

Subject: Joint Use of Public Facilities

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A MESSAGE FROM ERNIE CRIST

District Council recently passed a motion on the "Joint Use of Public Facilities". The purpose is to make maximum use of existing public facilities including schools, municipal, recreation etc., for the benefit of the public.

Parties to the agreement are

The City of North Vancouver,
The District of North Vancouver,
The North Vancouver Recreation Commission,
The Board of School Trustees.

The parties of the Master Agreement will sign a Statement of Co-operation which states that....

The partners agree that the quality of life and the sense of neighborhood and community will be enhanced by making public facilities and services accessible for use by neighborhood residents.

Under Guiding Principles, the partners affirm that education, recreation and leisure time activities undertaken by residents help to build a healthy community. Schools, recreation centers and municipal facilities are places where neighborhood residents may meet to carry out these activities.

Under Specific Use Agreements, it states that agreements between the partners regarding the joint use or operation of any specific facility, site or location, or regarding expenditures of funds for such resources, shall be set out in a separate stand alone "Specific Joint Use Agreement". HOWEVER, IT ALSO STATES, THAT EQUITY WILL NOT BE MEASURED ONLY IN TERMS OF DOLLARS. (My reaction to this statement is why not? Is it not true that good fences make good neighbors?)

Developing Specific Joint Use Agreements for the use of facilities will come under the jurisdiction of a Standing Committee and will be presented to the partners for agreement and approval. This will include cost sharing of capital costs, site and facility acquisition costs and construction costs - sharing of operation costs, provision for maintenance and the sharing of maintenance costs, including acquisition and renovations, and the sharing of related costs as well as staffing and management agreements necessary for joint operations.

The partners also agree that the specific conditions regarding the funding of joint use initiatives, developed under the master agreement, will be considered in each Specific Agreement.

Up to this point everything sounds fair, businesslike, progressive and sensible - Indeed what could make more sense than to share services on a businesslike basis.

However, under "Booking Specific Joint Use Facilities" and "Priority of Use" a different scenario becomes evident. Since the District owns the majority of Indoor Facilities as well as parks and playing fields, not only will the District pay the major share under the agreement but it will not gain access to school facilities for the use of District residents unless it picks up the full tab. On the other hand the School Board does not compensate the District for the extensive use of municipal recreation facilities nor for playing fields which they take for granted.

A great deal was made some years ago about the community school concept making schools available to neighborhoods during evening hours. It was argued that Schools have already been paid for and should be used during off hours for the benefit of the public. However, this concept was cancelled by the School District for lack of funding. When the Municipality approached the School Board to resurrect the program, School District 44

turned it down unless the Municipality would pay for it and nothing came of it.

Yet at the same time the school board stopped maintaining its playing fields, counting on the Municipality to fill the gap - a form of provincial downloading. I am very much afraid that this new shared services agreement, however meritorious and noble in principle, will be a repetition of the same scenario. With the School Board facing a substantial deficit, it is unlikely that it will provide money for additional services unless it is fully compensated.

This is even more true for the City. Playing fields are but one example. There is a desperate shortage of playing fields in the City. Under the umbrella of the Rec Commission it has used District playing fields free of charge. Neither did it contribute to the capital maintenance of District recreation facilities of which the District has a preponderance. This will continue unless the full value of the land plus facilities, including playing fields, are taken into consideration. There is no mention, however, in the proposed agreement to this effect.

Also, under "Parks and School Fields", the agreement lists as 1st priority the Rec Commission/Parks function. Under "School District Buildings and Grounds", it states that during the fall, winter and spring terms, School District facilities will be available for bookings between 5 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. weekdays and 8 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. weekends.

But Indoor Recreation facilities, provided by the municipality under the agreement, will be available for the School District, 24 hours a day. Indoor facilities will also be made available for School District 44's use between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. on weekdays. Schools programs may also make use of recreation facilities at other times, providing there is no loss of revenue to the Rec Commission. Will regular users be treated as second class citizens?

The function of the Rec Commission is to keep the municipality healthy. Recognized or not it is part and parcel of the preventive health care system. The Rec Commission is supposed to provide services and programs geared to provide maximum benefits to the maximum number of people at minimum cost. This concept appears to be very much in jeopardy and has been for some time as the Commission is more and more expanding its bureaucracy and empire including into the Arts field.


All told the agreement looks very much like an umbrella under which the DISTRICT OF NORTH VANCOUVER WILL CONTINUE TO SUBSIDIZE both the School District and the City EXCEPT MORE SO. Even now the Rec Commission is providing Phys-Ed programs in the schools that are clearly the responsibility of schools. The Rec Commission even asked the District of North Vancouver for funds to expand this program. At the same time the Commission is once again raising fees for its regular clients, including seniors.

But what is possibly the most serious danger inherent in this agreement is that it will result in a huge and non accountable bureaucracy setting fees and policies at will. Even now the Rec Commission, despite receiving a \$ 6 million dollar subsidy from the District taxpayers alone and with facilities paid in full, charges fees that are virtually the same as those charged in the private sector who have to pay taxes, recuperate capital investment and make a profit on top. Efficiency is clearly lacking.

I have long argued that the Rec Commission should be reorganized along the Parkgate model. This model, operating under the Societies Act, is far more efficient than the present Rec Commission model. What is more the Parkgate model is far more accountable to the respective neighborhoods. Since it is operating under the Societies Act, it can access funds from the private sector plus various government agencies as well, something the Rec Commission cannot do. But all my efforts to this end failed.

The collective bureaucracies and their political servants clearly do not wish this to happen. Yet it would mean true public control. It would also mean more flexibility to respond to neighborhood needs. Another unpleasant byproduct of the proposed agreement is that the District Council, under the guise of improving the level of service to the community will raise taxes, ostensibly for the public benefit when, in reality, it will be used to continue subsidizing both the City and School District 44 by another name. All this will be denied, of course, but I am speaking from experience. Financial finesse is not a District forte. Just look at the District Heritage Fund to mention but one example.

Ernie Crist

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