

Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver

March 22, 2010

Mayor Robertson and Councillors
City of Vancouver
453 West 12 Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V5Y 1V4

Dear Mayor and Councillors:

Re: City of Vancouver's Submission to the Local Government Elections Task Force

Please accept this as Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver's comments on the City of Vancouver's Submission to the Local Government Elections Task Force as proposed for Council approval March 23, 2010.

Although we agree with many of the City's recommendations to the Task force, we have a number of concerns that are not addressed.

The following are the City of Vancouver's recommendations in their submission to the Task Force with NSV comments in *red italics* below each point.

City of Vancouver Summary of Recommendations to the Local Government Elections Task Force - Appendix A

- Set limits on the annual amount of contributions that can be given by an individual or organization to an elector organization, campaign organizer, or an individual seeking elected office, similar to those at the federal level

NSV - Agree with imposing limits on individual donations. Corporate and union donations should be disallowed. NSV is particularly concerned about the potential conflict of interest associated with donations from the development industry.

- Limit the amount of money that may be spent annually by an elector organization, campaign organizer, or an individual seeking elected office during a general local election campaign, similar to those at the provincial and federal level

NSV - Agree

- Disallow contributions to an elector organization, campaign organizer, or an individual seeking elected office, from sources outside of Canada

NSV - Agree

- Require that all donations and expenses for candidates, elected officials and elector organizations be disclosed on a continuous basis at six month intervals

NSV - Agree and further suggest more stringent disclosure requirements immediately preceding and during election campaign periods.

- Implement a system of tax credits for municipal donations, similar to those for provincial and federal elections

NSV - Disagree with allowing corporations, especially developers, to donate. Therefore they should not receive a tax credit.

- Change the definition of “candidate” to include anyone seeking nomination within an elector organization for candidacy to a local government office

NSV - Agree

- Appoint the Provincial Chief Election Officer to oversee municipal elections in BC, and establish penalties and mechanisms for enforcement of offences under the amended local government elections legislation

NSV - Disagree - Appointing the Chief Election officer would require substantial increase in staff if he was responsible for enforcement in every municipality. It is unclear whether it would achieve anything. The ombudsman's office was not very effective. At present citizens can bring a judicial review application to set aside an election as was done in White Rock last year resulting in the removal from office of a counsellor. This, however, is a costly procedure. Consideration should be given to establishing an electoral court (like a court of revision) that would hear citizen applications to set aside elections where there have been certain kinds of violations.

- Extend municipal terms of office to four years

NSV - Disagree - Keep elections to 3 year cycles as they are now, or revert to a 2 year cycle as prior to 1993. Implementation of any change in the election cycle should be withheld until the subsequent term of office.

Local Government needs to be highly accountable. Since the change to three years in the early nineties we have elected too many governments that ram through things that were not part of their platform early in their mandate in the hope that the public will forgive them after three years. The government of Art Phillips and those that followed on the one or 2-year cycle achieved a great deal, ranging from the development of False Creek, Expo 86, Coal Harbour, the new Library, zoning in the downtown, and much more. This accountability is what made Vancouver livable (e.g. preventing highways coming into the city centre) over the last seventy years. Reduced accountability due to longer election cycles puts this in jeopardy. Elections cost money, but savings do not justify the loss of political accountability.

- Oppose allowing corporations the right to vote in local elections

NSV - Strongly Agree

- Provide local governments with the authority to use any method of elections they wish to use, and repeal the requirement for Lieutenant Governor in Council approval to adopt such a change

NSV - Disagree - Granting local authority over electoral process could lead to chaos and the possibility of vote rigging. If not under provincial legislation, there must be a process to insure that cities are accountable to voters for changes to method of election. Another approach used in parts of the U.S., is to have cities classified according to population and have different methods in smaller towns than large cities.

- Amend the definition of election offenses and related penalties to include individuals acting as an intermediary in third-party campaign contribution schemes

NSV - Agree

Regards,

Ned Jacobs
On behalf of the Steering Committee
Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver

Group contact email: nsvancouver@hotmail.com