

[UPDATE] New West ready to be wowed by public art

Community invited to WOW's arrival and official unveiling

[Theresa McManus](#) / New West Record

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Parts of WOW New Westminster are being assembled at a site on the Fraser River and will arrive at Westminster Pier Park on Nov. 23, when the the public art will be installed. Community members are invited to watch WOW be assembled on Monday and to attend the official opening on Saturday, Nov. 28. Photograph By Contributed

Royal City residents are invited to be wowed by the largest installation of the 2014 to 2016 Vancouver Biennale when it's installed in Westminster Pier Park next week.

Barry Mowatt, founder of the Vancouver Biennale, said WOW New Westminster is 140 feet long and up to 40 feet high. Designed by Brazilian artist Jose Resende, the piece consists of four 40-foot shipping containers positioned to form a W.

"It's designed to really play with the space, with the bridges," he said of its waterfront locale.

According to a press release from the city, steel cables are used as tie beams and will keep the shipping containers balanced. The city anticipates the piece will provoke conversation around New Westminster's historic identity as a hub of shipping, industry and transportation in British Columbia.

Marcello Dantas, senior curator for the Vancouver Biennale, said Resende is one of Brazil's most-respected artists and has a 50-year career in developing sculptures of grand scale that defy gravity.

"Resende's WOW Westminster is not only an interpretation of the economic activity of the Fraser River and the flow of goods through trains, ships and trucks, it's also about capturing the energy and history of this transportation hub, the transformation of the City of New Westminster and its waterfront into a recreational arts and cultural playground," Dantas said. "WOW Westminster will become a respite for citizens and an icon of the city and region for decades as viewers explore the riverside walk along Westminster Pier Park."

Mowatt invites community members to drop by Westminster Pier Park on Monday, Nov. 23 when a crane will lift the components of the 34,000 pound installation off a barge on the Fraser River and place them on land. The work is expected to take place from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The official unveiling will take place on Saturday, Nov. 28 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event begins with speeches and a ribbon cutting at 11:10 a.m., followed by guided tours of the three Vancouver Biennale installations on the waterfront. People can also do self-guided walking tours of the 1.1 kilometres that separates the three installations and get commemorative balloons and buttons of WOW New Westminster.

The Vancouver Biennale is encouraging people to take selfies with WOW and post them on a soon-to-be-identified website, where the resulting photo montage will become part of the history of the installation.

Once WOW is in place, New Westminster will be home to three Vancouver Biennale installation; Public Furniture/Urban Trees by Hugo Franca was installed on the waterfront esplanade in June and Blue Trees by Konstantin Dimopoulos arrived in October.

When council first considered the three installations, there was some debate about the artistic merits of WOW New Westminster – both inside council chamber and in the community. Council ultimately agreed to approve \$90,000 for the Vancouver Biennale, which includes the three installations, street banners, educational and cultural programs and more.

A staff report to council stated that the Vancouver Biennale has asked the city for additional funding of up to \$40,000, as a result of “unanticipated extraordinary expenditures” related to the installation of WOW New Westminster. The funds will come out of the city’s public art reserve fund.