Harvey Molotch wrote: “The city is, for those who count, a growth machine.”¹ There is little doubt that growth efforts abound in most North American cities,² but who counts and how the machine is powered are matters for debate. For Molotch, it involves a rentier class of local landowners allied with bankers, land developers, utility, and other place-based service providers in a coalition to promote growth. Such a coalition actively lobbies elected officials and attempts to create a local climate receptive to its development interests. It will likely attempt to circumvent resistance from local residents who object to the subjugation of their land use values to growth coalition exchange values. To achieve this goal, the coalition may try to represent growth as value free, with the implicit message that all growth is good because it feeds the local economy, provides jobs, and enhances a city’s image.³ As Mark Boyle suggests, growth coalitions are city “boosters.” They try to encourage an inclusive community feeling by supporting professional city sports teams, developing city slogans or nicknames, and endorsing festivals, contests, and national and international events.⁴ In short, the local landed elite works to see that its agenda for growth is supported and achieved.

Vancouver has a long history of growth politics. The early local growth coalition, comprised of developers and land speculators, not only lobbied the elected officials, they often were the elected officials — a precedent set by Vancouver’s first mayor, real estate agent Malcolm MacLean.⁵ Today’s coalition of major corporations, developers, real estate firms, large retailers, landlords, and hotel and restaurant owners continued to dominate city government, partly through their support for the city’s Non Partisan

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Yet, in the civic election of 2002, after sixteen consecutive years of pro-growth municipal government, Vancouver residents voted overwhelmingly for the Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE), a party whose roots can be traced to the Vancouver and District Labour Council and to the Vancouver branch of the Communist Party of Canada. While the outcome of a civic election may not threaten the existence of the local growth coalition, it can challenge the coalition’s access to “business as usual” with the city government. For this reason, elections are worth studying more seriously than has been the case in urban politics, despite the fact that in and of themselves, they cannot prevent the local growth coalition from continuing to push its agenda. Thus, it is important to examine the conditions under which oppositional forces secured an electoral victory and the ways in which they use this to advance progressive urban policies.

Vancouver’s history also suggests the need to temper Molotch’s thesis — elites may have to make concessions and these concessions can impose real constraints on their actions. While the efforts and objectives of Vancouver’s growth coalition are characteristic of Molotch’s rentier class, the coalition has had to learn to operate within the city’s stringent development guidelines and procedures, and the constraints imposed by Vancouver’s commitments as part of the Greater Vancouver Regional District.

Thus, Vancouver’s pro-growth contingent cannot readily manipulate land use decisions, or zoning or planning regulations. The city has a well-established commitment to the preservation of mountain views, access to its many waterfronts, and to the idea of a “liveable” city. In the 1970s, The Electors’ Action Movement briefly dominated city council, “ostensibly to remove control of civic government from the hands of developers, landlords and speculators,” and, under its leadership, city design guidelines were established in consultation with neighbourhood communities. Each neighbourhood developed guidelines and bylaws to reflect its particular values and goals.

The restrictions mandated during the 1970s remain in place today. It is a matter of course that all development proposals go through a prescribed process involving design professionals, residents, and city officials. There is some room to manoeuvre in regard to the neighbourhood design guide-
lines: although the principles that underlie the guidelines must be adhered to, negotiations between residents, developers, and the city result in a variety of implementation strategies. In this manner, experienced architects and developers are able to gain concessions in matters such as density and height restrictions. In the neighbourhoods of the affluent, savvy local residents can influence guidelines to insulate themselves from densification and other unseemly development proposals. Christopher Leo contends that the city’s flexible zoning can be implicated in helping to “promote Vancouver as a corporate headquarters and a residential area for the rich and the near-rich while on the other [hand] it shirks the far weightier problem of how the metropolitan area as a whole will accommodate population growth and house the poor.”

As part of the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), Vancouver’s development plans are coordinated with the overall strategies for managing growth and development as set out in agreements with the other 20 municipalities of the GVRD. The GVRD’s “Liveable Region Strategic Plan” was initiated in the 1960s, the first regional plan to seriously enlist public input. Residents of the region clearly articulated resistance to the growth-at-all-costs development they saw in the GVRD and the final document prepared from that planning exercise reflected their views. The “Liveable Region Strategic Plan” is still in use, continually revised and updated to include strategies on issues such as clean air and water, preservation of farmland, and allocation of residential and economic growth. Between 1984 and 1995, however, the GVRD lost its statutory authority relating to land-use planning. This authority was revoked by the conservative provincial Social Credit party of the day, a party committed to the traditionally touted profits of unrestrained growth rather than to the social and environmental profits of growth with a thoughtful, well managed plan.

Despite the regulations on development plans for city land, Vancouver’s growth coalition actively encourages growth that will support and enhance its financial interests in the city. Its political ally in this effort is the pro-business Non Partisan Association of Vancouver. In Vancouver’s at-large election system for city council, the growth coalition rallied its members to vote NPA candidates into office for sixteen years, from 1986 to 2002.
years saw Vancouver emerge as a city of international renown with growth coalition boosterism much in effect. The World Exposition of 1986 focused international attention on Vancouver and spurred development and business interests over the next decade and a half. Among the developments in the city's downtown, Canada Place was created to house the new Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre, the CN IMAX Theatre, and the Port of Vancouver's cruise ship terminal, anchored by the exclusive Pan Pacific Hotel. The Expo lands were sold to Hong Kong developer Li Ka-Shing and transformation of the industrial lands along the north False Creek waterfront into high rise commercial and residential towers got underway. Two downtown stadiums, BC Place and General Motors Place, were constructed for sporting events and exhibitions, and the Vancouver Grizzlies basketball team came to town.

In efforts to draw tourists to the city, Vancouver courted and won a spot on the Molson Indy race circuit, each September building and unbuilding a race track adjacent to the downtown core; every summer the city skies light up with colourful explosions as Vancouver hosts the International Symphony of Fire; the burgeoning film industry earned Vancouver the moniker “Hollywood North,” and the booming high tech field lured young urbanites to condominiums in trendy new Yaletown. In a survey of 215 world cities in 2002, Vancouver, “Gateway to the Sea to Sky Highway,” was ranked the third best city in which to locate a business.

Along with growth came the gentrification of several neighbourhoods. In the late 1980s, both Vancouver's population and real estate prices climbed. Subsidized low-rise apartment complexes, built for veterans on the city's west side, were redeveloped as market-based condominiums and increased property values sent young professionals farther and farther east in search of affordable single family homes. A building frenzy raised high-rise office towers and residences downtown, and condominiums and townhouses on any piece of land that could support the zoning. The outcome of all of this activity was a steep decline in available low-income housing. A report by the BC Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services shows that in 1994, 41 percent of renters in Vancouver had difficulty affording their rents. The same report states that condominium construction had “effectively
crowded out rental construction in many areas by taking up much of the land zoned for multiple unit development.” While Vancouver courted Hong Kong investor immigrants, corporate head offices, and young white collar professionals, its low-income population was at great pains to find accommodations it could afford. David Ley astutely describes the 1980s in Vancouver as “the embourgeoisement of an aspiring world city.”

One part of the city that did not profit from these years of growth was the Downtown Eastside. The Downtown Eastside (DTES) was once the heart of the city, site of the original 1890s settlement of Granville. Throughout the 1970s, the area suffered from retail closures and business moves into the new centre of downtown. What remained were poorly maintained hotels, pubs, and nightclubs. The residents were often elderly and generally poor. During the 1990s’ construction boom, the new downtown office towers and residential high rises narrowed the city’s corridors of sunlight, and pushed its poor into ever smaller and less liveable spaces. The DTES became the concentrated home of the city’s poor, elderly, drug addicted, and dispossessed.

This neighbourhood is not without its champion. A tenacious and sometimes successful association, the Downtown Eastside Residents’ Association (DERA), was formed in the 1970s to address community issues of housing, health, and economic welfare. Over the course of its history, DERA has formed alliances with trade unions, and has received funds from a variety of organizations ranging from the Royal Bank to the city police and the Department of Health and Welfare. Two members, Libby Davies and Bruce Eriksen, were elected to city council (1982–1993 and 1980–1993 respectively) and Davies now represented Vancouver East in federal parliament. Two other members, Jim Green and Jean Swanson, have run for city mayor (1990 and 1988 respectively), and Jim Green won a seat on city council in the 2002 election. The local media described him as one of the most influential people on council. Despite their achievements, residents and supporters of the DTES have faced ongoing battles with municipal and provincial governments and developers intent on gentrifying and “cleaning up” the Downtown Eastside so that it will better complement Vancouver’s image as an attractive place to live and do business. Provincial leader Bill Bennett was quoted in 1986 saying that Expo ‘86 had succeeded where the
city had failed to “get rid of the slums.” By slums, he was referring to the many DTES lodging units that were demolished, and those that raised room rates by up to 200 percent during Expo, forcing their long-term residents onto the streets.

Until the 2002 municipal election, it seemed that business as usual was on the agenda for Vancouver and its growth coalition, particularly with the election of former NPA mayor Gordon Campbell to the provincial Premier’s office in 2001. Campbell professed the beginning of a “New Era for British Columbians” and declared the province “open for business.” In a dramatic turn of municipal election events however, the NPA-dominated city council and mayor were swept from office, their previously uncontested reign ended. Equally dramatic is that their defeat came at the hands of a political neophyte, the former Chief Coroner of British Columbia, Larry Campbell. Prior to the election, mayoral candidate Larry Campbell had never held a political office.

While Larry Campbell was new to municipal politics, the Coalition of Progressive Electors was not. Formed in 1968, it had at its core labour unions and socialist organizations, and for many years competed with the Civic New Democrats for Left-of-centre votes. In *Challenging Politics, COPE, Electoral Politics and Social Movements*, Donna Vogel highlights the efforts of COPE in the 1990s to broaden its public base to include new social movements, such as feminism, antiracism, and lesbian and gay rights. In 1993, COPE changed its name from Committee of Progressive Electors to Coalition of Progressive Electors in an attempt to position itself as the representative for all who opposed the NPA. This move alone would not bring COPE electoral victory. In fact, early in 2002 Vogel predicted that “as a progressive political party in Vancouver it appears as though COPE has run its course. The current political conjuncture calls for the formation of a counter-hegemonic vehicle unmarked by an ‘old left’ legacy and entrenched loyalties to particular progressive movements.” I suggest that COPE was aided in its defeat of the pro-growth NPA by two factors: tactical campaign errors on the part of the NPA, and the hostility of the public towards the ruling provincial Liberal party.

Key election issues during the 2002 campaign included the city’s bid for
the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, public transportation, safe injection sites for intravenous drug users, and affordable housing. The Olympic bid was supported by proponents of growth and decried by those who wanted public money channelled towards affordable housing and other much needed social services. The NPA supported the bid while many COPE candidates did not. Although COPE mayoral candidate Larry Campbell was in favour of the Olympics, he promised to hold a city-wide referendum on the issue should he be elected mayor. Public transportation was high on the agenda for residents who depended upon its services and for the growth coalition. A plan for increased numbers of buses between municipalities of the GVRD was threatened by the possibility of an expensive rapid transit line between downtown Vancouver, the Vancouver International Airport, and Richmond, which would involve overhead rail lines and expensive tunnelling and was tied to a provincial requirement of P3 funding. The NPA and pro-growth organizations such as local construction unions, the Vancouver Board of Trade, and the Airport Authority supported the rapid transit line while COPE campaigned against transit megaprojects and transit fare hikes. Despite the importance of the Olympics and public transit, however, the safe injection sites and the Woodward’s squat dominated media and public attention during the election campaign. These were the issues on which the NPA faltered.

The NPA underestimated public support for incumbent mayor Philip Owen and the social policies he was pursuing. Moreover, close ties between the NPA and the provincial Liberal government made the NPA a target for labour unions and citizens who had suffered through a provincial nurses’ strike, hospital closures, welfare cutbacks, spending freezes on government subsidized housing, increased post-secondary tuition fees, the drive for privatization of crown corporations, and a protracted city-wide transit strike. The COPE campaign endorsed the social policy efforts initiated by Owen and capitalized on the public displeasure with provincial austerity measures during a highly publicized conflict over the redevelopment of the vacant Woodward’s building site in downtown Vancouver, where a squatter camp had established itself to protest the lack of affordable housing for local residents.

Philip Owen, mayor of Vancouver from 1993 to 2002, was an understated
leader who stayed out of the media spotlight, the kind of man who inspired one local cartoonist to pen a “Where’s Philip?” comic in the spirit of the Where’s Waldo books. To the dismay of the NPA, in the late 1990s Philip Owen was spending time in the Downtown Eastside where he pursued strategies to deal with its drug- and crime-related problems. In the course of his investigations, he interviewed mayors from European cities who had implemented safe injections sites as part of their harm reduction strategies, and he took walks along Hastings Street in the Downtown Eastside talking to junkies and learning the price for a rock of crack cocaine.26

By 2000, Owen had developed the “Four Pillars Plan” to address the needs of Vancouver’s drug addicts and the communities that suffered as a result of the criminal and social problems associated with the drug trade. The four pillars were “Prevention, Treatment, Harm Reduction, and Enforcement.” While the NPA supported the Plan and made it policy in 2001, several councillors were uncomfortable with the plans for supervised safe injection sites as part of the harm reduction strategy. As this was the first proposal for such sites in the country, Vancouver drew media attention not only in Canada but also across the border to the south. The desperate Downtown Eastside, with its poverty, homelessness, drug addiction, and crime, made for sensationalist representation in the media and unpopular city advertising.

The debate over safe injection sites raged in all parts of Vancouver as concerns were voiced about the city’s image as a haven for intravenous drug users and fears that drug problems in the city would be exacerbated. Opinions for and against were expressed in local newspapers and heard on radio talk shows. As municipal election campaigns got underway, candidates for council and mayor were pressed for their positions on this contentious issue. COPE’s mayoral candidate, Larry Campbell, and the COPE members running for council spoke out strongly in favour of the “Four Pillars” approach, including the opening of safe injection sites. It is at this point that the NPA made a crucial campaign mistake: just months before the election, in a meeting at which Philip Owen was not in attendance, the council decided not to renominate Mayor Philip Owen for office. His replacement, Jennifer Clarke, wavered on her stand regarding safe injec-
tion sites. If she had been hoping to gauge public opinion, she was too late. The issue, which began as a Downtown Eastside concern, had spread throughout the city, encouraging a critical look at drug problems everywhere in the metropolitan region. Parents from the city’s affluent west side began to call for help for their drug addicted teenagers, and some floated the idea of a safe injection site for the west side. At the last minute, Jennifer Clarke declared her support for the proposed sites, but by then it was too late. The credibility of her concern for the Downtown Eastside and for Vancouver’s disenfranchised had already suffered from many of her actions, including her much publicized referral to the DTES as a ghetto and her proposal for generous renovation grants and tax relief for Gastown landowners adjacent to the DTES.  

Philip Owen made no effort to disguise the reasons for the NPA’s decision to drop his candidacy. He told the Globe and Mail in October 2002 that “It’s not very hard to figure out why the NPA dumped me. As soon as I was connected with Dean Wilson (Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users member and advocate of the ‘Four Pillars Drug Approach’), I was out of there.” The Vancouver Courier quotes him as saying “They kneecapped me and tossed me out.” If the former mayor’s words are to be believed, the NPA council was afraid of alienating its growth coalition constituents, constituents Simon Fraser University professor Nick Blomley described as “a constituency that would like to solve the problem of the Downtown Eastside by seeing the poor disappear by allowing the full scale gentrification of what is very valuable real estate.” Although Philip Owen had not been a charismatic city leader, he had worked tirelessly on the “Four Pillars” approach and had shown dedication to addressing the problems of a small but very visible neighbourhood. The voting residents of Vancouver were shocked when the NPA dropped him and, in the words of one resident, “voters will make the NPA pay for turning its back on Mayor Owen.” And so they did.

Another issue to garner media attention during the municipal election was the fate of the vacant Woodward’s store building located in the Downtown Eastside. On 14 September 2002, protestors set up camp on its sidewalk and demanded that the building be developed as affordable
housing for local residents, not redeveloped for the upscale commercial and residential market. While the Woodward’s building and its squatters did not rate as election-making-or-breaking issues, they did add fuel to the fire for the Left-wing COPE camp who exploited the situation to highlight the pro-business NPA’s lack of sympathy for the homeless and inaction on the city’s housing crisis.

There was considerable public pressure for the issue to be resolved, at least with regard to the homeless squatters. Many municipal residents were sympathetic to the plight of the homeless in a city that had seen house prices rise sharply over the past decade, and rental housing in many neighbourhoods give way to retail condominiums at premium prices. Recent provincial cuts to welfare, a lowering of the minimum hourly wage for first-time workers, and a freeze on plans for provincially funded housing had aggravated the already tight housing market. With the Woodward’s squat, Vancouver once again received unflattering media coverage of the Downtown Eastside.

By 2002, the NPA had been dealing with the vacant Woodward’s building for nine years. Woodward’s Department Store had closed its doors in 1993 due to financial insolvency. The low-income neighbourhood of the DTES could no longer support the store that had once been a hallmark of Vancouver’s prosperity and progress. The first proposition for redevelopment came in 1995 from Fama Holdings, the purchaser of the property. The Fama proposal called for a mixed-use development of residential condominiums, retail, and commercial space. The proposal was accepted and passed by the Development Permit Board with a deal in which Fama was granted extra residential space in exchange for heritage preservation. The proposal was vigorously opposed by DTES residents who called for housing to accommodate the unmet needs of the local community. Through their efforts, development was stalled.

In 1996, Mike Harcourt, then NDP premier, announced the offer of provincial funding for 200 coop housing units to Fama Holdings. Fama and the province were unable to reach an agreement and the funding went to Lore Krill Coop, which completed construction of two buildings with 203 coop units at another Downtown Eastside location. Fama Holdings submitted a second plan for development in 1997; again it included no provisions for
coop or non-market housing. Nevertheless, it was approved by the city’s Development Permit Board in October of that year, despite sixty petitions by DTES residents at the public hearings.\textsuperscript{33} Fama’s plans did not come to fruition because it was unable to engage with a suitable developer.

The approval for a second time of the landowner’s market housing proposal raises questions about the “stringent” nature of Vancouver development regulations. The Woodward’s case suggests that, in some neighbourhoods at least, the voices of the community are not weighted equally with the goals of land owners and developers, and that the city planning department may have some sympathy for pro-growth forces. Appeals from local residents continued, and in March 2001 the provincial New Democratic Party government purchased the building at market value for $22 million. It initiated a partnership with the city and put forward a plan for 200 units of coop housing, commercial space, and a campus for Simon Fraser University’s downtown School for Contemporary Arts. In June 2001, while the Woodward’s project was still looking for a development partner for the commercial aspect of its proposal, provincial elections brought Liberal leader Gordon Campbell to the premier’s office. Plans for the Woodward’s building were halted as part of a provincial freeze on subsidized non-market housing.\textsuperscript{34} During these years, City Council took no initiative to deal with the Woodward’s building, nor did it work on behalf of the city’s most underprivileged residents in their quest for affordable housing.

In September 2002, members of the city’s homeless contingent, supporters from the Downtown Eastside, and social activists set up camp in front of the Woodward’s building. Their protest was aimed largely at the new provincial government, but implicated the city council. The latter had done little to ensure equitable development in the neighbourhood, instead accepting two development applications that would have seen the Woodward’s building transformed into market housing and commercial space. The city’s response to the protest was to send in the police. On 23 September, people were physically removed from the sidewalk and a waiting city garbage truck carried away tables, banners, and personal belongings.\textsuperscript{35} The next day, the squatters were back in greater numbers and, day by day, support for their cause grew. The Woodward’s squatters received visits and assurances of
solidarity from a range of supporters, from Jack Layton to MP Libby Davies, MLA Jenny Kwan, and Jim Sinclair, president of the BC Federation of Labour.\textsuperscript{36}

The Woodward’s squatters held their ground for three months, right through the municipal election. In fact, the fate of the Woodward’s building, the proposed safe injection sites, and the overall development of the Downtown Eastside had become flashpoints for the voting municipal public. In the months leading up to the civic election, the COPE campaign enlisted support from local unions who put their considerable organizational abilities into action and encouraged their members to vote. COPE exploited the NPA connections to the unpopular provincial Liberal party, most significantly to Premier Gordon Campbell, NPA mayor from 1986 to 1993. For residents angry with the provincial Liberals, voting against the NPA was a sure way to send a message. Voter turnout for the election was one of the highest recorded turnouts in the city’s history.\textsuperscript{37} A Vancouver City document mapping the city’s voting pattern shows that residents from the city’s affluent South Westside, traditional NPA territory, voted for the NPA’s Jennifer Clarke while the remainder of the city largely supported Larry Campbell.\textsuperscript{38}

The problems of the Downtown Eastside, often ignored or considered by the general public to be the concerns of a peripheral group, had become part of the fight against the pervasive neoliberal rhetoric of the province, the city, and the growth coalition. Televised scenes of police in riot gear at the Woodward’s site did little to endear the NPA to those voters who might already have been leaning somewhat Leftward.

What has the outcome of the election changed for the city of Vancouver and for its growth coalition? On the Woodward’s redevelopment issue, the evidence suggests some restraint on growth coalition aspirations. While campaigning, Larry Campbell promised to deal swiftly and fairly with the issue: he assured the squatters that shelter would be found and that, under his leadership, the city would do all it could to address the housing needs of the city. Shortly after his election to office, Campbell made good on his promise. Homeless squatters were put up at a Downtown Eastside hotel at the city’s expense for four months while alternatives were sought. During that time, the city purchased the Woodward’s property from the province
for approximately $5 million. A consultative public process to determine the future of the Woodward’s building was begun.

In late 2003, the city’s official website dedicated several pages to the Woodward’s building, entitled “Help create a vision for the future of Woodward’s.” These pages contained guiding principles for development, including 100 units of non-market housing, job opportunities for local residents during the development process and for ongoing building operation, and incorporation of the visions and talents of the residents of the Downtown Eastside. They also included the results of a Community Visioning Workshop and Ideas Fair, and an invitation to view the proposals that had been thus far presented to the city. Most of the development proposals took the guidelines to heart, including in their plans such community-specific offerings as a Native healing centre, drug and alcohol addiction services, and rooftop gardens.

One submission, however, stood out as an example of city-developer relations during the NPA era. The submission by Concord Pacific, development company of Li Ka-shing, clearly stated its demands for rezoning and the costs it expected the city to pay. From the Vancouver city website:

Concord is clear in its expectations that the land cost would be an up-front contribution by the City to be paid back through deferred amortization over the life of the project. Any environmental issues would be identified early and remediation costs would be capped. Concord is specific in seeking relaxation of current height restrictions and would further require development density increases to accommodate the aforementioned proposed development program and possible flexibility for density transfer. Concord would seek to have the project exempted from Development Cost Levies and Community Amenity Contribution requirements and the Public Art benefit would be specifically allocated towards creating historical references to the site’s past. Finally, Concord would explore options for an extended property tax exemption and would investigate Provincial credit enhancements for the project.

While the other development proposals may have had similar intentions, Concord Pacific, a company that had won many of the city’s largest development contracts during the NPA years, seemed unafraid to state its demands to the new mayor and council for business as usual. In what might be viewed...
as a new atmosphere at City Hall and at the City Planning Department, the Concord Pacific bid was not successful. Westbank Projects Corp./The Peterson Investment Group was selected to redevelop the Woodward’s building in September 2004. This proposal included an open-air market, a much needed neighbourhood grocery store, daycare facilities, post-secondary education facilities, community gardens, public park space, and local skills and job training.  

More broadly, Mayor Larry Campbell and his COPE-dominated council were outspoken in their intentions to address the housing and service needs of the city’s residents. Soon after taking office, in an effort to retain low-income housing in the city, the mayor instituted a bylaw to levy a $5,000 tax on property owners for each single occupancy room converted to another form of housing, such as tourist facilities. In 2004 the council legalized secondary suites for all Vancouver homes. As promised, the city held a referendum on the Olympics and residents voted 64 percent in favour of the Games (46 percent voter turnout). On 15 September 2003, the city opened its first safe injection site. Other progressive steps initiated by COPE include an ethical procurement program for municipal spending, adoption of the environmentally friendly LEED rating system for all new municipal buildings, the creation of a women’s task force, a pedestrian task force, and a task force to reduce the city’s greenhouse gas emissions. COPE has also publicly challenged the provincial government on several fronts, such as the attempt to limit public access to welfare assistance and Safe Streets legislation that would make panhandling punishable by law. An application for development of the city’s first Walmart was denied on the grounds that a destination store contravenes the City’s goal to create walkable neighbourhoods, might hurt local businesses, and would draw an unacceptable volume of automobile traffic.

On other issues, however, such as public access to government and a commitment to improving public transit, COPE was less successful. Other than webcasting city council meetings online, it is unclear how much more accessible city government was to the average Vancouverite under COPE than it was during the reign of the NPA. In regard to public transit, COPE was deeply divided on the success of the proposal for the rapid transit line
between the Vancouver Airport, Richmond, and downtown Vancouver. The final project would cost more than one billion dollars. The public fear and the concern of COPE councillors who voted against the rapid transit line was that it would drain the public purse and hamper efforts to support other transit needs, such as increased bus service on existing routes. The provincial government made its $300,000 contribution to the project contingent upon a P3 structure — a stipulation rejected by Mayor Campbell in 2003, but accepted in late 2004.

Early in its mandate, COPE initiated a campaign to institute an electoral ward system in Vancouver. The campaign seemed to be half-heartedly run and did not enjoy the support of local media, traditional growth coalition allies. A strong media campaign by groups such as the Vancouver Board of Trade and the Fraser Institute helped to defeat the plebiscite on 16 October 2004. Voter turnout was dismal at 22.6%. The Coalition of Progressive Electors failed in its first major effort to democratize civic government.

The endorsement of Larry Campbell for mayoral candidate by the Coalition for Progressive Electors was a shrewd one. As former Chief Coroner for the province, Campbell was well versed in the problems of the Downtown Eastside, which became such a focus of media and public attention during the election. He was easily able to position himself as more informed and more capable of handling the DTES issues than the NPA’s Westside Jennifer Clarke. Campbell also had a clear image advantage over his rival. Jennifer Clarke had been on council since 1993, but was not a well known public figure for Vancouver residents. While she had to convince the public that she would represent more than her Westside and business base, Larry Campbell had an instant public appeal. He was new to politics, had a direct, outspoken manner during interviews, and a CBC television series, Da Vinci’s Inquest, was based on his career as provincial Chief Coroner.

The unforeseen consequence for COPE in selecting Larry Campbell is that he had no history with COPE and no allegiance to its stated ideology. COPE has long advocated inclusive government, public access to government, and decisionmaking that will benefit city residents rather than cater to the business and development community. Throughout their tenure in office, Mayor Larry Campbell and COPE Councillors Jim Green, Raymond
Louie, and Tim Stevenson frequently joined forces with the two elected NPA councillors to support contentious growth coalition initiatives, such as approving slot machines and upgrading for the city racetrack (a move endorsed by the entertainment industry but contested by residents in the area), supporting the city’s bid for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games, and endorsing the rapid transit line. Support for these initiatives led to an intractable rift within the COPE Council between those who held firmly to the traditional progressive COPE platform, and those who believed in brokering deals with growth coalition advocates partly as a means to gain broad support for re-election.

To return to the election results of 2002, it is clear that, whether from interest in and sympathy with the high profile issues of the Downtown Eastside or in reaction to the government services cuts meted out by the provincial Liberals, Vancouver residents attended the polls in almost record numbers to vote for change, and the growth coalition lost its traditional political control of the city. As I have argued here, however, losing an election limits, but does not reduce the growth machine’s political importance.

In the case of Vancouver, the progressive governing organization COPE was able to initiate a number of progressive task forces and land use plans, but it could not withstand the pressures of internal conflict between members who supported growth coalition projects and those who did not. By the time of the November election in 2005, Mayor Larry Campbell had announced that he would not run for re-election. His supporters on Council, Green, Louie, and Stevenson, left COPE to form Vision Vancouver, with Jim Green as candidate for mayor. Voter turnout for the election was significantly lower than that of 2002, only 32 percent, and COPE was shut out, returning only one councillor, David Cadman, to office. The NPA’s Sam Sullivan is mayor, supported by five NPA Councillors; Vision holds the remaining four council seats.
Notes

11. Ibid., p. 687.
19. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., p. 105.
29. Ibid.
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30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.