

# north shore news

## JAMES: Conflict rules, term limits worth a think

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Just  
**ASKING**  
Elizabeth James



*"A former member of the [provincial] Executive Council or a former parliamentary secretary must not [for 24 months] make representations to the government in relation to any specific ongoing transaction or negotiation to which the government is a party..."*

– Government of B.C. Conflict of Interest Act

In the high heat of summer, this column is more philosophical than specific and throws out some thoughts about the structure and operation of our local governments.

You may well wish to add your own ideas to the discussion and that would be all to the good.

For the most part, my points are relevant to all three North Shore municipalities and even to the Metro Vancouver region but one or two arose out of specific recent events in our local communities.

First up, is conflict of interest guidelines for former members of council, for no other reason than to link it directly to the quote that opens this column.

I've written before about the need for council members to avoid direct, indirect and/or perceived conflict between the public interest and personal benefit. Along the lines of "no man can serve two [or more] masters", I remain unapologetic for my position on the topic.

Nonetheless, where my previous comments were written in the context of serving members of council and regional committees, today's discussion asks how far we should go in guiding the personal and business activities of former elected officials or members of staff.

The quote refers to conflict situations that may arise for members of the Legislative Assembly but, since municipal and regional governments can exist only at the pleasure of the province, surely conflict legislation should also devolve to local officials?

If so, perhaps the legislation should be updated to mirror that of Quebec's Ville Lac Brome which, for 12 months, prohibits former council members from "serving as a director or executive officer of a corporation...or from holding employment or any other position so as to obtain undue benefit for themselves or any other person, based on [information gained during] their previous office as council members."

Bearing in mind that not everyone who leaves or retires from a municipality will be of retirement age, I have to ask, 'How long should we curtail someone's right to work after they leave their municipal position and its associated 'insider information' behind?

Next up is the continuing discussion **about amalgamating the two North Vancouvers.**

Most of you who follow local issues will know the recent history to date. In brief, it seems most politicians and municipal staffs who want the word erased from their dictionaries, say, “Well, we’re not going to save money by amalgamation because we still need these people, or because, because...” and then they shut down the conversation.

But **any elected politician who refuses to discuss the topic is in a direct conflict of interest; the decision is not theirs to make.**

**Secondly, major financial savings are not the main objective for most people who raise the topic with me. Instead, coordination of services, thoughtful planning, transportation and development are top of mind. Surely, after they have endured a massive turmoil of uprooted streets and infrastructure they’ve earned the right to have the subject discussed.**

**Third topic: term limits.**

We’re a conflicted lot, aren’t we?

People I talk to say they’re fed up with the governments in power — all governments. I don’t seek out these opinions, or listen only to the converted. The proof of that claim is amply demonstrated by the results of the only two referendums we’ve been allowed.

**So I ask, if voters don’t want rampant development, or a party system at the local level, why do they elect, in one municipality at least, a party-like slate that virtually guarantees a 4:3 split in favour of development over the ensuing four years? What a depressing term for the three.**

**I think the time has come to return to three-year terms and then rotate out half the council incumbents at each election. A mayor would serve only two terms.**

**Last up: the relationships between local governments and Metro Vancouver’s governing bodies.**

After 15 years of mandate-creep, are we not well past the point at which the relationships between elected local governments and the region need to be reevaluated and updated? And by the region, I mean to include TransLink.

Ah, TransLink; don’t get me started on the latest deck-chair movements on that expensive Titanic — that discussion is for another day.

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