

Subject: Recreation**Date:** Sat, 16 Oct 2004 11:10:09 -0700**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>, "Senior Management Committee" <managecomm@dnv.org>

A MESSAGE FROM ERNIE CRIST:

The North Vancouver Recreation Commission needs to be reorganized.

Despite an annual subsidy of close to \$ 6 MILLION DOLLARS from the District alone, Rec facilities in the District are deteriorating at an alarming rate. It is just a matter of time before they will be in a state of disrepair requiring tens of millions of dollars to upgrade. The alternative is to turn to the private sector where the prime objective is no longer to keep the community healthy but to make maximum profit.

The administration of the Recreation Commission is top heavy. It is all over the place doing things which are not really within its jurisdiction such as running the Centennial Theater. That should really come under the Arts Commission or the Arts Council. The Recreation Commission does not pay any taxes. This is an additional form of subsidy. It is on top of the \$ 6 million dollar subsidy from the District and the \$ 3 million from the City of North Vancouver. Despite these huge subsidies the Commission cannot look effectively after simple maintenance.

Simple repairs and replacements of parts such as a shower head, by way of example, take months to repair. A hand rail costing twenty dollars so clients can hang on to prevent slipping in the steam room recently took months to install and cost countless dollars for a study.

The purpose of the Rec Commission is to keep the community healthy. It's official function is to provide programs for the maximum benefit to the maximum number of people at minimum cost. More and more, the Commission is abandoning this motto. Increasingly private lessons are promoted at the expense of space for the general public. The Commission is counting the dollars it gets from these private lessons but loses sight of the overall objective.

Playing fields allocated by the Recreation commission in both the City and the District should be another concern for District taxpayers. There is an abundance of fields in the District but a shortage in the City. The result is a shortage in both jurisdictions. The City of North Vancouver is building the high-rises and the District is building the playing fields at no cost to the City.

When it comes to capital maintenance of Recreation facilities in the District it is the same story. The City, with only one quarter of facilities of the District, is not paying a cent towards capital maintenance while its population is more than half of that of the District.

There is a way out of this dilemma. The solution is to reorganize the Commission based on the "Parkgate" model. Parkgate has a great deal of autonomy. "Parkgate" is a society largely controlled by an elected board made up of community and neighborhood volunteers.

As a society it can raise money which it has done with great success ever since it was founded. While it is still operating under the umbrella of the Rec Commission in some ways, it is far less bureaucratic and far more efficient. It is far more responsive to neighborhood needs.

Virtually all facilities in the Lower Mainland are based on this model including those in Vancouver. If the District would dissolve the Commission, in its present form and reorganize it along the Parkgate model the District would have plenty of money to upgrade the facilities and prevent further deterioration.

All my repeated efforts to accomplish a reorganization have failed however. The Commission bureaucracy spends great sums of money on PR gimmicks. Recently it claimed that only 20 % of its clientele polled was dissatisfied with its performance. If 20 % of a clientele in a private business would indicate dissatisfaction with the services the alarm bells would go off and changes in management would be forthcoming rather quickly. In the District of North Vancouver, however, the Commission is using these statistics

to prove that everything is great.

In fairness, the Commission in many ways is doing an admirable job in the provision of programs. It is hampered, however, by its new philosophy of making facilities available for private lessons at the expense of its regular clientele as it did when it evicted a bona fide community Curling Club from one of its facilities to make room for a private club. However, the Commission is totally out of it's depth when it comes to running itself like a business - a business not to make profit but to provide recreation programs for the maximum benefit to the maximum number of people at minimum cost. If that were the case the facilities would not continue to deteriorate and it would not take months to replace a shower head in the shower room.

Ernie Crist

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