

Waterfront Vancouver celebrates first anniversary of grand opening

Businesses keep coming as construction development continues

By [Anthony Macuk](#), Columbian business reporter

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Libby Drapela, left, and Danica Drapela of Ridgefield stroll along the Columbia River at The Waterfront Vancouver early this month. (Zach Wilkinson/ The Columbian) Photo Gallery





One year ago today, an estimated 15,000 people gathered to celebrate the debut of Vancouver Waterfront Park and Grant Street Pier, the central features of The Waterfront Vancouver development.

The development's first two restaurants had opened a few days prior, but for all practical purposes the Sept. 29 event marked the official opening of The Waterfront Vancouver, a years-in-the-making project to reconnect the city to the Columbia River and transform an abandoned industrial zone into a bustling urban residential and business hub.

At the time, the amenities were limited to the park, the pier and two restaurants. But three still-under-construction towers along Waterfront Way loomed over the proceedings, offering a hint what was to come.

The subsequent year has been marked by a constant stream of announcements and openings. More of the development's seven "Phase One" buildings have come online, residents have moved in and business tenants have set up shop.

TERMINAL 1 SET TO BECOME MARKET, HOTEL, OFFICES

The Waterfront Vancouver isn't Vancouver's only waterfront area undergoing redevelopment. Directly east lies Terminal 1, another redevelopment site with big plans to become a new downtown destination. Understandably, people occasionally confuse the two.

The sites are two halves of the same former riverside industrial zone, located next to each other with no clear separation (the dividing line is a small access road one block east of Esther Street). They together make up one contiguous space between the Columbia River and the BNSF Railway berm, extending west from Columbia Street.

But the two areas have different owners, and the two redevelopment projects are being undertaken separately and with minimal coordination. The developed blocks at the waterfront are owned by their developers, and the unclaimed blocks are owned by Columbia Waterfront, a subsidiary of Gramor Development. The streets and Waterfront Park area are owned by the city of Vancouver, which worked with Gramor to develop the master plan for the 35-acre area.

Terminal 1 is owned by the Port of Vancouver, and the port is leading the development process, partnering with private developers to build individual blocks in accordance with the port's master plan for the 10-acre site. The centerpiece of that plan is to demolish the former Red Lion Hotel and replace it with a public market house akin to Seattle's Pike Place Market, which would sit on a rebuilt pier.

Terminal 1 also includes a quartet of developable blocks to the north of the former hotel, and the port has a plan for each: two mixed-use buildings, one office building and a hotel. Only one of those projects is currently underway: the hotel on the southwest block. Vesta Hospitality recently broke ground on an AC Hotel by Marriott, which will be a 150-room, seven-story structure with a hidden interior parking garage.

The hotel is targeted to open in mid-2021.

The first round of buildings represents about \$300 million of an overall investment that is expected to top \$1.5 billion, and it's enough for the Waterfront's mastermind to declare victory.

"I think we created the top destination in town," said Barry Cain, president of lead Waterfront developer Gramor Development of Tualatin, Ore. "I think this is it; we did it."

Phase One: restaurants

In September 2018 there were two finished buildings, each with one restaurant: WildFin American Grill to the east of Grant Street Pier and Twigs Bistro and Martini Bar to the west.

The original plan called for all the Phase One buildings to be ready for the grand opening, Cain said, but the realities of construction pushed several of the them onto longer time lines.

THE WATERFRONT VANCOUVER

The lineup

The Waterfront Vancouver is home to an ever-growing number of restaurants, tasting rooms and other retail establishments. Here's a list of everything that's opened to date, and the scheduled dates for everything in the pipeline for the next year.

Year one:

- WildFin American Grill, September 2018.
- Twigs Bistro & Martini Bar, September 2018.
- The Daily Catch walk-up window, April.
- Maryhill Winery tasting room, April.
- Stack 571 Burger and Whiskey Bar, August.
- Barlow's Public House, August.

Future:

- Airfield Estates tasting room, October.
- OnPoint Community Credit Union, November.
- Brian Carter Cellars tasting room, November.
- Pizzeria sul Lago, 2019.
- ZoomCare health clinic, 2019.
- Pepper Bridge Winery and Amavi Cellars joint tasting room, 2019.
- Jorge's Latin American Cuisine, Spring 2020.
- Hotel Indigo, 2020.
- El Gaucho steakhouse, 2020.
- Naked Winery wine bar, 2020.

"We just didn't get there, so we had to open with just the restaurants," he said. "But I think it turned out OK."

The rest of Phase One started to catch up in December with the opening of the Rediviva apartment building and the Murdock office tower, both built by

Gramor. Gramor also built the two restaurant buildings, which were later named The Don and The Jean in honor of Cain's parents.

The rest of the Phase One slate came from other developers. The RiverWest apartment building from HSP Properties began construction in the summer of 2017 and its first residential tenants arrived in June of this year.

At the eastern end of the row, Kirkland Development broke ground on the Hotel Indigo and Kirkland Tower condos in the summer of 2018. The two adjacent buildings are being built as a single project and are scheduled to open next year.

All of the Phase One buildings include ground-floor retail components, and they quickly began to fill. April saw the arrival of two new commercial tenants: the Maryhill Winery Tasting Room in the Don building and The Daily Catch, which is WildFin's walk-up window on the side of the Jean Building.

Stack 571 Burger and Whiskey Bar debuted its new Vancouver location in the Rediviva building in August, and later that month Barlow's Public House opened on the second floor of the Don Building.

More food and wine

The restaurant growth isn't slowing. Pizzeria sul Lago will open later this year in the Murdock Building, and Pacific Northwest steakhouse El Gaucho has announced that it will open its second Portland-area location next year in the Hotel Indigo.

Most recently, Jorge's Tequila Factory owner Jorge Castro announced that he will move his downtown Vancouver restaurant to the second floor of the Jean Building, reopening it under the name Jorge's Latin American Cuisine. The new iteration will be retooled with a more upscale menu and atmosphere.

The large roster of restaurants was always part of the plan, Cain said, but there's been another area of interest that he hadn't expected: wineries. No fewer than five wineries have followed Maryhill's lead and announced plans to open new venues.

First there was Naked Winery, which signed up to open a wine bar next year in Kirkland Tower. Then Pepper Bridge Winery and Amavi Cellars announced a joint tasting room on the ground floor of the Rediviva.

Earlier this month Brian Carter Cellars revealed plans for its own tasting room at the Rediviva, and one week later Airfield Estates announced plans to open at RiverWest. Aside from the Naked Winery, all plan to open their doors by the end of the year.

"That was one of the biggest surprises to me," Cain said. "The wineries like to sell directly to consumers now."

One year at the Waterfront Vancouver



[Barlow's tap wall draws interest on Waterfront Vancouver](#)

Tasha Graeff took the plastic card, walked to the beer tap and poured a locally brewed IPA into a glass.



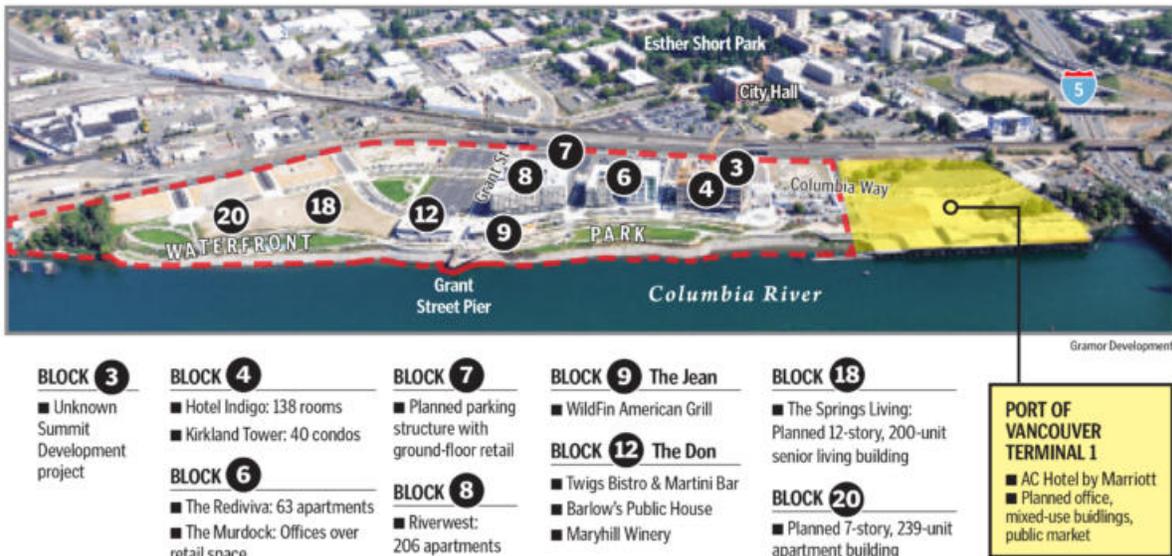
[Living the Waterfront Vancouver life](#)

Among the most notable of the many changes that have reshaped The Waterfront Vancouver in the past year: People live there!

Cain said he now sees potential for the Waterfront to become a regional wine destination, joining other tasting room hot spots like Woodinville, northeast of Seattle.

More retail announcements are likely in the coming months; there's still at least one retail space available in each of the Murdock, Rediviva and Don buildings, and as many as eight in the R

The Waterfront Vancouver



iverWest building.

“It’s just a matter of how we split up the spaces,” said RiverWest project manager Josh Oliva.

Other new tenants

The retail lineup is starting to expand. OnPoint Credit Union is in the process of building a new branch at the Murdock, scheduled to open in November. And walk-in health clinic ZoomCare has quietly claimed one of the ground floor suites at RiverWest.

The apartments are filling. RiverWest is about 56 percent leased, according to Oliva, and Cain said the Rediviva is about 85 percent leased. The Murdock’s office space is about 80 percent occupied, he added, and he expects it to hit 100 percent in about another month.

Cain said he expects the overall development to wind up being about 75 percent residential when all is said and done, but in the shorter term he hopes to see another office project to supplement the Murdock. Oliva offered a similar assessment, calling for more offices and a greater overall diversity of uses at the Waterfront.

The district tends to be more of an evening and weekend destination at the moment, he said, and the addition of the Hotel Indigo and more offices will help drive daytime traffic, which will in turn spur the arrival of new retail uses such as a coffee shop or a fast-casual food option.

“It can’t be all restaurants and bars down there,” he said. “We need some other retail too.”

There's been no shortage of business for the existing tenants, however, and the new arrivals haven't taken any of the traffic from the original duo. Attila Szabo, whose company owns WildFin, Daily Catch and Stack 571, said the burger restaurant has enjoyed a strong opening and WildFin has had a consistently good first year.

He declined to share sales numbers, but stated that Vancouver has been the busiest of WildFin's five locations. And he said he expects traffic will only increase as the waterfront continues to expand.

"There's a huge residential component that is yet to be tapped," he said.

The next projects

Kirkland Tower and Hotel Indigo are the last of the Phase One buildings, and Cain said there isn't really an official "Phase Two." Future buildings will be announced and constructed on a rolling basis until all the waterfront's 21 blocks have been filled.

Several buildings have already been announced, although none have broken ground. California-based Jackson Square Properties has plans for an apartment building on Block 20 at the western end of the district, and The Springs Living has announced a 12-story senior living facility on the adjacent Block 18.

Gramor Development plans to build a 740-space parking garage on Block 7 to replace the surface parking on several other blocks, freeing them for development. That project is scheduled to break ground next year and open in 2021.

Summit Development previously announced plans for an apartment tower on Block 3 that would have utilized a new type of wood product called cross-laminated timber. That project appears to have stalled, but Summit still owns the block and could revive it or propose an alternative.

Twelve blocks remain officially unclaimed as of this month, although Cain said several of them have potential deals in the works, including Blocks 14, 17 and 21.

The full build-out process could take as long as eight or nine more years, Cain said, depending on economic conditions and the confidence of future developers. Business news headlines in recent months have reflected apprehension about a possible recession on the horizon, but when asked about that risk, Cain didn't sound concerned.

The big worry, he said, was that a recession back in 2016 could have scared away the initial group of businesses and knee-capped the project before it got off the ground. But at this point the waterfront district is well-established.

"For the next guys, it's been proven," Cain said.