

Interview with Glen Bailey
Am Johal, 2007-12-07

Glen Bailey is the Director of the Crossroads Urban Center in Salt Lake City and was a spokesperson with Impact 2002 and Beyond, an Olympic watchdog group in Salt Lake City in the lead up to the 2002 Winter Olympics. He spoke over the phone with Am Johal.

Can you talk a little bit about the lead up to the 2002 Olympic Games in Salt Lake City? What were you promised on the front end? What ended up happening in reality?

In Salt Lake City, it was a very similar experience to what I've been able to gather is happening in Vancouver right now. There were fairly grand promises being made at the beginning, about 7 years before. Everything was possible. The Olympic Committee was in sales mode. They made an initial \$10 million dollar original commitment to housing. It didn't come through. The CEO at the time, Tom Walsh, figured that was what was needed to put in to affordable housing. It was supposed to be ancillary housing. There was no specific plan, however.

We talked about housing for media, and we kind of kept pushing them to follow through on those proposals. They did it very slowly. They were actually blowing the opportunity by not moving aggressively as they should have. So that kind of eroded over time and eventually very little happened. There were something like 360 affordable units in one of the units, but 40-80% of median income, it was not low-income housing but working class housing. Then they talked about 470 relocatable units, pre-manufactured homes to be set up as social housing.

Then there was a plan called City Front. Some units that were marginally affordable, but even that didn't hold up. For the Olympics, only 156 marginally affordable units were developed in the Gateway. Of the 470 relocatables, they developed 42.

SLOC's housing legacy in terms of developing new units was virtually non-existent. Housing SRA, quasi-governmental bodies, some units were produced of marginal affordability, on the higher end of what's called affordable housing. It had nothing to do with SLOC, they had nothing to do with it, there was no support.

In terms of evictions, another big area, SLOC was not at all helpful in the long-run, we would have been much better off working with City Hall. The city government was interested in setting up a homeless shelter which was immediately full. It was partially because of the City. Not because of SLOC. They did play a coordination role but it was not helpful in terms of stopping evictions.

Marginal properties that were typically used by low-income tenants, did some window dressing renovations and jacked up the rent. They were turned permanently in to a higher end use. They weren't necessarily hotel or motels, but landlords evicted

apartment dwellers to make higher profits. SLOC did virtually nothing. They were not relevant to stopping what was happening, but they were the cause of it.

What were some of the specific situations related to rent increases?

But basically what we found is that rents went up significantly in ways that displaced people who typically would live there. We found that shelters did fill up despite what people said - that it was unnecessary.

We found one case, a basement apartment from \$550 to \$2500 month for that one month that the Olympics were on. We found that there were condos where the tenants were told that they had to be out for January 10th to accommodate the FBI. The landlord backed off after pressure. There was 175 units, some of those were to house secret service, they were paying \$500-\$700, they would improve the property and then charge higher rents after the Games. That was one kind of conversion.

There were folks pressured, property owners had multiple building, then there were 20 units that went to FEMA, after a bunch of bad press, which is eventually what worked, the owner backed out of the FEMA contract. There were numerous ones where we didn't even know that it happened.

It went from \$180 week to \$105 night at Zions Motel, \$12 night to \$200 Night at a hostel, All Star Travel Inn, a shabby place went from \$38.70 to \$187 a night. The Colonial went from \$195 week to \$168 per night. After the Games, they went up to \$245 a week. That was really commong - pgrading and then opening at a less affordable rate later. The Capital went from \$40 night to \$125 night, the Gateway went to \$125 night when it used to be a weekly. In all of these places, low income tenants got evicted.

Well there was an awful lot of public funding going in to the Games, but very little to deal with their impacts. There was local spending by Utahans, but also federal dollars. Lots of spending on transportation in a relatively small amount of time. It was largely argued that it had to be done for the Games. A lot of highway and freeway expansion. A guy named Earl Holding, owned the Little America Grand Hotel in the run up to the Games and had a lot of the Olympic royalty stay there. He was on the Executive of SLOC which was a 501 C non-profit and organized like a charity. Yet he got a 13.8 million contract for his ski resort, he had two other developments through public policy that benefited him including a highway to his resort, he of course is making good use of it now. There was a favourable land swap where the federal government swapped to Mr. Holding to get better base facilities for the Games. The land was developed for housing and development that he benefited from.

Mitt Romney is now a Republican Presidential candidate. What about his role in Salt Lake City during the Olympics?

He was the 3rd CEO of the Games. Tom Welch was a salesman, he left in a cloud. Frank Joklik, a South African, was like a corporate CEO. When they had the scandal and people realized how we got the Games, Romney was brought in. People were ordered to right the ship, to appease the Olympic Organizing folks, they brought in Mitt Romney, son of a former governor of Michigan, George Romney. He was an investment banker in Massachusetts. He was an active Mormon and was very well thought of in the Church. He did a lot of things to restore confidence in the Games. He reorganized the Board. He went around to groups that had concerns. He appeared to be responsive. He did a lot of spin control, because of his background and spoke to a lot of constituencies. We were on the right track. That worked within the Mormon community.

There was a reporter working for a television station that was interviewing me. She said, "I hope this doesn't ruin the Games." I thought it was inappropriate for a reporter to be saying that about the scandal. They were so biased and so concerned about the impact on Utah. It was just odd. I realized that the media, was heavily invested in making a lot of money out of the Olympics. They didn't want to do anything to discredit that agenda.

How did the media treat you as a critic of the Games?

They were really two voices that were consistently critical. One was a guy named Steve Pace who refused to go away. He was constantly in their face. The other was our coalition. Weirdly, we were the only two groups that stood out. We did get a lot of people talking to ourselves. We were marginalized though. Our coalition was harder to ignore because we had a base of support, we were presented as being against everything by the media anyway. We were careful not to take those hard positions. I was attacked on talk radio, not just by the right wingers, but also moderate ones. I became their target for the day.

There was some work we did after the Games. They wanted to create an Olympic Legacy Park which is frequented by the homeless. We thought it was a bad idea. "You guys have been against everything," is what one of the media told us at a press conference. That was the attitude that was there.

You visited Vancouver in 2002 after the Olympics. Despite taking an early approach, the situation is being replicated here in a large scale way despite Olympic promises. Is the Vancouver situation familiar?

I'm alarmed by what I've seen about the housing situation in Vancouver. It's not like you didn't warn them and they have that whole Expo experience with evictions. The Olympics are a project to quicken the gentrification, it happens with a deadline so it's more abrupt. There is no transition time at all. The other thing it reminds me of the near West side of the city in Salt Lake City. They built a shopping mall. The land value has skyrocketed near the railroad track. It was supported by public investment. The low income people are placed under pressure.

Then government people say, “well, what can we do with market forces?”

Well, it was the public investment which created the market forces.

When everyone's on the rah-rah bandwagon, you can get isolated pretty quickly. Hopefully, groups can get together and form a common agenda and not be divided by bureaucrats or politicians or you will continue to see more evictions in Vancouver.