share. It will become perhaps the most important piece of a revitalized museum and cultural precinct in the capital city. People will flock to the impressive shared experience that will complete the maritime circle of understanding and finally tell the long story of life, commerce, science and culture on our diverse coast. By looking back, we can more clearly move forward, to cherish all that we love about the region and the sea. I am pleased to support this partnership and proud to lead a team of volunteers who are determined to help make this possible.”

Sandra Richardson, CEO Victoria Foundation:

“The Victoria Foundation is very pleased to support the *Future of History* project – a remarkable collaboration that will engage and broaden the community's knowledge on the diverse history of our beautiful region. Every person has an important story to weave

into the south island's heritage tapestry. This project will provide a channel for many communities, especially the region's original inhabitants, to continue sharing their stories with dimension and integrity.

When we come together to learn each other's histories, we foster understanding, empathy, and even a curiosity to learn more. A shared and respectful awareness of the past is the bedrock for strengthening communities, and for advancing reconciliation. These are important values the *Future of History* project would share with residents and visitors alike, and are values the Victoria Foundation holds dear, as an organization dedicated to helping ensure that no one in our community is left behind."