

VANCOUVER ISLAND

Victoria International Marina

After 30 years of redesigns, red tape and litigation, construction is finally underway at Canada's new C\$24m superyacht marina, with the grand opening on schedule for mid-2017

CRAIG RITCHIE REPORTS



Computer-model image of the brand new Victoria International Marina on Vancouver Island

GROUND HAS FINALLY been broken and construction is now well under way on Vancouver Island, where the Victoria International Marina is on schedule for its grand opening in late spring 2017.

Located in the Songhees neighbourhood overlooking Victoria's protected middle harbour, the state-of-the-art, C\$24m facility will feature a total of 28 slips accommodating superyachts to 50m. A 650m² building constructed over the water on one end of the property will house an upscale gourmet restaurant, while a second 650m² building facing it will accommodate the marina offices, crew amenities and additional yacht services. The entire site offers spectacular views of Victoria's iconic inner

harbour to the east and direct access to the open sea through the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the south. Its premier location, at the gateway of the Pacific Northwest Passage, marks the first entry point into Canada for yachters travelling north, making the new marina a particularly convenient location to provision en route to Alaska.

"It has been a very long road to get to this point, but we're thrilled to have construction under way and we're looking forward to the grand opening in June," says Craig Norris, CEO for the marina's ownership group, Community Marine Concepts Ltd. "We have received a tremendous level of interest from yacht owners and captains alike in visiting the Victoria area. We're hearing that they

would love to come, but to date there has been no infrastructure to support them. This marina changes everything."

Long road to realisation

The idea of developing a superyacht marina in the Victoria area first surfaced in 1987 when a development group known as Pacific National Investments Ltd (PNI) acquired two building lots on a former railway yard located on the north side of Victoria's middle harbour. PNI submitted a development plan to the City of Victoria consisting of residential units and a superyacht marina, then proceeded to begin installing site infrastructure, breaking ground in the early 1990s. The development was divided into

five phases, beginning with residential condominiums and concluding with the marina. But residents who moved into the newly-opened condominiums petitioned against any further development and the City of Victoria responded by rezoning the property and imposing a number of development restrictions. In response, PNI took the City of Victoria to court in 2000, suing for breach of contract. Their lawsuit was successful, but the rezoning had effectively stopped the marina in its tracks.

Efforts to develop the site resumed when Edmonton, Alberta-based Western Asset Management (WAM) Development Group subsequently assumed a stake in the project. By 2009, a partnership between WAM Development Group and Crown Marine Management Ltd put forward a design for a 54-slip marina centered around a 1,400m² building, with construction set to begin that December. The project was delayed again when the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations then filed an application for judicial review of federal government approvals for the marina, on the basis they were not adequately consulted.

Further down-zoning in September 2010 led to more construction delays. By spring 2014, with WAM Development Group's appetite for the project quickly waning, Community Marine Concepts acquired complete ownership of the marina development. 

Research shows that the average mid-size yacht represents an overall economic contribution of around C\$20,000 every time it visits



The Victoria Harbour Marina team; the construction work in progress (top right)



A visit from the 49m yacht *Invader*

“By that point a previous project manager had submitted a new design involving a floating building,” explains Norris. “But after more than a year of review with the city it still hadn’t been approved, and there was no indication of whether it would be approved or how long that might take. Each time there has been a change, the design has had to go through a lengthy approval process involving three different levels of government.”

Rather than wait out an unknown, the new owners returned to the previously-approved 2008 design, made a small number of engineering updates, and secured the final approvals required to proceed. “That decision was the right one,” says Norris. “Because of the detailed review process, each level of government is clearly aware of the lengths we have gone to in order to ensure the facility exceeds all relevant standards and brings a positive contribution to the harbour.”

One of those minor refinements to the 2008 blueprint reflects the marina’s efforts to simply be a good neighbour. After local paddlers expressed concern that the marina would block a long-

used kayaking route along the harbour’s northern shoreline, the 2008 design was amended to provide a 121-metre long, 8-metre wide paddling canal which will run between the shoreline and the marina structure. “The marina is designed for superyachts, but we want it to reflect the diversity of the entire Victoria Harbour marine community,” says Norris. “Some of the paddling groups have now expressed an interest in being involved with the marina in some way, so there is a great deal of interest and anticipation as construction progresses.”

Remarkable cruising

Interest in a superyacht facility in the Victoria region has been growing for years, says Norris. “Victoria Harbour is a natural starting and ending point for yachters exploring the remarkable beauty of the Gulf Islands and north to Alaska, so we’ve reserved seven of the slips for daily moorage, with a three-day minimum. Seasonal guests will be accommodated through another seven slips that will be leased on a monthly basis (with a three-month minimum), while seven further slips will be leased on an annual

basis. The final seven slips are reserved for long-term tenants on an invitation basis, with a 40-year lease. This arrangement will allow us to accommodate visiting yachts easily, or allow the marina to host events or races without displacing our long-term tenants.”

Most of the yachts that use the facility will likely come from the United States, says Norris. “The Pacific Northwest is a tremendously beautiful yachting paradise, with more than 25,000km of coastline to explore between Victoria and Alaska,” he says. “We want to showcase this, and as true ambassadors of the unique Pacific marine lifestyle. The marina is a critical step in that process, but it is only the first step in our end goal of facilitating memorable and remarkable experiences.”

With the Canadian dollar historically trading in the range of US\$0.78, Canada represents a particularly attractive location for American citizens to home-port their yachts, or as a stopping point for provisioning their vessels. Victoria is easily accessible, with a modern international airport and proximity to both Vancouver and Seattle. And the favourable

exchange rate also favours a number of outstanding shipyards located nearby, should an owner wish to have any maintenance or upgrades done to their yacht. All told, the potential economic impacts for the city are enormous. “Our research has shown that the average mid-size yacht represents an overall economic contribution of somewhere around C\$20,000 every time it visits,” notes Norris. “Our marina has 28 slips that, with turnover, work out to roughly 185 visits in a year. That’s potentially C\$260 million in direct economic impact each year for the city of Victoria. And it’s spread over a wide area, with spending tied to everything from helicopters to culture and entertainment, hotels and taxis, beauty, sports, recreation and personal shopping. It’s well understood in the Mediterranean, and it’s well understood in the Caribbean, where municipalities know exactly what sort of economic activity is associated with a premium yacht marina property. We have high expectations to satisfy, but I’m more than confident this facility will exceed those expectations and make the wait worthwhile.” **SB**