



Main Street News

Main Street Communications Ltd. Maple Ridge • Victoria Spring 2001 Issue 3

Notes

- Main Street Communications designs and delivers:
- Public participation processes
- Communications strategies
- Advertising and promotions
- Training
- Event management
- Strategic documents

Main Street assisted with the grand opening of the **Maple Ridge Public Library**, a major milestone in the District's Town Centre project. See page 4.



by Vicki Bentzen

As one part of our work, Main Street Communications helps governments and businesses with advertising and information campaigns. There is something satisfying about a good-looking ad or handout; it provides solid evidence that the months of planning and decision-making are bearing fruit.

Where our company provides greater value, however, is in planning the steps that precede the advertising. If the project or initiative in question is at all controversial, we advise clients to get staff, suppliers and key contacts on side before they try any mass communications. Decision-makers sometimes squirm at this advice: it entails time-consuming, sometimes frustrating conversations with individuals and small groups. But consider this question: if you can't persuade 100 close contacts on the value of your project, why should the general public support you?

Successful business people (and local politicians) work customer by customer to generate a positive buzz for themselves. They take the time to learn about the habits and opinions of their key

Do-it-yourself communications: the 100 rule

customers and supporters. In return, these small businesses (or politicians) depend on their key supporters to informally promote their products, services, special events and agendas.

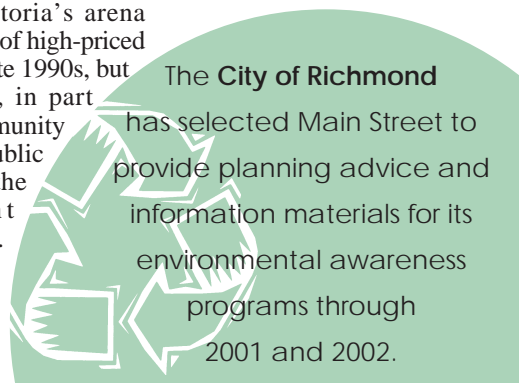
Larger organizations often roll out their programs in an impersonal way, without explaining the benefits. This saves time, but the price is steep. When the organization's stakeholders or middle managers are questioned by their peers or families, they can deny any knowledge of what the organization is doing. In a municipality of 75,000 people or a provincial agency with a specialized clientele, expressions of skepticism or confusion by insiders will feed rumours and hostility in the community. It is unlikely that any ad campaign will repair this kind of damage.

The City of Victoria's arena project got plenty of high-priced publicity in the late 1990s, but it bogged down, in part because the community was bypassed. Public attacks against the project went unanswered. Based partly on Main Street's experience in Maple Ridge

and Chilliwack, Victoria has chosen a slower, tougher process of one-on-one persuasion to advance the arena concept, and community business people are stepping forward to validate the process.

Decision makers may need significant time and resources – up to 50 per cent of the available communications budget, in fact – to nail down the first 100 supporters for a project (while we're at it, 200 is actually better). However, this face-to-face contact is essential for testing the value of your initiative and checking key messages, and it gives public communications activities a much better chance of success.

Vicki Bentzen is the president of Main Street Communications Ltd.



The City of Richmond has selected Main Street to provide planning advice and information materials for its environmental awareness programs through 2001 and 2002.



Street Noise

Public Participation at Burnaby Mountain

In 1999, Simon Fraser University established the Burnaby Mountain Community Corporation to develop housing and related commercial services for up to 10,000 people on the campus perimeter. The BMCC has set up both a public advisory committee and an outreach program to win public acceptance. Main Street spoke with BMCC president Michael Geller, a Vancouver-based urban developer with 25 years of project management experience.

How do the public participation requirements of this project affect your work?

In the past, I thought of public participation as something you had to do in order to say you had done it and get your municipal

approvals. In this case, I was genuinely interested in having the broad university community involved in the planning process. They, ultimately, will be the end users of this development.

A private developer is motivated by the bottom line, and public participation is usually just something that will delay the project. Here, there's a desire to move forward, but it isn't the main thing.

What tools have you used?

The first thing is this office. Rather than being buried in the Academic Quadrangle, we have set up a storefront office to give a public face to the project. To reinforce that, we have set up displays and brought a

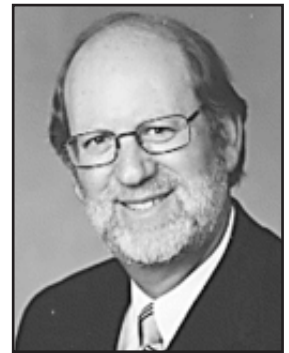
consulting team to open houses on Convocation Mall. The other thing is special interest workshops on key topics including transportation and housing. In terms of maintaining awareness, we have used the SFU News, the Peak, which is the student paper, and our web site.

Is all this activity getting you the profile and the support that you want from people at SFU?

Not yet. On a university campus, there's so much to read. There are so many people who still claim they don't know what is being proposed. We have more than 700 faculty and 16,000 students here; we have reached many of them, but it hasn't been as effective as I would like.

The greatest success we've had has been with one-on-one contact. We've met with people who started out very critical, and whether they come into this office or I go into their community, I like to think I have a high rate of success in changing people's perceptions. A lot of these face-to-face encounters start out as e-mail dialogues.

Are the workshops and open houses affecting the design plan?



Michael Geller

There's a lot of interest in what will be located on Main Street. There's strong opposition to having multinational shopping centre-type uses, so we're looking at retaining ownership of the ground floor retail space. The interest in affordable housing has led to a lot of planning for cooperative forms of development. These co-ops would be involved in their own property development. And overall, we have decided to break up the site into smaller parcels to accommodate more developers, including co-ops.

Construction on the first phase of the Burnaby Mountain Community is to begin in late 2001. For reports, illustrations and media clippings, visit www.sfu.ca/bmcp.





Community Relations



by Ian McLeod

Taming the town hall beast

presented fanciful conspiracy theories, attacked the planners as “scumbags” and “criminals”, and shouted down the attempted responses.

Rowdy, ugly behaviour at public meetings is a form of bullying that would be unacceptable in other settings. It silences thoughtful comment and discourages ordinary citizens. It also reduces the official appetite for public consultation. Already, many government decision-makers prohibit staff from organizing or attending town hall meetings because their chief result, as often as not, is to provide low-grade comedy for the late news.

The town hall meeting can be a useful tool for imparting information and receiving feedback. To make such events work, however, project teams need to acquire or borrow certain skills. First of all, the team itself has to learn to



Main Street recently facilitated a community-wide forum in Chilliwack. The company worked with 11 volunteer facilitators and small groups to identify issues and provide feedback to City Hall on downtown social issues.

prepare, technically and mentally, to field hostile questions. Second, the project head should go to the community to find a neutral chair with experience in resolving conflicts and running effective meetings. A preliminary session with community leaders to discuss the ground rules could be helpful.

Parliamentary procedure is no longer fashionable as a guide to running open meetings.

Some kind of procedural guidelines are needed, however, to keep a check on defamatory attacks, filibustering and tantrums. These guidelines should be applied at meetings by experienced chairs who are known to the community and who are not project officials.

Ian McLeod is senior consultant at Main Street Communications Ltd.



Main Street

Communications Ltd.

Offers seminars, workshops and strategic advice on:

- Public Consultation That Works
- Effective Media Relations
- Issues Management and Crisis Communications
- Writing News Releases That Make News
- Business Writing
- Public Speaking and Presentation Skills
- Building Teams, Committees and Partnerships

The Main Street News

is published by Main Street Communications Ltd. as a service for our clients and colleagues.

The company's current clients include the **City of Burnaby**, the **City of Chilliwack**, the **Cultus Lake Park Board**, the **District of Maple Ridge**, the **City of Richmond**, **Ridge Meadows Recycling**, and the **BC Transportation Financing Authority**. The newsletter is designed by Cindy Farnsworth, our graphics associate. Please

submit comments and suggestions to

imcleod@telus.net.

City Uses Polling to Develop Key Plans



For the second year in a row, the **City of North Vancouver** has hired Ipsos Reid to survey local residents on future directions for the community. The pollster's findings will help guide the City's capital planning over the next several years. North Vancouver currently has 11 capital projects on the drawing board.

In 2000, the Reid group talked to 400 residents as part of the development of the City's five-year financial operating plan. The respondents mentioned transportation, municipal spending and waterfront development as the key local issues, with crime mentioned fourth.

Respondents were then asked to rate the importance of 15 City services on a 10-point scale (and state their level of satisfaction).

Those services deemed most important were:

Policing and Crime Prevention	8.7 (7.0)
Fire Protection	8.5 (7.9)
Environmental Initiatives	7.8 (6.2)
Parks	7.7 (6.9)

A majority of respondents (63%) said they be willing to pay a three per cent property tax increase, but favoured user fee increases much more strongly than property tax increases. City Finance Director Terry Christie presented the 2000 survey findings at last fall's UBCM conference. He can be reached at (604) 983-7320.



Main Street's principals at the Maple Ridge Town Centre Opening with Mayor Al Hogarth; Vicki Bentzen with CAO Bob Robertson and Library logo in Ice; storytime on grand opening Saturday.



Thousands of Maple Ridge area residents attended grand opening events for the first components of the \$50 million Maple Ridge Town Centre on March 16 and 17. The newly-opened part of this downtown revitalization project includes a business centre and the largest public library facility in the Fraser Valley. After a period of controversy last year, the District launched a public information program to explain the costs, the impacts and the services that will be available when the project is complete. Community media coverage has been increasingly positive as the benefits of the project hit home. Construction continues, with an expanded fitness and aquatic centre to open in fall 2001 and an arts centre to open in late 2002. In addition to the public information program, Main Street assisted with the planning of the grand opening, and the design of logos, pins and banners.



Main Street has moved...

Communications Ltd.

Main Street Communications has moved its head office in Maple Ridge to historic Port Haney, and has also moved its Victoria office.

Our new Maple Ridge address is: #4, 22268 116th Avenue, Maple Ridge BC V2X 1P5.
Telephone: (604) 467-4188. Fax: (604) 467-4885

Our new Victoria address is 1975 Townley Street, Victoria BC V8R 1B3.
Telephone: (250) 598-5345. Fax: (250) 598-5344.

