

Sept 2016

## Q & A: Review by Big City Mayors' encouraging for possible Victoria membership in caucus

**Editor's Note: This is the first in a question-and-answer series with local politicians on the issues of the day. Barb Desjardins is chair of the Capital Regional District, Mayor of Esquimalt, and co-chair of the Victoria Police Department.**

**An unprecedented total of \$125-billion in infrastructure grants, potentially the largest pot of money available to cities in the history of Canada, is up for grabs over the next 10 years.**

**The powerful Big City Mayors' Caucus (BCMC) of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has been lobbying the prime minister, cabinet and the Liberal government for funding on its priorities. For the first time in a decade the Prime Minister's Office is talking to the urban municipalities. However, no single jurisdiction in the Victoria region is large enough to qualify as a 'Big City.'**

**Q:** Has the Capital Regional District asked to join the Big City Mayors' Caucus, and if not, why not? Is it worthwhile to join, if not, why not?

**A:** As CRD chair, I have requested CRD be included in the Big City Mayors' Caucus. As someone who has participated at Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the value of its voice within this caucus, is very important for the CRD. We are a region with significant federal property and jurisdiction and we are significantly distant from Ottawa. There are very important reasons for having a regional voice on this caucus. The Big City Mayors' caucus speak and provide strong advocacy for issues such as transportation and housing that are CRD regionally significant.

**Q:** Would you be willing to lobby for a seat at the table and send a delegation to Ottawa and Vancouver to press your argument?

**A:** I have contacted the president and staff of FCM as well as reached out to the chair of the caucus and I will continue to lobby for this important representation for our region. If going to Ottawa is what is needed, I am happy to do this and I think it would be important to bring a delegation of mayors to support this initiative.

**Q:** Would the CRD be willing to enlist the support of influential Gregor Robertson, Mayor of Vancouver and third term chair of the BCMC, along with Raymond Louie, a councillor with Vancouver City Council, the new chair of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities?

**A:** It is also important to gain support of members of the Caucus such as Mayor Robertson, Nenshi, and others.

**Q:** What are the political implications of missing out on our share of \$60-billion worth of infrastructure grants because of a fragmented local jurisdiction?

**A:** In past years this region has missed out on funding , advocacy and awareness. This can be significantly affected through raised profile within the Big City Mayors Caucus and FCM. We have a unique region with 13 municipalities and 3 electoral districts. In combination we speak and represent 350,000 people and growing. This is significantly greater than some member cities of the Mayors caucus. We come together at CRD which is why this is the body that should provide input to and work within the BCMC.

**Q:** What are the barriers to the CRD having representation at the Big City Mayors' Caucus?

**A:** It is my hope that all members of CRD would see the benefit of seeking this membership, without full support in our region first, this will be challenging to have success. CRD is the place where we all have a voice, we all have strength in a single voice. I will be bringing this concept to the August 2016 meeting of committee chairs and out to the board for support and development of a strategy toward membership within the BCMC as soon as possible.

**At the CRD board meeting on Aug. 10, Desjardins spoke to the issue in her report of the chairperson. This fall FCM will be tabling guidelines for membership in the Big City Mayors' Caucus - such as population, shared priorities, regional economic and political relevance - which will be considered by the BCMC in 2017.**

**"It's excellent news," says Desjardins. "Membership has been loose at best, so having a process which they go through will only help us and FCM in getting greater voice."**

**Until admitted, Victoria is the only provincial capital city in Canada - the 15th largest city in Canada with a growing regional population of 378,000 according to the most recent BC Stats numbers - denied a seat at the table of the powerful Big City Mayors' Caucus. There are 21 members including Regina, Saskatoon, Kitchener, Gatineau and Waterloo - all with smaller populations than Victoria.**

### **BIKETORIA BUDGET ALREADY BLOWN**

It looks like taxpayers will need to dig deeper - much, much deeper - to help pay for the **\$7.75-million cycling network** conceived by the City of Victoria. The only bid to construct the two-way bike lane along Pandora Street has only received one bid from Brunnell Construction Ltd. that's **\$435,000 over the budgeted cost of \$2.98-million.**

City staff says the busy construction season is to blame for the lack of bids and that the shortfall could be possibly made up from the Gas Tax Reserve. The province is considering increasing the Gas Tax by 57 per cent to fund various transportation-related initiatives. Some city councillors are wondering if the project should be delayed to allow time for additional bids to help moderate costs.

## **Meet your Grumpy Taxpayer\$ Board of Directors**

### **MUNICIPAL MATTERS**

The most recent dubious expenditure to come out of **City hall in Victoria is the \$125,000 art installation** on the Johnston Street parkade building....**Katie Hamilton** has left her position as director of citizen engagement and strategic planning, and spokesperson for the City of Victoria on most matters including the bridge replacement. **Rebecca**

**Penz is the interim media contact...** BC Stats reports that four regional municipalities have actually seen their **populations dip slightly in the last five years** 2011-2015. Those are North Saanich, Oak Bay, Sidney, and Saanich....Consider that the **median family income in the metropolitan census area of Victoria is \$86,430** and only \$76,040 in Vancouver, according to the most recent Statistics Canada data. It includes couple and lone parent families....

### **HARBOUR AUTHORITY ADDS TO WAGES**

In the last issue Grumpy\$ began a multiple part series on politician's pay in the Victoria region. As it turns out, City of Victoria Coun. Ben Isitt was recently appointed as the City's representative on the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority. That position carries with it annual pay of **about \$13,500 so Coun. Isitt's estimated total salary received from the City of Victoria, the CRD, and various other roles, increases to \$78,500.** The non-profit society only reports the total director income based on a percentage of revenue and would not confirm individual salary for any of its 13 directors.

### **WHAT'S COMING UP**

AGM AND GUEST SPEAKER SET FOR TUESDAY, Nov. 8

**Dermod Travis, executive director of Integrity BC and a well-known Times-Colonist columnist, will highlight the first annual general meeting as guest speaker during the evening of Tuesday, Nov. 8.** Formed in 2011, Victoria-based Integrity BC is a non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to help restore a bond built on trust and confidence between citizens and their elected officials. It has revealed White House salaries dwarfed by BC city managers, exposed junkets charged to the taxpayers' tab, helped protect British Columbians from election gag laws, launched the 'Take back BC' campaign, and uncovered prohibited political donations.

### **BRIEF PRESENTED TO PROVINCE**

Grumpy Taxpayer\$ of Greater Victoria released its brief '**Top 10 Ways to Improve Capital Region Governance**' to the province calling for a major overhaul of a dysfunctional Capital Regional District (CRD). The CRD, an organization designed 50 years ago, is unfortunately held in low regard both by taxpayers, and somewhat surprisingly, elected municipal mayors and councillors. [\*\*CLICK TO VIEW BRIEF >>\*\*](#)

### **OPEN BOARD MEETING**

Donations have ranged from \$25 to \$450. With your help Grumpy\$ has now **reached the 75% mark** of our start-up goal of \$5,000. To make it easier for our supporters we've added a PayPal button at the bottom of this page that accepts all major credit cards. Thank you for your generous support. Join us **Tuesday, Sept. 13 from 12 to 2 pm** for lunch and meeting at location TBA. Partners and interested supporters are welcome to sit in, RSVP to [grumpytaxpayers@telus.net](mailto:grumpytaxpayers@telus.net) ...

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