

north shore news

JAMES: Election changes deserve closer look

[Elizabeth James](#) / North Shore News

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"We want the transition to the new rules to be as smooth as possible for local elections participants and those considering running for local government, so they understand their campaign finance responsibilities and obligations..." (from a news release dated Sept. 9, 2013)

Last September's news release by Community, Sport and Cultural Development Minister Coralee Oakes made no mention of the other critical change she had up her sleeve.

British Columbians had to wait until Feb. 25 to learn about the province's plan to move from threeyear to four-year terms for municipal councils and school districts - effective as of this year's November elections.

Remember how Premier Christy Clark said there wouldn't be a fall sitting of the legislature because government could get more work done out of our sight and behind closed doors? No, she did not put it quite that way but she might well have done so.

The opening salvo from IntegrityBC noted that a politically disillusioned public has a right to have their say on such changes.

"To have this done in the dark of night with a stroke of the pen stripped them of that right," said executive director Dermod Travis."

What's new, Dermod? It's known as the HST syndrome. Symptoms are obfuscations or outright denials, followed by sudden announcements when it's too late for the public to consider the implications, let alone mobilize their opposition.

Campaign financing Even if you limit your Googling on campaign financing to the Lower Mainland, you'd be wise to have an anti-nauseant at the ready.

From \$169,000 to Vision Vancouver in the 2005 municipal elections, to a whopping \$960,000 to the NPA party in 2011, to the peanuts-by-comparison developer and union donations here on the North Shore - does any of this largesse come without expectations of a quid pro quo somewhere down the line?

That very question may have been on the minds of **North Vancouver City Couns. Heywood and Clark last Nov. 4 when they submitted a non-binding motion that urged "all candidates for election to council to abstain from accepting donations from developers with projects or potential projects before council, or from labour unions that represent City employees."**

Will Oakes' Local Elections Campaign Financing Act (Bill 20) recognize the full intent of that motion - which only passed four to three? Hard to say but I'm not holding my breath. That's because Suzanne Anton, who sat on Vancouver City council until 2011, now sits as the Liberals' up-front and seen-everywhere attorney general in Victoria.

North Vancouver motions and future provincial plans for campaign limits notwithstanding, developers and Vancouver's Gregor Robertson are not allowing the green to grow under their feet.

As you may already know, Vancouver developer Bob Rennie — otherwise known as the "condo king" who has been helping Vancouver council out of its Olympic Village embarrassment — recently threw a \$25,000 a plate luncheon fundraiser for Vision Vancouver.

Yup; this is where taxpayers who barely earn that much in a year get to upchuck their KD-macaroni.

In an article he wrote for The Georgia Straight, Vancouver urbanist Ned Jacobs quoted a guideline for community planning: form should not follow finance. Then he went on to warn, "When this axiom is discarded, the result is substandard urban design and loss of livability - frequently with deleterious social and financial consequences."

Although Jacobs did not appear to be zeroing in on campaign financing per se, a healthy dose of watchful caution would not go amiss.

Four-year terms on council Our backs are against the wall on this one. Bearing in mind what you've just read, do you believe the motive for four-year terms is to allow "local governments more time to consult, plan and achieve community goals" or to "help manage election costs" as they claim in the Feb. 25 news release? Or do you think there might be a few ulterior motives at play? If we have no option but to put up and shut up this November then I want to see two things: term limits and a massive turnout at the polling booths.

How many terms? No more than two.

I used to worry that, if term limits were implemented, we would risk having to throw out the good with the bad.

Now, it seems that without those limits, if voters unwittingly land themselves with developer go-alongs or Rob Ford wannabes, they are powerless to take corrective action - not for the three years they have endured to date but for an endless rotation of four.

Six months away from the election campaign, it would be worthwhile for us all to do a lot more digging of to bolster our decision-making when time comes to evaluate the candidates on offer.

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