

David's Vancouver City Council Presentation - Feb. 15, 2005

There are a few people other than me who are going to speak to the Motions that Councilor Louis is going to bring forward today. One of my roles at this meeting is, I believe, to set the context in which the City Staff Report and the Motions are being presented – and so, thank you Councilor Bass for the extension on time. I'll do this in 10 minutes.

The chain of information has been that I spoke with Councilor Louis about the Motions, and then, Headlines' Staff and I informed people involved in the project and the issues about both this meeting and the Motions, in the hope that some of them would be able to be here on very short notice.

On February 27, 2003 each and every person on Council voted to participate in an innovative project called PD. The unanimous vote was a very important moment as it implied Council's full participation and spoke to it's understanding of and commitment to participatory democracy in general and this project in particular.

Two years later it seems necessary to restate what the project was and how it functioned, because I have become aware that some of Council either didn't understand what the project was when you voted for it, or have lost track of what it was and is over time.

There were 18 public performances of the play – which was not simply a play, but a public Forum. Councilors Louis, Woodsworth, Bass, Roberts, Cadman and Louie did attend and were, I know, because I spoke with each of them at the time, extremely moved by what transpired in the community hall, as were many City Staff.

I want in particular to thank Wendy Au for her hard work. I have known Wendy for many years and have the utmost respect for her and believe she understands deeply the opportunity that this project was and is for true public input into issues that affect all citizens of Vancouver.

Participatory democracy can take many forms. Here are some things it isn't: It isn't surveys, or certain kinds of public Forums the questions of which are tightly designed to get a predetermined result.

Participatory Democracy, at its core, asks the public to frame the questions. It is an opportunity for the public to determine agenda and to propose solutions. It is an opportunity for elected officials to listen, and then to fashion solutions based on public input.

This is how Practicing Democracy came together and how it functioned, or was supposed to function. Headlines has been the producing company, and I was the director, but the public chose the topic of looking at 'the results of the cuts to social services' from a short list developed by Councilors Cadman and Woodsworth in the absence of Councilor Sullivan who was invited and confirmed but could not attend.

The public participated in an intense week long process of telling their own stories that formed the basis of the public performances. The workshop participants (all community members) and I developed the play and then, again, it was the public - a great cross-section of the public - who responded with suggestions, that formed the recommendations in the report that went to Council. The information for that report was gathered at performances and written mostly by Carrie Gallant, with input from me. Headlines has been a conduit all along - a vehicle through which the public could communicate with City Government.

Also - other than our yearly operating funding, Headlines' did not ask for nor did it receive any project funds from the City for this undertaking - contrary to what I have heard some of you believe.

After the Legislative Report came back to Council on May 6, 2004, the process got complex and frustrating.

From Headlines side, Carrie and I did not, in retrospect, understand how precisely items needed to be worded in order to make their way through Council. The recommendations are written quite generally as they are the reflection of ideas

expressed in large public gatherings. I don't think, however, that it would have been our place to put forward actual motions. This is the role of elected officials.

Once the Legislative Report came to Council, what it needed was a small Committee of City Councilors who would digest the recommendations along with City Staff and fashion Motions from the innovative suggestions in the report. Instead, City Council received the report and sent it to Staff. It landed in Wendy Au's lap. This put her, I believe, in a Catch-22 – because, as I have heard over and over again, it is not Staff's role to fashion new policy.

The City Manager, Judy Rogers, tried, I think, to solve this problem by calling a half-day meeting of all senior Staff and Council to process the recommendations. This tells me that the City Manager felt the initiative was important enough to spend that kind of time on – and that it required input from Council members. It's interesting who showed up to that meeting. Someone, please, correct me if I am wrong, but from what I understand, almost to a person, the same Councilors who attended performances came to the meeting, which was then canceled due to low attendance.

The resulting report back from Staff reflects the frustrating process that the document has been through. The report focuses almost entirely on some of the very positive initiatives the City is undertaking, but does not, in any detailed way, deal with the innovative recommendations from the public that could become Civic Policy.

In the chart that forms the core of the report many of the recommendations are marked:

- C1 Work in Progress AND
- C2 Possibility for Consideration AND
- C4 Outside of City Jurisdiction

When I asked how these three could be possible at the same time, it was explained that because the recommendations cover so much ground, there are aspects of them that are each of these three designations. And so, I would

suggest, it is easy to come to the false conclusion that the City is already acting on many if not all of the recommendations, or that many of them are impossible because they are outside the City's jurisdiction.

The truth is that there are aspects of the recommendations that fit all three categories – innovative ideas that the City has not undertaken and that could be drawn out of the report and distilled into workable Motions. Also, this City Council, and every Council I have been aware of before it, have all dealt with items outside of the City's jurisdiction. It happens all the time and must not be used as a reason to not act upon pressing issues.

Page 3 of the City Staff Report states:

“The *Practicing Democracy* project put forward a number of innovative ideas and constructive recommendations ...and... warrant(s) careful consideration.”

Page 4 adds: “Any further work based on Practicing Democracy recommendations will have to be undertaken at the direction of Council.”

There has not, to date, been any creative time spent by Councilors to translate the recommendations into possible policy. The exception to this, of course, is Motion #2 coming forward from Councilor Louis today.

Motion #1 is our (by that I mean Councilor Louis' and mine) – it is our way of honouring the C2 recommendations under the current circumstances and moving them forward in what might be a productive way, by sending all items marked C2 by City Staff to relevant Committees or individuals working on those specific issues. An example of why this should happen is that the recommendations regarding Food have already gone to the City's Food Policy Council. Feedback from one of the people on that Council has been that many of the recommendations are truly innovative and were very helpful and well received. This can and should happen with the rest of the C2's.

Motion #2 calls for a “Homeless and Sex Trade Worker Advocate”. This idea is not an invention of mine or Councilor Louis or Headlines Theatre. It is a creative distillation of the desires of the public who participated in a community-based project unanimously endorsed by this Council. This Motion will help create safety in Vancouver’s streets, something I know you are all concerned about and is a major focus of the upcoming budget.

This position does not belong inside the Vancouver Police Department. The request also does not belong with the Police Board. Either of these responses to the Motion will be ways to effectively kill it.

In order to have any credibility, it needs to sit alongside the City’s Child and Youth Advocate. Having a person to Advocate for issues of the Homeless and Sex Trade Workers will, in the long-term, help create safer streets, and so will, also in the long term, save money from the Police budget; and so a consideration might be to allocate funds for the position as part of the large increase that appears to be coming for the Vancouver Police.

I sincerely hope, that you will hear Councilor Louis’ Motions and other speakers’ comments as what they are: The reflections of the desires of the many people who participated in the Practicing Democracy project that you unanimously endorsed, and will then pass both of them.

Thank You.