

BURNABY

Bloy backs panel on future of hospital

JONATHAN FOWLIE
VANCOUVER SUN

VICTORIA — B.C. Liberal MLA Harry Bloy on Thursday defended a committee he chaired on the future of Burnaby Hospital against allegations of political interference.

"It's a citizen's committee. Everyone on the committee volunteered their time to do this," Bloy said in an interview.

"I believe you're going to be impressed with the report," he added, saying the committee's final report is being written now and will be complete as early as next week.

Bloy was responding after emails leaked to the New Democratic Party showed the Burnaby Hospital Community Consultation Committee — which has conducted several public meetings on the future of Burnaby Hospital, and holds itself out to be impartial — appeared to be orchestrated behind the scenes by B.C. Liberals to make the government look good.

Those emails show the committee's citizen chair — Pamela Gardner, who has served as a B.C. Liberal Party riding president in Burnaby-Edmonds — has been in contact with key party insiders about the review.

They also show Gardner tapped former B.C. Liberal Party president Sonja Sangiunetti to write the final report, and that she told B.C. Liberal operatives that Sangiunetti would say that problems at Burnaby Hospital aren't "a reflection on the Liberal government but more on the Chair of Fraser Health."

"It's not the Liberals that force and continue to allow the citizens of Burnaby to suffer," Gardner wrote.

On Thursday, Bloy said the emails were simply an expression of personal opinions by people passionate about the issue.

"Everybody who was working on the committee exchanged some of their views and how they thought it was going," said Bloy, who received the messages in question at his personal email account.

"I wasn't concerned that it was partisan. Some people expressed some of their own personal views," he added, saying he did not respond to the emails. Bloy also defended the choice of Sangiunetti as the report's author.

jfowle@vancouversun.com



Ingrid Steenhuisen stands among boxes, which she had packed in anticipation of eviction, inside her home at the Little Mountain housing project in Vancouver on Thursday. The province, City of Vancouver and developer Holborn Properties have agreed to fast-track construction to replace Little Mountain units torn down in 2009.

VANCOUVER

Social housing deal spares families

Three-party agreement stops evictions, fast tracks Little Mountain construction

DARAH HANSEN
VANCOUVER SUN

More than four years of uncertainty ended happily Thursday for the four families remaining at Vancouver's Little Mountain social housing complex.

The residents, the last of 224 families who once called the complex of buildings home, learned they would be spared eviction after a deal to fast-track construction of 50 new social housing units on the site was reached by the provincial government, City of Vancouver and developers Holborn Properties.

Under the agreement, a portion of the 6.2-hectare parcel at Main Street and 33rd Avenue, near Queen Elizabeth Park, will be subdivided, allowing construction to go ahead almost immediately under the current zoning.

The remainder of the property is slated for redevelopment by Holborn into a high-density, mixed-use community

that includes towers up to 12 stories high, with the majority of buildings in the four to 10-storey range.

That part of the project is still subject to rezoning by the city, which would require public hearings, said Vancouver Coun. Kerry Tang.

Joo Kim Tiah, Holborn president, said the new housing units will be built on the southeast portion of the property, adding his company "understands the importance and urgency to deliver social housing as soon as possible."

Tiah said the province is putting up the funding for the construction, which could begin in the spring with completion within 18 to 24 months.

Holborn is expected to pay back the money when the large project goes to market, he said.

The province confirmed Thursday it continues to own the Little Mountain property, pending the rezoning, despite a deal made in 2007 to sell the land to Holborn for an undisclosed sum.

This is a huge relief for all of us. We were hoping for the best, but we were also trying to be realistic.

INGRID STEENHUISEN
LONGTIME RESIDENT OF LITTLE MOUNTAIN

An email from BC Housing, The Sun, states Holborn will continue to be responsible for eventually replacing the 224 units of social housing originally on the site, and add to more units for aboriginal people.

Housing Minister Rich Coleman was unavailable for comment Thursday, The Sun was told.

Tang said the deal will give the hundreds of residents displaced from the original site

the chance to return to the neighbourhood.

It also brings to an immediate end a dispute between the four families who have remained on the property and their landlord BC Housing. The families have been fighting an eviction order which would have seen them out of their homes by the end of September. They will be allowed to stay in the remaining building on the site until the new social housing units are ready for them.

The eviction case was to go for a hearing before the Residential Tenancy Branch on Monday.

"This is a huge relief for all of us," said a tearful Ingrid Steenhuisen, whose family has lived at Little Mountain for nearly 50 years.

Steenhuisen said she's looking forward to unpacking some of her belongings which she reluctantly began putting into boxes this summer pending the outcome of the tenancy dispute.

"We were hoping for the best, but we were also trying to be realistic," she said.

Meanwhile, a small party was breaking out next door at the home of Sammy and Joan Chang, an elderly blind couple who've been living in the complex since the mid-1970s.

"I think we'll have a celebration," said David Vaisbord, a documentary filmmaker who has collected more than 300 hours of footage of the couple since 2008 in an effort to rally support against their eviction.

Bill Lee, 81, has lived with his wife across the lane from Little Mountain for over 50 years and said he is pleased some of the families will be moving back, but is still angry they were moved in the first place.

"The project is stupid," Lee said. "They should have built it first, let some people move in, then you don't have to kick them out, right?"

dahansen@vancouversun.com
Twitter.com/darahhansen
with files by Mike Hager, Vancouver Sun

» LITTLE MOUNTAIN FILM | D2

TRANSPORTATION

TransLink seeks collection firms to crack down on fare evaders

CHRISTOPHER REYNOLDS
VANCOUVER SUN

TransLink is on the hunt for collection agencies that will crack down on riders who don't pay their fares.

The transit authority is making use of its new powers to collect overdue fines, putting out a request for proposals from "collection services" so it can flex the muscle it gained when provincial legislation came into force in September.

"Unpaid after 90 days — we take action," said TransLink spokesman Drew Snider.

One or several collection agencies will be selected for a contract before year's end, he said.

Snider said resorting to a collection agency could bring TransLink \$4 million a year and makes more sense than employing TransLink staff, who don't have the time or training to obtain unpaid fines from riders.

With collection agencies may come court involvement, he

90 days without fine payment. About 30 per cent of fare evaders have driver's licences or vehicle registration, the Ministry of Transportation estimates.

TransLink will be able to refuse transit service to evaders until all fines are paid, but Snider acknowledged the legislation doesn't spell out how offenders will be kept off buses, SkyTrain or be denied the ability to purchase passes at retail outlets.

He said the new powers need to be fine-tuned over the next few months to ensure the remaining 70 per cent of fare evaders are forced to pay up.

Until September, many of the \$173 fines issued to transit riders without a valid fare went unpaid because TransLink had no enforcement mechanisms in place to collect them.

The transit authority will be able to use revenue from the fines — which escalate to \$273 if unpaid for one year — to cover the costs of fine adminis-

tration on SkyTrain last year, along with another \$7.9 million in lost fares on buses.

"I'm more than confident that this is going to give TransLink the powers they need to actually collect the fines once those tickets are issued," said Transportation Minister Blair Leckstrom earlier this year.

Other public bodies use collection agencies too. ICBC employs them if debtors go a year without repayment, after it has "exhausted all previous avenues," said spokesman Adam Grossman.

TransLink chief operating officer Doug Kelsey said once the new system is in place, fare evaders will be able to pay fines at TransLink fare dealers, online or through the mail.

In addition to the new enforcement powers, TransLink's fare compliance capability will be bolstered by the new Compass Card smart card system and faregates, scheduled to be in place in 2013. The electronic Compass Card

OYSTER PERPETUAL SUBMARINER DATE

MONTECRISTO

MONTEBRIO
OAKRIDGE CENTRE 604.263.3611
HASTINGS AT HORNBY 604.899.8866

ROLEX

DISTRIBUTION STRICTLY PROHIBITED

added, as small claims action can be undertaken by collectors on behalf of TransLink. TransLink can also go after fare evaders through the Insurance Corp. of B.C., which can refuse licence or vehicle registration renewal to the transit scofflaws if they go more than

tration, dispute resolution services and collection costs. The province said the new enforcement rules could apply to outstanding fines issued over the past 10 years. There are about 245,000 unpaid tickets. TransLink estimates it lost about \$7.4 million to fare

will replace existing monthly and daily passes, tickets and cash fares at SkyTrain and SeaBus. New faregates will work with the card to ensure only paying customers are able to get on board.

creynolds@vancouver.sun.com