

Robert D. Flitton - Principal Player

Bear Mountain Resort Debacle

by Ben Isitt (6 December 2006)

At the centre of the Bear Mountain Resort travesty is a man named Robert D. Flitton, Residential Development Manager for Bear Mountain, who has an interesting history. According to a biography on the Senate of Canada website, "Mr. Flitton was a self-employed businessman in the British Columbia real estate and development industry." In 1982 he was elected National President of the Canadian Home Builders Association and chaired the CHBA's Government Liaison Committee for 2 years. He then moved into the BC provincial government, serving as a Deputy Minister for five years under Social Credit premiers Bill Bennett and William Vanderzalm.

Flitton's appointment as Deputy Minister of Lands by Bennett was discussed in the BC Legislature on 17 May 1988, during a debate on the Riverview-Westwood Plateau development in Port Moody and Coquitlam and the role of provincially owned BC Enterprise Corporation in disbursing those former Crown Lands. NDP MLA Bob Williams, a professional planner, said: "The deputy minister was Robert Flitton. Mr. Flitton has been an active, card-carrying member of the Social Credit Party through most of his career. Mr. Flitton was a vice-president of the Social Credit Party in Kamloops. Mr. Flitton was active on the executive of the Social Credit Party in Prince George. Mr. Flitton..."

Williams was then interrupted on a point of order by Lands and Forests Minister Grace McCarthy, who accused Williams of "beginning one of his personal attacks on a citizen of the province, in this chamber where he has immunity." Williams resumed: "This deal is still being delivered by this minister through this Crown corporation. This deal, hatched by Mr. Flitton, who was a Social Credit hack and then made deputy minister, one of the first hacks to be made deputy minister.... This was one of the most clear-cut cases of patronage and a Social Credit hack becoming the deputy." McCarthy interrupted Williams two more times, but he continued.

"The land is being sold through the Enterprise Corporation: the deals that Mr. [Peter S.] Hyndman hatched with Mr. Flitton are continuing. That deal is ongoing, and you are currently responsible for it, Madam Minister. I don't blame you for trying to isolate yourself from it, but you're tied; you're part of the package.... You look at the subdivision of those lands: beautiful slopes above River-view, from the Lougheed Highway to the top of the hill, pulled out from the old Riverview Hospital lands; 25 different sales, many of which you have been participant to in the past year through your responsibility. But the players have done extremely well out of this exercise. It's kind of relevant, particularly when we reflect on the Expo deal as well. To see how well a person can do when he makes a deal for a big package of land: then he can break it up into the pieces. They do incredibly well."

A year earlier, on 14 July 1987, Williams told the Legislature: "B.C. Place includes all kinds of other activities. It includes all kinds of land projects, such as the member for Victoria has been concerned about: projects in Riverview, Westwood Plateau, Songhees, B.C. Place in Vancouver, Coquitlam suburbs and Whistler...Now, through this legislation, you also want to make the activities retroactive and legalize the activities of this minister over the recent months in terms of the various land deals she has been pulling together without legislative authority whatsoever...."

What kind of process is there for the selling of these lands.... The flogging of land at Songhees, the inner harbour real estate values that are extraordinary.... What kind of public process is there? What kind of tendering is there? What kind will there be? Not a word. Yet we know the deals have been cut. They are proceeding. There's a potential here for fire sales and favouritism."

Robert Flitton served as BC Deputy Minister of Lands and Forests from 1986-1987, negotiating these transactions. His name came up again in the Legislature on 6 April 1989, in relation to the non-compliance of Doman Industries with the terms of forest licences signed in 1977 for the Stathcona and mid-Coast areas. Doman had agreed to open a pulp mill no later than 1981 as a condition of access to Crown timberlands. The mill never

opened. But Flitton was involved in the decision to permit Doman to maintain cut levels. Another controversy implicated Flitton and Vanderzalm in allegations of preferential treatment related to the proposed Powder Mountain development near Whistler. Flitton later served as Deputy Minister of Transportation and Energy. He left the provincial government around 1991 when Social Credit was voted out of office.

Flitton was promptly hired as Government Relations Manager for Doman Industries, serving in this capacity for the next 14 years. In this position, he was Agent for Western Forest Products (a Doman subsidiary), which owned considerable land in the Highlands (where Flitton resides). On 17 February 2003, he appeared before the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, representing Doman Industries on the softwood lumber issue.

In 12 April 2002, at a public hearing in Highlands, he spoke in favour of the LGB9 development proposal, as a private citizen. In January 2005, Flitton was appointed to the district of Highlands Community Infrastructure and Services Select Committee and the Community Hall Task Force Committee. Beginning in May 2005, he was part of the 'Were You Aware' lobby group formed in the Highlands around development issues (see: <http://www.wereyouaware.ca>). On 21 June 2005, Flitton spoke in favour of the LGB9 Highlands zoning bylaw at a special meeting held in Langford, which was later declared null and void by a judge for occurring outside the Highlands.

On 22 February 2006, Flitton addressed the CRD Planning and Protective Services Committee, urging approval of the Highlands Regional Context Statement (which would move the CRD Urban Containment Boundary to allow for LGB9 expansion into Highlands). Flitton identified himself at that meeting as having been "involved in the management of this land for 14 years" and the "person who consolidated this property so someone like Bear Mountain could develop." Flitton also said that traffic issues related to the LGB9 expansion "will be resolved by a road through Bear Mountain development to the island highway." On 18 April 2006, Flitton again addressed Highlands council supporting the Regional Context Statement.

On 12 September 2006, Flitton appears in the minutes of Langford city council in his capacity as Residential Projects Manager for the LGB9.

Sources:

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8. District of Highlands, Council Minutes, 12 April 2002, 6 June 2005, 21 June 2005; 18 April 2006; Annual Report 2005
9. CRD Planning and Protective Services Committee, Minutes, 22 February 2006
10. City of Langford, Council Minutes, 12 September 2006
11. Were You Aware (Highlands), Issues 2-14, May 2005-June 2006