

EDITORIAL

# Where the pool belongs

A new fire hall isn't the only piece of city infrastructure that belongs on Massey Drive.

So does the new pool.

City residents will vote in a referendum Oct. 28 on whether to allow the City of Prince George to borrow the money to build a \$35-million pool to replace Four Seasons Pool and a \$15-million fire hall to replace Fire Hall No. 1, currently across the street from Four Seasons.

The plan is to build the new fire hall on the south corner of Massey Drive and Carney Street to improve response times within the Bowl.

The city is suggesting the new pool remain downtown, however, across the street from the current Four Seasons Pool, where a parking lot and the Days Inn currently sit.

Both Four Seasons and the fire hall are in dire need of replacement (have a look at the videos on the referendum page of the city's webpage for a behind-the-scenes look and see for yourself) but the new pool also needs to leave downtown.

It should be built as an addition to the YMCA of Northern B.C. facility on Massey Drive.

This is hardly a new idea. It's been talked about at various times for more than 20 years. Prince George is home to one of the few urban YMCA facilities in Canada that does not have a swimming pool attached to it.

There are obvious reasons why cities across the country have collaborated with the YMCA to build and manage public swimming facilities.

First, the YMCA brings a proven track record of operating swimming pools as part of their overall mandate of developing healthy communities and families.

Second, the YMCA also has a tradition of making their facilities available to lower-income individuals and families through reduced or waived fees or in exchange for volunteer hours. Furthermore, the YMCA fosters volunteerism to operate and manage its facilities to allow it to further funnel financial resources into its programs and services.

Third, there is the land available around the Prince George YMCA facility to house both a swimming pool and the extra parking spaces needed.

Finally, the Northern B.C. YMCA is centrally located for easy accessibility for city residents.

There are some details that would have to be worked out, of course, starting with would the city retain ownership of the pool and the land it sits on.

Also, would the YMCA be able to raise some money through a capital campaign to lower the building costs to taxpayers?

Would the city also have to contribute annually to operations?

If so, how much?

There are also the city workers, currently earning good union wages at Four Seasons Pool.

To put it bluntly, the YMCA can't afford those wages to work the front desk, clean the change rooms, maintain the facility and so on, particularly since it leaves as many of those duties as possible to volunteers.

While the city lifeguards could easily transition to the YMCA-operated pool, the city would have to work with CUPE to transition current Four Seasons staff into other city jobs and offer buyouts to those willing to take them.

Finally, there is the matter of losing not one but two major pieces of city infrastructure from the downtown core.

Instead of a problem, that should be seen as an opportunity, either to foster private development of those two properties or to build a large downtown park that would cover the current fire hall, Four Seasons and the property across the street.

Yes, two roads would have to be diverted but the result would be a huge, pedestrian-friendly public space right outside City Hall that could house Downtown Summerfest, Remembrance Day ceremonies, the downtown winter carnival and other events. The city already has plans in its archives for a downtown park in that area so it could just be a matter of dusting those off.

While there are hurdles to moving the pool out of downtown, the benefits far outweigh the shortcomings for the city to partner with the YMCA to operate a replacement for Four Seasons.

Over to you, mayor and council.

— *Editor-in-chief Neil Godbout*



## An apology to Robert E. Lee

An open letter to Gen. Robert E. Lee:

Sir, I am addressing you across that final divide that separates the quick from the dead because I wish to apologize for the arrogance of the former. I have always respected your military intelligence and personal integrity, and I must admit I feel scandalized that there any among us who happen to be living at this brief moment who would disparage and judge the dead by revising history to suit their own bias.

Years ago, when I interviewed for the military here in Canada, I made sure to include you in my litany of military role models.

That stopped my interviewer cold and the officer demanded that I explain my sympathies for a man who, in his opinion, defended so unworthy a cause. My response now is the same it was then – that whatever qualms you certainly had about the Union breaking to pieces, you knew that your home was Virginia and it had voted to leave. You could not do violence to your home.

There might be no simpler loyalty than this. A man may feel compromised by his government, his religion, perhaps even the spirit of the age. But his home, which is by definition where one's family and legacy perseveres, is

the most fundamental ground upon which he can and must take a stand. This was the case for even Lincoln's extended family through his wife Mary Todd, many of whom fought and died for the South, as you well know.

They could not turn their hands against their homes either.

Ostentatious and arrogant as I am, general, I will not attempt to retrace your history or to say here what has been better said a thousand times elsewhere. But what does bear repeating is that you did not seek the command of the Confederate Army after refusing supreme command of the Union Army, and when the war was lost you surrendered wholly, discouraging any guerilla activity.

These are signs of a deep and honorable character – qualities that are often lacking in leaders today.

I've purposely left the question of slavery alone thus far.

Some have said that if the South wanted to have honour in their cause, they should have freed their slaves first and then fired on Fort Sumpter. I do not know what your own personal

opinions are on it, sir, only hints and whispers. For my part, I find it quite ironic that instead of helping the descendants of slaves today, there are people tearing down the statues of long dead, allegedly oppressive, ancestors. It won't change what is or was.

And perhaps sir, that is your greatest as well as subtlest legacy: you did your duty and acquitted yourself with honour, all without fanfare.

While your main opponent went on to become president, and one of the worst of all time, you did not fall for the trap of using your past service for enriching your present circumstances. I'm not sure how you ended up the head of a liberal arts college, but it is a fitting final position for a man as wise and well measured as yourself.

Wherever you are in the afterlife, I wish you God's peace and blessing. Be thankful you did not live to see what many are now doing. Far from listening to the better angels of their nature, those embroiled in the current fratricidal frenzy south of the Mason-Dixon line are being propelled by greed for power and merciless violence towards their fellow citizens. Whatever the complexities of your war between the states, they were settled by people of courage and valour.

We are less than they.



Right of Centre

NATHAN GIEDE

## NDP should slow down

B.C.'s new NDP government launched itself out of the gate with remarkable speed, using its first 30 days in power to enact and announce a flurry of policies it had promised during the election campaign.

A hike to the minimum wage. B.C.'s new human rights commission. Welfare and disability rate increases. The return of free adult basic education. A review of the Site C dam. Legal challenges against the Kinder Morgan pipeline. A ban on grizzly bear trophy hunting. All since July 18, the day Premier John Horgan and his cabinet were sworn in to office.

It's an aggressive pace for Horgan and the NDP administration. But peel back a few layers, and some of those high-profile announcements show a distinct lack of substance, as well as clumsy execution.

Last week's minimum wage announcement was a good example.

Labour Minister Harry Bains convened a teleconference for journalists, with only three hours notice, to announce the NDP government would raise the minimum wage 50 cents in September, to \$11.35 per hour. The problem was, the previous Liberal government had already announced that increase on Feb. 27.

The NDP also reaffirmed an election promise that it would, eventually, create a Fair Wages Commission to get the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. There was no budget or details on how that would work. The ministry admitted the commission hadn't even been approved by Treasury Board yet.

Green Leader Andrew Weaver was also displeased that the NDP pinned the commission to a path for a \$15 minimum wage by 2021.

The NDP had campaigned on that timeline. But it later signed a power-sharing deal with the Greens that didn't contain such a date. Weaver felt the NDP reverting to that timeline prejudiced and pre-determined the entire Fair Wage Commission.

Take also the example of the NDP's earlier announcement to ban grizzly bear trophy hunting.

Forests Minister Doug Donaldson stumbled when asked by reporters to break down how many bears were killed as trophies, how many for meat, and what the NDP would do to ensure hunters couldn't simply get around the ban by pretending to hunt for meat and then leaving the bear carcass in the woods. How will the rules be enforced? Donaldson, who has otherwise appeared quite competent as minister in his early days, couldn't say.

It left the distinct impression that, rather than a decision based upon sound evidence, science and reasoning, the NDP was just charging ahead with decisions first, facts later.

Perhaps the new government should consider slowing down its speeding trainload of announcements, to allow it to research and present its policies in a less haphazard, panicked, way. But that would be contentious, too. You already hear grumbling in some NDP corners that the government is moving too slowly on big-ticket items, like campaign finance reform and Metro Vancouver housing affordability.

Deputy premier and finance minister Carole James said the NDP has been under a compressed timeline between the swearing-in and September budget dates.

"We wanted to make sure people saw some key commitments early, so yes we've been talking about what could be implemented in the first 30 days," she said. "I think we're all pretty proud about the fact we're able to move on commitments and live up to the commitments we made to people in the province in the first month in government."

When asked if the NDP was rushing, James said some policies, like adult basic education, needed to be enacted quickly, before the start of school in September. Others, like minimum wage and the grizzly bear hunt, require public consultation that needs to begin immediately, too, she said.

Fair enough. But for the Opposition Liberals, it looks like the NDP is using the broad powers of cabinet to ram through as many decisions as possible before the new government even tests the confidence of the legislature.

"I had no illusions they'd be a group of people who would try to govern by OIC (order in council) rather than through legislation," said interim Liberal Opposition leader Rich Coleman. "Because they are going to have difficulty with legislation in the house."

Then again, the NDP has done a fairly good job on some of its other early announcements. Its pledge to back First Nations rights against Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain pipeline appeared a comprehensive and well-reasoned first step.

The referral of the Site C dam to the B.C. Utilities Commission was clear in its review mandate.

When Social Development Minister Shane Simpson announced a \$100 monthly increase on the disability and welfare rates on July 20, he showed in a subsequent interview that he was fully on top of the file.

He knew the budget implications (\$180 million a year) and the intricacies of how and why he'd made his decision. And he'd only been on the job two days.

Expect the NDP announcements to keep landing fast and furious in coming weeks.

Guest Column

ROB SHAW *Vancouver Sun*



COLLEEN SPARROW  
PUBLISHER AND GM



NEIL GODBOUT  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



CHERYL STEWART  
DIRECTOR OF ADVERTISING

**Mailing address:**  
201-1777 Third Ave.  
Prince George, B.C. V2L 3G7  
**Office hours:**  
9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday  
**General switchboard:**  
250-562-2441  
info@pgcitizen.ca  
**General news:**  
news@pgcitizen.ca  
**Sports inquiries:**  
250-960-2764  
sports@pgcitizen.ca  
**Classifieds advertising:**  
250-562-6666  
cls@pgcitizen.ca

**Display advertising, digital advertising and website inquiries:**  
250-562-2441  
ads@pgcitizen.ca  
**Reader sales and services:**  
250-562-3301  
rss@pgcitizen.ca  
**Letters to the editor:**  
letters@pgcitizen.ca  
**Website:**  
www.pgcitizen.ca  
**Website feedback:**  
digital@glaciermedia.ca

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