



## **From “No Fun City” to “FUNCOUVER”: Why we need new leadership at City Hall**

Most Vancouverites would agree that we live in one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Various international organizations have confirmed something that we have known for a long time, that Vancouver is one of the best places to live in the world: outstanding recreational opportunities, high standard of living, relatively low crime rate (particularly violent crime), moderate climate. But there's something missing. Montreal, Madrid, London, New York, Sydney and dozens of other cities around the world all have something Vancouver doesn't. The French call it *joie de vivre* - the joy of life.

It is not for a lack of demand that Vancouver is without the *joie de vivre*. Nobody wants to live in a beautiful but bland city. And it's not for lack of imagination or talent - everyone knows that you can't swing a cat anywhere on the west coast of North America without hitting someone who has a crazy, brilliant, fun idea rolling around in their head. Vancouver has an abundance of creative geniuses be they impresarios, entertainers or just plain old dreamers.

Events like the Polar Bear Swim and the Illuminaries Festival are proof that you can not stop creative individuals from being creative anymore than you can stop eight year old children from daydreaming or asking questions. So, if Vancouver has the desire and the talent necessary to be a culturally diverse, dynamic, dare we say magical place, how did it become rightfully known as No Fun City?

The finger of blame can not, and should not, be pointed at any one individual or group. The truth of the matter is that the mindset responsible for things like cancelling of the Sea Festival and First Night and telling people to stay home on New Year's Eve has become *institutionalized*. But, rather than attempting to apportion blame, we would be better off trying to find solutions.

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Solutions come from ideas and ideas come from people. Vancouver desperately needs leaders who can understand, on a systemic level, where the problems lie, and eliminate them.

The city council we elect in November will be responsible for deciding whether Vancouver takes the next step and becomes a truly "world class city" by embracing its dormant creative soul and nurturing it, or it allows small bands of NIMBY's to continue to suffocate the spirit that was so evident during Expo '86. Should the NIMBYs continue to hold sway at City Hall, our close-to-great city will become a sleepy suburban village by-the-sea for the next several decades.

If you think that last statement hyperbolic, you are mistaken. Much has been made of the "brain drain" that threatens Canada's future, but few observers have come to understand that Vancouver is, slowly but surely, losing its creative individuals and its creative edge.

The roadblocks that are thrown up in front of anyone who dares to try to spark the creative fire in Vancouver has been responsible for the defection of all manner of artists and impresarios to Eastern Canada. It is not immediately obvious because Vancouverites, for the most part, have never heard of them. And they will not hear of them until those individuals become national figures living in Toronto - or L.A. or New York -- for that matter.

We need to understand that there is more to life than slaving away for the sake of paying an \$850,000 mortgage on a 1200 square ft condo. Happiness does not emanate from a 50-inch TV screen. And, even if the Canucks do, one day, win the Cup, the hysterical rush of excitement and sense of community that will come along with the run through the playoffs will fade as quickly as it manifests.

**Vancouver needs new leadership. We need a city council that will listen to, encourage and help those among us who have a vision for a better, more vibrant city.** That is not to say that all councillors must be the modern day equivalents of PT Barnum or Walt Disney (although having one such person in council chambers would be reassuring).

Our Council must, above all, understand that Vancouverites are screaming for a change to the Victorian attitudes that are turning us into Singapore East and holding us back from being the best city in the world. The saving of the fireworks festival and the Indy have been a good start. But things never should have come to that in the first place. Allowing our bars and restaurants to remain open until 4 a.m. is, likewise, a very positive move but there is still much to do.

That's why we will carefully vet candidates in the coming election. We will ask each and every one of them if they are prepared to do what is necessary to transform No Fun City into FUNcouver. And we will do what we can to move voters to the polls on election day, to support those who aren't afraid to have fun.

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