



COALITION OF VANCOUVER NEIGHBOURHOODS

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Electoral Reform, Or Cementing The Status Quo?

The Coalition of Vancouver Neighbourhoods urges all members of the Provincial Legislature to reject Bills 20 and 21 and implement meaningful reforms in advance of the November 2014 municipal elections. “Although the Provincial Government says these bills will reform municipal elections, in fact they will just cement the status quo in which Big Business, Big Labour and Major Land Developers control what happens in our cities.” says Jak King, Chair of the Coalition.

Bill 20 will increase municipal terms of offices from three years to four years. “We need more accountability not less” maintains Mr. King. “The Coalition believes that having politicians accountable to the citizens they serve every four years instead of every three years means that elected officials will have a longer time without public scrutiny, able to make decisions that please their Party funders rather than the electorate.”

Current campaign finance rules allow parties to spend unlimited sums — far in excess of what we see in other provinces. Vancouver municipal politicians can accept money from foreign sources. This is very significant for Vancouver’s neighbourhoods as so much of the new housing stock is built for foreign investors rather than for local residents. We urge the legislature to make important amendments. for example, capping donations at an amount consistent with other jurisdictions, and ensuring that only individuals, not corporations can make donations.

The Coalition wants to see real reform, similar to what we have at the Federal level where there are requirements for full disclosure and for limits to individual contributions, where the non-electoral influences are severely limited and it is the citizens who have the real influence over party platform and policy direction. One of the most egregious gaps in what is proposed is that Big Business and Big Labour can still make significant contributions in non-election years with no transparency or public scrutiny.

The Coalition believes that significant electoral reform is critical to improving the relationship between Vancouver's municipal government and our communities. Last year was named "The Year of Dissent" by the media. "We saw unprecedented numbers of community rise up in protest against forced redevelopment, demolition of affordable housing, extinction of view corridors, and this Council's ongoing dancing to the tune of major developers and party funders." maintains Fern Jeffries, Co-Chair of the False Creek Residents Association and the Coalition, "We need the Provincial Government to stand up for accountability and good government".

The Coalition is committed to developing a better relationship between the City of Vancouver and the city's neighbourhoods. Meaningful community engagement and local resident influence over land use and development is critical. Bills 20 and 21 undermine this, making it easier for elected officials to avoid public accountability and continue to respond to the influences of major corporations.

We want real reform, reform that will redress the undue influence and power of money in our local political system.

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