

CITYCAUCUS



**Mike
Klassen**

Political columnist

Vision blind over Village

Close your eyes and try to picture yourself a year from now. We're just weeks away from the next Election Day in Vancouver.

What do you think voters will be talking about in 12 months? Will it be the chicken coops? Might it be the kangaroo council meetings where decisions are made in advance? How about the "f***ing hacks" remark by Mayor Gregor Robertson?

My bet is all these issues will pale beside the Olympic Village, which has become the mother of all headaches for Vancouver taxpayers. There doesn't seem to be a painkiller strong enough to make it go away.

Robertson and city council hoped they could deal with the financial problems of the Olympic Village in secret backroom meetings. Luckily for the public, media found out and exposed the mayor's hypocrisy in the process.

That's because he campaigned on the promise to be "open and transparent" on all financial dealings relating to the development.

What the city was forced to admit was that the developer defaulted on the full loan repayment. Millennium came in about \$2 million short. The developers, Shahram and Peter Malek, are now being so bold as to admit publicly that interference by the city itself is a major reason for flat sales.

When it comes to the Olympic Village mess, there are three major factors that observers attribute directly to Robertson and Vision Vancouver's term of government.

First, Vision used the waterfront development as a way to attack the NPA during and after the last election. As recently as last week – two full years into elected office – Robertson was still blaming the past council for the mess. Last year, he called the project a "train wreck" and suggested taxpayers would be "on the hook" for a billion dollar bill.

Vision's second critical mistake was delaying decisions on the social housing component until after the Games. It's resulted in huge delays and whopping bills for the city – over \$300,000 per month by one estimate. It's been seven months since the athletes left and 252 subsidized housing units still sit empty.

Finally, it was the insistence by Robertson himself to push the project to LEED Platinum status, adding huge and unnecessary costs to the development.

The Olympic Village blame game he perpetuates is not surprisingly costing taxpayers even more. One report suggests the developer could face a \$200 million shortfall – that's real money Vancouver taxpayers will be "on the hook" for.

Robertson is quick to point fingers, conveniently forgetting it was his own Vision caucus members who unanimously supported every major decision on the project. Even as a NDP MLA, he himself lobbied council twice not to cut millions in costly social amenities.

Of course, Vision Vancouver does not want to go into an election campaign with the Olympic Village still in big trouble. But somehow I don't think Vancouver taxpayers will be much better off in 12 months.

Read more Mike Klassen at citycaucus.com