

Vancouver activists launch Olympic watchdog group

By ALLISON LAWLOR
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A coalition of environmental and social activists formed a coalition Wednesday to ensure that their concerns about Vancouver's bid for the 2010 Winter Olympics are not ignored.

Vancouver's bid also got a boost in funding and services valued at \$1-million Wednesday from the Calgary Olympic Development Association. The announcement was made in Calgary before a luncheon for athletes heading to the Winter Olympics opening in Salt Lake City next week.

The Impact of Olympics on Community coalition, which outlined its mandate and launched a web site Wednesday, says that if the city does get the Winter Games hundreds of residents of the downtown eastside could be displaced much like they were during Expo 86.

"We want to put in place some restrictions," David Cadman, president of the Society Promoting Environmental Conservation, told globeandmail.com, citing restrictions Los Angeles placed on evicting the poor from areas during the 1984 Olympics.

"The communities want to be part of the decision making," he said. The environmental society is part of the coalition.

The coalition wants to ensure that an independent community impact study is done and public consultations are held during the bid process.

"We're not opposed to the Olympics but we recognize the massive level of public investment involved into the billions of dollars with that comes responsibility," Am Johal, coalition spokesman said in a press release.

"If carried out responsibly, the 2010 Olympics has the potential to be a catalyst for economic, environmental and social opportunities."

But the coalition cites the debts of the Montreal Summer Games and the evictions during Expo 86 as examples of what can happen when the community is not involved in the bid process.

The coalition has requested a meeting with Jack Poole, president of the Vancouver-Whistler Bid Corp., but has yet to receive a response.

Wednesday's funding announcement means the Calgary Olympic Development Association a private funder of winter Olympic sports development in Canada will provide the Vancouver bid with about \$250,000 in direct funding and the rest in support services such as providing expertise to the bid process and opportunities for B.C. athletes to be involved in winter sports development programs in Calgary.

The association said it will continue to provide support and services as the Vancouver bid develops.

The Canadian Olympic Association has notified the International Olympic Committee that Vancouver is Canada's entry into the race to host the 2010 Winter Olympics. The COA said in a statement last week it sent a letter to the IOC well ahead of the Feb. 4 deadline. The bid

proposes that hockey, figure skating, curling and speed skating be staged in Vancouver with alpine skiing, cross-country skiing and ski jumping held in the nearby mountain resort town of Whistler, B.C. The Paralympic Games are also proposed for Whistler.