

THE BATTLE FOR COOMBE & WHISKEY COVE

By Verna C. Barrett, February 2004.

Editor's Note:

Belcarra residents should look back with gratitude. Belcarra's political history was a long fight to remain independent. In the 1960's, Belcarra Bay residents Wallace and Gladys Crawford led a campaign to fend-off takeover bids by Port Moody and Coquitlam. During the early 1970s Wallace Crawford was Belcarra's representative to the *Greater Vancouver Regional District*, which meant that he essentially acted as our 'Council'.

Then, suddenly in 1973, without prior notification of (or discussion with) the local property owners, the *GVRD Parks Department* claimed the right to "take-over" the area proposed for *Belcarra Regional Park*. Properties at Coombe and Whiskey Cove were the first targets for acquisition, and the Turtlehead and Belcarra Bay properties were to follow. Woodhaven-Bedwell Bay would take longer. The negotiator had great confidence, being then in the process of dispossessing the people of Tynehead of their houses and farms. During the emergency, Verna Barrett, housewife, grew to be Verna Barrett, politician. Without her efforts the community we know today would be but a few moldering cottages and a few devalued homes. Every property title would have been so over-shadowed by the threat of expropriation that property owners could have neither built nor sold.

All who came to Belcarra after 1973 are here because Verna Barrett made it happen, and all the 'old-timers' can stay in peace because Verna fought a good fight! Belcarra owes its very existence to Verna Barrett!

Ralph Drew, Editor



Verna Barrett

We purchased our property at Coombe, north of the Belcarra Picnic Grounds, in 1961 for \$7,500. There was a "turn-of-the-century" four-bedroom cottage on the property, but no road access; only water access. We kept our boat at Deep Cove and crossed Indian Arm to *Coombe Landing*, and the *Harbour Navigation* ferry *SS Scenic* provided mail and freight service along Indian Arm that included *Coombe Landing*. By 1969 there was road access as far as Whiskey Cove, and after Gordon Robson built a new house on the south side of Whiskey Cove around 1971, we decided to build a permanent residence on our Coombe property to eliminate the problems of maintaining two households.

Armed with the appropriate building plans in February of 1973, I visited the GVRD Electoral Area Clerk in order to obtain a building permit to replace our cottage at Coombe with a new permanent residence. He refused my request and when I asked why he explained that no new building permits were being issued because the Coombe-Whiskey Cove area was slated to be part of a Regional Park. I pointed-out that it was zoned RS1 (Residential Single Family) and the *Official Regional Plan* (ORP) designated it "Urban", there was no "Park" zoning, that I had never been consulted or informed about any change in the zoning since I had purchased it in 1961; and therefore I was entitled to a building permit. He again refused on the grounds that *Lower Mainland Regional Planning Board* (LMRPB) had decided in the late 1950's that there should be a *Belcarra Regional Park* from Indian Arm to Anmore, that the GVRD was proceeding to implement the plan, and that he had been instructed by the Board not to issue any more building permits since any "improvements" on private property would only drive up the acquisition costs for the GVRD. I told him I refused to sell, and he told me "fine, then we will just expropriate your property".

Shaken, I returned home to North Vancouver and phoned George Carlisle (then CEO of the GVRD) and asked him what authority the GVRD had to expropriate my property. He replied "Letters Patent" and hung-up. I phoned him back and asked what a "Letters Patent" was when it was at home, he replied "Look in the *Municipal Act*" and again hung-up. I was told later by the former Electoral Area planner that GVRD staff then proposed that they rezone all the proposed park area to "Public Use" and when he pointed-out that the only "uses" permitted in *Public Use* was hospitals, penitentiaries, and highways, the plan was abandoned but only after he resigned in protest.

At a meeting with all the affected property owners in the Coombe–Whiskey Cove area, we decided that the boundaries were probably just a mistake and that surely when this was brought to the GVRD Board's attention they would redraw the boundaries. None of the men present could devote the time necessary to lead our delegation, none of the women felt competent, and so by default it became my job to persuade the GVRD Board to make the necessary changes.

After spending a couple of weeks at the *Vancouver Public Library*, I discovered that in 1953 the LMRPB had been formed to co-ordinate planning in the area from Hope to north of Lions Bay. The LMRPB Board was made-up of politicians from the municipalities therein, but the property owners in the unincorporated areas had no political representative since the Board, as a whole, was charged with the responsibility to look after their best interests. Zoning proposals from a municipality were "scrutinized" by the *Technical Planning Committee* (TPC) a sub-committee made-up of municipal planners from all the municipalities in the LMRPB before their recommendations were passed onto the LMRPB Board.

Sometime in the late 1950s the TPC had made a recommendation that numerous areas within the LMRPB should be set aside and designated as future Regional Parks. Many proposed sites were removed after vigorous complaints were received from prominent property owners, friends of members of the Provincial Cabinet, BC Hydro, and municipalities reluctant to lose potential lucrative taxable subdivisions. The boundaries of the proposed *Belcarra Regional Park* were changed, but no politician protested the inclusion of the Coombe–Whiskey Cove area. Bylaw 13 to designate the proposed Regional Parks was given three readings and sent to Victoria. (Incidentally, I discovered later when I did title search's on both included and excluded areas of the proposed parks, that many of the included private properties were quietly bought-up by some of those same municipal planners, and then subsequently sold to the relevant Park Authority).

At this same time the coal loading facility at Roberts Bank was being criticized by many municipalities because of the coal dust pollution created by the numerous and frequent coal trains running through their areas. So Premier W.A.C. Bennett solved that problem by dissolving the LMRPB in 1961 and dividing it into the four Regional Districts which still exist today. The Park function of the LMRPB was then passed to a new Board, the *Fraser Burrard Park Society*, which continued to pick-up some key private properties when they came onto the market, but were hampered by a shortage of funds. Later on, the *Fraser Burrard Park Society* was dissolved and the Park function was assumed by the GVRD which had taxing authority.

My next problem was to acquire and read the *Municipal Act*. I quickly discovered that it was so dull and pedantic that it put me to sleep. So I solved that problem by standing-up in an unheated room and reading it out loud until I could understand it. Mr. Carlisle was right. Letters Patent in the *Municipal Act* created the Regional District and gave it the power to expropriate when, and if, necessary. But I also learned that a citizen had the right to read the Minutes of any Public Meeting of a Municipal Council or a Regional Board at a cost of \$0.25 a page for copies.

The other important fact was that the *Municipal Act* stated that if a Regional District Board down-zoned by bylaw private property in an electoral area, the provincial *Minister of Parks* had to approve it before fourth, and final, reading by a *Regional District Board*. So, the next job was to search-out all those Minutes of all those meetings from 1953 to 1973. Mr. Carlisle informed me that they would be at the *Vancouver Public Library*. When I inquired there, they could not be found, so the librarian phoned Mr. Carlisle who replied that they were probably at the *Vancouver Maritime Museum*. When I got there, I was informed that the Minutes belonged to the GVRD, and that I could not see them without a personal letter of permission from George Carlisle, *contrary to the Municipal Act!* So I decided that I would need to enlist the help of my MLA which (in 1974) happened to be Dave Barrett (no relation), the new Premier of British Columbia.

When I got to Victoria, Premier Barrett was too busy to see me; in fact, no one was interested in my plight. So at 5:00 pm when the Legislature Building was closing, I was so desperate that I lay down in the rotunda and refused to leave until someone would talk to me. I got passed from a *Deputy Assistant Clerk*, to a full-fledged *Assistant Clerk*, etc., etc., until by 10:00 pm I was seen by the *Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs*. He confirmed my right to see those Minutes, and immediately phoned Mr. Carlisle at home to make them available to me.

The other important item he told me was that the infamous Bylaw 13 was *still* sitting in the files at the *Ministry of Municipal Affairs*. It seems that there had been a Cabinet shuffle about that time, "Parks" had been incorporated into "Housing", and therefore there was no "Minister of Parks" to approve and sign the Bylaw before it was returned to the LMRPB for fourth and final reading. Obviously, during all the confusion and change of staff created by the dissolution of the LMRPB, the *Fraser Burrard Park Society* must have assumed that Bylaw 13 had been approved. I decided that I would only share this information

with the other affected property owners at Coombe and Whiskey Cove, and save this legal point in case we had to go to court. (I finally informed the GVRD about Bylaw 13 at a Board Meeting in 1977, long after the situation had been resolved, and I was the new Director for Electoral Area "B". They then had to prepare and pass a new bylaw to legally establish the boundaries of *Belcarra Regional Park*).

When I returned to the GVRD offices, Mr. Carlisle was out, but his secretary had been told to give me the Minute Books to read. While I was taking notes I found that she had inadvertently included the "In Camera" Minutes as well, so naturally I didn't tell her this until I finished. (Unfortunately, I heard later from a sympathetic staff person that she was fired for this mistake). Mr. Carlisle phoned me a week or so later and asked to see me because he had a proposal to make to solve the problem. When I got there he proposed that the GVRD Board would buy the properties and give us a lifetime right to use the cottages provided that we make no improvements, repairs or changes to the land or the dwellings except paint. I had to tell him politely where he could "put" his proposal.

All this time I had been attending GVRD Board and Park Committee Meetings in order to determine which Director said what, what they "liked" to hear, and who were the "leaders" of the political cliques. In addition, acting on the "criteria" as set-out by the Assistant Manager of GVRD Parks (Rick Hankin) I had to read his entire Recreation Thesis at UBC to try to figure out what was a "recreation unit", how it was calculated in regard to the proposed Belcarra Park, and what was the scientific unit of measurement. Consequently, all this work necessitated that I quit my job at VGH as an x-ray technician in the Emergency Room. During this time I worked closely with Wallace Crawford, the Electoral Area "B" Director on the GVRD Board, but I didn't tell him about Bylaw 13 in case he accidentally told staff at the GVRD. He recommended that since there was little sympathy for us on the Board, I should "lobby" the individual Board members and use the funding formula adopted by the GVRD to pay for all the GVRD functions (parks, planning, air pollution, labour relations, etc.). This was predicated on the assessment base, for example the *City of Vancouver* had 51% of the assessments of the whole Regional District and, therefore, Vancouver paid 51% of the total costs incurred by the GVRD. When I pointed-out to Vancouver Mayor Art Phillips that his tax payers would have to pay 51% of the cost to buy the properties at Belcarra, but that the residents of Port Moody, Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, and New Westminster would be enjoying the park at little cost to themselves, he agreed that the proposed park boundaries should be looked at more closely. Not all mayors were so sympathetic to our plight. My mayor in the *District of North Vancouver* (Ron Andrews) and Alderman Don Lanskaill of West Vancouver refused to see me; only Vancouver, Burnaby, and White Rock were actually sympathetic. Perhaps Don Lanskaill, as Chairman of the *GVRD Park Committee* and a former member of the *Fraser Burrard Park Society*, was biased. Of course it didn't help that I had enlisted the help of Judy LaMarsh (a former Federal Cabinet Minister) who had retired to Vancouver and was the host of a daily local radio phone-in show. After spending all of a Sunday with her, showing her all the research I had done, and the fiasco of Bylaw 13, she agreed to spend all Monday morning on the air with me about our plight. So she phoned-up several Directors on air and succeeded in catching out both Andrews and Lanskaill in factual errors and omissions.

Also, we the property owners at Coombe-Whiskey Cove, plus some neighbours from my street in the *District of North Vancouver*, filled the public gallery and staged a noisy demonstration at a GVRD Board Meeting which garnered us favourable reports in the local newspapers. A *Vancouver Sun* reporter suggested to me that I should look into the possibility of a third crossing proposed by *Swan Wooster Consultants* in 1967. I discovered that Ron Andrews wanted to rezone the *Blair Rifle Range* in the *District of North Vancouver* for housing, but the ORP had ruled that the extra vehicular traffic would first necessitate a bridge from the Port Moody-Coquitlam side of Indian Arm. After great difficulty I obtained a copy of the engineering report (which was a gift to the Lower Mainland to celebrate the Centennial) and, sure enough, there was a bridge from Turtlehead to Cove Cliff. After checking with Highways, they showed me a long range plan for a highway extending through Coquitlam and Port Moody's North Shore to Turtlehead and over to Cove Cliff. Unfortunately, tests found that the bedrock at Turtlehead was too fractured to support a bridge, so a dam across the Indian Arm was the next best alternative. This would have changed Indian Arm into a fresh water lake, after years of leeching-out the salt and the demise of marine life, but most importantly would have reduced the tidal action under the *Second Narrows Bridge* at a considerable cost saving due to the reduced need for constant dredging. At least this explained the proposal to rezone the area to "Public Use".

Finally in fall of 1973, the GVRD Board agreed to defer any further actions until we could get a lawyer. After interviewing several who all agreed that we didn't have a hope, I found the lawyer (Chuck Johnstone) who had represented the GVRD Board when they had protested the wholesale expropriation of Richmond farmland for the planned expansion of the *Vancouver International Airport*.

Meanwhile Wallace Crawford had named me as the Alternate Director for Area “B” on the GVRD Board, and when he died suddenly the following spring, there I was on the Board. Talk about a fox in the hen house! Needless to say, I was not warmly welcomed by GVRD staff and some of the Directors; however, it did give me legal access to previously *confidential* memos and minutes of meetings.

After protracted negotiations, and on the recommendations of a couple of sub-committees of the Board, the boundaries were finally redrawn to exclude the Coombe–Whiskey Cove area from the proposed Park, and we were free to apply for a building permit. However, the harassment by staff did not cease.

Because our cottage had been only serviced by a “surface well” on the gazetted road allowance at the back of our lot, the GVRD Building Inspector ruled that we must “drill” a deep well, but unknown to me they had contacted the *Water Rights Branch* in Victoria and asked that we be denied a permit because it could “infringe” on the proposed Park. When I visited the *Water Rights Branch* in Victoria to appeal the denial, the Director decided since *Water Rights* was superior (in terms of longevity) they could over-rule the *Ministry of Municipal Affairs* (from which the GVRD received their powers) and we were granted a permit to drill. Much the same thing happened with our community wharf at Coombe. The GVRD contacted *National Harbours Board* (NHB) and requested that our annual water lot lease be cancelled. Upon appeal, NHB ruled in our favour on the grounds that there had been a water lot lease in good standing there since 1905, and that in their view it did not pose a threat to any proposed land based park.

The next hurdle was reacting to a recommendation from the *Water and Waste Committee* of the GVRD. They recommended that since severe fecal pollution had been discovered in the Indian Arm adjacent to the Turtlehead–Cove Cliff area that it was obvious that septic fields were leeching into the Arm; therefore no building permits in Area “B” should be granted within 300 feet of the water. I was stymied since GVRD was the Lower Mainland’s *Pollution Control Office*, and they were not going to help me. So I went out to UBC and contacted the people who managed the UBC research vessel which regularly patrolled Indian Arm. They agreed to test for me, and their written report said that the fecal pollution was the result of a “tight pipe” leading directly from the GVRD toilets at the *Belcarra Picnic Grounds* without benefit of any septic field. When I brought this to the attention of the GVRD Board at the next monthly meeting, Mr. DeBou (Manager of GVRD Parks) defended it on the grounds that he had a *Pollution Permit*. The recommendation from the *Water and Waste Committee* was dropped and the GVRD Parks Department had to install an approved septic field at the *Belcarra Picnic Grounds*.

At the next Municipal election, I was returned as the Director of Electoral Area “B”, and the next project was the formation of the *Sasamat Volunteer Fire Department*. Upon the successful establishment of the Fire Department, we were able to incorporate as the new *Village of Belcarra* in 1979.

The rest is history.

The following are transcriptions of newspaper articles that appeared in the local press during the events of 1973 and 1974:

Belcarra Residents Allege Intimidation

(*Vancouver Province*, May 3rd, 1973, page 12.)

A group of property owners near Belcarra Park claimed Wednesday they are being intimidated by GVRD staff.

The group of 15 owners, living in Coombe and Whiskey Cove on the southeast shore of Indian Arm. Also said in a petition they are being discriminated against by being included within the proposed boundaries of an expanded park.

The petition to the regional board, which acts as a local council for the area, notes the area was subdivided in 1912, is zoned for single family dwellings and residents cleared the road allowance from Belcarra Bay to Coombe.

Allan Barrett, a spokesman for the group, told reporters GVRD staff have warned residents not to build further on their property because it will eventually be used for the park. He said that on the basis of these warnings he did not apply for a building permit.

Barrett also said the market value of the lots is being ruined because prospective buyers are being told the area will be expropriated for the proposed park.

Vancouver Mayor Art Phillips asked at the GVRD meeting that the staff be reminded that it is improper for them to give such warnings or advice.

A motion by Mayor Jim Tonn of Coquitlam, that the 19.4 acres in the area be removed from the proposed park, was referred to the park committee for consideration.

Tonn said in a letter to the Board: "If the information I have received is correct, the cost for approximately 19.4 acres will be \$1.4 million, which I think you will agree is prohibitive in this case. Portions of Belcarra, Turtle Head and Bedwell Bay areas have been excluded from the park boundaries because of the cost factors."

Property Owners' Appeal Rejected

(*Vancouver Sun*, May 28th, 1973, page 9.)

The *Greater Vancouver Regional District* has rejected the appeal of 11 property owners that their land be excluded from the Belcarra Park.

The parks committee of the GVRD voted to keep the land at Whiskey Cove and Coombe within park boundaries.

The residents said their property was of little use increasing waterfront access. They also said that being designated as a park destroyed the property's resale value.

Placards Protest Board's Park Property Plan

(By Harvey Oberfeld, *Vancouver Sun*, May 30th, 1973, page 69.)

The *Greater Vancouver Regional District* met in extended closed session today after several residents from the Coombe and Whiskey Cove areas near *Belcarra Park* showed-up to protest inclusion of their property within the park boundary.

About 30 residents held-up placards when the regional district came to the matter of their property on its agenda.

The residents had presented a petition to the May 2nd meeting of the board asking that their properties be deleted from within the designated boundaries for eventual acquisition of land to be added to the area of *Belcarra Park*.

The placards asked why the regional district wanted to include their homes within the park when it already has 4,500 acres in the area.

The residents also wanted to know why decisions affecting their properties had been made earlier by the GVRD arbitrarily in closed meetings.

They said in a brief that the district has changed park boundaries before for various reasons and should do so now to protect the owners.

"We are afraid that the board fails to appreciate that the clear majority of the residents of Coombe and Whiskey Cove are opposed to being included in the park," they said.

A confrontation between board members arose when Ald. Harry Rankin of Vancouver moved to have the GVRD table the matter to give the residents to make further representations.

(A spokesman for the group told the *Vancouver Sun* later the group has obtained a lawyer and plans to fight the regional district if it proceeds with its plan to retain their properties within the designated marked boundary.)

GVRD chairman Alan Kelly tried to cut-off discussion, invoking a rarely-used rule limiting each board member to speaking only once on a particular subject.

Residents Win Delay

(*Vancouver Sun*, June 28th, 1973, page 44.)

The *Greater Vancouver Regional District* agreed Wednesday to postpone until September any final decision on including the Coombe and Whiskey Cove areas in *Belcarra Regional Park*.

Lawyer W. C. Johnstone sought the delay on behalf of residents who would eventually lose their homes if the areas are included inside the new park boundary.

He said the time is needed to assemble all the necessary material backgrounding the Coombe-Whiskey Cove problem and to prepare a proper presentation.

At the last board meeting, several residents waved placards protesting the board's preliminary decision to include their area within the park boundary.

Board members agreed to the delay on condition that the property owners do nothing in the meantime to change their own status by seeking building permits to develop further the area.

Park Protesters Win Reprieve

(By Bob Hendrickson, *Vancouver Province*, May 31st, 1973, page 11.)

A group protesting inclusion of their property in a proposed expansion of *Belcarra Park* won a month's reprieve Wednesday from the *Greater Vancouver Regional District* (GVRD) board.

About 25 residents of Coombe and Whiskey Cove, near Ioco, raised placards in a quiet demonstration when their petition opposing designation of their property as park came-up for discussion by the board.

The board agreed to delay for a month a vote on a park committee recommendation that the area be retained within the proposed boundaries of *Belcarra Park* so representation from the group could be heard.

Ald. Harry Rankin said: "People should be able to come to the board and not just to committees." (Under board rules delegations are not allowed to speak.)

Mayor Art Phillips noted that the board acts as a local council for the electoral areas, or unorganized areas, such as the Belcarra region. "This board has to be a little more accessible, particularly for unorganized areas, even if it means a little more inconvenience."

Although the GVRD delayed a decision on what property to include in the park expansion, the board voted for a 30-day freeze on building permit applications in the area and instructed staff to produce a draft bylaw to rezone the necessary areas for park purposes. A public hearing is required before a vote on a rezoning bylaw.

The question of public representation was raised again when the board approved a recommendation calling on the provincial government to suspend legislation requiring direct elections of regional representatives.

Mayor Ron Andrews of *North Vancouver District*, in presenting the recommendation, said the amendments to the *Municipal Act* introduced at the last legislative session cannot be suspended until the legislature meets again in October.

Belcarra Study Delay Proposed

(*Vancouver Sun*, October 29th, 1973.)

A *Greater Vancouver Regional District* staff report has recommended that the GVRD park committee continue its moratorium on purchase of park land at Belcarra until the area's political future is decided.

The report noted significant local opposition to the GVRD's land purchasing and recommended an overall policy review by the committee.

But, it said, the area is being considered for incorporation as a municipality and a general review should be delayed.

The GVRD halted all land purchasing in Belcarra last June following opposition from community groups and individual residents.

The park committee will receive the recommendation at a meeting on Wednesday.

GVRD Excludes 19.1 Acres From Belcarra

("Landowners Win In Park Fight", *Vancouver Province*, October 4th, 1973, page 35.)

The 4,500-acre *Belcarra Regional Park* will not include 19.1 contested acres of privately owned land known as the Coombe-Whiskey Cove property, The GVRD board decided Wednesday.

The decision delighted property owners in the audience from the area on the Indian Arm waterfront just inside the park's proposed south-west corner boundaries. But it angered GVRD park committee chairman Don Lanskaill.

"This is a bad precedent," Lanskaill told reporters as he walked from the meeting. "We're going to have to live with that for years. Every man and his dog will now want an exclusion from park boundaries so he can own prime land right next to a park."

The exclusion had its qualifications and GVRD directors made it clear that they were acting to allow owners to maintain a rural way of life and were not opening the way for intensive commercial development of the properties.

The formal vote was in favor of the principle of exclusion provided the yet to be written conditions are agreed to by the owners.

Richmond lawyer W. Charles Johnstone, representing the owners, said he had been advised by consultants that the cost of acquiring the land would be between \$1.5 and \$3.5 million.

"That is the cost," said his written brief, "to add something less than one-half of one per cent in area to a park already planned to be more than four times as large as Stanley Park in Vancouver."

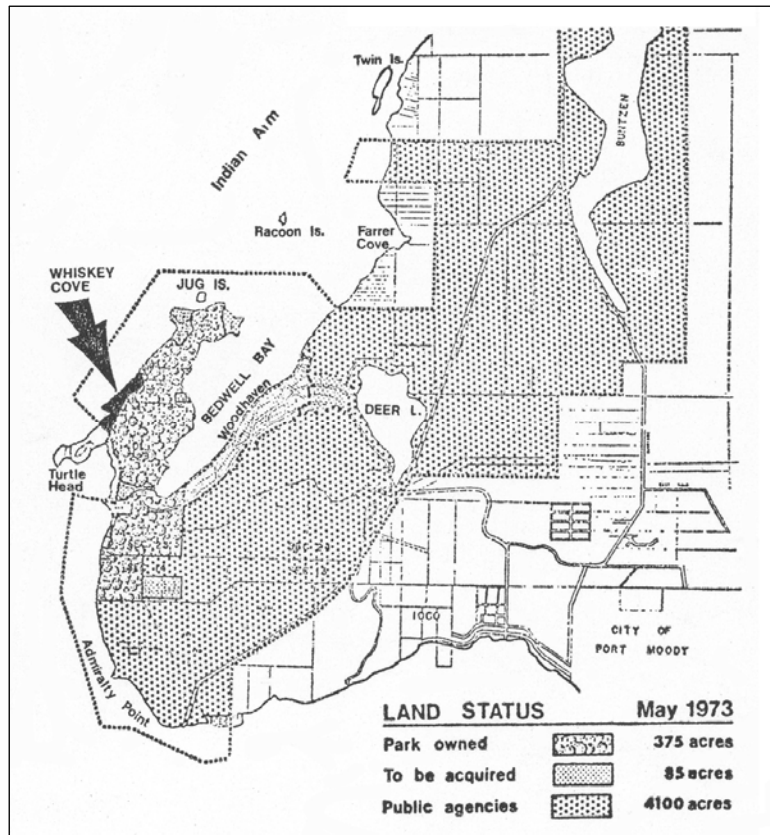
Johnstone quoted two experts:

- Park planner Arthur Cowie (who also is chairman of the *Vancouver Park Board*), was quoted as saying: "In my opinion the parks authority has not shown why this property is essential to the overall park development." He also was quoted as saying that earlier exclusions of similar, nearby properties created a precedent.
- Professor Michael Goldberg, of the *University of B.C.* faculty of *Commerce and Business Administration*, was quoted as saying the high cost of acquiring the property as a park was not justified by uniqueness, accessibility of capacity to sustain high intensity recreational services.

Johnstone said there still are rumors that the property is actually to be used as a site for the north end of a third crossing of Burrard Inlet.

Lanskaill, who protested a board decision that he reply at one, said he had been promised a copy of the property owners' brief well in advance of the meeting but didn't get one.

He denied that third crossing rumor; said the property was worth \$750,000 not \$3.5 million; and said earlier exclusions were property with more and relatively expensive houses.



Cut 31 Lots From Park – Ratepayers

(*Vancouver Sun*, March 4th, 1974, page 14.)

The *Belcarra Ratepayers Association* has asked the *Greater Vancouver Regional District* to exclude 31 subdivision lots from the *Belcarra Regional Park*.

In a letter to the GVRD, the ratepayer group said it was “greatly surprised and deeply shocked” to learn that the regional district board might consider changing its decision to exclude the Whiskey Cove–Coombe subdivided lots from the park.

The board voted in October to exclude the owners’ land from the park, but a report made public last week suggested that the decision be rescinded and the Whiskey cove area be annexed immediately.

The ratepayers’ letter, due for consideration at Wednesday’s GVRD meeting, states in part: “The proposed *Belcarra Regional Park* will have many miles of waterfrontage on Indian Arm, Sasamat Lake and Buntzen Lake, as well as approximately 4,500 acres of land.”

“The GVRD has not shown sufficient cause for acquisition of the 31 lots, subdivided and taxable as residential lots since 1912.”

Eleven property owners are involved.

GVRD Lashed For Park Shuffle

(*Vancouver Province*, March 7th, 1974, page 42A.)

The bureaucracy of the *Greater Vancouver Regional District* was publicly tongue-lashed Wednesday by Vancouver Mayor Art Phillips on its handling of proposed property expropriations for *Belcarra Regional Park*.

Phillips was speaking in favour of referral to a small committee of negotiations with 11 property owners in the Coombe–Whiskey Cove area on the southeastern shore of Indian Arm. After hearing a recitation of staff foot-dragging and obstruction from the property owners’ lawyer W. C. Johnstone, Phillips said, “I think the staff handling of it (the negotiations) was disgraceful and I think the board’s handling of it has been disgraceful... These people have been given the bureaucratic shuffle in the worst sort of way...”

“The staff have made some proposals here ... one an idiotic proposal that the GVRD should buy the land today and pay part of the price and then pay the rest in today’s dollars 30 years hence.”

The board had voted last October to exclude the properties from the park provided owners did not make use of the residentially owned land in a way that interfered with the neighbouring 4,550-acre Belcarra Park.

Park committee chairman Ald. Don Lanskill of West Vancouver protested the October decision because he said it would create a precedent for exclusion demands that would haunt the board in future park acquisitions.

After a meeting of the board in January — closed to the public — GVRD chairman Allan Kelly told reporters the decision was being rethought because many of the board members were not aware of all the facts in the matter when they voted. They didn’t know that two of the owners held 22 lots out of the 31 involved and that most of the lots had no houses on them. They were being held in some cases as retirement home sites and in others were either vacant or had summer cabins on them.

In February Johnstone met GVRD officials to discuss proposed concessions some of the more permanent owners were being required to meet to stay on as residents. He described some of the requirements as contrary to natural justice and contrary to the intent of the board. It was partly these demands that angered Phillips.

The board named a committee of four politicians, at the suggestion of Vancouver Ald. Harry Rankin, to meet the owners and work out a more human deal.

Exclusion of Lots From Park Favored

(Vancouver Province, April 22nd, 1974.)

A committee of the GVRD will recommend that 31 subdivided lots in the Coombe and Whiskey Cove areas be excluded from *Belcarra Regional Park*.

The recommendation, made Sunday at a meeting of the four man committee, calls for a return to the GVRD position taken on the properties last October.

Since that time, the district has considered changing its stand and including the properties in the park area.

Year long deliberations on the fate of the lots have angered area property owners requesting that their land be excluded from the park.

Alderman Harry Rankin, a member of the committee, said the recommendation is one of four to be put to the GVRD meeting on Wednesday.

The committee also will advise the district to take first refusal on the private lots if any are put up for sale and to negotiate to buy the one lot which fronts on Whiskey Cove.

It will also ask that one piece of property be re-plotted to provide a few large lots rather than many small ones.

Rankin said the committee took into consideration that the district already holds 4,500 acres of park land in the area and that the 1,700 feet of frontage is not a large area.

"One looks at the overall picture in terms of regional park need and one looks at the individual picture and the right of the individual and one comes up with a compromise," he said.

The original GVRD plan to include the 31 lots in the park near Indian Arm drew stiff protests from residents, who complained that the district failed to consult with residents before making its decision.

Protests dimmed in October when the district voted to exclude the property, but flared again in January when it was learned that the GVRD was considering rescinding the decision and annexing the properties.

A committee consisting of Rankin, Coquitlam Mayor Jim Tonn, Burnaby Alderman Alan Emmott, and electoral area representative W.B. Crawford was named to consider the matter.

Property Owner Requests Court To Bar Expropriation For Park

(*Vancouver Sun*, April 24th, 1974, page 15.)

The owner of property near the proposed *Belcarra Regional Park* has gone to Supreme Court to fight expropriation of his land for a park.

Harold Lando, of 1234 Matthews [Vancouver], is seeking a court declaration that a bylaw under which the *Greater Vancouver Regional District* seeks to expropriate the 53.5 acre property is null and void.

Lando also seeks an injunction prohibiting the district from expropriating or taking steps toward it in relation to the Belcarra Park regional expropriation bylaw.

He also wants a court ruling that he is entitled to enjoy the land and not be deprived of it "without a fair hearing in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice."

Meanwhile, a group of other property owners adjacent to the park won a partial victory today in their battle to win exclusion from it.

The district's board voted to exclude from the park boundaries 8.2 acres of an 11-acre property in the Coombe-Whiskey Cove area originally sought by GVRD park officials for inclusion.

The vote climaxed almost a year of negotiations, debate and protest by the owners of adjacent 31 subdivided lots.

Board members decided, however, that while most of the site should be excluded, a three-acre parcel consisting of lots not occupied by the owners should be included within the park boundary.

The district also retained the right of first refusal should any of the other properties be sold in the future.

The decision to grant the owners' plea for exclusion was based on a recommendation from a special committee set-up last month.

It consisted of Coquitlam mayor Jim Tonn, Vancouver Alderman Harry Rankin, Burnaby Alderman Alan Emmott and loco-Buntzen electoral area representative Wallace Crawford.

GVRD park committee chairman Alderman Don Lanskail of West Vancouver charged today that the committee, which recommended the exclusion, was unfairly constituted.

The park committee has led the battle for acquisition of the site and Lanskail said the district was setting a dangerous precedent by excluding the lots.

He questioned in what state Stanley Park would be now if politicians years ago had decided to allow housing that existed at the time to remain.

Belcarra Park Dispute Solved – With \$200,000

(Vancouver Province, April 25th, 1974.)

A long running dispute between some residents near Belcarra on the loco peninsula and the parks committee of the GVRD was resolved Wednesday — but the GVRD may have to pay up over \$200,000.

The fight has been over whether 31 residential lots within the proposed *Belcarra Park* should be excluded from the park's jurisdiction; or, if they were to remain inside the park, whether the properties would be expropriated or the owners allowed to remain as long as they gave the GVRD first refusal at time of sale. The properties are in the Coombe-Whisky Cove area.

The board agreed to split the properties in two. About half will be excluded and allowed to develop but the other half will remain within the park.

Those within the park — the Strutt and Robson properties — must give the GVRD first refusal.

And even while this decision was being made, Robert Robson informed the board he was willing to sell now.

The board then held an in-camera session to deliberate on property acquisition.

Outside, Robson said he estimates the market value of his five lots for sale at “well over \$200,000.” He said he was concerned about whether the GVRD would pay-up immediately or try to defer payment.

He said he may have to apply for a building permit — which requires a decision within 90 days — to force the issue.

The GVRD already faces a Supreme Court action regarding potential expropriation of 53.5 acres for the park. The owner, Harold Lando, says he is contesting his right to enjoy the land and not be deprived of it “without a fair hearing.”

The decision regarding Coombe-Whiskey Cove residents also produced sparks between an advisory committee looking into the dispute and the board's parks committee.

Alderman Don Lanskail (West Vancouver), chairman of the parks committee, which has advocated all the properties should come within the park, said the advisory committee was “slanted” and composed of “the most vociferous opponents.” The advisory committee had recommended all the Coombe-Whiskey Cove area be excluded.

Coquitlam Mayor Jim Tonn, chairman of the advisory committee, denied the advisory committee had been slanted and said it had not consulted with Lanskail and others of the parks committee “because we have been hearing from you over the past year.”

And advisory committee member Mayor Art Phillips of Vancouver said at one point: “I am again appalled at the lack of homework done by the parks committee.”

Lanskail maintained it is as important to free Belcarra Park from all development as it was when Stanley Park was set-up.

Residents Fear Losing Their Homes

(“Park Residents Blast GVRD”, *The Herald*, August 12th, 1975.)

Charges that the *Greater Vancouver Regional District* is trying to squeeze some 1,200 *Belcarra Park* area residents out are completely unfounded, says Coquitlam Mayor Jim Tonn — a director of the GVRD.

Last week Mrs. Verna Barrett, loco-Buntzen’s representative on the GVRD board, claimed more and more of the area is being swallowed up for Belcarra regional park without regard to the interests, wishes or concerns of the residents.

“They’re just trying to eliminate us out here completely,” she said.

“That’s just not happening,” snapped Tonn, when contacted by *The Herald*.

“There is a community plan being developed and the residents will have their say in the development of the area,” the Coquitlam mayor said.

He countercharged that the Belcarra area residents “want to have a nice regional park but nobody but themselves to enjoy it.”

“You can’t have utopia,” Tonn said.

Tonn admitted that the loco-Buntzen area is being considered as a possible part of an amalgamated, or restructured, Coquitlam embracing Port Coquitlam, parts of Coquitlam and Port Moody.

However, Mrs. Barrett feels the GVRD is still stepping on the Belcarra residents.

She said since 1968, the proposed boundaries of the park have been expanded through land purchases and major expropriations.

The projected size now is about 4,550 acres, with two of the expropriations still being contested in the courts.

Mrs. Barrett said the GVRD has been proceeding “willy-nilly”, grabbing up land without holding public hearings or discussions with local residents to see how they feel about the huge park’s development.

Tonn, on Monday however, said that the hearings are yet to be scheduled. He said each resident will have the opportunity to have his or her say in the planning process.

The real problem, according to Tonn, is the residents “want all the amenities of the park while still paying their nominal 10-mill levy.”

“Some of these people have been here since about the turn of the century. I just don’t feel this is justified at all,” Mrs. Barrett said.

The GVRD board, made up of mayors and other elected officials from 17 Vancouver area communities, is supposed to act as the council looking after the interests of the unorganized electoral area.

“They’re not doing that at all. Most of them haven’t even ever been out here,” complained Mrs. Barrett.

She said that while the GVRD is taking over more and more land, it contributes nothing toward the cost of providing police, fire or other services in the area.

Mrs. Barrett noted the district’s proposal now is to change the original park boundary, expanding into the Woodhaven–Bedwell Bay subdivision to establish a large parking area on the west side of Sasamat Lake.

The GVRD has paid \$212,000 so far to acquire property for this project and will have to spend at least another \$230,000 to obtain the remaining sites, she said.

The original estimate in 1971 was \$205,000 to acquire these properties, she said.

The parking lot and a beach could easily be established on the east side of the lake on land owned by the province, Mrs. Barrett suggested.

That would give the present residents their privacy and provide a flatter beach, a better septic tank disposal area and three hours more sunlight for bathers, she said.

Efforts to get the GVRD or its park committee adopt that proposal have fallen on deaf ears, Mrs. Barrett said.

She also criticized the way the regional district has been considering most matters relating to the park at in-camera sessions, away from public scrutiny.

"I can see when it comes to actual discussions of money, that should be in camera, but I can't see so many of the other things they do being in camera as well," she said.

District chairman Allan Kelly said the GVRD has "bent over backwards to meet the wishes of the residents."

"In fact, the park boundaries were set up years ago and we've been changing them ever since just to accommodate the demands of the residents out there," he said.

The district is acquiring the private lots on the west side of Sasamat Lake because the provincial government has indicated it will turn over lots it holds in the same area once this is completed, he explained.

Land on the east side of the lake is leased out and is not available for park use right now, he said.

Mrs. Barrett said an independent commission should be set up, including local residents as well as representatives of the various levels of government involved, to examine the park boundaries and plan development.

The commission could also investigate how much validity there is in the premise behind the GVRD park plan — that the federal and provincial governments and their agencies are willing to cede at no cost about 4,100 acres in the area for park purposes, she added.

Meanwhile, a GVRD source said a map outlining the final proposed boundaries for the park is ready for presentation to the district's park committee later this month at an in-camera session.