

Subject: Re: North Vancouver Recreation Commission

Date: Wed, 22 Oct 2003 10:06:04 -0700

From: Bill Tracey <wrtracey@telus.net>

Reply-To: systek@engineer.com

Organization: Systek Engineering Ltd.

To: Ernie Crist <ernie_crist@dnv.org>

CC: Elizabeth James <cagebc@yahoo.com>, Mayor and Council - DNV <Council@dnv.org>, fonvca@fonvca.org, Cathy Adams <cathyadams@canada.com>, Eric Andersen <eric_g_andersen@hotmail.com>, Maureen Bragg <m.bragg@shaw.ca>, Corrie Kost <kost@triumf.ca>, Allan Orr <allandorr@shaw.ca>, Brian Platts <bplatts@shaw.ca>

Ernie,

While I appreciate that you are trying to improve the management of recreational facilities for the District, I am somewhat concerned by your frequent references to the "Parkgate Model".

I am a director of the Seymour Community Services Society (which operates Parkgate). While I can't pretend to speak for the Society, I can tell you that we work very hard to maintain a good working relationship with the NVRC. It is not always easy, perhaps for some of the reasons you set out in your message. However, we are partners, and we must be able to get along with each other.

I suggest it is not helpful for us to have you pushing the "Parkgate Model" in the face of the Rec Commission at every opportunity. If the NVRC did not see us as a threat before, they certainly must do so now. What you may very well succeed in doing is to set the NVRC on a course to prove the model is a failure, and that would not be helpful either to Parkgate or to the citizens of the District.

It was never the intention of SCSS to replace the NVRC -- rather it is our desire to enhance the capabilities of NVRC. We need each other. I don't doubt there are things that NVRC could do better than they do now, but we can achieve that without setting NVRC and SCSS at each other's throats. Please cool the rhetoric!

Regards,
Bill

Ernie Crist wrote:

Dear Ms James: I appreciate that you have taken the time to respond to last night's Council debate re the proposed reorganization of the Rec Commission. However, I need to emphasize a few salient points which were contained in my motion. We all agree that the Rec Facilities are deteriorating and that there is not sufficient capital to reverse this trend, not to speak of needed capital facilities expansions. Neither is there any money in sight from capital reserves, the District having mismanaged not only its Heritage Fund, which was set up to pay for such items, but its infrastructure reserve funds to boot. In light of this, it makes sense to reorganize the Commission around the Parkgate model which is superior not only in its ability to obtain outside funding but is also superior in every other aspect since it is controlled to large extent by the public - not to mention that the Parkgate model would effectively end any and all subsidies to the City. The question is why is the Commission and those it controls so adamantly opposed to this. Surely it can only be because the Commission is jealous of losing control over its empire and is afraid the Parkgate model would confirm what we already know. It is more economical and above all it is more democratic. In other words this model would not only save the taxpayers a great deal of money but would also enable it to carry out its mandate to the public in a superior fashion. This is not a matter of conjecture but is an undeniable fact well known to the Commission which is most assuredly the reason why it is fighting so bitterly against change. Bureaucracies are loath to give up power and the Rec Commission is no exception. The reason the District Council is so adamantly opposed to my initiative is not because I am wrong but because I am right and the unfolding events will confirm this regardless of the comments made at last night's meeting and notwithstanding the Commission being a sacred cow which lesser politicians are loath to upset, regardless of the consequences to the taxpayers. Yours truly, Ernie Crist

-----Original Message-----

From: Elizabeth James [<mailto:cagebc@yahoo.com>]

Sent: October 21, 2003 4:32 PM

To: Mayor and Council - DNV; fonvca@fonvca.org

Cc: Cathy Adams; Eric Andersen; Maureen Bragg; Corrie Kost; Allan Orr; Brian Platts; Bill Tracey

Subject: North Vancouver Recreation Commission

21 October 2003 Dear Mayor and Council: District of North Vancouver Council Meeting: 20 October 2003: Agenda Item # 2: New mandate for delivery of public recreation_____ Dear Mayor

and Council: This memo is to address some of the comments that were made last evening, during discussion of this agenda item. First of all, I wish to acknowledge that Mr. Sandy Fleming and some members of Council are frustrated, even angry, that this discussion has resurfaced. I acknowledge the fact but do not accept it as being justified. There appear to be two main reasons for the anger/frustration and vehement reaction to the motion: (1) that the matter has been 'studied to death' and, (2) that Council believes any discussion of Clr. Crist's contention that "District taxpayers

subsidize the City" is tedious and irrelevant. So, let's take a look these points:

1. **Studies:**

If memory serves me correctly, a study was, indeed, conducted around 4-5 years ago and a report ensued. When, at the time, Clr. Crist pointed out that the findings of the study had been based on data which seriously under-estimated the value of District assets, an ancilliary study had to be carried out and a further report issued. As a result, and combined with obvious deficits in facilities maintenance, many residents were left with an uneasy feeling that all was not well at the Rec Commission.

Due to the fact that I had many things on my plate, I freely admit to having paid attention only to summaries and local discussion of the matter. In the knowledge that other members of the community had a particular interest in the subject, that Gary Young was about to retire and that, as a consequence, matters would evolve over a period of time, I did not become engaged in the discussion.

In summary, and despite councillors' protestations, doubts about the quality of those studies remain. I would be happy to have it shown that such concerns are unwarranted and, to this end, commit to obtaining copies of the various reports so as to delve into more of the details.

2. **District subsidizes the City:**

Here again, it may well be that an accurate evaluation of the *pro rata* capital investment of the City vs the District can be gleaned from the study reports. Until that has been accomplished, exact numbers cannot be quoted in this email. Suffice it to say that, due to the relative ratio of available land, it is pretty obvious that District taxpayers have provided - and paid for - significantly more playing fields and built facilities than have City residents.

According to information provided by Mr. McPherson and Ms. Heather Fleming during last night's discussion, it would appear that "attendance at these facilities is seamless." In other words, when a citizen plays on a District field, or attends a District recreation facility, no-one knows where that person is coming from - the City, the District or elsewhere.

If we accept Clr. Harris' comment, we can be pretty sure that young people from all three North Shore municipalities use North Shore and other GVRD soccer fields "seamlessly." Can the same be said for adult teams? I'm not sure but, taking into account the fact that those teams actually pay a fee for playing privileges, there should be some way in which this could be tracked.

The situation is somewhat different with respect to use of built facilities. Since the District has - approximately - twice the number of residents as the City, it seems reasonable to suggest that the same ratio could be expected to apply to usage. If that could be proven, then a similar apportionment of capital, capital renewal and operating costs would also be reasonable, would it not? Surely, it would be a simple matter to conduct a survey of attendees at the District's built facilities? As they check in, attendees would be requested to answer a question on a 3 X 5 card: Are you a resident of the District, North Vancouver City, West Vancouver, or elsewhere? with appropriate check boxes supplied for each.

The bottom line here is that, if any level of government is to provide an efficient, cost-effective service to the taxpayers who pay the bills, two things must apply: (a) the government must know all of the factors that go into the matrix of the decision; and, (b) the government must acknowledge and comply with 'the right of the public to know'.

It is not appropriate that Mr. Sandy Fleming so clearly displayed his anger - both inside and outside Council chambers - because Clr. Crist, once again, had had the temerity to ask the questions to which residents have not been given sufficiently clear answers in the past. As with other members of council, Clr. Crist was elected to, among other things, *provide stewardship of public assets*. In accordance with that legal requirement, any councillor has not only the right but also the responsibility to ask the questions - as often as it takes to gain accurate and complete answers.

Some of the answers may well lie in the admission by Clr. Muri, to the effect that 'past Councils have been derelict in their duty to put the true costs of facilities maintenance on council's table for discussion nor, more importantly, to allocate funds to offset those costs.'

Certainly, it is elementary to consider that the small cost of a tap washer can, when neglected, lead to a large

budget item when the room floods; so it is with neglected maintenance on District infrastructure.

In the final analysis, however, it has become obvious over the past few years that costs of all services have increased dramatically. Given that governments cannot and should not be all things to all people, then I believe it is long past the time that the subject of recreation services be put to the people of the North Shore - and especially to District residents.

Are people happy with the service provided by the Rec Commission, or not? If not, why not?

This is the maintenance/capital renewal required and these are the costs. Are you willing to pay additional taxes? Higher user fees? Or should we scale back?

Failing any willingness to consider amalgamation of the two North Vancouvers, it would seem a fair and reasonable solution to allocate capital, capital renewal and operating costs to each municipality according to *per capita* usage of facilities.

In closing, it does little to foster public confidence in the Rec Commission model of administration when key individuals appear to be so poorly-briefed on relevant facts. For example, in answer to the question, "How much money has the Parkgate Society raised?" the answer from Ms. Fleming was "in the area of \$450,000." The facts are that somewhere around \$1.2 million has been raised....and that the Society has been hoping to raise an even larger figure this year. We have little option but to wonder, "Which figure is correct? Are numbers being skewed to support a particular agenda? How is the money being spent?"

I trust this can be taken as a useful contribution to the discussion and let's have an end to a palpable, and very disturbing resistance to a full and open discussion of all of the District's recreation issues.

Sincerely,

Liz James

[604] 988-2066

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