



Straight Talk

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NPA says Vancouver park board not fighting cuts

By Carlito Pablo

While the police are getting a free run at the trough, the Vancouver park board is being starved, as it has taken an unprecedented \$1.9-million cut in its operating funds this year.

What's shocking, according to Non-Partisan Association councillor Suzanne Anton, is that the Vision Vancouver/Coalition of Progressive Electors/Green majority on the board hasn't come out publicly to defend its budget.

The lone NPA member on city council pointed out that the Vancouver Police Department got an additional \$800,000 for its antigang operations, and a bigger amount—about \$9.6 million—for the recruitment of 96 new police officers.

"We're putting all our resources into police and we're taking away resources from culture and from parks, which is what helps people not to get involved with the police in the first place," Anton told the *Straight*.

Like Anton in council, NPA park commissioner Ian Robertson is the lone opposition on the seven-member park board. He cast the sole dissenting vote when the board approved its 2009 budget, which absorbed a \$1.9-million reduction to operations funds in a meeting on April 6. Although the board's overall budget rose by 2.8 percent from 2008, Robertson explained that the increase is mostly accounted for by wage and inflation adjustments.

Aside from the cut to its operating funds, Robertson noted that the park board has also received instructions from city hall to increase revenues—mostly from fees—by \$2.6 million this year.

"What's missing is the advocacy by this park board to mayor and council to protect the budget at all costs," Robertson told the *Straight*. "Without this advocacy, we're going to be left with having to make some significant reductions in services or reduce hours of pools and rinks."

COPE commissioner Loretta Woodcock suggested that Robertson was merely "dramatizing" with his claims that the board majority isn't doing anything about the cuts.

For one, the board's vice chair and services-and-budgets-committee chair told the *Straight*, Vision commissioners recently went to the mayor's office to express concern.

Woodcock noted that a big chunk of the cuts—about \$1.2 million—will be in the form of reduced hours of work by union and management staff. There is also a hiring freeze.

The Bloedel Floral Conservatory's operations will be reduced, while a reduction in the hours of some of the community centres would have to be determined, Woodcock said.

"We directed staff to report at our budgets-committee meeting on a monthly basis, which is a public meeting, to see how the cuts impact service," Woodcock added.

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