



Steveston Historical Society

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September 25, 2026

Chair and Members
Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee
City of Richmond
6911 No. 3 Road
Richmond, BC V6Y 2C1

Re: Heritage Boat Restoration Program Extension (Report to Committee dated September 4, 2026)

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Steveston Historical Society, I am writing in strong support of the staff recommendation to extend the Heritage Boat Restoration Program at Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site for two years.

Heritage organizations increasingly recognize that traditional trades are best kept alive by practising them, not only by preserving the objects they produced. A restored boat on display tells part of the story, but a working shipwright shows visitors how that boat was made and keeps the skills in use. UNESCO has recognized traditional wooden boatbuilding as living heritage, and the ÉCONOMUSÉE network, which began in Quebec and now includes BC Artisans at Work, is built on the same idea: skilled trades are sustained by practising them in public, where visitors can watch, ask questions and perhaps even ultimately be inspired to learn the skills on display. Britannia's program applies that principle to one of the most important trades in this region's history.

In two years, the program has restored two heritage vessels and the site's working slipways, and put a practising shipwright in front of thousands of students, tour visitors and festival-goers. What strikes us is less the tally than what it represents.

Britannia has become a place where boats are worked on, not just displayed, and visitors notice: the teacher and visitor comments in the staff report keep returning to how much it meant to see the work happening. More importantly, the skills are being passed on. Students handle real tools beside a real restoration, and volunteer Shipwright Assistants are learning the trade by doing it. That group is still small, but person-to-person transfer is how traditional trades survive, and no exhibit can replace it. The work also deepens the stories the site can tell. The Crystal S, whose grant application the Society was proud to support in 2024, will anchor an exhibit on the Japanese Canadian boatbuilders who played a central role in building Steveston's fishing fleet. Recognition from Tourism Richmond and Heritage BC, and staff's note that

the program is unique in Canada, suggest that Britannia now offers a model other heritage sites can learn from.

As the staff report notes, this work depends on a skilled person on site. Caring for heritage vessels, running public programs and supporting the site's operations requires someone who understands both wooden boat repair and a public heritage site, and this cannot be contracted out. The Shipyard Operations Supervisor position is what makes the program work. Without new funding it ends next spring, and the progress, volunteer base and knowledge built up over the pilot would be difficult to rebuild.

The proposed extension would allow the restoration of the Iona to be completed and give staff time to develop a business plan and long-term service level. We encourage Council to approve it. We also hope that, once the business plan is in place, Council will consider a permanent commitment so that Britannia remains a place where this trade is still practised.

Thank you for your continued investment in Steveston's maritime heritage.

Sincerely,

Linda Barnes, Co-Chair
Steveston Historical Society

Joanne Teraguchi, Co-Chair
Steveston Historical Society