

Good News/ Bad News

From Flawed Public Process to No Public Process

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In a truly weird turn of events the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation distanced itself from the Aquarium's private consultation process in its bid to expand its zoo and whales in captivity facilities. At the September 11th Park Board meeting the Aquarium put forward its plan for the Park Board to lead a 'public' input process paid for by the Aquarium. The Aquarium's plan called for it to spend \$300,000.00 on polling, exhibitions and public meetings where it would try to convince the people of Vancouver to support the expansion of the Aquarium footprint by 50%. This would be done with the Park Board logo on all the materials and Park Board staff acting as administrative support.

But at the September 11th meeting in a surprise 6-1 vote the Board, led by independent Commissioner Allan Degenova, a strong supporter of the Aquarium, voted to remove the Park Board from the process and encouraged the Aquarium to go ahead on their own.

While the Park Board severing its ties with the Aquarium's private process is good news, it does leave a vacuum in the public process. The people of Vancouver have no public venue to express their views outside of the Aquarium led process. The Park Board will have only the Aquarium's version of public response when they revisit this issue in November. The Park Board should still hold their own public consultation process where the people of the city can express their concerns in a free and fair manner.

Call the Park Board and tell them you want a public process before they make their decision. This Board was not elected on a platform of Aquarium expansion--in fact the NPA did all they could to not talk about the Aquarium during the election. Tell them democracy includes the public.

Contact the Commissioners at: pbcomment@vancouver.ca or call the Park Board at: 604.257.8400

Here are the remarks Stuart made at the September 11th Park Board meeting on behalf of the Green Party of Vancouver:

"Good evening. My name is Stuart Mackinnon. I am here today on behalf of the Green Party of Vancouver to express our great dismay at the undemocratic, non-transparent and dangerous process you are proposing for consulting the public concerning the Aquarium/Zoo expansion.

What kind of fair and open process can we expect when one of the partners stands to gain from a positive outcome? Although in the consultation document Kirk and Co. have promised 'stake holders' meetings and that 'one-on-one interviews will be conducted in approximately ten public locations, resulting in several hundred interviews', at least one group was informed that they will only be interviewed for 15 minutes by telephone. What kind of a process is it that will allow groups that can be expected to support the expansion to be interviewed in a public setting, while a group like No Whales in Captivity, who oppose it, are relegated to a telephone interview away from the public ears and eyes? Already we can see that the process is not one that is transparent, public and independent, but looking like it is designed to arrive at a pre-determined outcome. The

consultation document further states: "The Park Board/Aquarium consultation team may identify a group of academic and technical experts to provide technical input on aspects of the project." Here we have further evidence that a pre-determined outcome is forthcoming. It is the Aquarium itself that gets to pick and choose what kind of "academic and technical" expertise will be presented to the public.

According to the report presented and passed at the July 10, 2006 meeting of the Park Board, the consultation process will first present to the public the design features of the expansion and revitalization. After the public has been 'consulted' on the new features, then we will be asked whether or not we support the idea of an expansion. This seems to me to be a case of putting the cart before the horse. Why would we need to be consulted on any design plans if we do not support an expansion in the first place? This entire process is designed to direct the public along a path that inevitably leads to support for the Aquarium expansion plan.

A further expansion of the Aquarium means a further reduction in park space. It means more cars and buses in the Stanley Park and it means that once again the Park Board will ignore the need for an over all Master Plan for the park before altering this haven of green space in the city. The need for a Master Plan for the park was first recognized more than 15 years ago. The Park Board prepared a draft plan in 1990 but this was never passed by any elected officials. Instead the Park Board has continued whittle away at this legacy from our parents and grandparents, a legacy that we borrow from our children and grandchildren.

To have the Aquarium as a partner may save the Park Board money but it prejudices the process to the point of it being a sham. Having the Aquarium lead or even share the consultation process suggests at the very least a bias and at worst a foregone conclusion on the results.

It is not too late to see that there are fundamental flaws in this process. It is not too late to stop and reconsider. Public officials must not only do good, they must also be seen to do good. This process is not only not fair, not transparent and not democratic; it has all the makings of corruption and scandal. Stop it now. Do the consultation on your own. Make this a process that not only is in the public interest, but can be seen by all to be in the public interest. Make it not one in which one of the stakeholders seems to be a net beneficiary to a predetermined outcome, but one whereby the public has complete confidence that it is fair. We ask that you defeat this motion tonight and start again. Thank you."