

**Subject: FW: Letter to the Editor - in defense of the Northlands Public Golf Course Society.**

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**From:** Ernie Crist <CristE@district.north-van.bc.ca>

**To:** "FONVCA (E-mail)" <fonvca@fonvca.org>

> *The Editor:*

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> *The men and women of the Northlands Public Golf Course Society deserve a large bouquet for their efforts. They not only played a crucial role in bringing the Northlands Golf Course to fruition but their hard and dedicated work also continues to play an important role in advising "Northlands" based on the experience of its members. Were it not for the Northlands Public Golf Course Society, the Northlands Golf Course would not exist today. In its place there would be a massive housing project. There would be no benefit, to the District taxpayers, however.*

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> *In other municipalities, including the City of North Vancouver proceeds from municipal land sales are allowed to accumulate. The City and most other municipalities are using only the generated interest to pay for needed capital project. The District, on the other hand, continues to use its land sale proceeds as a slush fund more or less. But it is not just proceeds from land sales that are being used up, income from District leases also shares the same fate. Even "profits" generated by the Golf Course are going into general revenue. In the 2000 budget almost a half a million dollars from Northlands instead of going back into the Heritage Fund was siphoned off.*

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> *The result is that instead of a total Heritage Fund goal by 2001 generating between \$12 and \$15 million in interest annually, the District has little or nothing to show for its substantial land sales plus income. The District could not even pay for "Parkgate". It had to borrow the money via a public referendum process. What is worse, the District is now contemplating another land sale spree to continue its practice of spending more than it raises from taxes.*

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> *The best calculations have put the accumulated value of District land sold in the last 15 years, including interest, at over \$ 300 million. Even if we subtract the value of land to pay for genuine capital projects, we should still have a minimum of \$ 150 million left.*

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> *All this is often belittled or even denied to mislead the public, but all the political baffle-gab in the world cannot change facts. Worse - having virtually unlimited access to land sale money, has corrupted the District's fiscal management posture. Like a "junkie" who must have his "fix", so the District sold its land to feed its addiction. Even road patching was financed with such funds. It was, as one expert described it "an all time low in the application of fiscal management principles". Or as another expert put it "only graduates of third class institutions of learning would entertain such a practice".*

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> *Indeed, under the guise of "we need more housing" the District was in such*

> a frenzy to sell land, it even wanted to sell the land currently occupied  
> by the Northlands Golf Course. This even though the District has the  
> highest per capita residential tax in the Lower Mainland. With  
> "Northlands" in place the District has at least something to show for  
> it. Otherwise the proceeds from that land too would have been  
> squandered, more or less.

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> To enable the Northlands Public Golf Course to meet its financial  
> obligations of paying back both principle and interest to the Heritage  
> Fund, "Northlands" required both a banquet facility and a driving range.  
> This, said the financial experts will not only give the District an  
> income to meet all its fiscal obligations but it will generate an  
> additional \$ 1.5 million annually. What is more said the financial  
> advisers, it can be done with low fees - it was all part of the original  
> plan. But so greedy was the District that it sacrificed the land required  
> for both the banquet facility and the driving range. "Northlands" needed  
> 172 acres to be fully successful. After the District was finished robbing  
> it however, it had been reduced to 131 acres.


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> The reason why "Northlands" today is not in a fiscally worse position is  
> to a large extent the result of the Northland Public Golf Course Society  
> and its members. They have dedicated both their valuable time and their  
> expertise for the benefit of the District taxpayers. The inevitable result  
> has been that this group of volunteers has been the target of more than  
> its fair share of criticism.

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> Guarding as they are over the public interest, needless to say the  
> Northlands Public Golf Course Society is a thorn in the side of many  
> bureaucrats and their apologists, although as professional standards go  
> and as the District KPMG study showed, the District is not exactly looked  
> upon as a beacon of competence among professionals. On the other hand,  
> the community owes the Northlands Public Golf Course Society a great vote  
> of thanks and as one who is intimately familiar with both the history of  
> "Northlands" and the District's "fiscal acumen" or lack thereof, I  
> salute them.

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> Ernie Crist

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