



Kitimat Museum & Archives

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**Monday to Saturday, 10 am to 5 p.m.
Closed Sundays and Holidays**

Spring 2019 Extra

Kitimat Heritage Group Checks for CN Station Life Signs

The CN Station is iconic for Kitimat and Canada, representing access for construction workers and residents who ventured by rail seeking work and a new life in Canada's post-war era economic development.

Since early 2018, the Kitimat Heritage Group (KHG) has discussed the state and future of the CN Station building after it suddenly became vacant in 2017. A plan was launched—to explore whether the Station could be refurbished, what the costs would be, and whether CN Rail would approve and grant a land lease. The KHG vision statement identified restoration and renovation to the building for community functions such as markets, meetings, celebrations, a display area, and retail space. The latter would provide a significant revenue stream for ongoing maintenance, utilities, and insurance.

In December 2018, District of Kitimat Council provided the KHG with funding to hire architect Alora Griffin to assess the building. Ms. Griffin's report states "the building should remain in its current location for several reasons. Firstly, because of its size and lack of a wood floor, it would be impossible to lift it and transport it to a new location." The cost to dismantle and rebuild is "cost prohibitive." Relocation does not support heritage as the association between rail line and station will be lost and so moving will not receive Heritage BC Legacy funding.

In the winter of 2018-2019, the KHG formed the *Save the CN Station* Working Committee with Gillian Mullins as lead. On April 30, 2019, Gillian with KHG Chair Walter Thorne, retired mayor and strong CN Station supporter Joanne Monaghan, and Museum Director Louise Avery met with CN senior officials.

CN will not allow any refurbishment of the CN Station building, only relocation. Risk and liability are concerns to CN so the building will remain boarded up and empty, with perhaps a fence added. CN has an interest in selling its 7.5 acres and part of the station sits on one end of that property. The value of the land is too great at this time to tie it to a lease.

CN offered to provide some funds for relocating parts of the Station. The KHG will not relocate parts, and explained that the building's exterior boards have asbestos. Under the BC Building Code, asbestos abatement must be completed before the building can be demolished.



Photograph taken by Walter Turkenburg perhaps of the Station opening in 1955. Courtesy of Jerry Turkenburg.

But municipal and provincial heritage designation provides a level of protection for the building. A demolition permit would need to be issued by the District of Kitimat. Given the municipal

heritage designation, that is not likely to occur. Also, the cost of asbestos removal is saving the building from demolition. In effect, the CN Station is in limbo—no demolition, no refurbishment.

On May 14, 2019 the KHG held a public meeting to update those present on CN's position. The Kitimat Heritage Group will not be removing parts because of asbestos issues, the cost of abatement, and the loss of heritage value, given relocation.

Those present at the meeting want the initiative to go forward in another way—to seek national heritage designation for the railway station for protection from demolition. There exists federal legislation—the Heritage Railway Stations Protection Act. If the Sites and Monuments Board of Canada agrees to designate, it submits its recommendation to the Minister for approval. The Minister responsible for Parks Canada, the Minister of the Environment, officially designates the railway station and informs the railway company of the decision. Visit [Parks Canada Heritage Railway Station Protections Act](#).

Parks Canada and the Sites and Monuments Board of Canada have been in touch. A representative plans to speak with CN directly about the Kitimat situation but asks us to note that obtaining designation cannot force CN to maintain the Station.

If you would like more information or can assist with ongoing work, please contact Gillian Mullins or Walter Thorne directly or through the Museum at 250-632-8950. The next *Save the CN Station* meeting is planned for September 2019.