

## **“Pssst. Mr. Mayor, the mic’s still on!” Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson slams citizens appealing for transparency in hand-picked “Mayor’s West End Community Advisory Committee”**

(Vancouver, July 12, 2010) Unaware the microphone was still on after a Vancouver city council meeting on Thursday, July 8, Mayor Gregor Robertson and two Vision Vancouver councillors showed their true colors. The Mayor was ranting about citizens who had endured eight hours at City Hall for a chance to express sincere concerns about the Mayor’s [motion](#) to create a “Mayor’s West End Community Advisory Committee.” The clip remained on the City website until removed on Sunday, but has been captured here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IDcmUQa0WWM>

*Robertson: "Who are all these f\*ckin'... who are these hacks man? Are they... they NPA hacks?"*

*Heather Deal: "They're owners"*

*Stevenson: "Oh no, no they..." (inaudible)*

*Robertson: "What's that?"*

*Stevenson: "Carol Walker was a COPE candidate"*

*Robertson: "Who was?"*

*Stevenson: "Carol Walker"*

*Deal: "The last speaker"*

*Stevenson: "But they're all... you know... who knows really..."*

*Stevenson: "But it's 100% owners..."*

*Stevenson: "Every one... there's not a renter... and that's what they're upset about... they don't like"*

*Robertson: "They don't want renters in the, in the mix."*

*Stevenson: "Ya"*

*Stevenson: "You can't railroad us..."*

*Robertson, Deal, Stevenson: (laughter)*

*Robertson: (mocking) "You're trying to subvert process here, damn it... We want consultation. They want..."*

*Deal: "Democracy cubed"*

*Robertson, Deal, Stevenson: (laughter)*

*Robertson: "God, we're just tryin' to have a little advisory committee, for f\*ck sake"*

The citizens who had spoken to Council, just prior to Vision Vancouver councillors passing the Motion to create the committee despite strong opposition, expressed concerns that (1) the community had not been consulted in advance, (2) more time was needed to build trust and refine details of the committee, (3) the member selection criteria were problematic, (4) members would be hand-picked by Vision Vancouver councillors, creating the potential risk of partisanship, (5) it could be manipulated to rubber-stamp controversial rezoning applications (5) the motion failed to indicate if the public would be consulted about issues and whether the results of deliberations would be open to the public, (6) rather than creating this committee, the city’s Short Term Incentives for Rental Housing (STIR) program—rammed through Council in similar fashion a year ago—should be cancelled or revised, and (7) instead of this committee a broader and more open community consultation process should be used. Speakers also said that an advisory body is not the innovative planning process people wanted and might not be effective as an interim planning process. Other alternatives had not been considered in the Mayor’s haste to go ahead. The Mayor views this committee as a pilot project for several other Vancouver neighbourhoods in urgent need of comprehensive planning in the face of development pressures.

Above all, the citizens asked for open consultation, transparency and accountability since one of the main committee functions is to meet directly with developers about rezoning applications prior to public consultations and to make recommendations to the mayor. This could lead to a situation that any further consultations would be rendered meaningless because key decisions had already been made. Mayor Gregor Robertson should address all these issues before inviting applications for membership to this committee. Also, the public needs to carefully scrutinize the committee composition and activities. See “Backgrounder” for more information.

*West End Neighbours (WEN) is a network of residents that has grown to thousands of citizens, including renters and owners, concerned about the impact of fast-tracked rezoning on liveability in the West End and the implications for all of Vancouver.*

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**BACKGROUNDER: The West End Rezoning Debate & “Mayor’s West End Community Advisory Committee”**  
12 July 2010



**Key Facts:**

- More than 7,000 people have signed the “West End No Rezoning without a Comprehensive Plan” [Petition](#). The majority of signers are renters, and the entire community of renters, owners, leaseholders, and so on want to know that the comprehensive needs of the community are considered in decision-making.
- In July 2009, Vision Vancouver councillors rushed the [Short Term Incentives for Rental Housing](#) (STIR) program into existence, with the input of developers but without public input. The program offers developers huge incentives and bylaw relaxations in order to build new rental apartments that will be rented out at the higher end of market rates. The West End has been targeted for the most radical rezonings under this program, with dramatic increases in height and density (e.g. Maxines at 1215 Bidwell for a 21-storey tower, and St John’s Church at 1401 Comox Street for a 22-storey tower). Benefits for developers appear to be excessive. For example, proforma calculations by citizens suggest the latter rezonings could result in windfall profits for Westbank Projects Corp. and Peterson Investment Group of \$26 million to \$34 million.
- In April, Council passed a motion by Councillor Ellen Woodsworth for a West End Community Vision Process.
- In May, the City’s Planning Department held two community meetings and a survey on “West End Discussions on Community Needs and Affordable Housing” with the report supposed to be made public on June 30.
- This report finally came out at the end of the day on July 8, when the City Manager finally released a [staff memo](#) entitled “West End Community Engagement.” It concluded that “There should not be any further site specific rezonings until a comprehensive community plan is developed,” and “The public should be more involved in the planning process.” The [288-page report](#) of community consultation meetings and a survey held in May was finally made public on July 9. Both documents indicate the strong desire of the community to have a comprehensive planning process before major decisions are made to approve spot rezonings.
- The City report findings are consistent with the recently released report on “What Makes the West End Great” published by the West End Resident’s Association (WERA).
- The Mayor’s [motion](#) to create the “Mayor’s West End Community Advisory Committee” was presented quietly, with no community consultation in advance, and no public notice except for it appearing on the agenda of the City website. This motion is highly significant, as it is being proposed “as an opportunity to pilot an innovative engagement approach that can be evaluated as a potential interim measure for all communities waiting for official planning processes to be initiated.” Currently at least six communities are awaiting such a process.
- There has been no indication that Vision Vancouver will respect community demands to the stop spot rezoning applications that have caused such a “stir” in the West End.
- Neighbourhoods for Sustainable Vancouver, and other communities such as the Grandview-Woodland Area Council have also spoken out against the creation of this Mayor’s committee, instead asking for an open consultation style such as Vancouver’s CityPlan visioning process.

**Links**

- Vancouver Planning and Environment Committee (July 8, 2010)  
(1) Agenda; (2) Item #6 is Motion for “Mayor’s West End Community Advisory Committee”; (3) click on “Video Clip of This Item” to see citizens and councillors in action:  
<http://vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20100708/penv20100708ag.htm>
- Essential information on Vancouver’s West End, City’s consultations meetings and survey in May 2010, and reports:  
<http://www.vancouver.ca/westend>
- Information about the controversial Short Term Incentives for Rental Housing (STIR) program:  
[www.vancouver.ca/STIR](http://www.vancouver.ca/STIR)
- “West End Neighbours” channel on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/WestEndNeighbours>
- Twitter: <http://twitter.com/wenalerts>