

I N A U G U R A L . . . A D D R E S S

MAYOR JACK VOLRICH

Wednesday, January 3, 1979

Release Time: 2:00 p.m.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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I am gratified that the people of Vancouver, in re-electing me to the Office of Mayor, have again given me a strong vote of confidence. I will do my best to deserve that confidence.

I congratulate the members of Council who have been re-elected, and I welcome Alderman Helen Boyce back to the Council, and our new freshman, Alderman Doug Little.

I thank former Aldermen Bill Gibson and May Brown for their services to the citizens of Vancouver.

I hope that the new Council will work together in a spirit of co-operation and goodwill. There are many important decisions to be made during these next two years, which will have an important bearing on the future and direction of our City. There are challenges ahead that will call for courage and determination.

The increasing financial burden on our taxpayers, and the economic health and vitality of our City, are matters that need our serious concern and attention. We've seen in the past year "tax revolts" in many cities on this continent. The facts and conditions in most cases don't compare to those in Vancouver. We are in a good and stable condition by any comparison, including the basic comparison of how much our citizens pay in taxes. Yet there is a message in these uprisings of taxpayers, and I think it is this. "We believe that governments can operate a great deal more efficiently than they do. And we believe that you can keep taxes within reasonable limits without affecting the quality and extent of public services. In fact, we insist that you do so."

And I think the people are right. I believe that the public perception of government (at all levels) is that there is a great deal of waste and inefficiency. The tax protest is based on a genuine belief that governments can and should do most of the things they are doing - but much more efficiently - and this means at far less cost to them as taxpayers. The voice of the people should be heeded. And it should be heeded in Vancouver, as

I think it is necessary, then, for us to lay down a firm financial policy which will place limitations on the extent of our budget and tax increases. There is nothing easier than spending public money. The challenge is in restraining ourselves.

I am recommending a financial policy for the next two years that will have the following elements:

1. General tax increases for all classes of property for the next two years should be held at less than one-half the rate of inflation. This will impose a predetermined lid on any tax increase, and we will simply have to live within the means that are available to us. This will require greater efficiency at all levels and in all departments, as well as a strict limit on budget increases.
2. The amount of our capital spending from our annual budget should be cut back, and I believe that this can be done by at least two million dollars in the current year. We should also impose a lid on our annual capital spending as a matter of policy, and I would recommend that this be not more than 4% of our total budget in any one year, or an equivalent mill rate limitation. That would have amounted to about seven million dollars last year, whereas we spent 9.3 million.
3. Business taxes should be somewhat reduced in 1979 to help ease the burden on business properties that has largely been brought about by the new assessments legislation. This can be done without shifting any further load onto residential properties. Rental values on commercial properties are expected to inflate by about 10% in this coming year, and therefore we can consider a reduction in the rate of the business tax without any serious loss of revenue from this source.
4. Our activities in certain fields - including planning - have increased very considerably in recent years, and I would recommend that these be closely reviewed, and reduced.
5. There should be a critical examination of each and every program financed by the City, as to whether it can be justified as a proper use of taxpayers money.

In general terms we should also assume these further
priorities:

1. Continue to develop conservative and fiscally-responsible budgeting attitudes.
2. Continue to press for fair and equitable cost-sharing arrangements with the Province in regard to health and policing costs.
3. Continue to improve the financial strength of the City.
4. Work towards obtaining a triple "A" credit rating, and make our presentation to the rating agencies in New York in late 1979. An improvement of our rating can mean savings of many tens of thousands of dollars in annual interest costs on capital borrowings.
5. Consciously assist the development and strengthening of our City's economy.

More specific policy recommendations will be placed before the Finance Committee for its consideration at an early date.

I made a brief reference to police costs and I add the following comment. Our Chief Constable is not placing before us this year a request for additional manpower, but we will not be able to avoid facing an increase, inevitably, next year. Vancouver taxpayers are continuing to pay more than a fair or equitable share of policing costs, and I therefore urge the Province to approve and implement as soon as possible the recommendations of the Task Force on this subject, so that we can afford to give our citizens the kind of policing and protection that they deserve. Even with the insufficient resources and manpower that they now have, I give our Police Force credit for doing an excellent job in our City.

There is another matter of vital importance that we should continue to press on the Provincial Government, and that relates to the burden of school costs on our property taxes. The position of municipal governments in this Province over many years has been to urge the Provincial Government to remove this burden totally. I have supported that position consistently and I am going to ask this Council to take a strong stand in reaffirming this position. To most of our taxpayers, it's the bottom line on the tax bill that counts, and it is the Provincial Government's responsibility to...

as a Council, have no present control. I want to emphasize that there are two facets to this situation - one being the fact that the proportionate burden of education costs on property owners is actually being increased, the other is our concern over increasing school budgets which are far exceeding increases in our general municipal budgets. I want to emphasize that there has to be a new approach to this whole subject of financing education, and I call on the Province for determined action in the matter this year.

Our City economy is in reasonable shape, but it could be better. There are areas of retail activity which are in some difficulty. There is a general decrease in housing starts, but still an overall improvement in the housing situation. There is a slowdown in the construction industry, but some of the projects on our drawing boards will do a great deal to help the health of that industry, if we can bring them into reality.

I would also like to see us develop - and it can be done this year - a major new industrial park in Vancouver, in the south-east sector. There is a vital need for us to encourage and attract new industries to our City, and this particular matter is under discussion with the Provincial Government. This is one of the important priorities of our new Economic Development Office.

I have spoken in the past two years about the need for us to be concerned about the economic viability and well-being of our central city - our downtown area - in a context where there seems to be some disagreement, or misunderstanding, of the policy of the G.V.R.D. I will not support any plan or policy that will encourage the loss or outflow of people and jobs from our City. I make this very clear to my colleagues in the G.V.R.D. If we are talking the same language - that is, the orderly direction and sharing of new growth - then I am with them. If they are talking about the decentralization of industry and commerce and job opportunities out of Vancouver and into their own municipalities - then they will find me totally opposed. The G.V.R.D. will face a critical test these next two years - about its proper role, and its usefulness, and its future. This will depend to a large extent on its ability to comprehend the need to have regard for the health and well-being of all municipalities, including the City of Vancouver.

I have spoken on matters having to do with the hard facts of finance and economics. I would not want to give the impression to anyone that the role of government is only in the areas of physical services. I have always regarded our support for the Arts, and our role in their activities, as being an important part of our public responsibility and an important part of our cultural and economic being. While I have spoken of certain limits in spending that will undoubtedly have to take place, I feel that we have reached a reasonable and responsible level of funding for the Arts which I feel should be maintained. The cultural health and vitality of our community are in many ways related to our economic health and vitality. I intend to take an active role in these next two years with our Committee on the Arts in trying to achieve various objectives:

1. To seek more private support for the Arts.
2. To help develop more audiences and self-support for the Arts.
3. To establish Vancouver as the Festival City of this continent, just as Edinburgh - our Sister City - has established this reputation on an international level.
4. To bring the Arts more fully into focus and more readily accessible to children, the elderly, and the disadvantaged.

We have to recognize the fact that Arts are not for the privileged, but for the many, in our community.

Transit

There is no question but that the provision of fast and convenient public transit is a key to the development of the Greater Vancouver area. In fact, that is an integral part of the Regional District Plan.

We have moved ahead in a positive direction this past year, although progress has been slow. We are nearing a time when our engineering studies for Light Rapid Transit will be completed and cost estimates will be determined. We are, then, nearing the time for decision-making, and I believe that the basic decisions can be made within the next six months. If the cost estimates turn out to be close to our present assumptions, then obviously we will have to address ourselves to the question of financing - and this is something that will be negotiated with the Provincial Government.

Authority and with the Provincial Government, to determine how the cost can be raised, and shared.

To comment briefly on some ideas that have been advanced - I personally do not believe that an experimental line will help us learn anything, and I also feel that it would be unwise to spend any large amount of money in upgrading our bus system. These proposals, in my view, would only delay the implementation of a rapid transit system and use up resources that should go into that system. I also reiterate my personal support for an Arbutus Line that will serve the west side of the City and the Richmond area. The line could be made perfectly compatible with the residential areas it would serve, without noise problems, and without any lessening of property values, and more likely leading to an increase in those values.

So - we are nearing the time for important decisions on this question of transit. The matter will require strong leadership, and determination on the part of the Council.

Governmental Reform

I have stated that I would be proposing to the Council the appointment of a Commission to look at the matter of governmental reform. This would be in the interests of considering changes that may lead to more efficient and effective and responsible government. In my view the Commission should be an independent one - that is, not directly involving members of the present Council but, of course, providing full opportunity for everyone to express their views. I will shortly present to the Council a list of citizens who I think would be well qualified and experienced to give this matter their objective consideration, and guidelines for their work. I would propose that the terms of reference of the Commission would cover the following matters:

1. the question of a ward system;
2. the size of Council;
3. the length of term of office and frequency of elections;
4. qualifications for candidacy;
5. role and powers of the Mayor;
6. voter registration and voter qualifications;
7. special Committees and Commissions - their role and

8. the use of Initiatives, Referenda, and Plebiscites;
9. election date and date of swearing-in;
10. the size of the Park Board and whether it should continue as an elected Board.

In the year ahead of us, we will also be dealing with specific projects that have a great deal of importance to our City and its well-being.

I believe that we are close to coming to agreement with the Provincial Government on the outstanding issues relating to a Trade and Convention Center. I will report on this matter to the Council at its first business meeting on January 9th, and I hope that we can make a positive decision at that time. We can then proceed to make our presentation to the Federal Government, and we fully expect the Federal Government to respond favourably. Among other considerations, we look on this project as being a vitally important one for the redevelopment of our waterfront. Here we are, with the grandeur of our mountains and harbour, but with a waterfront that is a disgrace. We are asking for no more than the same kind of federal aid being extended to the ports of Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City, and St. John's. As far as this project is concerned, I believe that the necessary decisions on all political levels can be made by the end of February.

The P.N.E. has a vital role to play in our community, and it is necessary that we assist the P.N.E. to fulfill its plans for redevelopment. This includes the proposal for a new stadium, which is unquestionably needed in our City. While we talk about the activities that make a great city, we must recognize the importance of professional and amateur sports in our community. Yes - I would very much like to see Vancouver become a major league city in many sports. The subject of the P.N.E.'s multiplex proposal will come before Council again at our first business meeting for reconsideration of the previous resolution of Council. I will be recommending that this Council approve the P.N.E. as the appropriate location for the new stadium.

Vancouver's Centennial Year is only a few years away. I think it is time now to look ahead to 1986. Our approach to our

Centennial is an opportunity for us to plan ahead for not only the festivities that should match the occasion, but also for new projects that will bring lasting benefits to our City, and we can properly expect the participation of the Provincial and Federal Governments. To this end, I propose the establishment of a special Centennial Committee to plan ahead, starting this year. I will present specific recommendations on the make-up and terms of reference for this Committee within the next month.

Having some relation also to our Centennial Year, I am recommending that our City go on record as making a bid for the 1987 Pan American Games. We have not had a major event of this kind in Vancouver since the British Empire Games in 1954. If Council agrees, then I would intend to pursue the matter vigorously, in association with the Province.

As we have regard to these few years ahead of us, let's also give serious consideration to establishing a real and identifiable civic government presence in downtown Vancouver. There is now a massive provincial presence downtown, and soon we hope that the new Federal Building project will proceed. I think that a visible civic governmental presence is also very important, because the fact of the matter is that the retail and business community in downtown Vancouver continue to feel a certain physical remoteness to the people at 12th and Cambie. And, after all, downtown Vancouver is the heart of our City - and we should have someone there.

I have spoken of the years immediately ahead of us. But what is to be the greater destiny of our City? What kind of a city do we want to see for ourselves and our children 20 and 30 years from now? We have completed the first phase of important work in this regard, which was undertaken by the City Planning Commission. This report on future goals for Vancouver will be presented to you at a special Council meeting this month. This marks the first concerted effort to define overall objectives for the City's future, and it is having the full involvement of the citizens of our City. I would like to see this work fully completed by the end of the present year.

There is no other city on this continent - perhaps

Vancouver. In these next two years we have an opportunity to direct our City to its promising future, and to its great destiny. It's a matter of confidence. It's a question of will.