

LETTER: Spirit Trail unfairly targeted as object of Lautens' ire

North Shore News

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Dear Editor:

I opened up the North Shore News on [Friday, June 3 to learn the latest victim of Trevor Lautens \(http://www.nsnews.com/opinion/columnists/lautens-bah-to-batty-bully-boy-bicycle-backers-1.2270177\)](http://www.nsnews.com/opinion/columnists/lautens-bah-to-batty-bully-boy-bicycle-backers-1.2270177) verbal barbs, only to learn that I was one. Never one to mince words, Lautens describes the district's waterfront proposals as "contemptuously hostile to West Van interests" and "certifiable insanity." Such shrill sentiments merit a measured response.

As far as can be discerned, the object of Lautens' ire, this time, appears to be the radical suggestion that West Vancouver extend the Spirit Trail past Ambleside Park. Displaying a relatively rare level of co-operation, the three North Shore municipalities, the two North Shore First Nations, and the federal and provincial governments made a commitment to building a safe, accessible, multi-use trail running the 35-kilometre length of the North Shore.

At the time (which predated my term on council), the objective was to provide a place for pedestrians, joggers, cyclists, in-line skaters and people with mobility aids and to connect the various North Shore communities and amenities. While both North Vancouver municipalities and the First Nations have done their part, West Vancouver's efforts have largely stalled at 13th Street.

How, one might ask, could a reasonable person object to such a seemingly laudable goal? The trail supports healthy recreational activity for all ages, free of charge. It takes cars off the road. It connects our communities. It is fun! As a father of small children, it is also the only safe and relatively level place in the community to introduce new riders with limited skills and questionable judgment to the joys of cycling.

Argyle Avenue already hosts throngs of pedestrians, cyclists, wheelchair users and the like every day. Lautens' criticism appears directed towards the proposal to close Argyle to motorized traffic.

He implies that this proposal is a capitulation to "bully-boy bicycle lobbyists" and "their bureaucratic "enablers." In doing so, Lautens sets up his usual straw man and then proceeds to have at him.

The truth, of course, couldn't be further from this fiction. There is no West Vancouver bicycle lobby to enable. Staff propose to close Argyle to most motorized traffic for entirely legitimate, community-minded reasons. For one, it allows the aforementioned pedestrians, cyclists, etc. safe passage, without having to dodge cars backing out of angled parking stalls.

For another, it would allow the district to dig up large paved areas and significantly add to the much cherished and much used green space on the waterfront. Joni Mitchell lamented the paving of paradise to put up a parking lot. Lautens laments the loss of the pavement.

I am by no means convinced that Argyle should be closed to cars. The loss of parking is a serious concern and this is why staff propose to first install barriers on parts of Argyle and observe the impacts before making a final decision. Before proceeding, we need a sound strategy to replace the lost parking, to support our merchants and the vitality of our town centre. So, there is a debate to be had; a civil, informed debate like what occurred over the Seaview Walk and, as Lautens acknowledges, led to a positive outcome.

By contrast, conjuring up lycra-and-spandex clad bogeymen in a near hysterical call to arms does not foster reasoned dialogue. What it does, of course, is move newsprint. So, unfortunately, that means we can expect Lautens to keep manufacturing dissent and targeting new victims every two weeks.

Coun. Craig Cameron

West Vancouver

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