

Subject: District Mayor Bell interrupts Councillor asking questions re taxes.

Date: Sat, 22 Mar 2003 15:01:33 -0800

From: "Ernie Crist" <ernie_crist@dnv.org>

To: "FONVCA (E-mail)" <fonvca@fonvca.org>, <Cagebc@yahoo.com>

CC: "Mayor and Council - DNV" <Council@dnv.org>, "Directors Team" <managecomm@dnv.org>

A MESSAGE FROM ERNIE CRIST

On Mar. 17 a delegation from the waterfront industries appeared before Council. They voiced concern over what they described as high industrial municipal taxes and they asked that Council REPEAT ITS 2002 TAX FREEZE in the 2003 budget.

Last year's tax increase for residential property taxes had been in the neighborhood of 5 %. The industrial representatives pointed out that taxes for industries in the District were not only inordinately high but also that they were in fact the highest in the Lower Mainland. As a result they claimed they could not compete on equal terms. This year's projected increase for residential properties in the District is in the neighborhood of 6% which amounts to roughly \$ 90 for the average household. If Council exempts industries from an increase in the 2003 budget as well, the \$ 90 increase for the average household will go up to roughly \$100 to make up the difference.

When I asked a member of delegation whether industrial taxes, unlike taxes for residential properties, may be written off, Mayor Bell attempted to interrupt me. Clearly Don Bell did not want to allow such a legitimate question and in typical petty tyrant banana republic fashion, tried to stop me claiming this was an opportunity to ask questions not to enter into a debate. My question of course was exactly that, a question and nothing more.

Bell also attempted to interrupt me when I asked the delegation whether they were aware that, unlike residential properties, which are assessed at real or market value, industrial properties were assessed at only a fraction of their value. This is a fact. We know this because NEXEN, for instance, claims to have a replacement value of \$ 300 million but for purposes of taxation they are assessed at only \$ 23 million. The result is that even though the rate of taxation for industries as a general rule is far higher than those of residential properties, their taxes are not necessarily much higher than those of residential properties even though on paper it appears that they pay ten times as much.

Here too the Mayor tried to stop me even though such questions are exactly the kind of question that must be answered to understand these complex issues and make informed decisions.


But the real noise started when I asked for a staff report as to what the tax return for the District would be if the industrial properties were to be rezoned in line with their highest and best use such as Hotels for instance. This is, of course, a perfectly legitimate question. Some members of Council made more noise than a bunch of chickens after a fox has entered the hen house. They claimed that such questions were outside the experience of staff and would unduly take up their time. It was premature, said one Councillor, while another claimed that it was unfair and would be impractical.

Lacking any kind of experience and intellectual acumen, it never occurred to them that such facts and figures are routinely presented to Councils in other jurisdictions to help them in their long term community planning process. District staff too avoided answering the question. Instead of giving straight answers, they danced around the proverbial mulberry bush, clearly not wishing to be seen as going against the wishes of the "intellectuals" on District Council. Councillor Harris and Councillor Muri were particularly upset by the prospect of finding out the truth, claiming that it was untimely. My motion was defeated 5 to 2 with only Councilor McKeon-Holmes voting with me.

Such questions, of course, are exactly that need to be answered not only to have a good understanding about how Canada's tax laws work but also for purposes of community planning. Needless to say, income from industrial taxes must be weighed against many other things such as jobs, for instance. It also includes its potential impact on transportation, including that the District is part of the Port and that a large portion of the land is outside the jurisdiction of the municipality. Notwithstanding, there can be no professional community plan unless these issues are addressed. But then, judging

by the performance of the Mayor and Council on Monday the 17th of March, this is clearly outside the grasp of the present Council, headed by a man who is incapable of running a professional meeting without displaying his bias.

No wonder when it comes to efficiency in local government, the District rates at the bottom of the scale.

| | |
|---|---|
|  winmail.dat | Name: winmail.dat Type: application/ms-tnef Encoding: base64 |
|---|---|