

Nearsighted decision on Insite

Vancouver's safe injection site (SIS), Insite, will remain open since its lease on life is now renewed until December 2007 by the Conservatives in Ottawa.



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GUEST SHOT

They'd have been crazy not to renew.

The Alliance nutbars, who have wrestled controls of the federal Conservative Party from anyone even remotely moderate and reasonable, and wouldn't arrange for the PM's limo detour so he could rightly open up the AIDS conference this summer, have given him even more pathetic advice.

From even a purely administrative perspective, why the hell would you wait until almost the last day of the month to tell a tenant that they could be history and expect that even if you did allow for a renewal, as they have now, that they wouldn't hate your guts for making them wring their hands in angst for what seemed an eternity?

If the political gods take a few of the wrong days off this fall to go golfing, the genius contingent running the Party in the current PMO and may end up being responsible for a Prime Minister Kennedy. You read it here first.

There are two very distinct schools of

thought on the safe-injection site that will battle until December of 2007 and perhaps beyond: One says that we are saving lives and engaging in human compassion, while the other says that we shouldn't be funding drug use with tax dollars.

But is either of them right?

Sure, the Four Pillars approach hobbles along, two-legged, without much harm treatment (a real bona fide state-of-the-art facility is what's needed) or much harm prevention. Neither gets more than scant attention. Drug related crime on the Downtown Eastside is still a major problem and even if you made the DTES one big happy drug facility, it would invariably die

without the existence of surrounding, sustainable commerce to help keep the area "clean." But there are signs of real life. HIV/AIDS has been reduced by a significant enough margin since the site opened. Not one fatality in hundreds of overdoses and in a recent study only one user of the 1,000 studied was a new initiate.

That's good enough for me – for now. Until the powers that be at City Hall decide upon a comprehensive, integrated plan to clean up the DTES, instead of lunatic fringe platitudes about free drugs to addicts and picking up coffee cups to help us with our collective dizzy smile, the Four Pillars Plan is a necessity. In a city where we will be hosting the world in 2010, if the Conservatives hadn't renewed the SIS, no matter what else they'd have done, their legacy would have been that they left the host city with an almost permanent black eye.

It was the smart move to be sure, but the worst possible way to have gone about it. And that's what people will remember.

Regular Tuesday columnist Bill Tieleman will return next week.