

Subject: China trip and more

From: Elizabeth James <cagebc@yahoo.com>

Date: Tue, 8 May 2007 06:09:58 +0100 (BST)

To: Mayor Walton & Council <council@dnv.org>

CC: Mayor Mussatto & Council <council@cnv.org>, James Ridge CAO <james_ridge@dnv.org>, FONVCA <corrie@kost.ca>

7 May 2007

Mayor Richard Walton,
District of North Vancouver,
355 West Queens
North Vancouver, BC

Dear Mayor Walton:

This email refers to two recent matters of concern: (1) Your own trip to China in the company of six other Lower Mainland mayors; and, (2) Criticism of Clr. Muri during the Public Input session at tonight's Council meeting. As the second item can be handled more briefly, I will deal with that one first...

To say I was surprised and disappointed that neither you, nor any other member of Council chose to publicly respond to, or rebut the accusatory remarks against Clr. Muri, would be an understatement. As you know, it is not only a councillor's right to speak out if s/he sees a potential conflict of interest in progress, it is their responsibility. In effect, it is an important part of their official duty to protect the interests of taxpayers in such a way.

Although the bias of a developer need not be declared - it is obvious they want their application approved - that leniency does not apply to others who wish to speak in support of a project before Council, or at a public meeting/hearing. It matters that possible bias be revealed to those who listen to a speaker's rationale for support, in order that they may weigh the remarks on balance. Tonight's speakers may not place much importance on the fact that one of them receives only a small amount of remuneration for "collecting rents" - unfortunately for them, I do. So, thankfully, does Clr. Muri, and to her I express my thanks.

And now we come to the China trip...

Thanks to the habit of reporters allowing their interviewees room to 'put it in their own words', interested residents like me who read several different articles on the China trip might be forgiven if they are confused. What are we to believe? What, even, do you, Mayor Mussatto and the other mayors believe? On the one hand, we are told it was a "holiday" just like a "Mom" might pay for; on the other, it was reported that business was discussed. On one page it was a trip paid for by a private company - LVC Investments - as quoted by Frances Bula in the Sun. Yet tonight, you reported to Council it was paid for by the more arm's length Chinese Business Association.

Perhaps the most important confusion, however, is because it is unclear whether or not Council approved, or even knew about, your acceptance of the invitation in the first place. I may be in error but, from the sidelines, it appears this was an official function that arose out of your position as Mayor of the District since, in your report you mention that you gave a speech to Chinese representatives in that capacity.

In order to clarify these points, therefore, it would be appreciated if you could advise --

1. Was this a holiday, or a business trip by the seven mayors who traveled to China?
2. Who did pay for the trip? The company or companies? Or the Chinese business association?
3. Was the proposed trip, and its purpose, discussed with a fully-briefed Council, prior to your accepting the invitation?
4. If the matter *was* put to an informed Council, was the discussion held *in camera* and, if so, why?
5. If Council approval was not sought prior to departure, did you instead seek the advice of Senior Staff - i.e. the District Clerk, the CAO, or the CFO, prior to accepting the invitation?
6. If you did seek the counsel of Staff, what recommendations, if any, did they offer?

Mayor Walton, you and I have been around the business of politics long enough for us to know that *perception of conflict* is often as important as *reality of conflict* - and wording of the Community Charter appears unequivocal. So if you could clear the air on the matter, it would be helpful.

Your early response would be much appreciated.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth James
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