

Elephants in the Room

#1 Day Care (Part 1)

For the past 18 months of the current Anmore council, but particularly in the first months of this year leading up to the election of the new Mayor, several elephants have been stumbling around the room, either unseen or deliberately ignored.

The largest and most destructive of these creatures bears the name of the **"Anmore Day Care"**. Amazingly I find that many residents are under the misapprehension that it had been put out of its (and their) misery at the last election, when the referendum failed by a hefty 2 to 1 margin.

When I was campaigning door to door for election in November 2008 I quickly became aware that a majority of residents were firmly opposed to the proposal for a day care. I also became aware that for many the issue was not only the need to borrow money, with a substantial addition to their tax bill (although this was certainly a common reason), but that there were in fact many reasons why the day care concept was unpopular.

Understandably most Anmore residents believed after the election that the day care proposal was a dead issue. Which is why today residents are still coming up to me expressing puzzlement that we are even talking about it still. They hadn't realized that the referendum was about borrowing money for the day care building, not the idea of the day care itself.

Very shortly after the November 2008 elections former Mayor Weinberg convened a meeting of council along with 'interested parties' (read *day care proponents*) to resurrect the proposal. This should have been billed as a formal council meeting, since all members of council were present in a public meeting, and thereby formed a quorum. We can only speculate as to why he chose not to convene this as a regular council meeting and publish the agenda in advance, in the customary manner. And we can only speculate as to why formal minutes and a recording of that meeting were not taken, as is a requirement under legislation.

Notwithstanding, both a written and audio recording (unofficial) of that meeting were made. The records show that a number of those who were present echoed the opinion that there were diverse reasons as to why the referendum failed, and that the borrowing requirement was not the only reason.

Those present should have no problem recalling that Cllr. Palmer Isaak made a commitment to conduct a survey of the Village to determine whether or not a day care was wanted by a majority of the residents of the Village. Again, while there is no 'official' record, there is clear evidence that Cllr Palmer Isaak made such a commitment.

I will show subsequently why this is highly relevant in the light of a letter from the Ministry of Children and Family Development dated April 22nd 2010.

In subsequent months there was a frenzied attempt to find alternative sites to build a day care within the funds allotted by the ministry. Former Mayor Weinberg implied that there were deadlines, such as the provincial election in May 2009, before which we had to get a shovel in the ground.

After I had asked him over a period of several months as to what was the deadline for the day care, I finally confronted the former Mayor in council as to whether there was in fact a deadline. He finally admitted that there was none!

This reply was, though, less than frank. Council had not been made privy to the Funding Agreement No: C078100114 from the ministry, dated March 26th 2008, which set out the terms and conditions of the grant the Village was to receive. Section 3 of this 16 page document sets out the obligations of the Village for receiving the grant. They include the following:

- The project was to have been commenced within 4 months of the date of the agreement (March 2008)
- The recipient will not, without prior written consent of the Province, make any material change in or to the Project or the Budget, Plans and Specifications or Project Schedule.
- The recipient (i.e. the Village!) will continue the Child care Operation for a minimum of ten years from the date of issuance of a New Licence.
- If the recipient (the Village) breaches the provisions...the Recipient (the Village) will repay a pro-rated amount of all funds paid under the agreement.

While the ministry has been exceptionally lenient so far in applying the terms of the agreement, it is still insisting on completion of a number of items, and has recently (April 22nd 2010) provided a 90 day deadline for completion. (The recent letter was dated April 22nd 2010, and I am told that it was received in the Village on May 12th, three days before the mayoral election. Apparently Cllr Palmer Isaak decided to withhold the contents and even the existence of this material document until after the election. Residents will decide for themselves as to the appropriateness of this.)

Under the 'new' terms the Village is required to provide the following within 90 days:

- Details of a 'new project'.
- Details of the new project budget.
- Plans and Specifications *or*
- Project Schedule
- A needs assessment.

We know that there currently empty day care spaces within a few minutes drive of the Village; and that the City of Port Moody has just approved the construction of a large, commercial day care facility close next to Aspenwood Elementary, just outside Anmore.

Moreover the 'needs assessment' must not only cover the present circumstances. We must be able to demonstrate an ongoing need for at least the next 10 years. If within that time, the day care is unable to meet its financial obligations, the taxpayers of the Village become liable for any shortfall.

Those who have proclaimed that there is no risk to the taxpayers of the Village have simply not been telling the truth.

When the original public hearing was held in October 2008 prior to the referendum, the draft plan (including business plan and financials) had not been made available to all residents. Why not, you may ask?

Similarly why was the Funding Agreement from the ministry in March 2008 not only withheld from the residents, but even from your council members?

Yet again, why was the letter from the Ministry mailed from their Office on April 22nd, purportedly received on May 12th, withheld from council (and the public) by Cllr Palmer Isaak until May 17th?

All residents of Anmore deserve answers to these questions in a timely manner. Specifically they need to know why relevant information was withheld or concealed – and by whom – and why?

Cllr Chris Sedergreen.