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Rebel with a Clause



Rebel with a Clause

Did taxpayers pay for Constance Barnes' treatment?

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By ALEX G. TSAKUMIS, 24 HOURS

In the months since Vision Vancouver Parks Commissioner Constance Barnes' arrest and charge for drunk driving, much has transpired. After she committed to pleading "guilty" as charged and apologized to everyone under the sun for her admitted indiscretion, Barnes went off to rehabilitation treatment at an elite drug and alcohol treatment facility on Bowen Island, and has now returned to "work" for the people who elected her.

Well, a funny thing happened on the way home. No sooner did Barnes return to the welcoming embrace of Vision Vancouver, but she had some very interesting comments to make to certain members of the media.

When asked by (appropriately) well-regarded reporter Janet Brown of CKNW radio if Barnes was going to still plead guilty, formerly Contrace Connie informed us that this "will be up to my lawyer".

Pardon me?

I wondered what happened to her commitment to plead guilty? Then Barnes said something that had me thinking there was more to this story. "I'm returning my (Parks) stipend", she said, mumbling something about returning money as being a priority. And when Brown asked about who paid for the rehab program, Barnes shot back, "I did".

Well, not quite.

I immediately started thinking about the strange juxtaposition of comments: Most people would have a very difficult time paying for private rehab. In fact, the treatment center she was receiving care at, The Orchard Recovery Center, is one of the best facilities in North America, with a program that produces great results in the vast majority of patients. But the residential care programs range from \$14,000 to \$19,000. And Barnes, who previously did not pay more than a fraction of a civil suit obligation to a woman who was crippled in a 1970s crash, as a passenger in Barnes' car, repeated that she was the one responsible to "the people who elected her".

Hence, you may find it not so surprising, after a thorough investigation by this writer, that the taxpayers of this city, funded, at least in part, Constance Barnes' addiction treatment.

Parks Board Chair Raj Hundal, who admitted he has known of the loan "for months", in his typically good-natured manner, confirmed it. "Yes, Alex, it's true, Constance received a



Constance Barnes' treatment program at Bowen Island may have come on the back of taxpayers. (FILE PHOTO)

On the path to sustainability



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loan for her treatment, from the City, but this is a standing City of Vancouver policy for these circumstances. We were only following policy”.

Incredible.

But I had to ask: Why wouldn't Vision Vancouver be honest with Vancouverites and make public that Barnes was receiving a loan with taxpayers' funds? Did Parks Board know?

Hundal's response: "As far as I know, Constance told me that she told the Board she was receiving the loan". A somewhat weak response, but Barnes does have a knack for being convincing in her truthiness.

When I called Comms. Loretta Woodcock (COPE), Stuart MacKinnon (Green) and Ian Robertson (NPA), not one had any clue what I was referring to. In fact, Robertson, a much touted possible NPA mayoral candidate for 2011 said, "I was not informed, either by Constance or the Chair of this loan, because if I had, I would have been dead against it! Vision are approving cuts across the board, but funding their own people?"

Which leads me to this observation: At a time when there are children at risk throughout the city, when breakfast before school might be a luxury; library and community centre budgets are being cut back and people are still losing their jobs in an almost motionless economy, why on earth would anyone with Vision Vancouver not have turned to Constance Barnes and told her that regardless of the availability of the city policy, she should not be getting any help from taxpayers for her personal trials?

Instead, they took the politically expedient route: They stayed quiet, providing Barnes cover, on the backs of taxpayers.

Shame.

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