

# Tea cups starting to rattle in Oak Bay

Proposed tax hikes 4.8%, more than double inflation

An increasing number of residents in Oak Bay are thinking that it needs a tea party, the Boston Tea Party revolutionary kind.

In 2012, concerned taxpayers formed **Oak Bay Watch** to address concerns about new bylaws that they thought encouraged so-called monster homes and negatively effected the streetscape of the community. Since then the group has also turned its sights on financial accountability, transparency and adherence to democratic principles.

"What is most disturbing is the fact there has not been and, there is no indication, that any internal cost-cutting or efficiencies are being considered or planned. In fact the opposite is true. By hiring more expensive administration staff, council has added to the ever-increasing municipal budget," co-chairperson Anthony Mears told the Oak Bay News referring to this year's preliminary budget.

After getting hit with a 5.1 per cent tax increase in 2015, **Oak Bay is proposing an increase of 4.8 per cent in 2016 and forecasting hikes of 20 per cent by 2019.** The current

consumer price index (CPI) for Victoria year-over-year to Dec. 2015 is 1.7 per cent.

A lot of this year's proposed increase is attributed to a 16 per cent increase in administrative costs and excessive pay and benefits, according to Oak Bay Watch. Estimates put the human resource manager position at \$149,580 annually. Oak Bay Watch says proposed tax hikes exclude projected increases to sewer rates, which are expected to add anywhere from \$573 to \$607 per household.

To improve transparency Oak Bay Watch broadcast 33 council and committee of the whole meetings to its residents in 2015, available at <http://www.oakbaywatch.com/webcasts.html>.

In what is viewed as a blow to democracy, in December Oak Bay **stopped recording the motions' mover and seconder at council and committee meetings** making it difficult for electors to hold council accountable for their promises and decisions. \$

**Background Info:** [Oak Bay Watch Newsletter >>>](#)

**ARE CAPITAL REGION TAXPAYERS STRESSED?**

**TAX ASSESSMENT HIKES** - Nearly 1,900 home owners in Greater Victoria received letters from B.C. Assessment warning of **higher than average**

**increases to their property values this year (15 per cent or more).** The assessed value reflects what the organization believes a property is worth as of July 1, 2015 and so do not reflect increases since then.

**SHORT OF MONEY** - Incredibly, almost **40 per cent of Canadian homeowners say they have found themselves short of money** to cover their monthly mortgage expenses at least once in the past year, turning to debt, cashing in savings or borrowing from family to pay the bills, according to a Nov. 2015 survey by Manulife of Canada. This is of particular concern in the Victoria region considering housing costs are among Canada's highest. Mortgage rates may be close to historical lows now, but interest rates are broadly predicted to start increasing in 2016.

**LESS CHARITY GIVING** - British Columbians have become **less generous in the last five years, continuing what has been a decades-long trend,** according to the Fraser Institute in their annual survey released in December. Fraser's most up-to-date figures show the number of B.C. tax filers who donated to charity - as high as 30 per cent a generation ago - has dipped from 22.4 per cent in 2008 to 20.7 in 2013. These numbers do not reflect the recent economic downturn caused by falling oil prices.

[I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it any more >>](#)

## **IMPROVED ECONOMIC OUTLOOK**

After three years of flat or stagnant increases, Victoria was positioned for **economic growth of 1.4 per cent in 2015 and a stronger 2.6 per cent in 2016,** according to The Conference Board of Canada's Metropolitan Outlook: Autumn 2015. "As a provincial capital, Victoria has struggled in the face of provincial government fiscal restraint. The local economy has grown little in recent years but things are looking up," said Alan Arcand, Associate Director,

Centre for Municipal Studies. "The provincial government is in a stronger fiscal position, which bodes well for the outlook in Victoria's largest sectors: non-commercial services and public administration." Conference Board forecasts are based on the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) which includes the Greater Victoria region.

## **FOR THE MUNICIPAL RECORD**

**Al Hasham , the new chair of the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce**, has been profiled in the current edition of Douglas Magazine. Hasham, immigrated to Canada from Uganda when he was 10, and is the owner of two successful local businesses, Max Furniture and Maximum Express Courier, Freight and Logistics....The District of Highlands has a new **chief administrator, Lorraine Hilton, replacing Chris Coutes, who is now Victoria's city clerk... Victoria and region ranked a distant 20th out of 36 cities judged "Best Cities to Work in 2016."** **BC Business Magazine** looked at six economic indicators such as income, unemployment and education, each weighted differently, to reflect the health of a city's job market. Each statistic was divided or multiplied to come up with a score suitable to its weighting....

## **WHAT'S COMING UP**

**OPEN BOARD MEETING** - Join us **Tuesday, Feb. 16 from 12 to 2 pm** for lunch and meeting at location TBA. Sponsors and supporters are welcome to sit in, but please RSVP to [grumpytaxpayers@telus.net](mailto:grumpytaxpayers@telus.net) ...**\$5,000 START-UP FUND** - Donations range from \$25 to \$450. With your help Grumpy\$ has now reached the 35% mark of our start-up goal of \$5,000. See PayPal donation button at the bottom of this page that accepts all major credit cards....We welcome **Bev Highton**, owner and broker of NAI Commercial Real Estate and **Colin Nielsen**, a retired Mountie, to the Grumpy Taxpayer\$ board....In the news, **1st vice-president John Treleaven**, held an interview Jan. 13 with **Terry Moore of CFAX 1070 Radio** concerning the 50th anniversary of the CRD. <http://>

[www.cfax1070.com/Podcasts](http://www.cfax1070.com/Podcasts), plus **Gregoire Craigie on CBC On the Island**  
Jan. 14.

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Sincerely,

The Grumpy Taxpayer\$ Team

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**A non-profit, unaffiliated, non-partisan, citizen's advocacy group dedicated to lower taxes, less waste, and more accountable municipal government.**

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