

Vancouver Waterfront Park grand opening a smashing success

Posted by Chris Brown

Monday, October 1, 2018



Thousands turned out to enjoy the first day at the city's newest and brightest tourist attraction

VANCOUVER — “Awesome!”

“Pretty neat.”

“This is so cool!”

Just a few of the phrases overheard this past weekend as the city of Vancouver officially cut the ribbon on its new 7.3-acre Waterfront Park. Thousands showed up Saturday to enjoy the centerpiece of a \$1.5 billion development by Gramor Development.



Thousands turned out for the grand opening of the new Vancouver Waterfront Park. Photo by Mike Schultz

“Nice face-lift, Vancouver!” said Congresswoman Jaime Herrera Beutler at a ceremony to mark the park’s grand opening. “This will be a huge economic expansion in an area that has seen some really high highs, and some really low lows.”

“It’s definitely world class, no doubt about that,” said Barry Cain, head of Gramor Development. “But as to being a top five destination? I can’t, for the life of me, think of four others that would be above this.”

Cain, who received a standing ovation from the gathered crowd, and wiped away tears at one point, quipped that they picked a really bad time to kick off the massive development, right at the start of the Great Recession in 2008.

“Right before we closed on the land, this trestle hadn’t been funded yet, and I wasn’t sure what we should do,” said Cain. “So I went to mayor Royce (Pollard) and said, ‘mayor Royce, we got a little bit of the money but we’re a long way away from it, and we have to close on the land. Are we going to get through this, or not? Is this gonna get built?’, and he said ‘Barry, it’s gonna get

built. We're gonna get this done, I guarantee you.' And so we closed on the land, and thank God he was right, because otherwise I'd still be in hiding somewhere.”



Vancouver Mayor Anne McEnery-Ogle speaks during Saturday's grand opening of the new Waterfront Park. Photo by Mike Schultz

Ultimately the city did get funding for a key project, connecting Esther Street underneath the railroad tracks.

“That waterfront access project was the first of many successful partnerships in this endeavor,” said Vancouver Mayor Anne McEnery-Ogle, “and it was a \$44 million effort that didn't just provide access to the site, but it also improved rail safety and efficiency as well.”

The park was designed by PWL Partnership of Canada, and features over half a mile of walking trails, beach access, and much more. But the centerpiece is the Grant Street Pier, which extends 90-feet out over the Columbia River, suspended by cables on the shore.

“I don't know if people realize how important rivers are to us culturally,” said Washington Senator Maria Cantwell. “When you think about it, they're a metaphor for life. And here we have a river that goes from the headwaters of Canada all the way to the Pacific, and now we get to enjoy a little path of it as it flows through the city of Vancouver.”



Barry Cain, president of Gramor Development, wipes away tears at the dedication of the new Vancouver Waterfront Park. Photo by Mike Schultz

“This Vancouver Waterfront development is a treasure that I’m sure we soon won’t be able to imagine ourselves without,” said state Senator Annette Cleveland of Vancouver. “In addition to the additional construction jobs and economic benefit this project brought to our community, ongoing business activity at the completed waterfront is estimated to generate 1,364 direct jobs, and will contribute \$64.8 million in annual labor income.”

Cleveland says between those directly at the waterfront, and connected to it, the development is expected to create over 2,000 permanent new jobs in the city. City manager Eric Holmes, who helped drive the project since his arrival in 2007, said those economic benefits are only part of the reason for the development.



The Grant Street Pier at the new Vancouver Waterfront Park extends 90-feet over the Columbia River. Photo by Mike Schultz

“I think the practical reasons that the city did this is pretty apparent,” said Holmes, “economic development, community building, you’ve heard the numbers today, tourism, identity. But there’s another reason that is a little less apparent. We, together, created this spectacular and special place right here in Vancouver as one that speaks to the heart and the minds of our citizens. It’s a place where couples will become engaged, where families will celebrate milestones, a place where grandparents will play with grandchildren, a place to tell strangers about when we meet them on planes in faraway places, and a place to lure our friends here from out of town.”

The waterfront is home to two major restaurants already — Twigs Bistro, and WildFins. Next year several other restaurants are expected to open, including a Maryhill Winery tasting room, brew pub, and pizza establishment. Gramor is also working on a 132 room Indigo Hotel, which will also feature 40 rooftop condominiums and retail space. When the Port of Vancouver eventually finishes its redevelopment of the Terminal 1 space, including a new public market building, the Waterfront Renaissance Trail will run five miles, from the new waterfront east to Wintler Park.



Vancouver mayor Anne McEnery-Ogle and Washington Senator Maria Cantwell tour the new Waterfront Park ahead of the grand opening. Photo by Chris Brown