

**Subject: Happy Hunting!**

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**From:** Ernie Crist <CristE@dnv.org>

**To:** "FONVCA (E-mail)" <fonvca@fonvca.org>,  
Mayor and Council - DNV <Council@district.north-van.bc.ca>,  
Directors Team <managecomm@district.north-van.bc.ca>

A Message from Ernie Crist

I am greatly confused about the present state of the District reserve funds which stood at \$ 91 million in 1996 but which, according to a recent staff report, have dwindled to a mere \$16 million in 2000. Note that it is the CCA endorsed Council which has been in charge of the District during the last 3 years, more or less. They were elected in 1999 on a platform of tight fiscal control. Councillor Dunsford, during debate, stated that she had the situation explained to her and that she is now satisfied that the \$76 million is not missing. The Mayor too insisted that it was there, interrupting me several times while so insisting. We had just passed a bylaw which states that no member of Council may be interrupted while speaking.

It was all a mistake, Councillor Dunsford said. The \$76 million is still there, it is just not listed under "reserves" she said. No need to make a big fuss just because it is not where it is supposed to be. Indeed, Councillor Dunsford duly chastised me for being a doubting Tom. All I had to do was spend 2 hours with staff to be convinced as she had that it is still around, she suggested.

So where is it? I looked around for answers, including in the direction of the arms of the CCA endorsed Councillors, to see anything but I could not see any money under anyone's arm, at least not from that distance. Very shortly you will find out where the money is, said the Mayor, a man of impeccable financial credentials, as he interrupted me again.

Finally a horrible thought entered my head. Is it possible that the reserve funds have been used up? But if so where and how? Having a most excellent memory, I recalled that during last year's budget debate, we were told that our reserves were far too high and that they could safely be reduced. This is truly weird, I thought at the time, for I remembered that our previous Director of Engineering Services had told us the exact opposite. Building up these reserves, he said at the time, was crucial since replacing the aging infrastructure will cost hundreds of millions of dollars, he said, and as North Van City's engineer recently told the NEWS "it is only prudent to build up such reserve funds". The idea truly puzzled me, however, for a few weeks prior, also in the course of this year's budget debate, we were told that we must build up the Reserve Funds as they have become dangerously low. You understand my confusion don't you, dear citizens.

In light of this unsettling thought, I asked a question. It was during the debate on Bylaw 7307 which is the Waterworks Regulation Bylaw 1957,

which deals with the water user charges and water connection fees for 2002. "Has the money from the Water Fund Reserves been used for purposes other than the Water Fund" I asked? This is important because there is a direct connection between the water rates for residents and the Reserve Fund.

Costs for infrastructure renewal have to come out of this fund. If there are no reserves water rates will have to be increased. I repeated the question several times. At first I got a categorical NO but after a while and with the help of Mr. Kost, a citizen observing the scene from his seat in the audience, it was finally revealed, that \$600,000 had been syphoned off from the water reserve in one year alone.

If this practice HAS BEEN emulated in all the other reserve funds then it is entirely possible that a rather large portion of the 1996 \$ 91 million reserve fund has indeed been spent. A portion so large, in fact, that you might come surprisingly close to the missing \$76 million. I can hardly wait for the promised report proving that I am wrong. But while we are waiting, I think we should also look closer into the Heritage Fund. It is always possible that there is a connection between both the Reserve Funds and the Heritage Fund. Maybe they have been used interchangeably. As a regular Council watcher told me "in the District anything is possible".

A qualified audit company I am sure would find out very quickly where the money is or where it has gone. On a previous occasion, I had made a motion to that effect but I was not allowed to elaborate. The CCA endorsed Council rules do not allow for a Councillor to introduce and explain a motion unless it is seconded by a member of the CCA endorsed Council first. And as I already explained, there was no seconder for my motion.

Happy hunting.

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 [Part 1.2](#)

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