

Subject:**Date:** Mon, 4 Feb 2002 14:14:31 -0800**From:** Ernie Crist <CristE@district.north-van.bc.ca>**To:** "FONVCA (E-mail)" <fonvca@fonvca.org>

A MESSAGE FROM ERNIE CRIST

THE 2002 BUDGET

Feb. 4, 2002

MY OPINION

1) At a time when we have no money to maintain our assets, including our rec facilities, in a good state of repair, we continue to subsidize the City via the Rec Commission. What is true for Rec Facilities is also true for playing fields which we continue to build for the benefit of the City. You may remember that I raised this issue time and time again but without success. This is because it is politics and expediency which determine the actions of this Council not the desire to save taxpayers money as is being claimed. That budgets reflect the political bias of a sitting Council is nothing new, of course, except that the present Council carries its bias further than any previous Council in the last 20 years. For example, I made a motion that we reorganize the Rec. Commission and base it on the Parkgate model which would save the taxpayers millions of Dollars and would also restore control over the Commission, but it was turned down.

2) I also suggested that items such as road construction and road repair be taken out of the budget per se and be dealt with separately as part of a 3 or 5 year plan and taken to referendum. The advantage of this is that it would allow taxpayers to keep tab on the District's operations. You might say it would take the mystery out of the budget process as it would put all major expenditures on the table for everyone to see. This is being done in many municipalities but this Council nixed this idea as well.

3) Overshadowing this budget is the "sword of Damocles" - the Heritage Fund, land lease and fiscal issue which are a shambles. It certainly is not handled to produce the best returns for the taxpayers. One Councilor recently claimed that other municipalities are in the business of buying land only to rezone it and then sell it. That is exactly what I proposed and I made a motion to that effect but got no support including from the Councilor who now claims that this would be a good idea. Our Heritage Fund would be the perfect financial instrument to do so. Indeed, that is what should have been done with the Lynn Valley Core as I suggested. The opportunity was knocking at the door. It would not only have enabled us to produce a comprehensive Pedestrian Oriented Town Center complete with community facilities as was promised but could also have been done at no cost to the taxpayer. As it is the District got more traffic and more noise. Except for 'peanuts' being hailed as major contributions by the developer, the pedestrian center and the community facilities are nowhere in sight. The opportunity to think big has been missed.

4) Once again we have dealt with and argued about 3% of the budget. The

other 97 % is simply not debated. One Councilor has repeatedly stated that he does not want micromanaging. To give strategic directions on the big issues prior to the budget deliberations is not micromanaging but carrying out the responsibility of leadership. An example is the Lynn Valley Policing Center. It was cut from the budget. This is a big issue. Was there any debate about the whole question of community policing prior to this decision? Did Council issue any instructions that its preventive policing program should be abandoned?. Why was Lynn Valley picked and not any other? If not, then why would staff put this item on the chopping list knowing full well that since there is no CCA endorsed Councillor living in Lynn Valley the chance of restoring this project is virtually nil ? Is this leadership or is it just plain expediency?

5) What is clear from this budget is that the District is conducting business as usual - there is no vision and no direction other than a negative vision such as no money to improve access to the waterfront. Did you know that, at a time when we have more staff than ever, the road cleaning budget has been cut? Staff was told over and over again that cuts in the level of service are not acceptable but since Council is effectively cut out from 97% of the budget, such issues as road cleaning can never be addressed. In the past we have had a policy that all roads, notwithstanding priorities, have to be plowed within 24 hours of a major snow fall, including cul-de-sacs. Did you know that this policy has been quietly changed to 72 hours?. It means that some people living in a cul- de-sac may be stuck for up to 3 days before they can get out of their driveways. Who authorized such changes? I certainly was never informed. I had to find out from residents quoting staff during the recent snow storm.

6) Other than cliches, I do not see anything concrete in this budget about benchmarks or efficiency controls. After determining a budget increase of some 8%, management instructed the individual departments to reduce their requests by 1.35%. This means that a department could theoretically increase its budget by 20 % and then reduce it by 1.35%. while another department, which has held the line over the last 5 or 10 years, is also being asked to reduce its budget by the same percentage.

7) This budget again relies heavily on bleeding the Heritage Fund to the tune of millions of dollars, including land lease monies which means that the rape of the District's assets continues. While other Councils protect their Heritage Fund and use only the generated interest, the District is sucking its Heritage Fund dry. The result will be more blights on the mountainside to feed the District's addiction.


8) There is nothing in this budget to indicate any commitment towards sustainable community development or public transportation. It is simply not there. Sustainable and people friendly neighborhood exist on in the arsenal of propaganda. The District Council, instead of leading, is being tossed around from one ad hoc scenario to another with staff making the real decisions.

9) This budget is the result of a Council who promised to introduce fiscal responsibility. The very opposite has happened. At no other time have taxes been increased as much as during the last two years since this CCA

endorsed Council has been in power. This does not include robbing the reserve funds and monies from leases and land sales - and this at a time when we had to wait for 3 years to fix the roof at the Ron Andrews Rec facility only to find that after it was fixed at a cost of between \$ 60,000 and \$ 70,000 so we are told, it leaked more then before the repairs started. Now, it appears that Ron Andrews has company for the roof over the new weight room at Karen Magnusson is also leaking.

This is my opinion and if I could add one more point it would be this - mediocrity will never recognize excellence for it does not know the difference.

Ernie Crist

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