**If We Don’t Imagine the Future of Museums Today, There May Not Be a Tomorrow**

While the future of the Royal BC Museum has been a hot topic for the past few years, many British Columbians are likely unaware that the future of Canada’s entire museum sector is at a crossroad.

More than 2,700 museums, galleries, cultural centres, science centres, and heritage sites across the country fall into the broad category of “museum” (of these 2,700, BC is home to around 500). Federal funding, policies, and strategic priorities for Canada’s museum sector are governed by the National Museum Policy. This policy was last updated in 1990; 34 years ago. When the National Museum Policy was last updated, Google did not exist, less than 1% of the global population had access to the internet, one Canadian dollar had more than twice the purchasing power it does today, the last Residential School in Canada had not yet closed, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was still 18 years away from being established. In 2024, Canada’s museum sector, an industry that contributes more than $53.1 *billion* to the country’s annual economy and educates tens of millions each year, is governed by a policy made for a world that no longer exists.

While the Government of Canada promised in 2022 to consult the sector and Canadians who are passionate about museums to reimagine the National Museum Policy the following year, this work is more than a year behind schedule. With a looming federal election, it is unknown if the reimagined policy will ever see the light of day.

What could the future of museums look like? Much like the shift libraries have made from being primarily places where people access books, to being places that respond to community needs, museums are making the shift from being primarily about objects, to being about people and their stories.

You can see this shift in science centres like the Exploration Place in Prince George opening a community kitchen to educate about local food production and healthy eating. You see this in programs like the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria’s “Extreme Mentorship” program that pairs local artists with youth to help support the next generation of contemporary artists. You see this in the establishment of new museums like the Chinese Canadian Museum in both Victoria and Vancouver that are providing space for communities to celebrate their presence and contributions to Canada.

If you care about the future of museums, what can you do? The first and easiest thing you can do is visit a museum. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its lasting impacts on recreation, visitation rates fell by 80% in 2021. While some organizations have returned to pre-COVID numbers of visitors, many arts, culture, and heritage organizations are still struggling to bring back their audiences.

The second thing you can do is advocate with local, provincial, and federal elected officials for the bright future you would like to see. BC is scheduled for an election in the fall and a federal election looms. While 89% of Canadians believe that museums matter, museum lovers are often very quiet and the future of museums is rarely an election issue. If you love museums and want them to be a part of a brighter future, it’s critical that you visit, volunteer, advocate, donate, and engage with them. Museums work to preserve the past but without support, they will quickly become history themselves.