

THE PRINCE GEORGE FREE PRESS

VOL.1 NO.3

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 1994

PHONE 564-0005

Taxpayers getting a bargain

By SHANE MILLS

Prince George Free Press

When city council decided to save money by reducing snow removal service, they were following tradition. The City of Prince George, according to a survey of British Columbia municipalities, has one of the lowest residential and industrial tax rates in the province.

On a \$105,000 home, Prince George taxes (including utilities) would total \$1,132. Add in school and other taxes, and the bill comes to \$1,882.

In contrast, taxpayers in Kamloops would fork out \$1,365 in municipal and almost \$2,100 when school and other taxes are factored in. Residents of Nanaimo face a larger bill. The municipal part of the bill adds up to \$1,383 and the total bill comes in at \$2,283.

Mayor John Backhouse isn't surprised by the figures — "we really attempt to ensure the administration of the city is performed as efficiently and effectively as possible" — but he also knows not many people will give the figures much credence.

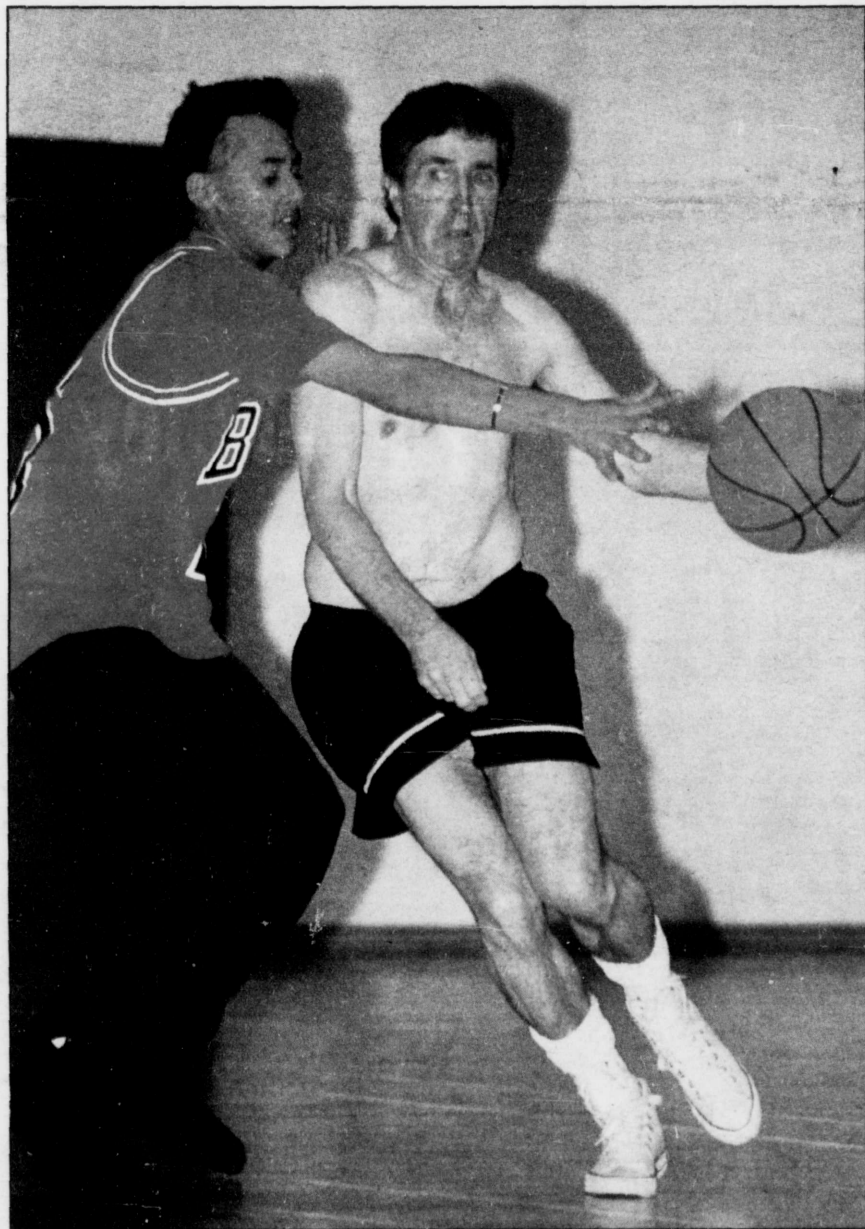
"Nobody believes because there is a general cynicism. People think they pay too much in taxes and they don't want to pay anymore."

Mayor Backhouse says the large industrial tax base in Prince George helps keep residential taxes down — "it doesn't harm us" — but he is quick to add industrial rates are also low in comparison to other parts of the province. Using Kamloops as an example, the rates for major industry, light industry and business are almost double that of Prince George.

Noting that "quite often (residents) don't mind paying for something they can see," Mayor Backhouse says the other major impediment in convincing people they are getting reasonable is the size of the tax bill. Other taxes are added, but council doesn't get the money.

"They say 'I paid \$3,000 in taxes, what are you doing with it?' But they may have only paid \$1,300 in municipal taxes," explains the mayor.

Follow the ball/To the net



Gerard McKenzie, on right, shows Jas Randhawa a few moves during a pick-up game at the YMCA. The games are held three times a week. ROB BIRON/FREE PRESS

Forest cash creates jobs

BC's Forest Renewal Plan is starting to pay dividends for the Prince George Region.

NDP MLAs Paul Ramsey and Lois Boone say 57 projects totaling almost \$3.2-million, as well as a Forest Renewal regional office, are coming our way in the next few months. The projects announced are expected to create 341 jobs.

Mr. Ramsey says the government has put its money where its mouth is. "What we wanted to do was make it very clear that people knew we were 'walking the walk' on this, that dollars were indeed flowing."

By far the most expensive initiative is a watershed restoration project for the Bowron River. The Forest Renewal Program will pay \$645,000 for an assessment of the project. Mr. Ramsey says the Bowron Valley's reputation as an ecological disaster area should change. "They used to call it the clear cut seen from space. I think we need to recognize it for what it is: the tree plantation seen from space."

Mr. Ramsey also wants to point out the number of wood lot licenses and the amount of timber from them will be doubling over the next two years.

The regional office will be one of six in the province.

Westel high on Prince George

Westel has announced where construction of its new centre of northern operations will take place.

B.C. Rail's communications company says its new Prince George office tower will be on the northwest corner of Second Avenue and Victoria Street.

Jim Cox, BCR's general manager for properties, agrees it's an exciting time for the company. "It's exciting for all of us. For us in the real estate division to be given the opportunity to do some development is great. It's a good investment. We've got lots of confidence in Prince George."

Mr. Cox says his company bought the property from the City of Prince George at the end of October but has actually had an option to purchase the lot since the summer. He says the design of the tower is not yet complete, and the only confirmed tenant so far is Westel. Mr. Cox says it will be either five or six storeys high, and will have roughly 50,000 square feet of floor space. Westel will occupy either two or three of the storeys for itself.

Mr. Cox would not say how much the property cost.

INSIDE

A6



A Predator

Sidney Wells has abused children across Canada.

A15



Warm Home

Local day care operators are people too.

B1



Fast Track

David Horn leads College Heights to the provincials.

B10



Next Step

Making a bid for professional dance careers.