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## LAUTENS: Behind council's sober second thoughts

[Trevor Lautens](#) / North Shore News

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Napoleon's retreat from Moscow was bloodier, but West Van council's U-turn on its slamming of proposed liquefied natural gas tankers on Howe Sound was quicker.

Councillors at the Aug. 4 meeting volubly backed off their unanimous decision two weeks earlier when they had asked Ottawa to ban Asianbound tankers from waters uncomfortably close to the western shores of West Vancouver.

I pause. Let's be fair. This is what politicians should do more often, right? - have sober second thoughts, admitting mistakes first time around.

By this measure, Mayor Michael Smith deserves praise for the frankness that slick politicians avoid when they give a 3,000-word, non-answer to an unwanted interview question.

At the second-thoughts council meeting Aug. 4, Smith commendably took full responsibility for the July 21 decision.

"All blame lies at the feet of the chairman of the meeting," Smith was quoted by News reporter Jeremy Shepherd. "My legendary impatience sometimes gets the better of me after over an hour of going around in circles on a debate. You get desperate to call a question, any question." (If you can recall any time that former mayor Pamela Goldsmith-Jones publicly admitted to her blunders, jog my memory.)

On that point - what the hell did we agree to? - Coun. Craig Cameron was equally candid: "I didn't know what we voted for." His only vote he's been embarrassed about in three years on council, he confessed.

Returning now to my usual sunny cynicism: Why council's hasty retreat?

Wild guess: Largely because John Weston, MP for West Vancouver-Sunshine Coast-Sea to Sky Country - the LNG tankers would sail through the population heart of his riding - wacked council's motion, the way it was passed, and its timing. Otherwise he's OK with it, one might drily say.

Strange. Does Weston carry such clout? Another wild guess: Yes, if he's the messenger boy for the big guy, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and by proxy for an equally agitated Premier Christy Clark. (As indispensable Sun columnist Vaughn Palmer recently noted, Clark vowed in 2011 that the first LNG export venture would be "operational by 2015." Not.)

If my take is correct, Harper, Clark and the oil and gas industry don't need the distraction of yet another protest.

The Howe Sound LNG plant, a subsidiary of Pacific Oil and Gas, owned by a Singapore billionaire, would be small potatoes compared with the proposed Northern Noway Gateway project. But it's our small potatoes. The issue hits close to home.

So was council's first decision correct? Or its second? Or will it be its third, next month? Coun. Michael Lewis expects more information will uphold council's original decision opposing the project.

Predictably, industry leaders say LNG is safe. Predictably, opponents, including chemistry doctorate Eoin Finn, cite the worst case: An LNG tank explosion destroyed a square mile of Cleveland and killed 130 in 1944.

Extraction industries are locally popular, generating prosperity and jobs. Unless something goes hugely wrong. Hello, Mount Polley.

Agent 7p2sd4g angrily writes: "Just as dear old Dal Richards was about to sign off on his delightful Harmony Arts concert at John Lawson Park (Aug. 7), who should enter, accompanied by 100 or so (mostly) female followers, right at the foot of the stage, but Justin Trudeau. Absolutely tasteless, and downright rude. Poor Dal looked shell-shocked."

Or was Dal willingly cooperating? We may never know.

Also speculative: Lisa King's front-page photo in the Aug. 7 News was a great shot - worthy of an award-winner - of Justin Trudeau dancing in a steamy, almost orgasmic clinch with Pamela Goldsmith-Jones, John Weston's Liberal opponent in next May's federal election. But was it winning politics? My guess is that it turned off as many voters as it turned on.

Agent C8tt0j4 reports "turmoil" at CKNW. Right, vertigo must be swirling in management/ownership heads - dropping its best and most loyally listened-to segment, Cutting Edge of the Ledge, with top Victoriawatchers Vaughn Palmer and Keith Baldrey, hosted by Bill Good. The Three Wise Men, I called them.

Except for sharp Mike Smyth, NW is wildly shuffling the deck, conscripting mostly affiliate Global TV staffers as temp fill-ins replacing

Good and Philip Till - it's radio's new Amateur Hour. Complete disclosure: I hold parent company Corus Entertainment stock. I sell my shares, you guys could be done like dinner!

Closing in Ambleside: Familiar, colourful and long-established Amadeo, and Redfish Kids Clothing, consolidating its business at its Hornby Street store after only two years in West Van.

One of my most respected Agents, Y8c5scu, conjectures what town hall will never admit about the delay in a joint policefire department building: The police and firefighters don't like each other (not a unique wariness). The plan for a "combined safety building" in fact showed two separate edifices joined only by an atrium.

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