



MEDIA RELEASE

NSV says local government election “reforms” conceal a Trojan Horse that will weaken democracy, and calls for deeper and quicker reforms, retention of 3-year election cycle

(Vancouver, January 31, 2014) Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver today submitted its comments to Coralee Oakes, B.C.'s Minister of Community, Sport and Cultural Development, on the White Paper on Local Government Elections Reform. Today is the deadline for public comment.

Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver (NSV) is disappointed by and largely opposed to the so-called “reforms” put forward by the provincial government in its recently-published White Paper on Local Government Elections Reform.

According to the White Paper, proposed changes “are the most significant in nearly two decades”. But the proposed package of minor adjustments, stemming from work of the Local Government Elections Task Force established in 2009, includes nothing to restrain the corrupting influence of “big money” on municipal politics. Instead of practical and progressive measures to reign in the unlimited campaign contributions that are undermining the democratic foundations of accountable civic governance, the proposed “reforms” amount in many respects to a regressive attack on grassroots political organizing and free speech.

The main points of the submission are:

1. Please retain the three year terms of civic office. Do not change to four years.
2. Proposed "Reforms" do nothing to restrain corrupting influence of “big money” in municipal politics.
3. Some "key changes" will actually hurt grassroots campaigning and free speech.
4. Please do not allow Vancouver City Council to make its own rules for election campaign finance. NSV believes that the current City administration is too compromised by systemic conflict of interest to be entrusted with this responsibility.
5. Expense limits are not enough. Caps are also needed on campaign contributions – in the 2014 civic election.

NSV is concerned that the cosmetic changes to campaign finance rules include a “Trojan horse” in the form of a possible shift from the current three years to four-year terms of office, which would weaken accountability and democracy.

Notably, despite a clear balance of public feedback opposed to an extended election cycle, the Elections Task Force recommended that the term of office for local officials be extended from three to four years. Although the September 2013 White Paper draft makes clear that “the provincial government has agreed not to change the term of office”, it is also clear that this position was predicated on a resolution passed by the UBCM in 2010 “to retain a three year term of office”.

However, the UBCM reversed that position at its 2013 Annual Conference and now the province appears to be considering the change to 4-year terms. The election cycle is the only remaining control the public has over elected representatives. It is currently too long rather than too short, and should probably revert to the former two-year cycle, which provided much greater accountability. As for claims that elections are expensive, NSV’s view is that there is no better way to spend tax dollars in a democracy.

A copy of the five-page submission is attached.



Neighbourhoods *for a*
Sustainable Vancouver

www.nsvancouver.ca

Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver is a citywide grassroots network of neighbourhoods with roots going back to 2007. In the November 2011 civic election, NSV ran a mayoral candidate and four council candidates for Vancouver City Council, based on Neighbourhood-based Real Democracy, Sustainability, and Vancouver-based Solutions. A major pillar was campaign finance reform..

Contact: Ned Jacob Tel. 604-873-5081, E-mail info@nsvancouver.ca, Web www.nsvancouver.ca