

Developer-funded elections conflict Vancouver City Hall

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by [Elizabeth Murphy](#)



• The City of Vancouver's civic election campaigns are predominately financed by corporate developers. **Vision Vancouver has become the party with more developer funding than any other.** This has been reflected in the policies implemented in Vision's two-term majority. Vision most recently has approved a record \$1.12 billion in development permits for the first half of 2014.

Civic elections hark back to the wild west here in Vancouver. The very developers who depend on city council to approve rezoning applications are the most generous donors to election campaigns. This **breeds conflict of interest.**

The Province reported on March 7, 2014 that real estate marketer/developer Bob Rennie held a Vision fundraiser lunch for the mayor with 50 development industry professionals at a \$25,000 suggested donation per seat .

On October 25, 2011, weeks before the 2011 civic election, Ian Gillespie, president of Westbank Projects Corp., held a Vision party fundraiser attended by numerous developers and architects. At a public hearing a week earlier, the Vision-dominated Vancouver City Council approved Westbank's massive one-million-square-foot Telus Garden development, which covers a full city block downtown bounded by West Georgia, Richards, Robson and Seymour streets.

Among many other massive spot rezonings over this term, Vision has approved Westbank's Oakridge Mall with 13 towers of up to 45 storeys. The twisty tower at the north end of the Granville Bridge was approved this spring. **Westbank and other favoured developers are all getting their projects approved at a record pace as whole neighbourhoods are being rezoned over community objections.** Heritage and character buildings are being demolished at an all-time record of over 1,000 demolitions in 2013, which will likely be exceeded in 2014.

Vision has by far overtaken the NPA as the new developers' party. However, one developer/fundraiser, Rob Macdonald, made a major donation of close to one million dollars to the NPA in the last election. Rob Macdonald has recently resigned from the NPA board.

The results have been that Vision's developer partners have dominated the city's agenda so Vision's stated election platform has not been achieved and likely never will under this regime.

Housing affordability is falling more out of reach for the average person under Vision's watch while they accept \$25,000 per seat lunch donations. However, Vision has now redefined affordable housing to mean "whatever someone can afford." New development is always more expensive and less affordable than the existing older comparable stock, whether built for rent or for sale. But the older stock is being demolished rather than improved, to be replaced by expensive new construction.

Homelessness has tripled under Vision due mainly to displacement of lower income residents by development pressures. The 14 sites of affordable housing that Vision has been depending on to house the homeless were initiated by the NPA before Vision had their majority on council and are still not completed. Ending homelessness was originally an NPA goal and is failing under Vision.

The Greenest City policy has resulted in increasing the city's ecological footprint rather than reducing it. Professional planning process is being swept aside to fast-track the glass and concrete towers the development industry favours, which are the least energy efficient form of development possible. To avoid creating a concrete jungle and heat island, we need to consider limits to growth.

Bike lanes are not Vision's initiative as they have been part of the city's transportation plan since 1995. However, the city has implemented this policy poorly without adequate – if any – involvement of those affected.

Cultural venues are also being lost, such as the Ridge Theatre and bowling alley, Pantages, Hollywood, Varsity, Granville 7 and Playhouse theatres; music and entertainment venues such as the Starfish Room, Richards on Richards and Maxine's; community space of St. John's Church on Comox, and the list goes on. Cultural uses need old buildings since they are generally the most affordable, but often threatened by development.

If Vision's policies are allowed to continue over the next term, which has now been extended from three years to four years, it would result in massive damage to our city.

We need real green policies rather than new expensive housing and promises of affordable housing in some distant future at the cost of losing our existing more affordable older housing stock. We, at least, should be protecting this older stock with adaptive reuse, secondary suites, multifamily conversions, infill and appropriate incremental development over time that doesn't put existing affordability at risk while other housing options are explored.

We need policies that benefit the majority of people – we don't need policies that benefit a few select developers who fund election campaigns.

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