

The Watchdog Bulletin



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Has the Joint Venture Committed Suicide?

The 'Pecuniary-spelled-backwards' plan for the Catalyst surplus lands seems to have hit a wall . . . and one that could be fatal.

The Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) officially informed the City and PRSC, the joint venture, in a letter dated December 14, 2006, that there were many hoops the City, in its application on behalf of PRSC, has to jump through before the ALC will deliberate on whether or not to remove the 5 parcels of land, which amount to 605 acres, from the Agricultural Land Reserve. The hoops include:

1. intensive soil testing of the agricultural capability of the land as the "agricultural capabilities . . . are more variable than identified on the . . . mapping currently available";
2. proof of community need including an overall Yrainucep concept plan in sufficient detail to show where all the proposed facilities are to be located;
3. in-depth technical planning analyses which have to meet seven requirements listed in the letter;
4. a public hearing held by the ALC after the public release of these required documents.

These are all timely and costly requirements for the City and PRSC. It's hard to imagine that the joint venture could pull this information together in under a year's time, if ever. And, then, even if the information is received by the ALC, what are the chances it would be adequate to convince the ALC to remove the lands from the agricultural land reserve -- particularly at a time when it is clear that any geographically-remote community must develop a local food supply to survive in the face of climate change and peak oil.

An even bigger question is where PRSC, the joint venture, is going to find the money to pay for these expensive analyses and soil testings? They have very little capital. And while the joint venture plan is to log the Wildwood Hill in order to fund some start-up costs, by their own admission, the log sales will bring them no more than \$200,000 and, if what was said at the Wildwood logging meeting is true, this money is to be earmarked for environmental testing on the waterfront. Following the public release of all these documents, there will be a public hearing and, at that point, there will undoubtedly be testimony refuting many of PRSC's findings.

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Important stories in our Community

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" . . . where is PRSC, the joint venture, going to find the money to pay for these costly analyses and soil testings? "



Meet Woodward and Bernstein, the Watchdog's newest investigative journalists. Having spent numerous years uncovering wrongdoing in the corridors of power for *The Washington Purr*, they decided to trade their Capital Hill hobnobbing for the simple life. They are noted authors of numerous books and have won the Pawlitzer Prize on three occasions. They have recently moved to Powell River and are working on a new book entitled: *In the Mist: The Political Landscape of Powell River*.



How your tax dollars are spent

Trip to Turin, Italy for CAO Stan Westby	\$7,147.77
Trip to Turin, Italy for Don Allan, (former) Mgr., PRREDS	5,000.00
Trip to Lund, Sweden for Mayor Alsgard	6,111.65

What's for dinner?

A 2002 Worldwatch report says that a typical meal made with ingredients from a supermarket takes four to 17 times more petroleum consumption in transport than the same meal made from local ingredients. And a head of lettuce grown in California and shipped nearly 5,000 km. to Washington, D.C., requires about 36 times as much fossil fuel energy in transport as it provides in food energy when it arrives.

Preserving our Agricultural Lands here in Powell River means we can become less dependent on transported food. What a good idea!

Who has their paws on the PAWS fund for Millennium Park (\$79,000)

- the PAWS Committee;
- the City of Powell River; or
- PRSC (the 'joint venture')?

Answer: C, the joint venture.

Ombudsman begins Investigation of the City

On November 30, 2006, the B.C. Ombudsman formally advised the City of Powell River that it was initiating an investigation as a result of numerous complaints from Powell River citizens regarding the city's actions with regard to the joint venture. In the letter, the Ombudsman asked for specific documentation from the city. [Shortly after receiving this letter, the Mayor and City Council announced they would be resigning from their Directorship positions with the Powell River Waterfront Development Corporation, the PRSC (the joint venture), and the Community Forest Ltd.]

Having received no response from the city, on December 27, 2006, the Ombudsman wrote a second letter to the city. Subsequent to the second letter from the Ombudsman, the city advised that they would forward the requested information to the Ombudsman in early 2007.

The Ombudsman's office deals with issues of fairness and accountability in public administration in British Columbia. <http://www.ombud.gov.bc.ca/>

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Then, there is the Ombudsman's investigation into the city's actions with regard to the joint venture. Then, there is the takeover of Catalyst by a New York City hedge fund, Third Avenue Management. Will TAM want to be in business with a small city government? Will they want to sell the surplus lands or hold onto them? All unknowns at this point in time.

It appears, to astute observers, that the Yrainucep plan for the joint venture is already a dead duck. The question remains: Is there another plan for which the Yrainucep proposal was merely window-dressing. Will the mill convert to an energy-generating facility? Will there be a new dam on Powell Lake? Only time will tell as, surely, we, the citizens will be the last to know.

To read the full ALC letter, go to: http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/application_status/Powell_River/ALC%20Letter%20December%2014%202006.pdf

FORMOSA SUES THE WATCHDOG

On December 20, 2006, the *Peak* newspaper reported that Dave Formosa filed a defamation action against Patricia Aldworth, author and publisher of *The Watchdog Bulletin*. At the time the *Peak* published their article, Aldworth was on holiday and had not been served with the writ.

Formosa's court action originally named Marjorie Milliken as a defendant. However, Milliken has been dropped from the lawsuit. Aldworth's Statement of Defence has now been filed.

Anyone wishing to view the Statement of Claim, can go to <https://webapps.ag.gov.bc.ca/cso/eseach/partySearch.do> and put in the name "Formosa, Dave" to access the document. However, this method costs \$6. Or you can contact the Watchdog at watchdogpr@shaw.ca and request a PDF copy.

A Letter to my Readers

When I arrived in Powell River on September 1, 2005, I felt as though I was one of the luckiest people alive. Until purchasing my home a month earlier, I had had no idea that the Powell River area was so spectacularly beautiful. Coming from Victoria, where high-rise condominiums were taking over the city, I could breathe easy -- as that certainly wasn't going to happen here. People were friendly and, within no time, I had numerous friends and acquaintances including my neighbour, Dr. Dirt, who took care of my front garden. I had a magnificent view of the ocean and I could walk and hike to my heart's content.

It was when Dr. Dirt suggested I go to the public meeting on the OCP later in September that I began to realize there was a downside to living in paradise. Having spent my young adulthood working in the political milieu of Washington, D.C., I was shocked at the performances of our local elected officials at that meeting. Without understanding all that was taking place, it was clear to me that there were two sides in town and, given the consistent banging of the mayor's gavel when opponents to the removal of the trails were applauded, I realized where the politicians stood. The supporters for the removal were our local officials, PRREDS (funded by the City), some local real estate types, and the mill: the usual suspects.

I could not understand why the mill would want to deprive citizens of walking on trails that had been used over the decades. But, at that point, there was a lot I didn't understand. I later learned that any dissent to what the supporters wanted was ignored whether it be trails, the secret joint venture, Section 21, etc. And, if the opposition could not be ignored, it was quashed. Consent was manufactured and life went on.

I also realized that people in Powell River had learned not to speak out. It was a culture. Everything seemed to be a secret. Someone might say to me: "Oh, I learned such and such, but I can't tell you who told me." Or "You might want to talk to so and so, but I will have to ask him if he is willing to speak to you first." Openness and transparency did not seem to be 'ethics' in Powell River whether speaking of local government or speaking to your neighbour.

Many long-time residents of Powell River told me they did not even bother to vote in the local elections because they said it never mattered who got elected, they were all the same. Certainly, I began to see their point. Letters I wrote to City Hall never got answered. In fact, I never even received an acknowledgement for numerous letters I wrote, some of which had many citizens' signatures on them. And I learned that Powell River had a local newspaper that seemed to follow the party line and did not appear interested in investigative journalism.

In pure frustration, I penned the first Watchdog in February 2006. It was an attempt to bring information on local public issues to the attention of Powell River citizens. An alternative. After its dissemination, I realized I had struck a chord. A healthy chord. Those who received the Watchdog read it and asked for more. Thus, I did a second, and then a third, and on it went. I got invaluable assistance from other activist dogs. The email subscription list grew and grew. People were passing it on to their friends. It took up an immeasurable amount of my time but I was lucky to have the time as a retiree.

In September, I continued to hammer away at the secrecy and 'wheeling and dealing' regarding the joint venture and wrote an article entitled, "The Story of the Greased Pig." Within weeks, I was hearing from all sorts of people that Dave Formosa was planning to sue me. Planning to sue me?

Mr. Formosa called in Dr. Dirt to meet with him and sent a message back to me that he was sending the Watchdog to his lawyer. I was flabbergasted that an individual who believes himself to be a Powell River leader would have such a thin skin, let alone, attempt to threaten me through my neighbour. Mr. Formosa never attempted to reach me although I let it be known that I would be happy to talk to him. He told Dr. Dirt that he had "no intention" of calling me.

Not having heard from him, I sent Mr. Formosa a letter asking him to join with me in enlightening the people of Powell River. I offered him the opportunity to put an article in the Watchdog that I would not edit. In fact, I would even write it for him if he so wished. No response.

Having found a lawyer in Victoria who would take his defamation complaint, Mr. Formosa filed a writ against me on November 16, 2006 in the Supreme Court, at the Victoria registry. However, I did not know of the writ

until some weeks later when my friend, Marjorie Milliken, was served with a summons at her Savary Island home. She had also been named in the writ, in spite of the fact that she had never authored anything in the Watchdog. We call it in the legal profession - 'casting a wide net.' In any case, Marjorie got in touch with Mr. Formosa's lawyer and I wrote him as well saying she was not responsible for the Watchdog. Shortly thereafter, she was dropped from the writ.

I headed off for Christmas to frolic with my pup in warmer climes without having received a summons. Some time after I left and after Marjorie was dropped from the suit, an article appeared in the Peak newspaper about the Formosa lawsuit naming both Marjorie and me as defendants. I had no knowledge of this article before it appeared. Neither did Marjorie. Watchdog Jr. said to his mom: "Does the Peak always print articles on lawsuits between private parties?"

Once home, in January, I was served with a summons. By this time, I was receiving numerous phone calls and emails of support and the Watchdog subscription list skyrocketed. I can only thank Mr. Formosa and the Peak.

We have very serious issues facing our city. The mill is now owned by an American firm and no one, least of all the mill employees, can feel secure about the future of our community. What that means, at the end of the day, for the joint venture is a whole separate issue. The days of thinking 'if the mill wants it, it is good for Powell River' have been over for quite some time. But the full weight of the change has yet to be felt.

I continue to extend to Mr. Formosa the opportunity to make a statement in the Watchdog and I continue to hope that Powell River will evolve into a community that allows freedom of expression and dissent without citizens worrying that they will be hit with defamation suits. Such freedom is an absolute requirement for a participatory democracy.



Patricia Aldworth, publisher
The Watchdog Bulletin