

## JAMES: Pay parking decision points to larger issue

[Elizabeth James](#) / North Shore News

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Just  
**ASKING**  
Elizabeth James



*"This (pay parking decision) is just the tip of the very huge iceberg of non-creativity that is currently defining North Vancouver planning across the board."*

– Siobhan O'Connell, April 6 North Shore News

In her letter to the editor, Siobhan O'Connell added an exclamation mark to the frustration many City of North Vancouver residents feel about what they see as a growing lack of democratic process at city hall.

The Harbourside business owner-taxpayer wrote she was "beyond offended and utterly frustrated" that, absent any pretence at public consultation, council had voted 5-2 to turn area streets into a pay parking zone.

Whether or not O'Connell was aware, this issue has been festering for six years or more. We know that because, at a mid-April 2012 open house held to discuss development of the lands held by Knightsbridge Properties and Concert

Properties, two of the main concerns that attendees raised were related to traffic gridlock and the already existing lack of parking spaces for employees and clients of the Northshore Auto Mall.

On April 18, 2012, North Shore News reporter Benjamin Alldritt noted that traffic consultant Peter Joyce, of Bunt and Associates, "said he had heard residents' concerns over traffic at previous events over the past two years."

Driven by the pace of development, concerns about traffic congestion and parking throughout the city were repeated to council by a dozen or more presenters at a subsequent meeting of council on June 17, 2014.

Over those years, anyone who had taken their car down for an early-morning servicing could have told you the Auto Mall street parking was already taken.

How has it taken until now for city staff and council to bring down a hammer – on the wrong people?

Reached for her comment, O'Connell repeated her belief that a temporary solution would be for the city and property owners to

reach some sort of agreement that vehicles be allowed to use the five vacant nearby lots to cope with overflow parking needs.

"We often see people from the film industry parked down there," she said. "Why shouldn't North Shore residents and businesses be allowed to do the same?"

When I thought of what it would take in business volume for O'Connell to just break even after paying her 24 employees and \$14,000/month rent, I didn't have the heart to answer by suggesting the use of those lots would likely also come at a price.

Lack of parking and traffic congestion issues are reaching crisis point in all three municipalities. It is hard to see how driving commercial operations out of business by making it impossible for their employees to get to work, or clients to patronize them will do anything to improve the quality of life on the North Shore. It is not as though convenient transit alternatives are anywhere close on the horizon.

And speaking of transit, the other major point to be made – especially in the city – is that the developments approved over the past eight to 10 years have so crowded our main thoroughfares, it will soon be impossible to build any effective form of rapid transit, even if TransLink did decide to look beyond the bridges.

Another aspect of the Harbourside question yet to be determined is for the community to hear exactly what will be the updated nature of the development on the still vacant lands. Many of the fundamentals of the original plans have changed significantly over the intervening years since Knightsbridge and Concert Properties first began to put their ideas to council.

Not only has council membership changed at least twice over, the tone of council discussion has become toxic.

Meanwhile, city's hall's overzealous staff appears to prefer overcoming council's democratic right and responsibility to make the final decisions.

Beyond that, though, is the fact that man-made or not, climate change is giving a boost to sea levels and forcing corporations and governments alike to rethink their attitudes to waterfront developments.

Will rising sea levels cause Concert to pull back and revise their plans? If that should happen, will Mayor Darrell Mussatto and his team at city hall give the public another chance to voice its opinions?

Or will they say – as they have over the recent Lot 5 changes – that citizens had plenty of opportunity to say their piece at the start of the process and all they need do now is comment on the design and/or zoning variances.

More and more it seems, the four in the 4-3 votes on council seem to think the public is only useful to pay for the decisions they make behind closed doors.

Question is, are city taxpayers of North Vancouver going to take that lying down?

Or will more and more of them "get their Irish up" as O'Connell has done?

*After 16 years with the multi-disciplinary Perinatal Programme of B.C. and later in various endeavours in the growing high-tech industry, Elizabeth James now connects the dots every second Wednesday on local, regional and provincial issues. She can be reached via email at [rimco@shaw.ca](mailto:rimco@shaw.ca) (<mailto:rimco@shaw.ca>).*

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