

New, Purpose-Built Vancouver Art Gallery will Benefit Entire Visual Arts Community, Position Vancouver and BC Globally

VAG announces creation of an “artist advisory group” for a new Vancouver Art Gallery

VANCOUVER – The entire visual arts community in Vancouver and British Columbia stands to benefit from a new purpose-built space for the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the institutions’ board and leadership are stepping up their efforts to ensure all voices are heard in the discussion about how the new Gallery space should be developed.

By February 1st, the City of Vancouver is expected to present a report to City Council regarding the future of Larwill Park located at Georgia and Cambie, and the VAG’s request that two acres of this city-owned property be designated for the development of the new space.

“After years of discussion, research, and public consultation, we have reached a key decision point in terms of our goal of a new building,” says Kathleen Bartels, Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery. “Development of a new space, one that is purpose-built, will allow the Gallery to better meet the growing and changing needs of both the City, the Province, and our visual arts community.”

Prominent artist and Gallery supporter Stephen Waddell agrees. “It is high time we had a space for the visual arts in this city that can truly showcase the richness and diversity of our artists,” he says. “The needs and views of our artists should be at the centre of this discussion. We have some of the most exciting visual artists in the world, and the Vancouver Art Gallery needs a much larger, more prominent space to showcase their achievements.”

A group of artists launched the online petition this summer, and have already collected hundreds of signatures from other artists, critics, art writers, educators, curators, gallery workers and gallerists who support the project.

In response to this significant support, Bartels announced that the Gallery is putting together an artists’ advisory group to provide high level input and recommendations to the Gallery throughout the process of developing the new building.

“It is critical to us that the voices of those who work in the visual arts are heard through this process,” says Bartels. “Over the summer, the Gallery reached out to an even wider array of arts stakeholders and institutions to continue the discussion about what the needs of the community are, and this new advisory group will ensure the needs of those who will most benefit from a new Gallery will be well represented.”

“We want everyone to be a part of this exciting project,” says VAG Board Chair Bruce Munro Wright. “The Board couldn’t be more proud of the work of the management and staff of the VAG, and we are confident that now is the time to move forward with these plans.”

Wright pointed to the results of a recent survey of 149 major art museums in North America, including the Met, MOMA and the AGO, that ranks the Vancouver Art Gallery in the top twenty in seven measurements, including annual admission revenue, membership, school program, corporate sponsorship and attendance.

“The VAG is in an ideal position to launch this project now. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to work together to build the kind of space for the visual arts that our dynamic, diverse, and growing city deserves,” he says.

Bartels says the many programs and collaborations the Vancouver Art Gallery already has with a wide range of local artists, arts and educational groups are the kinds of work a new purpose-built space would allow the organization to expand upon.

“We agree with the community’s feedback that emerging artists in Vancouver need more support, and a new Vancouver Art Gallery will allow us more opportunities to provide this. We also want to continue to grow events such as FUSE, which has been so successful in showcasing local talent to a wider and wider audience. At the same time, we want to have the space to more fully reflect Vancouver’s unique place in the Asia Pacific and the many rich traditions of First Nations art,” she says.

We need new space to be able to properly exhibit and store our continually growing permanent collection that is a legacy for the people of Vancouver and British Columbia. All of this becomes possible if we get the go ahead at Larwill Park,” she says.

“We know there is a growing interest in the visual arts in Vancouver, and we hope people will chime in with their support for expanding the presence and role of the VAG in cultivating and promoting it,” says Bartels. “We look forward to working with everyone to build on our successes, and to the construction of a new Vancouver Art Gallery.”

In the coming weeks, the Gallery will be adding more to the discussion, releasing an overview and recommendations of the business plan for the new building, and working with the City on a public consultation for the project.