
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Civil Rights and Community Group Slam Railroaded Decision to Publicly Fund Private Security

The B.C. Civil Liberties Association, Pivot Legal Society and the West End Residents Association are decrying a last minute process manoeuvre to railroad through a proposal to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars of public funds to support an expansion of private security for businesses.

At a meeting of City Council yesterday, Vancouver's Civil City Commissioner presented a proposal for the City to fund an expansion of the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association's (DVBIA) Ambassadors Program. There had been no attempt at a public consultation on the controversial proposal to have public money invested in a private security program that is unaccountable to the public. Both the BCCLA and Pivot Legal Society maintain that no aspect of community policing can be privatized in a democratic system.

BCCLA's Micheal Vonn: "Private security is unaccountable to the public. When asked why there had been no public consultation on the proposal, Charles Gauthier, the Executive Director of the DVBIA said, "This is a service we're providing our members, so I don't see why we would consult with a residents group." There, you can't get any clearer than that. This is not a publicly accountable program."

Pivot spokesperson David Eby: "Spending over \$800,000 to harass the homeless out of Vancouver's commercial areas will just displace that population to residential areas. If Council actually wanted to solve the problems associated with poverty in our city, they would have put that money into sufficient housing staff to ensure the 1200 social housing units promised to Vancouver by the Province will be open by 2010."

WERA Director Aaron Jasper had similar concerns: "The choice to subsidize and expand the BIA's private security force is not the solution. The priority should be to help get the homeless off the streets and into housing. The money would be better spent on genuine outreach programs and on expanding services provided by the community policing offices."

Hopes for a considered plan to address the myriad of community issues and concerns were effectively quashed by an end-run that the NPA councilors made on the process. They introduced a last minute amendment arbitrarily changing the characterization of the proposal solely in order to change the requisite number of votes in their favour.

Concerned citizens groups were effectively sidelined. The councilors who voted in favour of awarding this private contract also rejected an amendment to take that contract to tender, thus preventing community policing offices and others from making proposals. Those who approved the motion gave every signal of being deaf to genuine community partnership.

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