

Mayor says no report necessary on impact of local Olympic bid

by Mike Howell

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A much-anticipated progress report by city manager Judy Rogers on the 2010 Olympic bid for Vancouver and Whistler is little more than a superficial summary of what many people already knew, says Coun. Tim Louis.

Louis, who wants council to fund an independent study on the Olympics, was anticipating a detailed progress report on the bid looking at possible negative impacts - not an eight-page summary.

"When we get a report on transit options, we get a 50 or 100 or 200-page page tome. I've seen reports that literally weigh more than I do."

The report, distributed Monday by city hall, was discussed at council's meeting Tuesday as council formally endorsed the 2010 Olympic bid.

Louis wasn't surprised as the report doesn't address negative impacts of hosting the Olympic Games.

"One of the problems all cities who bid for an Olympics are at risk of is being blindsided by boosterism. Now that's not to be confused with pre-determining that the event is not worth proceeding with - that's not what I'm saying. What I am saying is let's open both of our eyes, identify the potential negatives, be proactive, develop a plan that mitigates the negatives."

The report lists the venues to be used for events, a timeline of the bid process and how the Olympic bid corporation is "incorporating the principles of environmental sustainability into all aspects of planning and preparation."

Noting the transportation "challenges" of the Sea-to-Sky corridor linking Vancouver to Whistler, the document predicts the Games will bring net economic gains of between \$5.7 billion and \$10 billion, depending on whether the Vancouver convention center is expanded. As for a visit by Mayor Philip Owen and nine city staff during the 2002 Olympics, the report simply states the "knowledge and contacts gained through this experience will prove to be invaluable in finalizing Vancouver's bid."

The report is accompanied by two-month-old press releases from the provincial government predicting the Olympics and an expanded convention center would create an estimated 118,000 to 228,000 direct and indirect jobs in B.C.

Coun. Jennifer Clarke agreed that the report wasn't as detailed as she had hoped but stopped short of calling for an independent study. Clarke said she wanted to hear from the Olympic bid presenters before deciding what council's next move should be.

Last month, Louis and Clarke knocked heads over the call for an independent

study, with Clarke and other NPA councilors deciding to defer Louis's motion until Tuesday. Louis and fellow COPE Councilor Fred Bass voted against the deferral, saying a study needed to start immediately.

"It's not too early to do this, in fact we're getting too close to too late," Louis told the Courier last month.

Mayor Philip Owen said calls for a study are premature, considering Vancouver won't learn if it gets the Olympics until July, 2003. The city's Olympic bid has to be in by Jan. 10, 2003. "Why would we do a detailed report when we don't know whether we've got the Olympics? It doesn't make any sense. In July, 2003, we'll know. And after that, we have seven years to gather detail."

But Am Johal, chairman of a Vancouver based Olympics watchdog group called the Impact of the Olympics on the Community, said the time for independent analysis is before the bid is finalized. Johal noted the report doesn't address concerns about the Games' impact on housing and the environment.

"This isn't real information or real analysis of what it's like to host the Games. People deserve real information if we're walking down a road where we're going to be spending million."

The Olympic Bid Corporation's preliminary estimate for capital and endowment costs to build and enhance sports facilities to host the Games is \$600 million. Several chartered accountant firms have volunteered to assist the bid corporation to prepare a financial and business plan.

The provincial and federal governments are expected to cover the capital, endowment and security costs.