

Civic salaries are out of control

By William Corden

A recent revelation about salary levels paid at Vancouver City Hall has shone a scialytic light on the unfettered compensation packages that some of these City Administrators get paid.



We find out that the Chief Administrative Officer for the City of Vancouver makes over Can \$700,000 per year which is more than the Premier of the Province and the Prime Minister of Canada make COMBINED!

It is a stunning weakness in the system for setting salary levels in both the Civic environment and the Crown Corporation club where councils and Ministries have been snowed by Consultants for years and years, management consultants who are hired to do job compensation reviews.

The consultants are in conflict right from the start because..... they'll get fired if they don't come up with the right recommendations.

Basically these "talent experts" are hired not by the councils or the ministries but by the very people who stand to benefit. We had an example here some years back where the Chief Officer of our Ferry Corporation (which at the time was a "Public, Private Partnership", a joke in itself) did a classic carpetbagging job.

Didn't he hire a consultant, only months after he took the job, to look at his salary level because he thought he wasn't getting paid enough, the consultants were paid handsomely for their research and guess what?

They reported that he was almost insultingly underpaid, comparing his responsibilities to Corporations like Coca Cola and G.E. and so recommended that his salary be doubled which it was, because he had the authority to do it.

Then he had to hire an assistant who came in at his old

salary. And he forgot to mention to the board of the ferry corporation that he was still getting money from his previous employer, a bankrupt airline company.

So the long and short of it is that these government and quasi government executive positions have virtually unchallenged authority to set their own pay levels, bad enough in itself but it has a knock on effect right down through the organisations, so you end up with departmental supervisors pulling down over \$120,000 a year for a job that paid just \$85,000 a couple of years ago.

This all feeds into the inflationary spiral because the organisations have to fund the increased salaries with increased fees and taxes. In Vancouver my property taxes have gone up by 100% in the last ten years and community center user fees are routinely increased at twice the level of inflation, they just pick figures out of the air and don't care about protests. I cite Vancouver but I'm sure that it's the same in every city in North America , not just Canada.

There's no way but up as far as I can see unless somebody figures out a way to undercut them. One thing I know for sure is that if the CAO job in Vancouver was advertised at just, say, \$200,000 there would be a line up around the block of people qualified to do the job and people prepared to do it at the advertised rate.

But, as they say ... good luck with that idea.