

# We can learn from Mayor MegaWatts

Over the last two and a half years, I have lost track of the seemingly endless efforts by local journalists to compare Vancouver with Surrey, or vice versa.



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**REBEL WITH A CLAUSE**

The temptation to do this, it is easy to surmise, exists because while Vancouver is steeped in failed policy and public relations exercises that do nothing to make our lives better, Surrey actually seems to have grown into the role of leading city in the Lower Mainland.

This didn't come to pass by accident either.

If leadership counts for anything in making a city better than how you've found it, Surrey Mayor Dianne MegaWatts, in the same tradition of a Carole Taylor, is the difference.

After having thankfully dispatched the often-morose Doug McCallum from the Mayor's chair in the fall of 2005, Ms. Watts has turned Surrey into one of the most livable and enjoyable places in all of British Columbia.

Her reasonable populism and measured approach to everything from crime to sustainability, the real kind, is testament to Surrey's success.

At noon today, Watts will be giving her state of the city address and this scribbler, and *24 hours* newspaper, have been given the exclusive on her speech.

A perusal of her remarks is a journey through astounding accomplishments for a rookie mayor, who, at the genesis of Her Worship's travels, was unfairly vilified by Surrey councillors Marvin Hunt and Judy Higginbotham, both of whom look like unremittably foolish pinheads, in retrospect.

Since Dianne Watts' inaugural, a crime reduction strategy has seen a co-operative effort between three layers of government, 100 individuals and 50 organizations bear tremendous fruit. With a combination of compassion and decisiveness, Surrey has taken it's previous moniker, for decades past, as 'Crime Central' and obliterated that notion with steely resolve: 840 grow-ops identified in 2007 alone and only 30 left to deal with – a drop of approximately 96 per cent;

the Prolific Offender Target Team nabs and jails 216 chronic offenders; auto-theft down by 50 per cent and (are you paying attention, NPA councillors in Vancouver??) 119 new police officers, plus 45 support staff;

and, most encouragingly, instead of ridiculous drug-replacement fantasies, as touted by Vancouver's now backpeddling mayor, drug TREATMENT for the addicted downtrodden in Surrey, with an additional 300 new homes for the homeless.

No begging the Gordonator for help. No whining to the prime minister about funding. No lifting credit from Minister Coleman for housing initiatives. No agitating unions. No hair-brained councillors more concerned with free-range chicken eggs than people. You get the message: No operating like Vancouver

Her Worship said she was going to clean Surrey up. I gather she wasn't kidding.

When I interviewed Watts recently in her modest office at city hall, about her livability accord and sustainability plan, she was crystal clear, "You can't have towers anywhere a developer wants them ... we said city centre ... and we meant it – you can't have bloody towers in a flood plain ... we are seeing major investments in landscapes that make sense for everybody, with growth that's got purpose and makes people's lives easier." Not to mention, her vision for expanded transportation plans that will ease Surrey into 'greener' pastures – so to speak.

Thus, you see why Dianne Watts, the grand visionary, is emerging as the most popular and accomplished mayor in this province.

She gets it.

When I asked her about ambitions beyond the mayor's chair, I noted her uncanny ability to bridge the political divide, bringing peace to a previously rancorous Surrey council...

"Premier...?" I said. She laughed, loudly. "You're hysterical," said Watts.

Apparently, I'm as funny as I am accurate.

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