

**8 April 2013 Council, Jim Wright, 8300 Osgoode Drive, re item 9,  
Museum Feasibility**

I support the ongoing museum project. I aim to share ideas for doing it with excellence in keeping with the City of Richmond's mission.

You're probably familiar with a process called *appreciative inquiry*, which simply means "Build on what you do well." Let's use that process. What we've done well in recent years is the Richmond Olympic Oval.

Since the financial spin around the Oval is debatable, it's not relevant. We just want to continue the cycle of success.

First of all, the Oval building is striking but functional, using British Columbia materials to express our values, especially with the denim pine ceiling from a forest brought down by pine beetles that has literally risen above that immense setback. In that context, my heart sank when I saw the artist's sketch of the museum's signature element, an ~~ineffective~~ imitation of the Sydney Opera House. The intent was good, but let's aim higher, as we successfully did with the Richmond Olympic Oval.

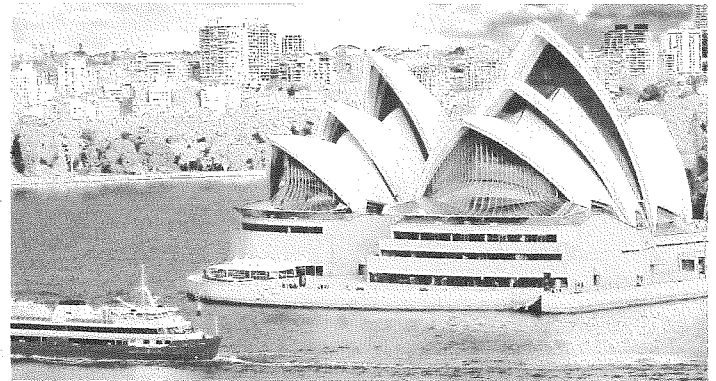
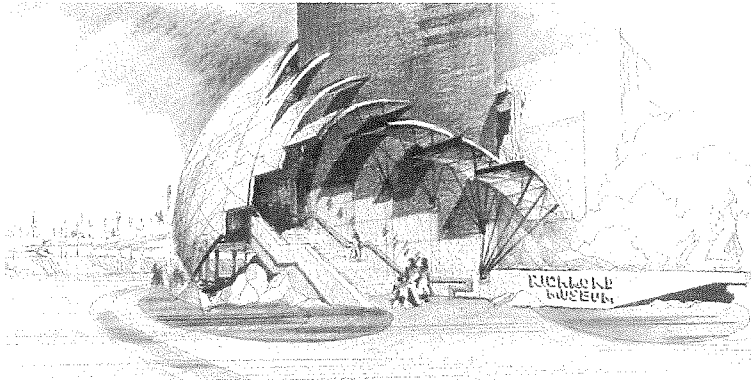
Second, the Oval building serves its range of purposes at the consistent level of *excellence*. I've been there for the Olympic skating and the Winterfest celebrations and on ordinary days, and the quality level stays way up. At 9 or 9:30 in the evening, the building is still buzzing with focused happy healthy activity of many kinds. When I listened to *Oval* General Manager John Mills describe the Olympic Museum at a council meeting, I went from skeptic to unsuspecting supporter, especially in view of the track record that he and the Oval have established. The Richmond Museum already does its thing in a top-quality way, but it somehow has to prove itself on a larger scale before the public will buy into a large-scale capital cost, which may not even be needed. I discussed one way in my Digging Deep column in last Friday's *Richmond Review*, so I won't repeat it now, but I will attach it with my speaking notes for the recording secretary.

Third, the Oval seems to have developed expertise in forming partnerships in which it primarily wins for Richmond and simultaneously enables its partners to win. In contrast, I and a lot of citizens feel <sup>concern</sup> dismay at the way the City often seems to get taken to the ~~the~~ <sup>advantage of by</sup> cleaners by its developer partners of one kind or another. At least that's the perception. In the museum resolution, there's talk of a "donation" from YVR in connection with a museum for their mall. But YVR and their mall should be a big winner from the museum. (There's a museum of flight in Langley, but no museum tells the YVR story of Grant McConachie and Russ Baker and a whole lot more.) Can the Richmond Museum be a *senior partner* with the airport and airline businesses? The basic idea in the resolution is good if we can do it with *confident strength*. <sup>perhaps</sup> Can the museum <sup>can</sup> go to the oval and bottle some of that. Or kidnap John Mills until he shares the Oval success?

Please do.

*Listening to the speaker before me,  
I'm delighted that we're further  
ahead than I realized.*

## Inspiring the world with Richmond's destination museum



Consultant's sketch of proposed new Richmond Museum building and photo of the Sydney Opera House in Australia.

### Digging Deep Jim Wright

While browsing the *Review* online, I smiled at a sketch. At first glance it was a baby Sydney Opera House. The words said “Richmond pitches \$59-million destination museum.” I thought “April Fool’s joke!” I checked the date, late March, and guessed a story for April 1st had jumped the gun.

Besides the sketch, a seeming clue to a spoof was the \$59-million figure. It’s famed as the price Richmond paid for the Garden City Lands. Since that won an unloved Teddy Award, a national title for civic waste, the reminder seemed odd.

The recent cries of “Waste!” at the smaller Olympic Museum plan for the Richmond Oval were dying down, so I also couldn’t fathom the city stoking the embers. Why spring a more-costly museum on us? We don’t covet a lifetime achievement plaque at the Teddies.

Once I realized the “destination museum” idea was not in jest, it got me thinking about the terrific mini-museum we have now. It’s in a cranny of the Richmond Cultural Centre. The staff who work wonders there do deserve more room to help us save and celebrate our legacies.

“How to help?” I wondered. “Are there ways to nurture our museum’s role?” As tends to happen, I turned to our central park, the Garden City Lands, which ought not to be a waste.

The park had answers, starting with its agricultural legacy. By law, Agricultural Land Reserve uses have precedence there, and the park should convey ALR values because we honour them and Harold Steves and all who’ve stood for such values. As a young MLA, Harold did much to found the ALR—on April 18, 1973—to conserve BC farmland and foster agriculture. Forty years later, the ALR remains a model for the world. That’s great substance for exhibits.

Picturing it, I thought there could be displays in an educational building near the Lansdowne Road entrance to the lands, like the Nature House at the Richmond Nature Park or the Red Barn at the Terra Nova Sharing Farm. And there could be interpretive features on farm-road trails or in playgrounds or wherever they'd have best effect.

As it happens, by the way, anti-ALR forces chose the Garden City Lands as a battleground, and our citizens repelled them for years against all odds, so there's no better site for ALR exhibits. Also, our museum put on an excellent agricultural exhibition last year, so there's no doubt they do it well. I feel certain they'd do just as well with our other legacies too, given practical kinds of support.

A millennia-old legacy, the delta sphagnum-moss ecosystem on part of the Garden City Lands, is likely the only one in the world in a city centre. Neglect has left it in critical condition, but it's worth all the care it needs. The museum could exhibit that treasure in the context of the Richmond islands' range of wetlands.

When taken together, our various wetlands are a potential Ramsar Wetland of International Importance in the long term. The exhibit might immerse visitors in that community goal and our progress toward it.

The unique natural viewscapes from the Garden City Lands are priceless too, and no doubt the ALR uses of the lands for agriculture, recreation and conservation will enhance the views. With respectful curating, our museum staff could exhibit nature's art as far as the eye can see.

There's much more to include in the museum's roles. In time, the Department of National Defence area to the east ("DND Lands") will extend the central park if the City of Richmond learns from early mistakes with the Garden City Lands, and the armory there could house museum growth.

Our museum exists to better our community quality of life, but by then it would serve the world. One might call it a destination museum.

Note: The Richmond's Garden City Conservation blog has hundreds of relevant articles. For topics like "Ramsar Wetland of International Importance" and "DND Lands," just use the blog's search box.

*Jim Wright is president of the Garden City Conservation Society.*