

Subject: Crippen Regional Park, Bowen Island

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Federation of North Vancouver Community Associations

Re: Open letter to Provincial Ministry of Community Services and the GVRD Regional Parks Board.

The *Federation of North Vancouver Community Associations*, an umbrella organization representing 18 registered community associations in the District of North Vancouver, wishes to express its concern over the manner in which some 40 acres of Crippen Regional Parkland is being sold to the Bowen Island Municipality for its own uses. The land in question is owned by Electoral Area "A" and all GVRD member municipalities. Instead of seeking the assent (by way of referendum) of the electorate, the GVRD is using the mechanism of the "alternative approval process."

Already felt to be an extremely difficult standard to meet for large municipalities, the "alternative approval process" sets an essentially impossible requirement for a region the size of the GVRD. The minimum number of registered voters required to respond to a petition, and therefore force a referendum, would be 10% of 1,401,250 which equals 140,125 electors. Each petitioner must file on a separate sheet of paper, the total number of which must either be delivered or mailed in within 30 days. This number of petitions, if placed in a single pile, would form a stack of some 46 feet in height. In our judgment this constitutes such an onerous requirement that it makes a mockery of the democratic process. On the North Shore we have the Capilano Regional Park. Using this process the GVRD could sell any part of it and even if all the voters of the three North Shore municipalities signed the counter-petitions they could not muster 140,125 signatures.

In a letter, dated August 11, 2003, to the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services (Hon. Ted Nebbeling at that time) the *Federation of North Vancouver Community Associations* strenuously objected to the new provisions in the Community Charter which would allow for such an onerous "alternative approval process" with the 10% requirement. Formerly this had been 5% and had never been applied to situations encompassing multiple municipalities. Even the UBCM, after an extensive survey, had recommended retention of the 5% requirement for municipalities.

In summary there are several aspects to this issue which are of concern:

1. **The sale:** This sale, if approved by the GVRD board members, will set a precedent for sell-off of any parkland, for any reason, throughout the province.
2. **Sale price:** The sale price of \$2 million appears to be extremely low for almost 39 acres. What would be fair market value, as established by realtors and sales in the area?
3. **Democracy:** Bowen residents – the purchasers being offered this attractive deal – were allowed a full referendum to authorize the funding necessary for the land purchase. GVRD residents who collectively own that parkland were not allowed a voice on April 30th.
4. **Democracy and accountability:** The well-nigh impossible hurdle which the Community Charter [CC] has set for the counter-petition process is a poison-pill for democracy. During the drafting of the wording of the CC, the *Federation of North Vancouver Community Associations* protested the original CC requirement of 5% of electors – on the basis that the hurdle was too onerous. Response of the provincial government? Up it to 10%!
5. **Lack of transparency:** GVRD kept the negotiations at a very low profile until, as required by the CC, an advertisement of the

counter-petition had to appear in the papers.

6. **"Surplus" parkland:** Most important of all is this question: Since when has any park in this province been "surplus?" What of future generations? Is this sustainable development?

There are many other distasteful aspects of this proposed deal, but before they are addressed, some of the information needs to be amplified, in order that the picture can be verified as to its completeness and accuracy.

What needs to be done? If you share these concerns.....

Approach the resolution of this issue on 3 fronts:

- Disposal of this parkland must be by way of a referendum by all affected citizens.
- Require that the sale of parkland be fully disclosed to all GVRD taxpayers what plans Bowen has for the land, or what the GVRD plans to do with the \$2-million; and,
- The critical need for amendments to the Community Charter.

If you believe the foregoing has merit, then please take immediate action to urge your local Council and your GVRD Board representative to reject this proposal unless and until a full referendum has been held throughout the GVRD – preferably in concert with the upcoming November '05 Civic Elections.. Further, it is important that the provincial government be urged to review the wording of the Community Charter, particularly with respect to the referendum/counter-petition process.

Most critical of all, in the short space of time available before July 8th, members of the GVRD Board need to be made fully aware of the implications of this proposal – now and for the environmental future of this province.

In view of the tight timeline, your early reaction would be appreciated.

Sincerely,
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