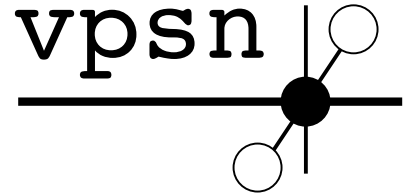


November 1, 2006

Mayor Sam Sullivan &
Members of Council
City of Vancouver
453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4



Re: Draft Naming Rights and Commemorative Naming Policies

Dear Mayor and Council,

I am writing on behalf of the Vancouver Public Space Network (VPSN) with regard to the Draft Naming Rights and Commemorative Naming Policies for Civic Community Facilities. I would like to begin by thanking you for providing this opportunity to comment.

The VPSN is a grassroots organization that works on issues of advocacy, education and outreach relating to public space issues in Vancouver and its environs. We were pleased to take part in the public consultation held earlier this year and provided feedback to City staff at that time.

I would like to draw your attention to three concerns that we have about the new policies. We begin with a general expression of concern about corporate Naming Rights before moving into looking at specific points of concern that arise in the structure of the new policies.

(1) Naming Rights - General Concerns

To start, the VPSN would like to commend Council for its initiative in requesting that these policies be developed and recognizing the need for a more a uniform approach to dealing with Naming applications. We recognize that the issues it refers to are often contentious and that developing policy in this area is a challenging venture. We support the draft policies as they relate to commemorative naming.

We are concerned, however, that key features of the draft policies - most notably as they connect to corporate naming - remain problematic.

The VPSN believes that Naming Rights, particularly corporate naming of civic facilities, exist largely as form of marketing activity not unlike other forms of advertising or branding. Naming activities are often presented as a form of corporate social responsibility because they allows corporations - often for a fairly nominal cost compared to other forms of advertising - to achieve a high degree of advertising visibility while claiming to be supporters of arts, culture, recreation, and other important activities. And while it is true that such contributions - particularly in an era of heightened fiscal accountability and government cutbacks - does assist civic facilities, we believe it would be an error for Council to assume that the motivations for such contributions are a result of some form of benign corporate generosity. On the contrary: we would posit that an extremely high return on marketing dollar is far more of a motivating force for corporate naming. Consider that just one event held in "ABC Theatre" means that all tickets, radio and television advertising, flyers, leaflets and programs, as well as related media commentary, inevitably lead to related exposure for ABC Corporation. Multiply this by the years-long duration of the Naming contract, and you

will quickly get a sense for the type of marketing exposure that Naming Rights will afford to a corporation or individual.

Rather than looking at corporate naming as a form of corporate contribution to civic amenities, it is potentially more accurate to consider the sale of naming rights to be a form of unintended municipal subsidization for corporate marketing. Not only does the minimal return of naming contributions (versus civic tax dollars) assist in underwriting *extremely* valuable branding activity, but the fact that the facility is a civic structure guarantees a generous audience exposure owing to the high volume of usage associated with many city-owned facilities.

This dynamic plays out regardless of whether the naming is on interior or exterior facility components, or whether it is on a sports, cultural park board or social service/childcare facility. Naturally the scale of marketing impact is different in each case, but it is no less problematic. Where ABC Theatre is more pronounced, there is still a problem if you take your child to the Diaper Brand Playroom everyday, or hit the AthleticWear squash courts in your local community centre. Citizens using the facilities are exposed to marketing messages that they are, in fact, underwriting.

All of this is problematic enough without the additional fact that only in very rare occasions do corporate/private donations for facilities ever approach the degree of investment made by the main contributor - the public. It is worth mentioning this, because the inadvertent effect of selling off naming rights to a corporate contributor who provides a nominal percent of building or operating costs, is that it seems to diminish the apparent worth of the public contribution as well.

Mayor and Council, we make these remarks as a form of context. In so doing, I wish to clarify that the VPSN is not opposed to corporations and other benefactors contributing to the arts, culture, recreation and civic life in general. In fact, we believe they should. But contributions shouldn't entail the right to put a corporate name on the side of a building, or on interior or exterior facility components (though granted, there are different opportunities and impacts associated with each).

There are other ways that such contributions can be acknowledged: an interior donor plaque, such as is used at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre is an excellent example. We believe that this draft report presents is an opportunity to explore better, less-overt, less-problematic ways to recognize donors to civic amenity development. We would encourage Mayor and Council to consider directing staff to extend their investigations in this regard.

(2) Building Age and the Long-term Effects of Proposed Policy

In addition to our general concerns about the City's broad approach to Naming Rights (as outlined in the draft policy), the VPSN is also concerned about some of the *structural* features of the policy.

One of the key distinctions made in the new Naming Rights policies concerns the separation of naming opportunities linked with New Facilities versus those connected to the Renaming of existing facilities. It is a distinction that is particularly relevant with regard to sports and cultural facilities - where there is a prohibition against the sale of Naming Rights with existing structures, but not New Facilities.

Given that staff themselves identify that many civic facilities “are now aging and in need of reinvestment,” the VPSN is concerned about the long-term effect of policy as it connects to the development and redevelopment of important cultural and sporting “anchor” architecture. One of the means of reinvesting in such facilities is to undertake substantial renovations, or to develop new facilities - either on the same site, or in different locations. All of these options have been associated with the sale of Naming Rights to corporations in other communities. On first read, the current draft policy would seem to suggest that only new facilities in new locations will be open to the sale of corporate naming rights.

This is problematic because ultimately aging architecture will need to be replaced. Herein lies one of the weaknesses of the policy. Essentially, since “new” is not defined in either of the draft policies, and since “facilities” can be interpreted more broadly than “structure” or “building,” then there is nothing in the policy that would disallow the gradual replacement of older facilities with rebuilt or renovated sites bearing corporate names. So the distinction between “New” and “Renaming” has the potential to be much more thin than intended.

A hypothetical example here comes from the current application surrounding the Vogue Theatre. Its current owners are renovating the structure to create a new set of facilities. Where this structure city-owned, this type of redevelopment work would allow the facility to be re-named. In fact, though the Orpheum Theatre/Westcoast Gas re-naming is mentioned in the proposed as an example of something that would be disallowed under the new policy, it is actually not clear that this is really the case. Depending on the nature of the modifications that get made to such a facility in the future, there is little reason to assume that this distinction will be easy to find, or that there will be an absence of debate over whether or not “new” means totally new, or partially new. With capital campaigns being what they are, the financial incentive to blur this line could also be fairly pronounced.

The VPSN is asking that Mayor and Council determine whether the distinction between New and Renaming opportunities can be strengthened to meet the concerns identified herein.

(3) Individual Naming

We would now like to make a few brief remarks around Individual Naming opportunities as they are discussed in the draft policies.

We concur with City staff that issues surrounding individual naming are less contentious and more acceptable than that of corporate naming. However, we still have concerns similar to those that we noted in the public consultation.

Our particular concern connects to individual names that are, in essence, the same as corporate names - either by virtue of a direct link (as in, e.g. Jim Pattison/Pattison Inc.) or through strong associations between the named individual and a linked corporation. We noted that the distinction between corporate and individual naming has the potential, in some cases, to become blurry and would propose that Council request clarification from staff as to how the Naming Rights policies might account for this. For example, does (Jim) Pattison get to name Park Board facilities just because his personal name is indistinguishable from the name of the corporation he owns? Not only does this allow for an unequal playing field between sponsors, but it also allows the potential for a defacto form of corporate naming to

take place in categories of facility (Park Board, Social Service, Childcare) that attempt to disallow this.

We would like to request clarification of this point and would like to request that Mayor and Council determine whether or not there is a way to strengthen the language of the proposed policy to account for these sorts of cases.

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Given that a the majority (59%) of respondents in the most recent consultation indicated an opposition to corporate naming, and given the general concerns we have identified here, the VPSN is asking Council to postpone adopting the draft Naming Rights policy and to consider the following recommendations:

- (1) Disallow corporate naming on new and existing civic facilities and/or interior and exterior components
- (2) Direct staff to determine a more suitable way to recognize key corporate donors to civic amenity development and redevelopment projects
- (3) Review components of the Naming Rights policy pertaining to the classification of new versus existing facilities and to add language to the policy that will further clarify this distinction
- (4) Strengthen components of the Naming Rights policy that allow individual naming but not corporate naming - to ensure that individuals whose names are synonymous with corporate names are accounted for in a way that is fair, and to further ensure that defacto corporate naming is not allowed in these situations.

Mayor and Council, I would like to thank you again for allowing me to comment on behalf of the Vancouver Public Space Network. Should you have any questions about our comments, please feel free to contact me at the email address listed below.

Yours sincerely,

-signed-

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