

January 17, 2019

Mayor and Council
City of Vancouver
453 West 12th Ave
Vancouver, BC
V5Y 1V4

I am writing on behalf of the DVBIA in response to the Council amendment to defer the approval of funding in the Capital Budget for improvements to Robson Plaza on December 18th, 2018 at the regular Council meeting.

It is our opinion that there should be no delay in construction plans for the permanent plaza, and that the funding should remain in place for this project.

Robson Plaza as part of Block 51 is one of the few large public spaces available downtown. It is regularly a host to marquee events like TD Vancouver International Jazz Festival and Amacon's Vancouver Christmas Tree lighting amongst many others. It has major significance as a gathering space and was identified by City Council as a place to pilot closure and programming from 2011-2015. Intensive seasonal placemaking and many rounds of stakeholder and public consultation helped contribute to a vision for the plaza. Based on the pilot's success, Council made a decision in April 2016 to close the space to traffic and design a permanent plaza. It was a long time coming.

The DVBIA has been a strategic partner with the City since the 2010 Olympic Winter Games in efforts to build successful public spaces. We have allocated significant resources to support City initiatives such as VIVA Vancouver, Robson Redux, and the stewardship of Block 51 in addition to our own placemaking initiatives such as our More Awesome Now alleyways, and The Perch POPS (privately-owned public spaces). These most recent programs were inspired by our organization's strategic plan emphasizing an enhanced experience for locals and visitors in the public realm and with consideration of the City's Transportation Plan 2040, Greenest City 2020 Plan, and West End Community Plan which all emphasize prioritization of pedestrians and the importance of vibrant and safe public spaces to foster social interaction.

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Downtown Vancouver BIA

Plazas are those 'Third Places' that provide opportunities to interact, connect, and sojourn in an accessible and inclusive space. In an increasingly dense urban environment that often has its citizens living in small quarters, the public realm becomes the alternative living room for those that do not otherwise have a welcoming common space to provide respite. Space is an amenity and access to space is vital to a livable city. We have collected data over the last few years in our public spaces that show extremely positive visitor experiences and how lively public spaces contribute to personal well-being. Details are available in our [Perch measurement report](#).

Unfortunately, construction has been delayed since design approval by Council in December 2016 which has slowed momentum enough for this Council to consider the project a less immediate priority. In its current make-shift state, the space's practical functionality doesn't lend to smooth event hosting or operational up-keep and the optics are poor. Deferring the construction of Robson's permanent plaza would only emphasize the temporariness of this place for people and all of the momentum generated and resources spent on the path to a permanent plaza would be lost. This recent decision does not align with initiatives that the City is currently working on including Places for People and Plaza Stewardship strategies or acknowledge the value of findings from this work and previous placemaking endeavours.

In consideration to the points above, the DVBIA kindly requests that the construction phase for the permanent Robson Plaza design go ahead without delay as originally budgeted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Gauthier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a long, sweeping underline.

Charles Gauthier, MCP
President & CEO
DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION