

From: "Mochrie, Paul" <Paul.Mochrie@vancouver.ca>
To: "Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"
Date: 3/31/2023 10:21:43 AM
Subject: Upcoming information bulletin on the Robson Memorial (March 31, 2022)

Dear Mayor and Council,

I am writing to inform you that the City will be issuing the below information bulletin today to provide an update on the Robson Memorial. Please keep this information bulletin embargoed until it goes live from the City media email account at approximately 11 am today.

This bulletin has also been shared with the local Nations and the Vancouver Art Gallery. Should you receive media questions on the matter, given the sensitive nature of the memorial, we suggest referring to communications at media@vancouver.ca

Best,
Paul

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The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

~ Content warning: the update below relates to Residential Schools ~

City of Vancouver
Information Bulletin
March 31, 2023

City update on temporary residential school memorial

The City of Vancouver remains committed to bringing the temporary residential school memorial on the steps of the Vancouver Art Gallery to an imminent close in a culturally respectful way.

The City first notified the artist and volunteers keeping vigil on site, of the decision for the memorial to come a conclusion on November 30, 2022. Since then, the City has reinforced the importance of the removal ahead of the two-year memorial anniversary, on May 28, 2023.

This decision is supported by xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. The City thanks the Nations for their guidance and understanding during this process and will continue working with them as we bring the memorial to a close.

As part of the process, the City has invited the artist and the volunteers to a meeting, scheduled to take place later today, to discuss next steps. This will be a private meeting, intended to allow space for the City, the artist and volunteers to engage in culturally sensitive and meaningful conversation. The City will provide the media with an update on the progress in due course.

Cultural Context

The memorial was initially installed in response to the profound need for grieving and healing spaces for residential school survivors and Indigenous peoples.

However, the continuation of the memorial is not aligned with the spiritual practices and cultural protocols of x^wməθk^wəy^əm, S^kwxwú7mesh, and səlilwətaʔ Nations, who share teachings that memorials of this nature are temporary. In x^wməθk^wəy^əm, S^kwxwú7mesh, and səlilwətaʔ teachings handed down through generations, as long as the memorial remains, the spirits of the children will remain tethered to the items placed on the steps and cannot move on.

The City recognizes that teachings such as these form the basis of a rich legal tradition upheld since time immemorial on these lands. The City has made a commitment to implement UNDRIP and maintain government-to-government relationships with each of the Nations, and their authority on matters of cultural safety must be respected; therefore, it is of great importance and urgency that the temporary memorial end, and ceremony is held to allow the 215 children to complete their journey.

The City has a responsibility to recognize the cultural protocols of the x^wməθk^wəy^əm, S^kwxwú7mesh, and səlilwətaʔ Nations and to respect their rights and titles. The City should have acted sooner to bring the memorial to a close once it was aware that the local Nations were not consulted and had not given formal permission prior to the memorial's installation.

Next Steps

The City acknowledges there is still a need for healing and mourning spaces. While the temporary memorial cannot remain on the steps of the Vancouver Art Gallery, the City will continue to work with x^wməθk^wəy^əm, S^kwxwú7mesh, and səlilwətaʔ Nations and Urban Indigenous communities to create a more permanent and culturally appropriate memorial.

In the interim, the City is committed to working with volunteers and the artist to identify interim spaces to heal and explore temporary vigils to grieve, opportunities for ongoing education and raising awareness of residential schools, and continue supporting Indigenous markets.

The City understands the emotional and difficult nature of the process, especially for Indigenous community members, residential school survivors, and their families. The Indian Residential School Survivors Society Emergency Crisis Line is available 24 hours, 7 days a week, for those that may need counselling or support after receiving this distressing information. Call 1-800-721-0066 or the 24-hour crisis line 1-866-925-4419.