

# The Griffins' Nest

INFORMATIVE • IMPARTIAL • INDEPENDENT

August 1, 2022

Dear Vision Vancouver,

**RE: Vision Vancouver's Response to Candidates Issue Questionnaire Three**

As a public utility, The Griffins' Nest aims to supply voters with information pertinent to the running of our democratic system.

With that, the Candidate Questionnaires preceding the 2022 Vancouver Municipal Election has the objective of showcasing the positions of potential VSB Trustees on major issues concerning the District.

As such, our Candidate Questionnaires must hold candidates responsible for any actions in the past, present, and future. This means that specific, tangible, and quantifiable answers by individual candidates are required to provide accountability. The format currently used by The Nest provides that by requiring respondents to answer individually.<sup>1</sup>

However, it is not our role to make sure that each answer by candidates fulfils the criteria of being specific, tangible and quantifiable outside of the framework already established. If a candidate were to answer in an abstract, vague, and overall perplexing way, The Nest would be obliged to publish such an answer within reason.<sup>2</sup> The burden of interpreting the answer would fall to voters, who can form conclusions as they will.

In the third issues questionnaire, Vision Vancouver candidates answered in a hybrid format, answering the question together, while individually providing their background and supplementing the main answer, although in an abstract way. This is after Vision answered together in the previous issues questionnaire, resulting in an email to them directing them to answer individually for future questionnaires. "We will not accept further answers that do not comply with the rules. You are politicians, we are journalists. It is our mutual responsibility to the public to stay in our respective lanes," candidates and the party were told. We also informed Vision Vancouver that "No other political party has opted to disregard the rules this way."

While technically offering individual answers, this hybrid methodology is a grey zone. Vision candidates did in fact answer the question, they did so together, and their individual responses only supplement that. The large preamble the party provided addresses a majority of the substantive issues within the prompt, whereas the candidates' "perspectives" added on to such are ornamental to the Christmas Tree of non-compliance that we received.

It is the finding of The Nest that it **would not be correct to publish** the collective answer portion of Vision Vancouver's response. While publishing only the individual responses would deprive their candidates from fully voicing a position on the issue, it was made clear to Vision, through direct communication and through other candidates' responses, that each candidate must respond

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<sup>1</sup> With the exception of the NPA, who have not yet announced candidates.

<sup>2</sup> Barring responses which, *inter alia*, are defamatory, hateful, or incite violence, **and** the consequences of publishing outweighs the public interest. Additionally, responses may be edited for grammar and clarity.

independently. Candidates of the same party can share common goals and views, but it is important that each candidate shares those views separately from the rest of the party line, as to fully provide accountability. Voters are voting for candidates, not parties, and deserve responses from each candidate. By providing collective responses, political parties force voters to select a numerator over nine as opposed to browsing between party lines. The latter is more respectful of municipal democracy.

Furthermore, the prescribed format must be observed. While flexible if needed, it cannot be disregarded. If candidates neglect it, it would breach our ethical standard of treating all candidates fairly, allowing some to gain an unfair advantage. Other candidates could feel blindsided by our decision to allow separate formats for some parties while they are following the one that we originally prescribed. This could lead to a lack of trust among our respondents and the public, which is something we must avoid at all costs.

It is paramount that we uphold the standards of integrity and fairness in our reporting. The Nest has a reputation for strong ethical principles, which is fundamentally important as a public utility. Referring to the *Canadian Association of Journalists Ethics Guidelines*: “Defending the public’s interest includes promoting the free flow of information, exposing crime or wrongdoing, protecting public health and safety, and **preventing the public from being misled.**” The last six words are engaged here by virtue of a political party stifling the ability of voters to distinguish candidates.

Publishing only the individual responses provides an acceptable amount of information from each candidate as to properly inform voters. It would also assert to Vision that the rules we have set in place must be obeyed, and parties cannot try to find loopholes in our system.

Going forward, we must inform readers and candidates that while we are receptive to a modification of format, we will not allow unjustifiable exceptions, especially those conjured upon what we can only reasonably understand to be political motivations.

With reasons specific and articulable, we hope this letter shares some insight into the editorial decision making of our publication and invites further questions in the interest of transparency.

Sincerely,

**Spencer Izen** (he/him) & **Stephen Kosar** (he/him)

**Co-Editors-in-Chief | The Griffins’ Nest**

2022 Vancouver School Board Summer Election Reporting Project

*Reporting the news from the traditional and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəy’əm (Musqueam), Skwx̱ wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and səlilwətal (Tsleil-Waututh) Peoples.*