

My Vote Matters group aims to boost Vancouver's voter turnout

West side realtor behind the group has made significant efforts to keep it non-partisan

BY JEFF LEE, VANCOUVER SUN OCTOBER 17, 2014



In the last Vancouver election the current government was elected by only 18 per cent of eligible voters. My Vote Matters hopes to increase voter turnout dramatically in this election. File photo.

Photograph by: GLENN BAGLO, PNG

Two hundred nine thousand, four hundred and forty.

That is a number that Mike Andruff and the backers of a new citizen-based voter engagement group, [My Vote Matters](#), say would constitute real success in Vancouver's Nov. 15 civic election.

It is exactly 50 per cent, plus one, of the number of voters who were eligible to vote in the 2011 election.

Andruff said he found it "horrifying" that in the last election the current government was elected by only 18 per cent of eligible voters. That only 34.6 per cent of eligible voters bothered to cast ballots isn't a ringing endorsement of democracy either, he believes.

"The thing is, democracy is not sexy, democracy is not cool. **Democracy is work.** Unfortunately people prefer to watch TV or go play tennis. This is our challenge, to stimulate people to participate," he said.

Andruff's non-profit society has made its mission to try to get half of all voters out to the polls. They

don't care who people vote for. They just want them to vote.

"We are trying to promote the voting process by giving eligible voters everything they need to get engaged here," he said. "It is a pet peeve of mine that I don't think we get enough people out to vote.

The group of nearly two dozen people are spending their own money to print up lawn signs with a simple message: vote on Nov. 15. They have put up a website, myvotematters.ca, where people can get information on the voting process. They also regularly update an online list of all-candidate and mayoral debate meetings being held by other groups, including community centre associations, neighbourhood groups, universities and colleges. And they've published a customizable candidate list voters can take into polling booths.

The privately-funded effort is in addition to a renewed effort by the city itself to modestly raise voter turnout by four per cent from 2011. City Clerk Janice Mackenzie said Vancouver is increasing the number of advance polling places, opening hours and voting locations with hopes of bucking the traditional trend of low turnouts.

Andruff said his group does not endorse any candidate.

"My Vote Matters is a non-partisan association and I have two very, very strict watchdogs on the team," Andruff said. "The volunteers make sure that all of the messaging at myvotematters.ca is factual and does not carry political overtones."

Andruff, a realtor on the city's west side, however, admits that he once was a member of The Electors Action Movement, a revised image of Mayor Art Phillips' 1970s party. He also was involved in community opposition to a dense development proposed for Dunbar. He resigned from those groups when he decided to try improving voter turnout.

"I took the view that in spirit and in reality, that I should be non-partisan," Andruff said. "I don't want to be a politician. I don't want to right the ills of the world. I just want to see a good election in November that is a fair representation of the community, a lot fairer than the last ones have been."

Patrick Smith, a Simon Fraser University political science professor, questioned whether myvotematters.ca will be successful. Reforming campaign finance laws may be more effective in encouraging people to vote, he said.

"The short answer is they probably don't matter on the relative order of things. We would be a lot better off if we fixed our election finance laws," he said. "But it is kind of hard to denigrate people who are out doing democratic work. It seems to be a worthy cause. But I don't think it is going to have a dramatic impact."

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