

**Subject:****Date:** Thu, 8 May 2003 09:50:11 -0700**From:** "Ernie Crist" <ernie\_crist@dnv.org>**To:** "FONVCA (E-mail)" <fonvca@fonvca.org>**CC:** "Mayor and Council - DNV" <Council@dnv.org>, "Senior Management Committee" <managecomm@dnv.org>

A MESSAGE FROM ERNIE CRIST

Members of District Council and Senior Staff recently held a "strategic" retreat at the top of Grouse Mountain - I did not attend.

To begin with I didn't think it was necessary to go to the top of Grouse Mountain to talk business and I said so repeatedly. The Municipal Hall is just fine for "brainstorming". It's cheaper too. It is also less time consuming. Getting up and down from "Grouse" takes two hours. If time and money are so important then why waste so much of it.

Also, I have had some very bad experience with such retreats. In most cases they are nothing more than gab fests. To the best of my memory, nothing much has ever been accomplished by such extravaganzas. The recent "excursion" to Grouse Mountain is no exception. The Grouse agenda contained nothing but clichés and platitudes of which we have too many already. The problem in the District is not lack of talk or lack of paper but lack of leadership. Don Bell is simply not a leader. This is my opinion. He is, however, a good PR man with a great capacity to confuse facts with fiction.

Without blinking an eye, after the Grouse session, he announced on Shaw Cable that the District's tax increase for 2003 was less than 4 %. The truth as Dr. Kost, a highly respected Council watcher, has pointed out is 27%. The Mayor's 4 % miracle (high as it is) has been accomplished by robbing our Reserve and Heritage Funds. This has been going on big time not counting the hefty annual tax increases since Bell became Mayor. The bottom line is that under Don Bell's leadership the District of North Vancouver has gone from a "have to have not" municipality. Instead of having money in the bank we have debts and soon we will have more.

The District, for no valid reason other than poor management and poor leadership, today is \$ 500 million poorer than it would be had it been run properly. The Mayor's boast of an only 4 % tax hike is like a farmer bragging that the farm is fiscally sound, without revealing that he liquidated yet another piece of land to stay in business.

Before Bell we had the second lowest taxes in the Region, now we have the second highest. Our Reserve Funds have dwindled from \$1300 per capita in 1997 to \$ 300 in 2002 and going fast. Now we are boasting that by the year 2006 we will have \$ 100 per capita. That is quite a comedown from the \$ 1300 a few years ago but it is being hailed as a big accomplishment. By comparison, Reserve Funds in the City of North Van are \$ 1600 and in West Van \$1700 per capita.


I have made countless proposals to put the District back on an even keel - indeed more than the Mayor and the rest of Council put together. This includes implementation of benchmarks, reorganizing the Recreation Commission and ending subsidies to the City, to mention but a few big ticket items. But the Mayor paid no attention. On the contrary, he erected one barrier after another. Instead he has provoked and harassed me constantly. Council watchers have witnessed this time and time again. Behind closed doors it is worse. He even incited staff to harass me.

His behavior can serve but one purpose. He is desperately trying to muzzle criticism and divert attention from his own disastrous policies which are now coming to light including Northlands and Canlan for which he and he alone is responsible, even as he tries to look for scapegoats.

Even now he is withholding information the public is entitled to. Jeremy Dalton a community activist has for months tried to get a copy of the Northlands Audit and so have others, but without success. Not even Council has received a copy even though it was promised weeks ago. The very least Bell should do is be open and come clean about these fiascos. The municipality would be better off. But that is not the present Mayor's style. Manipulating the process, hiding facts as he did with the budget, putting up phony issues and looking for scapegoats and hoping that the public will forget. That is his style. As a result, his recent revelation of seeing the "light" on Grouse Mountain sounds specious. I rather think

his "revelation" that we need a new direction and that he is the man to lead, now that the District is near bankruptcy, is nothing but an attempt to put a halo around the sad state of affairs for which he and he alone is responsible.

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