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Wednesday, October 21, 2009

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Rebel with a Clause**Rebel with a Clause****Helter shelter**

By ALEX G. TSAKUMIS

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I find nothing more compelling, or endearing, than a group of people committed to doing what is right, no matter how wearisome the circumstances.

There can be no more trying circumstances than fighting against insurmountable odds.

Heroes, I call them.

It is in this category that the residents opposed to the failed Gregor Shelters belong. The fight far from over, these folks, whose lives the Mayor of Vancouver clearly doesn't give a damn about, are still toiling away to save their families from the dangers and indignities of the thug-life, which has overwhelmed their neighborhoods.

Their streets are overrun by bandits, hookers and pushers; partying in lanes, continuing to use the streets as their toilet and dealing drugs at all hours of the day.

But what has come to light is that this nightmarish policy by Vision Vancouver was ill-conceived long before the evidence on the streets ever bubbled over.

Prior to any consultation process, which, incidentally, was initiated by outraged residents and never by the city or mayor, His Worship claimed that the HEAT (Homeless Shelters Action Team) shelters were in response to the death of homeless woman, who on a bitterly cold winter's night could not be coaxed by the police from her tent.

She used a lighter, starting a fire to keep warm, but fell asleep, and you know how the rest of the story went. An untimely end, indeed.

Though in a review of the mayor's announcements, it seems that Old MacGregor might have been too busy crafting about a half a dozen utterly wasteful tax-supported policies, that we've seen since, to realize that the actual introduction of HEAT and the shelters was done 10 days prior to the woman's death.

Setting aside the despicable nature of the Mayor of Canada's third largest city, using the death of a homeless woman with which to score the most shameless of political points, the manipulation of the existence of these shelters doesn't stop with a premature end for one of our downtrodden.

In fact, some city bureaucrats have been following the mayor's lead. Instead of some honesty about this train wreck in-waiting, we've been fed high-grade fiction crafted by the mayor's toadies at Silly Hall to cover up the truth.

In an April 27, 2009 City of Vancouver Administrative Report on HEAT, prepared by Cameron Gray, managing director of social development and Dan Garrison, housing policy planner, it clearly states that "neighbours were

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notified once the shelters were opened and were provided contact numbers people could call in case issues or concerns arose."

Better yet, the report was approved by Dr. Penny Ballem, city manager and Robertson disciple.

Further, on June 11, at a town hall meeting organized by concerned residents, the same housing planner, Garrison, told the 300-plus business owners, residents, media and officials in the room that the city consulted "everybody" (prior to instituting the shelters).

Well, perhaps Messers. Garrison and Gray (who is no longer with the City) along with Dr. Ballem would like to revise their collective statement.

In a July 8 e-mail obtained by the residents' coalition fighting this unremitting nightmare, the communications manager for shelter operator RainCity Housing, in replying to yet another aggrieved resident, stated: "I will share with you our side of things. In the middle of January RainCity Housing approached the City and stated we felt it was important to let people know of the shelter's presence (at the time, only the Granville Shelter was open). I drafted a letter that was vetted by Dan (Garrison) at the city and people at BC Housing (BC Housing was providing a third of the funding). I was told by Cameron Gray, who no longer works at the city, to provide the letter to the businesses on that city block (the 1400-block addresses on Granville and Howe, and the garages on Pacific and Beach), but not give the letter out to residents. As they were and are the landlord, we followed this directive..."

At Gregor Robertson's Silly Hall, truth is a very rare commodity.

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