

*November 11, 2008*

***Upper Kitsilano Residents Association  
2008 Vancouver Election Residents Update***

***Election Newsletter***

This newsletter was difficult to compose. Many of you over the last few months have encouraged your UKRA executive to write a newsletter giving our thoughts on the election, which we appreciate very much. Prior to the past two Vancouver Municipal elections, we have sent out a newsletter close to the time of the election. In past election newsletters we have basically given updates on a number of topics, and simply encouraged people to vote. We strongly believe that the local government we will vote in on Saturday has the most influence on our daily lives of any level of government, as we have said before. So in short, PLEASE VOTE!!! Also all parties require help on Saturday ensuring that the voters who have committed to vote for their party actually go out to vote. Please contact the specific party's organizing office for details, or send us a note.

In this newsletter, we wanted to highlight some of our experiences with some aspects, candidates and city departments in our current and potential future administration. This has been a great challenge. We have tried to:

- Encourage residents to vote
- Be as objective as possible, stick to the facts (from a community point of view), not appear to support any particular party or candidate, which is sometimes difficult (as you will see)
- On a regular basis, submit our actions and directions to our residents for review and approval, to help ensure that we reflect the views of most of our residents
- Summarize the points in the document, to facilitate reading the document, though of course we are pleased to supply more detail on any of the points
- Encourage voting based on the track record of candidates, whether incumbent candidates, or their track record outside of city politics, along with their stated platforms
- Provide data from a survey, conducted with a number of other community groups, of candidates' opinions on various community issues
- Encourage thinking about the city as a whole, as Council must, but also summarize specific stands that candidates have taken on topics that affected our area in particular, which we have been involved with over the last few years. The city is a group of neighbourhoods just like ours, with a group of specific and general challenges and opportunities.

There are a number of challenges with a municipal election discussion:

- Politics at any level are highly emotionally charged, loyalties are strong, the urban myth states that it is one of those topics that one avoids in order to have a calm discussion
- We have direct experience with the many city hall issues in this newsletter, and our statements are based on observation, impressions, basically the truth through our lenses.

- Various ways of describing issues, or even the specific issues that one chooses to describe, can strongly slant the orientation of a discussion.
- In our part of town, there are also many people, especially for some parties, who are friends with or are related to many of the candidates, which brings a whole level of personal involvement.
- Our perspective on the election considers a number of city-wide issues, however much of what is important to us are issues that impact our local Kits community
- The popular press largely supports the current majority party, being the party that is aligned with the corporate world (while acknowledging that the other parties also have their corporate alliances)
- Since local government has such an impact on our lives, this translates to mean that some candidates' platforms could have a very personal negative or positive impact on a voter
- Ideally a voter would want to vote for a candidate based on some combination of the individual candidate's qualifications, and their party's platform and track record. However the current majority council has always voted as a block, in our experience, on every community issue.

### ***Editorial on Neighbourhood Consultation***

Our experience is based on being a relatively active organization in our area for the last 15 years or so. Our observations in general, regarding the regular operations of the current majority Council, and some key departments such as Planning, Parks & Engineering, is that they operate in a hierarchical way. In other words, they are very top-down in their approach, there is a lack of real community engagement and a lack of value placed on neighbourhood input. The Departments such as Planning and Engineering are supported in this approach by the Council. Council has hired key staff, such as the new Director of Planning, who support this approach. Community groups across the city agree that there have been many more issues to engage in since the NPA have had a majority. A mechanism is often provided for community input, however the input is often minimized, disrespected, or simply ignored. The results are often presented in a way to support Council and Planning's chosen course of action. Many committed community people are wary of, or discouraged from speaking based on their treatment by, and the lack of impact on, the current Council. City hall seems to believe they are the experts. Just trust us.

Many forward-thinking cities, such as Seattle, have established a Department or Office of Neighbourhoods. City hall states repeatedly that they are consulting neighbourhoods in their various important decisions. However from our point of view, and from literally dozens of other community and residents groups all across the city, these methods are flawed. The need is especially grave in a city that has voted down the ward system, which would have allowed for individual Councillors to advocate for their area of the city. The Vision candidate for Mayor has articulated that he understands the problems, and has promised to create an Office of Neighbourhoods. This at least is an acknowledgement of the need for such an advocacy department.

In general over the last six years, clearly the COPE Councillors, have been the people who have asked the tough questions consistently in Public Hearings, and other committee meetings, that are in the minds of all the community members in the gallery. This has been especially noticeable over the last three years, with David Cadman, while not voting every time for the community alternative, consistently asking the questions, and expressed what needed to be brought forward. The Vision Councillors, while not necessarily in agreement with the community's point of view, were always respectful, listened and posed good questions.

One of the community groups that the NPA likes to advocate for are the people that are yet to move to Vancouver. They would like to provide them a voice, though we are not sure how they will decide what those voices will say. We would suggest that they should work out how to listen to their own residents respectfully, before worrying about how to respond to people who wish to live in Vancouver, but cannot as of yet.

## Specific Community Topics

**1. Neighbourhoods Candidates Questionnaire:** Over the last few weeks, *Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver* has been working to obtain responses on key topics from the Vancouver Council candidates. The purpose was to give us in the communities an understanding what their positions were on a variety, of what we felt were key topics, in contrast with the discussions and rhetoric that often fills the media around election time. We felt these were important neighbourhood issues that are important topics in the three years between elections, when the real work, the real setbacks and the real gains are made in the growth of our city. We of course suggest that strong neighbourhoods and strong community involvement brings forward good practical ideas, engagement, community buy-in, and ultimately initiatives that are more successful.

Please find at the end of this document in the "*Appendix: Candidate Questionnaire Responses*" a summarized analysis of the results of the survey from *Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver*. Basically the Vision and COPE candidates acknowledge that change is needed, and have made specific commitments on a number of key points. The NPA have basically committed to continuing on the path they have followed for the last three years.

**2. Community Visions:** The Visioning process was established years ago by the Planning Department to allow communities across the city without a local area plan, to create that plan, using volunteers from the community, questionnaires, public meetings, planners from the City as an interface to the community. Kitsilano has some old plans for different parts of Kits, so we were far down on the list for Visioning. Community groups across the city have spent lots of effort putting plans together. These groups are, especially over the last year, feeling that they are being relegated to a secondary position. Many recent decisions have changed the Vision groups' role and agreed-upon Vision plans. The groups have been expressing their concerns about the changes, and the decisions on specific topics. These concerns are being heard by city hall, but not acknowledged as justified.

**3. EcoDensity:** Your Upper Kits association is part of a group of approximately 30 neighbourhood groups from all across the city called *Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver*, that supports environmentally-friendly, sustainable planning for the future of Vancouver. We have expressed our concerns about many aspects of the EcoDensity initiative. These efforts have had a significant impact on the re-working of this initiative, however at a fundamental level the suggestions have been minimized, and basically ignored. The other parties running for Council have committed to re-evaluate the approval of EcoDensity.

**4. Broadway Improvement Project:** From 2005-2007, the City of Vancouver's Engineering, Parks and Planning Departments executed the Broadway Improvements project in our area. Initially over 80% of the trees on Broadway were targeted for removal as part of this project. After literally hundreds of hours of various community groups and individuals' efforts, all but a few of the trees were saved. Suggestions were made during the process by landscape architects and urban planners from our community, many of which pointed towards using a permeable surface for the new sidewalk, in order to prevent sidewalk heaving in the future, and for a more aesthetically pleasing surface than cast concrete. Engineering and Parks told us repeatedly that it was not possible, not a good idea, or not within their budget. Since then this same sidewalk covering has been installed on Cambie near the Park Theatre, and in other areas around the city. Many of the people who worked on this effort are to be commended, but they are also wondering why this was so difficult to accomplish with the intransigent Engineering Department, and Parks (the shepherds of the City's trees). The current Council was somewhat sympathetic to our efforts, but did not provide any real assistance in terms of funding, or firm direction to Engineering and Parks to listen to the community's concerns.

**5. Liquor Stores & Policy:** The City of Vancouver has a liquor store policy that was introduced by Council a number of years ago, after considerable work by many volunteer community groups, who had concerns about having liquor stores built wherever an investor wished to do so, which is the situation in most of the rest of the province. Three additional private liquor stores were proposed in our area over the last few

years. The first two were reviewed during the previous COPE Council, and were refused based largely on community feedback. During 2007, the NPA requested a review of the liquor store policy from the community, from rehab groups and from the liquor industry. Both the rehab groups and the community groups confirmed that the policy was working well and recommended no changes to the existing liquor store policy, and the industry recommended more flexible regulations. Council decided to provide more flexible regulations, one of which allowed for an additional liquor store in our area at Blenheim and Broadway, next to the seniors centre and McDonald's, and across the street from the bottle depot. Many in our community worked many hours to prevent this store's approval. However it was difficult to resist, once the changes had been made to the official policy.

**6. West 10<sup>th</sup> and Trutch Rezoning:** For many years, there were discussions, plans, surveys, letters, and meetings about the fate of the parking lot across from St. James Community Square. Many uses were suggested for the site, which was zoned for single-family housing. Dozens of meetings, letters and speakers came forth from our community over the course of almost 10 years. The current Council voted unanimously to rezone the property in July 2006 to a condominium development, which has yet to be started. As part of Council's decision on this matter, they requested a study of the traffic volumes and risks along our portion of West 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which of course is good. This study has also yet to be performed, however we have been communicating regularly with Engineering on this matter, and they have promised to perform the study this fall.

**7. Large Format Stores:** A number of years ago, there was a section of Marine Drive and a section of Grandview Highway set aside for large format retail stores, called Highway Oriented Retail. During the previous COPE council Wal-Mart and Canadian Tire had applied to rezone an area of Marine Drive to build large stores. The COPE council voted down the rezoning. The NPA stated in their 2005 campaign that they would support large format stores, and did vote to continue the big box zoning, and approve the Canadian Tire rezoning and development in 2007. The Vision local planning for the area around the stores clearly recommends against large format stores. We are still attempting to understand the inconsistencies between the stated aims of EcoDensity and car-oriented, big box store approval.

**8. Laneway Housing:** As in our recent newsletter update, on October 30, Council voted to approve laneway housing across the city's 70,000 single family properties. Amendments to the zoning bylaws are being prepared. The city is viewing this effort to allow laneway housing throughout the city as a test effort, even though zoning bylaws will be changed. There will be no process for neighbours to express concerns about any laneway house, it will be solely Planning's decision. A public hearing will be staged once the zoning bylaws changes are created, though the chances of any significant changes at that point are slim. This is clearly a controversial topic, with many differences of viewpoint across the city. However whatever your view, from our perspective, this is clearly an area where real community consultation has not occurred. It is part of the systemic problem with consultation and engagement that exists. Unfortunately the current Council does not believe that there is a problem.

**9. West 16<sup>th</sup> and Dunbar Facility:** Plans are proceeding for the facility at West 16<sup>th</sup> and Dunbar for a rehab facility. Council has clearly stated that these facilities are being established throughout the city, and that community feedback about the location of this facility will not have a major impact on the planning process.

**10. Board of Variance Third Party Appeals:** As many of you know, during the current Council's term, the right of a neighbour or association (such as ours) to express concern about a proposed development in our community has been lost. This was an important institution for decades in the city. Now the only body that can appeal a decision of the Planning Department is the developer of the project themselves. Many groups, led by one east side community group, have attempted to have this decision overturned, however they have been unsuccessful. Both Vision and COPE have promised to re-examine this decision closely.

**11. Home Depot in Kits:** During 2004, during the previous COPE council's term, Home Depot had expressed a desire to build a large format retail store at Maple Street and Broadway. This struck a chord with many nearby and other city residents, as well as local businesses. Again, many volunteers gathered

together to resist this effort, and after the eventual Public Hearing, the COPE Council voted not to allow this to proceed.

**12. General Gordon & Kits Secondary School:** The seismic upgrading of many of our most precious heritage buildings has been a topic of much recent discussion. Many heritage and community individuals and groups have been working on this important topic. Many feel that the current Council and School Board are not as effective as they could be regarding investment in making the buildings safe, and preserving the buildings. Both the Vancouver elementary and secondary school teachers associations are recommending voting for a Vision COPE school board to help with funding for schools, and the preservation of these important buildings.

**13. Parks Department Topics:** The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation is the caretaker of our parks, our community centres, our trees, and other key parts of our city. During this last term, Parks has generated some controversy with their public consultation processes, and subsequent decisions, with respect to some topics such as:

- Our own Broadway improvements trees project, and the removal of our Linden trees
- Logging of trees for views in Queen Elizabeth Park
- Jericho Marginal Wharf, the wharf next to the Jericho Sailing Centre. Many were advocating for retention of this heritage site.
- Removal of the Hollow Tree from Stanley Park
- Establishing a dinosaur amusement park in Stanley Park
- Mount Pleasant pool
- Lack of enforcement of protection for trees on private lots

It is interesting to note that some Parks Commissioners, including Marty Zlotnik, seem to have a large advertising budget, which includes bus shelters, billboards, and even mobile, electrified advertising panels on the sides of vans. Commissioner Zlotnik, who favours removing the Jericho Marginal Wharf, was chair of the subcommittee that recommended for demolition, and the full, NPA-dominated board did indeed vote to approve that action, with COPE Commissioner Loretta Woodcock being the lone dissenter. He favours establishing a marina for power boats at the location, again just east of the Jericho Sailing Centre. The Commissioner was also in favour of trading part of Pacific Spirit Park in order to facilitate preservation of the UBC Golf Course.

## **Appendix: Candidate Questionnaire Responses**

### ***Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver***

Attached are the results from the candidate questionnaires on issues important to our neighbourhood groups from across the city.

*Analysis:*

#### David Cadman and Ellen Woodsworth, the COPE Team

They filled in one questionnaire for both candidates, and they clearly said yes to almost all of the questions. They commit to:

- neighbourhood based planning processes should be implemented through CityPlan as the primary basis for future planning,
- objective and meaningful public consultation,
- an extension of the EcoDensity public process to address the outstanding concerns raised,
- reinstating third party appeals,
- civic party financing, disclosure, donation and campaign reform.

#### Gregor Robertson and the Vision Vancouver Team

They filled out one questionnaire for all the Vision Vancouver candidates. Vision said yes to almost all of our questions and commit to the same as COPE above:

- neighbourhood based planning processes should be implemented through CityPlan as the primary basis for future planning,
- objective and meaningful public consultation,
- an extension of the EcoDensity public process to address the outstanding concerns raised,
- reinstating third party appeals,
- civic party financing, disclosure, donation and campaign reform.

There are a few questions where Vision is not as clear as COPE. Vision has indicated they are checking with their candidates on these points.

#### Peter Ladner and the NPA Team

All the NPA candidates were sent the questionnaire individually, twice each directly. The NPA Campaign Manager was also sent the questionnaire requesting a NPA party response. We were told by the Campaign Manager that the NPA is non-partisan and does not have a party position, but they would send it on to the individual candidates. This is in contrast to the fact

that the NPA party has made statements to the media on a party platform and has voted as a block on almost every issue at Council during their term.

We have not received questionnaires back from any of the NPA candidates that are now on Council, only from three of the new NPA candidates, so those returns are attached. The NPA candidates presently on Council can therefore only be evaluated by their track record at Council over the last term while they have had a majority. All the NPA Councillors have mostly voted as a block with Sam Sullivan, including candidates Peter Ladner, Suzanne Anton, Kim Capri, and Elizabeth Ball. This includes creating, promoting and approving the EcoDensity Charter and Initial Actions. The NPA have given every indication by their actions on the existing Council that:

- they intend to fully implement the EcoDensity initiative as it is presently approved, if they have a majority on Council,
- prefer a top down planning process of EcoDensity rather than neighbourhood-based CityPlan process,
- do not listen to the citizens,
- do not support reinstating third party appeals,
- have voted down civic party financing, disclosure, donation and campaign reform.

Conclusion:

Anyone who is happy with how the last term of Council has been managed by the NPA majority would likely experience more of the same by voting NPA. Anyone who wants a change in the direction of Council should consider what COPE and Vision Vancouver are proposing. Change will only happen if there is a strong statement from the citizens that change in direction is what we want.

Thank you.