



## City Council Report Card First Six Months

Dizzy Dean (Baseball Hall of Fame inductee, 1953), once said, “It ain’t braggin’ if it’s true,” and we are in full agreement with the late, great Mr. Dean. We think it safe to say that FUNcouver’s ability to tap into the frustrated energy of Vancouver funsters has resulted in a paradigm shift at 12<sup>th</sup> and Cambie.

Last November’s municipal election clearly demonstrated that Vancouverites were ready for a regime change at City Hall. FUNcouver is happy to report that our new Mayor and Council have, so far, demonstrated a willingness to get out of the way and let the good times roll, in this fun-starved town. We are but a few small steps into the journey from No-Fun-City to FUNcouver, but we are, at least, moving in the right direction.

FUNcouver is fully cognizant of the fact that Mayor and Council have an enormous amount of work to do to realize their agenda and that is why we stated, during the election, that we are not looking to City Hall to actually *create fun*. We simply want the new regime to remove the myriad roadblocks that are regularly thrown up in front of anyone who’s trying to have a little fun and make a buck or two in the process. Over the past six months we have watched council in action and we have to say, with some reservations, so far, so good. Here’s our unscientific report on how they’ve fared so far:

**DOA Day:                    A+                    Shows promise**

In December, just days after being sworn in, Council recognized seminal Vancouver punk rock band DOA for their 25 year long contribution to our city’s cultural mosaic. The very idea that a city council would declare a day in honour of a punk band almost beggars belief but there was Councillor Jim Green, shaking hands with and singing the praises of DOA leader Joey Shithead at the Railway Club one rainy Saturday afternoon. Green stopped short of awarding a key to the city but we don’t think anyone in their right minds would hand over a key to anything of value to an old punk rocker named Shithead.

## Fun at Kits' Beach? Say it ain't so:    A    Listens well

If there is to be found, anywhere in our fair city, a better example of the spirit of NIMBYism than the anti-fun philosophy certain Kits Point residents, we are not aware of it. So, we were delighted when both Park Board and Council gave the green light to developing a restaurant – a restaurant that would, horrors!, be allowed to serve alcohol - on the City-owned beach. Judging from the hysterical reaction of some Kits Point residents, you'd think a nuclear power plant was going to be built. Kits Beach, like all beaches in our beautiful city, is there for the enjoyment of all, not just those who are fortunate enough to own adjacent property. Park Board is developing a strategic plan about all the commercial Public/Private potential for the City's beaches. Imagine! Something that might bring in more revenue and reduce costs to the taxpayers while promoting FUNcouver beaches.

## And... they're off!    C    Needs to pay more attention

While the jury is still out on this one, we were pleased that Council did not automatically say, "No!" to a request to install slot machines at the track at Hastings Park. Previous Councils have bowed to the pressure of small special interest groups and forbidden slots in Vancouver. In a city where you can legally gamble on horses, hockey, football, baseball etc. etc., play several dozen different lotteries, black jack, poker and roulette, saying NO! to slots is tantamount to telling someone they can order beer, red wine, white wine, scotch, gin or rum but not, under absolutely any circumstances, tequila. Not to mention a potential loss of \$12 million in revenue and 600 jobs if the province relocates 3 of the existing casinos should the city continue to say "no" to slots.

## Theatre patrons are not drunken hooligans:    B+

A city that does not have a thriving performing arts scene is little more than an oversized suburb at best, a glorified hick-town at worst. Cultural groups mostly exist hand-to-mouth – they get by with a little help from their friends, including our-mother-the-state. So, when the Granville Island Cultural Society (GICS) applied to be allowed to serve alcohol *two whole hours* before and after live theatre performances (in order to make a few, much-needed, extra bucks) and City staff recommended against the application, we watched with baited breath. In their report to Council, staff warned, "Extended hours of liquor service, particularly after a performance, may begin to shift the focus of the business to that of a pub and increase the potential negative impacts on the surrounding community." Council begged to differ and approved the application. However, it should be noted that GICS had initially hoped to be able to serve 'til 2 a.m., particularly on opening nights, something that, for reasons we cannot fathom, will not be tolerated by the City.

## Let the Games begin!      P      More effort required

While we would have preferred to have seen an unequivocal show of support for our Olympic bid from the new regime, we understand that they were compelled to fulfill their campaign promise to hold a vote on the matter. We were happy to see that, once the people had spoken loudly and clearly, even those councillors who voted No came on board (although we seriously doubt they did so without being prompted by the Mayor's office and, even then, we think their enthusiasm was feigned). It is our time to shine, so stick the ideology in your socks for awhile.

## The chamber's alive with the sound of music:      A

To those of us who follow Council proceedings on a regular basis, it is a welcome reprieve from the often childish, mostly annoying and pointless bickering that transpires on a regular basis between COPE and NPA Councilors, to have Council chambers filled with the sounds of music. Jim Green's idea to begin Council meeting with a five-minute performance by local singers and musicians is both innovative and refreshing. If we might be so bold as to opine how this great concept could be improved, we would say that the performance should take place after Council has been at it for a little while. It would be a good way to exchange the bad energy for good. It must be noted that performers are not given so much as a pittance for their efforts to entertain Council and on-lookers. This is unfair and we would request that Council allow performers to sing for their dinner by passing the hat (we really just want to see who contributes, and how much!)

## Gentleman, start you engines (wimyn, please restrain yourselves)      C-

Rookie Park Board Commissioner Lyndsay Poaps made one Hell of a rookie mistake when she told reporters she was, to some degree, offended by all the scantily clad, aesthetically appealing young women employed to promote the Molson Vancouver Indy race. The media had a field day and Poaps was denounced by many as a wet-blanket feminist out to ruin the party. We assume that more politically savvy members of the new regime instructed the shell-shocked rookie to lick her wounds, then button it. Nary a negative word about the Indy has been uttered by Park Board Commissioners or Councillors since and Commissioner Poaps later distinguished herself in her work on skateboarding issues.

## What's a guy gotta do to get a drink around here? B-

City staff have claimed that they were not consulted regarding the sweeping changes to provincial liquor laws and regulations brought in by Victoria, on December 2. The process of liberalizing BC's antiquated liquor laws and regulations began in the late 90s. It was known as the Surich Commission and City staff were involved. They may not like the results but for them to say they were not included in the deliberations is disingenuous, specious or both.

FUNcouver fully supports extending serving hours in all licensed establishments to 4 a.m. Council has instructed staff to expedite a report on the matter in order to accommodate requests to allow bars to keep serving 'til 4 a.m. during Pride Week and FUNcouver looks forward to that report. In the meantime, Council passed a motion allowing bars to stay open as late on Sundays as they are on Saturdays, a small, cautious but meaningful step.

We readily admit that we are concerned by the fact that several Councillors have stated that they may not be willing to support a 4 a.m. closing time for bars unless Translink agrees to put busses on the road 24/7. Some people can afford to pay for cabs. If that's contrary to the egalitarian principles of COPE, will they also force bar owners to lower their prices so the poor can afford to drink and rub elbows with those who have been more financially fortunate?

Look for a full FUNcouver report on the liberalization of liquor laws and regulations in the not-too-distant future.

## Go Canucks, Go! A-

On Tuesday, April 22, as the Canucks were preparing to vanquish the infidels from St. Louis in game 7 of the 1<sup>st</sup> round of the Stanley Cup playoffs, FUNcouver was very happy to tune in to the Council proceedings on TV and see Jim Green sporting a Canucks jersey. Three days later, Mayor Larry Campbell was joined by Canucks General Manager Brian Burke and Councillors Raymond Louie, Jim Green, Tim Stevenson, Fred Bass (fashionably late) and Park Board Chair Heather Deal at the SW corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and Cambie, where he raised about a dozen Canucks flags. Councillor Ellen Woodsworth was also in attendance but, unlike her fellow Councillors who proudly donned three different Canucks jerseys, Woodsworth, for reasons we will not even attempt to guess at, would not wear the Canucks jersey, opting to carry it in her hands, instead. Tsk, tsk, tsk Councillor, for shame.

## Money – you gotta spend it to make it C+

FUNcouver has no desire to see cultural organizations becoming overly attached to the public teat for their survival. That is a dangerous trap that can, and has, led to laziness on the part of the recipients who, over a period of time, develop a deluded sense of entitlement. However, the amount of money spent by our municipal government on festivals is miniscule (\$430k) compared to what's budgeted by Montreal. Montreal, as we are sure everyone knows, is an incredibly dynamic metropolis and we can learn much from that great city. FUNcouver does not advocate that Council bankrupt the City for the sake of putting on a good party or two but we would like to point out that our goal is not only to make Vancouver a better place to live for its citizens but also to make it a better place to visit for tourists. FUNcouver would like to see Council take a serious look at how it spends our money on culture with an eye to investing in projects that will enhance our tourism industry. And we would like to further point out that corporations are more likely to start, expand or relocate to a city where their employees are going to want to live and the more fun a city is, the more people are going to want to live there.

## The PNE for you and me B+

Good Gad, what the Hell were people thinking when they were advocating getting rid of the PNE or moving it to Surrey? For two weeks at the end of summer every kid in town has the opportunity to experience the magic of the PNE before going back to the books. Whether you're a wide-eyed 8 year old stuffing your face with cotton candy or a love-struck teenager trying to win a stuffed animal for the girl that makes your throat dry, your palms sweaty and your heart skip three or four beats at a time, the PNE is the place of dreams. Why... why would anyone want to deprive kids of the PNE? What kind of selfish person would want all the magic that's created by the PNE gone so they can go for a long, quiet walk by themselves? Go walk around New Brighton Park, for God's sake. Why would you want to deprive those little old ladies who stand in the sun with umbrellas, renting their yards out as temporary parking lots, of a few extra bucks, or us the joy of watching them do their business? A big shout out to Council for having the good sense to rescue the PNE. Now, if we can just deal with the unreasonable policing costs imposed by the Police Department for major citywide tourist attracting events, we could even bring back the PNE parade!

## Skateboarding is not a Crime: A

Having sat back and watched the progress of Council for a few months, FUNcouver decided to put them to a little test. A couple of months back, FUNcouver planted an idea in the Mayor Larry Campbell's office. We suggested that the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Slam City Jam would be a great occasion to recognize skateboarding as a legitimate recreational activity, sport and mode of transportation. We watched Larry and Jim take this idea and run with it and we gotta tell you, for a couple of old guys, those two can really leg it. In two months, the Mayor and Council have: rescinded the anti-skateboarding bylaw; taken away the police's powers to confiscate skateboards; declared skateboarding week; given unanimous approval for Park Board to build a new skate park; and returned the last boards confiscated by the Vancouver Police Department back to skaters.

FUNcouver is very pleased with the manner and speed in which City Council has moved on this issue. This was the first test that we put Council to and we really wanted to see what they would do, without being pushed. When we first approached the Mayor's office we were determined to do what was necessary to ensure that skaters, who have always been marginalized in Vancouver, get the recognition and funding their sport deserves. We are happy to report that we didn't have to twist anyone's arm or stroke anyone's ego. Larry and Jim took the ball and ran with it. Peter Ladner, whose son is a skater, was out of the blocks a half second after Larry and Jim and stayed with them right to the finish line and we think it's a sign of good things to come.

The Vancouver Skate Park Coalition worked long and hard, for many years, on these issues and FUNcouver is certainly not attempting to take credit for their efforts. We look forward to working with and advocating on the behalf of others who find themselves in similar situations – to paraphrase Churchill, “We will fight the No-Fun-Niks on the beaches, we will fight them on the basketball courts, we fight them on the dance floors... we will never surrender.”

Finally, FUNcouver commends Park Board Commissioner Allan De Genova for his efforts on behalf of skaters over the years.

## Observations

Overall we give the new regime a good grade. As we've said, so far, so good. We remain skeptical about whether or not this Council's COPE majority will be able to contain their inclination for social engineering over the course of the next three years but only time will tell. But then, social FUNgineering would be a good thing.

FUNcouver is extremely happy that the new Council has stood firm against NIMBYs in every corner of the city.

One of the biggest impediments to fun that we have identified is the attitude of the bureaucracy at City Hall. For far too long, meddling, overly cautious and obstructionist bureaucrats have stood between the citizens who pay their salaries and a good time. The pettiness and bloody-mindedness of it all is almost incomprehensible. We have noticed that Council have become painfully aware of this unfortunate situation. We are willing to work with Council to do whatever is necessary to get the message across to City staff who stand between No-Fun-City and FUNcouver that, if they want to run this city, they should stand for election in 2005.

Let us be the first to go on record as supporting any move by Council to increase the number of staff they have to assist them. We have ten councillors charged with running a city of 600,000 people. Those ten Councillors have three staff people to help them. That's ludicrous. Every Councillor should have their own assistant. A Councillor's job is full time plus and, if they are to be expected to be up to speed on every decision they have to make and answer to all the people who vie for their attention, they need more help and we would be fools to deprive them of funds needed to hire the requisite staff.

The Vancouver Police Department has longed for a city that rolls up the streets and goes to bed at midnight for some time. They have, in fact, done what they could to make their dreams come true for the past decade. FUNcouver will continue to study the reactions of the VPD concerning our efforts to make Vancouver the most fun city in the world and we hope that we will never again hear a representative of the force telling people to stay home and behave themselves.

The distance between No-Fun-City and FUNcouver is great and we are fairly certain it will, in the words of Jerry Garcia, be a long, strange trip (speaking of hippies, we would like to take this opportunity emphasize that, in spite of the fact that we have very little in common with them, FUNcouver acknowledges that hippies have the right to have fun – we are egalitarian funsters). No doubt, we will encounter vast chasms on the road between No-Fun-City and FUNcouver. Bridges that were destroyed by the No-fun-niks, who are now in full retreat, will have to be rebuilt. The enemies of fun will attempt to waylay us. Bureaucrats will wave their dreaded rule books at us and wag their fingers in our faces. Chicken Little officers of the law will deride our mission and shrilly equate it with tickling the dragon's tail. Puritans will warn that the wrath of some supreme being will be brought down on heathens who dare to sing, dance, skateboard, drink and generally be merry. NIMBYs will insist, "We have nothing against fun, but..."

But, in the end, as surely as Frodo reaches Mount Doom and destroys the Ring (sorry to ruin the ending for those of you who don't know), we will reach FUNcouver.