

Dan Spinner April GG Column

Political leadership In the West Shore – time to stand up.

With the federal election in the works, municipal election maneuvering already beginning for November and a very possible snap provincial election in the fall it is time to hold our politicians and would be politicians accountable. Accountable to a very high standard of personal performance and integrity that puts community needs over their personal ego needs – a standard that the growing, blossoming West Shore needs now more than ever before. There are many issues facing the citizens and businesses of the West Shore and most have to do with questions of infrastructure- the very core of any community.

Across Canada infrastructure problems are rampant with little political leadership in sight to deal with them. In the West Shore these needs are exacerbated by the combination of our enormously rapid growth, our fractured political system and the subtle ways in which various levels of government play one community and its needs off against another.

We need political leaders who will stand up and fight to fix our deteriorating schools – we need two new high school yesterday :our roads and transportation – we need a complete West Shore transportation plan that includes light rail, highways and the E&N well maintained and fully funded; our waste water systems are a hodge podge of individual municipal “systems” while the CRD attempts to foist its solutions on unsuspecting communities; healthcare – with record number of young families and at the other end of the spectrum larger and larger pockets of seniors, we need family and youth services galore not the cut backs that have recently closed the nonprofit Capital Families and cut Pacific Centre Services in half over the past five years. Where are the politicians standing up for those groups and their clients needs?

The CRD votes largely on population or budget basis. The Westshore currently has about 60,000 citizens so the needs of Saanich and Victoria often out vote the needs of the West Shore – when the West Shore has over 120,000 citizens over

the next few years I suppose the tables will be turned but right now it is the not growing Saanich and Victoria elected reps controlling the future of a community they do not represent.

At the federal level the Juan de Fuca riding seems to have become a mere political football in the federal chess game as a “swing riding” and provincially the Liberal Cabinet slyly calls Vancouver Island “Cuba North “while not realizing that they have great gains they could make if they were smart about it in a West Shore that is very different from downtown Victoria or up Island.

Our five Mayors and their Councils – all who work very hard - can sometimes be heard in public dispute with one another and we would call upon them when it comes to major cross boundary issues to put aside their differences. And there are some great examples of this such as Langford and Colwood unity on E&N and the need for the two new high schools – but we need more unity and more Mayors to speak with one voice to the various levels of government. Otherwise it is easy to continue to play one off against the other. We need political leaders with authenticity, deep care and knowledge about their communities and the political will to stand up for our urgent and growing needs in the West Shore.

With the federal election around the corner and two others elections to come the time has never been more important for that rarest of high quality political leaders to stand up and be counted. We have luckily many on the West Shore but we need more than ever before for the coming challenging years .