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EDITORIAL: Common cents

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A few years ago, the province put together a task force on reforming rules for local government elections. The group received public comment and made recommendations. Unfortunately the most important of those - concerning spending and contribution limits - were shelved.

With municipal politicians increasingly seen as the farm team for the big leagues, we'll leave it to the cynical to guess why that might have been. But now - with a legislative committee discussing the issue and accepting public comment - election finance reform is back on the agenda. As well it should be.

One need only look to recent campaigns in the City of Vancouver to realize that without regulation, obscene amounts of money are being raised and spent on local elections. To a much lesser extent, similar patterns are evident in many communities - with the cost of running for public office climbing ever higher. That leaves candidates either taking money from groups whose interests are directly affected by civic leaders' decisions or hoping for lottery wins.

Limits on both spending and donations are long overdue. Accepting donations from particular groups doesn't mean candidates are necessarily beholden to them but it would be silly to pretend an uncomfortable perception isn't being created. Reasonable limits, combined with disclosure of donations before voters head to the polls, would go a long way to fixing this. As would provision for proper enforcement by Elections B.C., historically not a strong point and without which, any new rules will mean a whole lot less.

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