

Mayor Philip Owen

Inauguration Address

December 2, 1996

Your Honour Chief Justice Williams, Reverend Lovell, Council colleagues, family and friends. As Mayor of Vancouver's 75th elected City Council, I wish to share with you some of our goals for the next three years, and our vision for the future.

The sweeping results of the recent election have provided us with a substantial mandate.

However, I must tell you that watching those results roll in on November 16th was also a somewhat humbling experience; humbling because such a margin of victory carries with it great responsibility.

The voters of Vancouver have challenged my Council colleagues and me to meet their expectations for the City in the years ahead.

We have been challenged to be fully representative.

We have been challenged to be even more inclusive.

We have been challenged to remain diligent in maintaining our community, social, cultural and fiscal initiatives.

I am pleased to say that we stand here today, ready to meet those challenges.

Our city is one of the most beautiful in the world.

Our quality of life is also among the world's highest. The Geneva-based Resources Group rated Vancouver as the best city in which to live in the world.

Economic opportunities continue to offer themselves to our community.

And we are still able to address the social and cultural needs of our diverse neighbourhoods.

The citizens of Vancouver have challenged us to maintain, and improve upon, the elements that make our city such a great place to live, work and visit.

I, your City Council, your Park Board and your School Board remain committed to that goal. However, we face a new and very major challenge. Just last week, the Provincial Government announced a 74% cut in funding to the City of Vancouver - \$17.2 million. Regional District and other costs continue to increase, while some revenues are decreasing. City Council and the citizens of Vancouver will have tough decisions to make, and they could impact many services.

The provincial cut is dramatic, disproportionate and discriminatory. This funding cut is equal to 60% of the City's Library budget, or the equivalent of 180 Police Constables. This funding cut alone is

equivalent to adding over 5% to your property taxes. The impact of the cut on each Vancouver resident is significantly higher than in any other municipality. But, as with gambling and other issues, the Province is not listening. They create the problems -- we have to deal with them. But, their decision has been made, however wrong, and we have to get on with it.

Public Involvement

Members of Vancouver City Council do not disappear into the ivory tower of City Hall after an election. We consult with and listen to the people who elected us in a variety of ways, and we will continue to do that. We will start with an unprecedented consultation program to develop the City's 1997 budget.

The provincial cutbacks, on top of normal budget issues, make the 1997 budget decisions unusually important. I have directed staff to bring a proposal to Council on December 10th to inform the public about the issues and seek their advice. This will begin with the information flyer going out with the current tax bill, and continue through December and January. We will want to know, by independent professional survey and broad consultation, what our citizens want us to do in response to the provincial cuts. Should we raise taxes or cut services? Or, should we do a combination of tax increases and service reductions? If so, which services?

In parallel with this independent professional process, I will be personally convening a series of meetings with leaders in our community from business, community services and cultural groups to discuss financial and service issues. We do not want to see major tax increases, but all of us want to make sure that we are maintaining key services - and we need your advice.

Our consultation will not stop with this major effort related to the 1997 budget. We will also consult the public on a regular basis.

During the recent election campaign we received numerous requests for information on virtually every aspect of City Government. Wherever possible, I or one of the Councillors would personally follow up on that request. I can tell you that I thoroughly enjoyed talking to people one-on-one about their concerns.

There are eleven capable and knowledgeable elected people here today whose job it is to answer your questions at any time.

On page 2031 of your blue pages, the first phone number you will see under the City of Vancouver listings is my phone number, followed by the phone numbers of your City Councillors.

Our City has an excellent web page on the Internet. Through the Internet, you can send e-mail to all members of Council and City staff.

Many of you already know how easy it is to get in touch with us. However, it seems to me that many Vancouver residents do not realize that we are in City Hall to serve them directly.

We invite you to call us.

We invite you to write to us, or send us e-mail.

We invite you to come down and attend Council meetings and Standing Committee meetings.

We are your elected City representatives and we invite you to participate with us in maintaining an efficient and effective government.

To further the goal of citizen participation, I am also proposing that Council meet on a regular basis outside of City Hall. I propose that Council meet in the various neighbourhoods around the city to allow the community and Council to dialogue outside the formal structures of Council sessions and committees. I will initiate this program immediately and have it operate on a monthly basis.

We will also continue with the very successful CityPlan initiative, a grassroots approach to community building which has already included over 200 City Circle discussion groups and an ideas fair at Robson Square that attracted 10,000 people over a single weekend. CityPlan is a vision of the future Vancouver, as established by its citizens.

Our challenge now is to take the results of these consultative processes and have the public decide which suggestions they want to see implemented. CityPlan and the Transportation Plan initiatives represent comprehensive plans for the future, from the needs of an individual block to those of the City as a whole.

We will also continue with our Better City Government review of our public involvement processes, with the intent of making them even better and more inclusive.

Crime & Safety

As our city grows, one of our biggest citizens concerns is crime and public safety. Our streets are safe - major crimes against people have not increased over the past few years. However, minor and property crimes have increased significantly, and our citizens are very concerned about this.

The Safer City Task Force submitted over 200 recommendations to reduce crime in our neighbourhoods. Many of these have been acted on, and we have taken many steps to control crime.

For example:

- *We have increased the annual Police budget by over 33% since 1990, from \$75 million to over \$100 million for 1996.*
- *We now have sixteen community crime prevention offices throughout the city, created directly as a result of volunteer commitments from individual neighbourhoods.*
- *We created two new storefront centres for street youth.*
- *We have helped the Police launch Faces, the fight against child exploitation, an early intervention program.*
- *We will continue to support programs like the police bicycle patrols.*
- *We have facilitated the neighbourhood Block Watch program which now number over 500 Block Watch citizen groups throughout the city.*

To complement and extend the work of the Safer City Task Force , earlier this year I created the Urban Safety Commission . The Commission is looking at legislative and justice system issues which the City and Police Board do not control, but which underlie many of our policing and safety issues. By mid 1997, this Commission will make very important recommendations to the Provincial and Federal Governments.

And we are working with the Minister of Justice in Ottawa and the Attorney General's Ministry in Victoria on the problem of non-returnable warrants, which allow criminals to walk freely on our streets because other provinces will not pay the costs of returning them to face the courts.

Safe communities require co-ordinated action by the Province, the City, Police and the community. One of our important City powers is Licensing. But, the process of license enforcement is complex and has been slow. Some operators now take advantage of the process to avoid the letter and spirit of the

law in regard to health, standards of maintenance, hours of operation and other requirements. I will propose the creation of a Licensing Commission, which will facilitate the license review process for problem premises. This Commission will initially be made up of all Council members, sitting in special sessions on a regular basis to deal with licensing issues. I will also ask for new legislation to give Council the power to create a specially appointed board to deal with these issues.

As Chair of the Police Board, I remain committed to integrating the work of our Police Department with the City's safety initiatives. The Chief Constable and Police members are striving to further their community-based policing approach and provide an increased level of safety and confidence for Vancouver residents. We will help.

Safety is more than just crime protection. We live in an earthquake zone, and emergency preparedness is important. Our Fire Department is developing the first heavy urban search and rescue team in Canada. Vancouver City Council, our Fire and Police Departments, and our Risk Management staff have played a strong leadership role in a major project to develop an Emergency Operations and Communications Centre and a Wide Area Radio System. These projects have gained strong support from the RCMP, the Ministry of Attorney General and many municipalities. They will provide modern, secure, and reliable communications for emergency services on a day-to-day basis and in a major emergency.

Our Engineering Department is developing four salt water pumping stations and a network to provide salt water for firefighting if water supplies are disrupted. They have upgraded our older bridges.

Our Emergency Preparedness staff and Fire Department are developing and providing training for our communities to assist them in responding to emergencies, and this will be enhanced.

Downtown Eastside

On a related note I would like to talk briefly about the City's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, which continues to suffer from drug related problems and the resulting increase in property crimes. We are dealing with these issues.

We support the Police with tough bylaws to deal with illegal pawnshop and second-hand store operations.

I will continue to support the Police Department's increased constable allocation for the Downtown Eastside.

I will ask the new License Commission to give particular attention to premises in the Downtown Eastside.

I feel we must continue to address the serious challenge to law and order that presently exists. However, it is clear that we cannot solve all the problems on our own. We have to distinguish between people who live in the Downtown Eastside, and those who are there because it facilitates their criminal activity. I remain committed to providing social programs and support for the people who need them within our financial limits, and call on the senior levels of government to meet their obligation to provide key services.

- Let us implement effective drug treatment programs the Province has said that it will provide.
- Let us re-examine the closing of the Pender Detox Centre.
- And let us look at the impact of phasing out the Riverview mental health facility and the urgent need to provide transition housing.

Social and Cultural Issues

In the face of the recently announced provincial funding cuts, my fellow Council members and I will strive to continue to meet the social and cultural needs of our city. The City of Vancouver has been a leading municipality in British Columbia and Canada when it comes to stepping in to deal with problems other levels of government cannot or will not address.

After extensive public consultation and five nights of public delegations, Vancouver City Council took a clear position on gambling. Our citizens told us clearly that they did not want a major casino or expanded gambling in their city. On November 1, 1994, Council approved the following resolution:

That major casinos not be permitted in the City of Vancouver.

We have also clearly stated that we oppose the expansion of all forms of gambling, including Video Lottery Terminals and Club Keno. We have passed a bylaw to limit the expansion of Club Keno in liquor establishments. The Province has challenged this bylaw. We will fight that challenge and continue to make the position of Vancouver residents known to the Province and advocates of expanded gaming.

We established the country's first Children's Advocate and I remain strongly supportive of programs that focus on services to children and youth, such as the ongoing attempts to include daycare facilities in major new developments. Children are the future of our society and must be treated as such.

We have made City land available for public housing wherever possible. Over one-third of Vancouver's 18,000 non-market social housing units have been built on City land. In addition, we will continue to demand that major developers make land available for non-market housing. We have already facilitated construction of nearly 4,000 units of diverse non-market housing in over 65 buildings.

We have supported the work of our Vancouver Heritage Foundation and its comprehensive plan for 1995 and beyond. We have seen the number of heritage designated sites in Vancouver rise from only six in 1986 to one hundred and sixty-two in 1996.

We have strongly supported the visual and performing arts community, particularly in the face of their ongoing struggle for financial stability. We are proud of the role we play in supporting the Arts.

We will continue to work for the establishment of bikeways and greenways throughout Vancouver. Consultation with individual neighbourhoods has produced excellent results regarding the placement of these corridors.

Our support of Vancouver's Library system will continue, including the marvellous new Central Library Square complex.

We celebrate the vibrant cultural diversity of our city. Our new Multilingual Information Referral Service allows people to deal with City Hall in Cantonese, Mandarin, Punjabi, Spanish, Vietnamese and French. We remain a leader in employment equity programs and we seek input from our many cultural communities to ensure participation from all members of society.

We will work to continue our support of social and cultural support services. They are important to the quality of life in our city. However, once again the provincial budget cut will have a significant impact. Many of our social and cultural programs have expanded because of inadequate provincial programs. Only our public consultation program will determine whether our citizens will continue to support the present level of City funding to these important programs in the face of the provincial funding cut.

Traffic and Transportation

Our citizens have told us repeatedly that traffic and transportation are major concerns. This spring, we held an extensive set of public discussions, designed to begin to create a long term City Transportation Plan which seeks to identify solutions to our present transit and traffic issues.

Our residents are concerned about increasing congestion and loss of accessibility. They are concerned about the environmental impacts of automobile traffic, and the impact of traffic on their neighbourhoods. They want to see good transit and provisions for bicycles and pedestrians.

These are complex questions, and we need to spend time on them. I will recommend that Council appoint a Standing Committee on Transportation and Traffic to replace the former Traffic Commission. The committee will build on these earlier discussions and will deal with the development of the City's Transportation Plan and with regional transit issues such as the proposed Broadway-Lougheed LRT line.

At this large scale, the Committee will have to work with BC Transit, the Province, and the GVRD, as well as the residents of Vancouver and, the committee will continue to deal with issues related to traffic in the city and its impact on our communities.

Taxation

Taxation remains an important issue for Vancouver residents. Many of our citizens spend a major portion of their income on housing, and have little money to spare. Many of our senior citizens live in valuable homes, but have modest incomes. Increases in taxation are a burden for them. We have recognized this, and limited tax increases to or below inflation since 1986. In 1996, Council held the tax increase to zero. In the light of provincial funding cuts, this will not be possible in 1997.

All levels of government find themselves short of money. As Provincial and Federal Governments try to get their financial houses in order, increasing burdens are being passed on to municipalities. With the recent provincial reductions, provincial financial support has dropped from about 6% of our budget five years ago to about 1% in 1997.

Unfortunately, local government has only one source of taxation Property Tax.

We can, however, move more to user pay systems. For many years we have billed our water costs through a utility. Moving to a similar system for sewer and garbage services would eventually see residents paying for the service they use, rather than a percentage of the assessed value of their homes. By moving to this type of system, we will encourage recycling and reuse and help the City meet its goal of reducing solid waste disposal by 50%. We will continue to press the government to provide the legislation required for us to introduce these changes.

But, these changes will not in themselves solve the taxation problem we face in 1997. Our taxpayers have told us that they value the services the City delivers and want them maintained. The voters of Vancouver have approved our Capital Plan, passing all three borrowing bylaws by a substantial margin. They have made it clear that City infrastructure, our parks and our community centres remain a high priority.

We know too that our citizens do not want to see significant tax increases. With the provincial funding cut, we cannot both maintain our services and limit tax increases. We will have to look hard at all our services, consider delaying some capital works, and we will have to raise taxes.

As I have said earlier in this address, I propose to put our financial dilemmas squarely before Vancouver residents. I want community groups, business associations and individuals to help us prioritize City services and programs and I will seek every opportunity for community consultation.

Better City Government

In the short term, we will face the difficult task of balancing tax increases and service reductions. In the longer term, I believe we can achieve our goal in large part by improving the delivery of City services. By doing things differently, we can improve services and lower costs.

After ten years of working at City Hall, I can say without reservation that Vancouver city staff are among the most professional civil servants in British Columbia or anywhere else.

With their assistance, our Better City Government program is making good progress toward providing top quality, cost-effective government. Our staff is carrying out basic reviews of many City services and operations. We are making changes. The quality of our services is being improved, in many cases with lower costs.

Perhaps the best example of this approach has been the creation of the Neighbourhood Integrated Service teams. These teams have been developed for 15 areas covering the City, so that Engineering, Planning, Permits and Licenses, Police and other City departments can respond to your needs and requests in a co-ordinated fashion. It is an approach that will make a huge difference to the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery by the City, and will resolve specific neighbourhood problem situations.

Citizens will also experience better service when they call City Hall. A new computer aided information service will assist all City staff in providing more accurate and current information and making better service referrals.

We will continue to seek ways to streamline the regulatory process, which in some cases has become difficult for staff to administer and difficult for the public to understand. We have already redesigned our business license process, and a new customer friendly system will be in place by mid-year 1997. In February we will receive proposals for radically redesigned rezoning, permitting and inspection processes. These proposals were developed by staff at all levels of the organization working with industry and community representatives to develop processes that better meet everyone's needs in a more timely manner.

In short, we will continue to search for better ways to get the job of your local government accomplished. I am confident that with strong public input and the support of staff, we can make the difficult financial and social decisions that lie ahead.

Conclusion

We have many challenges to meet over the next three years. In 1997, we must adjust to a major reduction in provincial funding and in every year of our three year term, we must live up to the expectations of Vancouver's citizens.

I am positive about Vancouver's future.

Vancouver is a great city in which to live, work, and visit.

It is our job to make sure that statement is true for everyone who calls this community home.

It is our job to safeguard that legacy for our families, children and grandchildren

It is our job to ensure the City infrastructure is maintained.

It is our job to deliver the services you demand.

And it is our job to keep expenditures in check.

I look forward to working with you, and for you, in the years ahead.

On behalf of Council, I would like to thank the citizens of Vancouver for their trust and confidence. We are honoured to accept your challenge.

- Philip Owen