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Parks commissioners defend Charter amendment

Proposed change will give parks board more power over signs, advertising

Sandra Thomas, Vancouver Courier Published: Wednesday, January 21, 2009

NPA parks board commissioner Ian Robertson denies a proposed amendment to the Vancouver Charter on signs and advertising in city parks and community centres would translate into increased corporate presence.

"This whole thing has been blown out of proportion," Robertson told the Courier. "It's not about allowing more advertising, but about tightening up policy around advertising."

At a parks board meeting Monday night, the board deferred a proposed amendment to the Charter which would give commissioners more power to regulate signs and advertising in parks but also relax regulations during special events, such as the 2010 Olympic Games.



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The parks board mulls over advertising in parks for special events, such as the 2010 Winter Olympic Games.

Photo illustration-Dan Toulgoet

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Robertson confirmed the move was driven in response to the need for extra signs during the Olympic Games, but he said the change is long overdue. "Right now there are no clear guidelines on advertising or signage in parks and at this point could be open to legal interpretation," he said. "I think this is a great idea meant to protect the interests of the residents of Vancouver."

Robertson said if the amendment to the Charter is approved, first by the board and then the provincial government, the guidelines would provide a template for all future large special events in city parks and community centres.

As a precursor to this proposal, in 2007 the parks board approved new naming policies, one of which allows corporations to pay to put their name on rooms within community centres. Under the policy, parks and community centres cannot be named for corporate sponsors, but gyms, hockey rinks, swimming pools and multi-purpose rooms can be named. Facilities such as the PNE Forum, Agrodome and Pacific Coliseum could also be renamed.

In November 2006, the city approved two policies related to the naming of civic facilities, which provided guidelines to cover situations where donations are made to secure naming rights or when a name is chosen but no money is involved.

At the time, the Courier reported concern among some community centre association presidents about the new policy, particularly because six community centres will be or are undergoing redevelopment and could be open to corporate renaming. New community centres are also scheduled to be built at both Southeast False Creek and East Fraser Lands.

Green Party commissioner Stuart Mackinnon said not only was the public confused about the intent of the amendment, but so were several members of the board. "It seemed to give the impression it would allow for more signs and advertising in parks, when in fact staff explained we already have that power," said Mackinnon.

He said the spirit of the amendment was to keep more control of advertising in parks and community centres. The report has been sent back to staff for clarification. "This is time sensitive because of course it was spurred by the Olympics," said Mackinnon. "But this is not Olympic specific."

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