

Subject: Rec Commission

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A MESSAGE FROM ERNIE CRIST

The North Van Recreation Commission needs to be reorganized. This, in my opinion, is the only way to prevent privatisation of our recreation facilities. The handwriting is on the wall. But when I submitted a plan to District Council to that effect, I did not even get a seconder. The Acting Mayor allowed an employee of the Commission (presumably) who was neither erudite nor knowledgeable about the subject, to tear my motion apart, while I as it's author and an elected representative was not even allowed to explain it for the benefit of the community.

The reasons for my initiative were as follows.

The Commission's annual budget is close to \$19 million dollars and is almost the same as the District Police and District Fire Department combined.

In addition to the fees it collects, the Commission receives close to \$10 million dollars in direct subsidies from both the City and the District. It pays no property or business taxes. This is the equivalent of an additional large subsidy. All this is on top of the fees it charges which, in many aspects, are close or equal to those charged by the private sector.

Despite these huge advantages, the Commission is in a state of crisis and its facilities are deteriorating at an accelerated pace. Routine repairs are simply not carried out in a timely fashion.

The Commission has become a huge and inefficient bureaucracy. Despite repeated efforts to put it on a sound business footing without jeopardising its public health function, District Council has refused to do so. My latest attempt was merely one more example.

I proposed that the Commission now operating under a Shared Services Agreement with the City be dissolved. I did so because under the current agreement District taxpayers are subsidising the City big time. At the same time the District does not have enough money to maintain District facilities. This, in my opinion, is irresponsible.

Also, the City is building the high-rises while the District is building the playing fields. This too is because of the agreement. There is no shortage of playing fields in the District but because the City is desperately short there is a shortage in both municipalities. Providing additional fields has cost the District millions of dollars. This is one reason why the agreement needs to be changed. Another reason is that the City, with only a quarter of the facilities in the District, is not contributing a single penny for capital maintenance of facilities located in the District. This is an additional huge drain on District taxpayers.

Since the City is not interested in amalgamation, I suggested we terminate the agreement and reorganize public recreation by hiring a director of recreation operating out of the District Hall. I also proposed that we reorganize our recreation facilities based on the Parkgate model. A reorganization along such lines would not exclude

cooperating with the City. It would, however, mean an end to subsidising the City.

Parkgate is a non profit society run by elected volunteers and members of the society. The overall control under this scenario would still rest with the District.

The advantages of this model are overwhelming. "Parkgate" is not only better run since it is at least partially under public control and is more efficient, it is also more responsive to neighbourhood needs. Since "Parkgate" is a non profit society it is able to access private funding and may apply for government grants not available to standard recreation facilities run by the Recreation Commission. Since it has been in existence "Parkgate" has collected in excess of one million dollars per annum which it has used for improvements and expenses. This at a time when facilities run by the Commission have deteriorated for lack of money.

So why did District Council refuse to even discuss my motion. The reason is that the Commission bureaucracy itself is opposed - it clearly fears reform.

The Recreation Commission has considerable influence in all sports areas, including field users who are interested in seeing their needs filled regardless of who pays for it. As a result politicians are reluctant to even raise the matter. They believe they are getting brownie points with both the Commission and the sports and field users by refusing to change the status quo. That is the only logical reason for their posture. The other reason, in my opinion, is that those same politicians calculate that District taxpayers do not care enough to press for changes even though it costs them a great deal of money.

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