

We are submitting this in the hopes that it can be a model of how to take back control for other communities who are undergoing similar “public consultation meetings” with Sitepath contractor Brian Gregg and his PR team:

Gregg along with two Telus employees plus a security guard (!) and a female door greeter (she was his sister), came to the Comox Valley for two “public consultation” meetings, one for a proposed 62-meter tower on Dove Creek Road, Courtenay and one for a 43-meter tower on Ellenor Road, Comox.

The Dove Creek meeting on Nov. 9th was in a big hall (quite a distance from the actual Dove Creek community who have their own smaller hall), presumably so Brian and his team could spread out their display signs and keep people far apart. They no doubt were already well aware of and prepared for the strength of the Dove Creek community, who have been working hard on this tower issue for almost a year.

Thanks to Marcus and Sharon's newsletters the community knew ahead of time what the set-up would be and what to expect from Gregg and co. Thus, we all arrived at the same time shortly after the doors opened, and we were very cohesive and well prepared. Brian and his team all wore masks (were they trying to hide their faces?). About 50-70 people in total arrived **over the evening**, armed with their own microphone and cordless amp, their handouts, their independent research, their questions, and their courage. To Brian's shock, these folks soon gathered in the front of the room and announced that the “public consultation” everyone had come for was going to begin. Brian tried to take control, even taking over the mic temporarily and threatening to just pack up and leave if people didn't follow his “open house” format, which the crowd let him know was not what they were there for. Then the Telus team rushed around and took down their posters and retreated to the side of the room, where they started talking loudly among themselves so it was hard for people to hear even with the mic. But the community persisted and eventually Brian and the 2 others that worked for Telus were forced to come to the center of the circle and answer questions (with their masks on and eyes kept to the floor). The most stunning moment was when, in answer to the numerous health questions put to them, Brian said, "We're not here to discuss health issues!" and the crowd said, "Well, WE are!" A community member stepped up and called them out on that, asking what right they had “to limit or tell us what concerns WE should have and

could speak about. WE should be deciding what concerns we want to talk about, NOT you!” And everyone loudly agreed!

And they of course gave their usual scripted answers about not being medical doctors or biologists and that they were just following all the Health Canada guidelines including Safety Code 6. Someone else had some technical questions about frequencies, but they cleverly avoided those by saying that they weren't technicians. The question that we should have asked is: If you are not doctors or biologists or tech experts and therefore can't answer our questions, then WHY did you not bring along a team that included these experts???

Some folks with a big poultry business who apparently live 600 ft from the proposed tower site seemed to be the most upset of all, and called them out on liability to livestock, pointing out that the tower site is right smack in the middle of the prime agricultural land in this whole area. The Telus guys admitted no studies had been done on chickens or livestock, to which a community member replied that the research needs to be done BEFORE the towers go up, NOT afterwards! The meeting ran 30 minutes overtime, and the community left considering it a huge victory, feeling proud for having stood up against these professional marketers!

The next night at the Ellenor Rd tower meeting held in a large school gym in Comox, the community did not have the history of the Dove Creekers who have been onto the tower issue for a long time, and thus they were not unified, straggling in over the course of the two hours, doing the big circuit of the spaced-out posters, maybe attempting a question to one of the Telus team for which they got a pat answer, and then leaving. Brian and his unmasked team (no viruses in Comox apparently!) were definitely on the defensive, and they were determined not to have a repeat of the night before. The community member who brought the mic the previous night was told upon entrance that there would be no mics allowed.

The community member who was supposed to MC our question and answer session had, a few weeks before, sent a pre-Notice of Liability (essentially a list of questions) to Brian and the property owner, and when Brian learned who she was, he became very agitated and hostile, warning her to never contact “our landowner” again and accusing her of pulling up land titles to find his name. (Obviously the subject of liability hit a big nerve!) Brian then walked away refusing to talk to her or answer any questions, and pulled aside the elected official in attendance and proceeded to complain loudly to

him. This elected official, who is director of the Dove Creek area but not the Comox area, had also been at the Dove Creek hall the night before and had actually stepped up to help play an MC role. However, he now sided with Brian and told us that the "open house" was "on Telus's dime" and we needed to respect their format. Given how few people were in the gym at any one time over the course of the two hours, it did not seem like we could successfully pull off the same MC-styled question and answer tactic, especially without a microphone. This area director was asked why the CVRD did not host a proper unbiased and fair "public consultation" meeting, and his answer was that it is not part of the "public process", so not their responsibility. We were all just left to wander around and talk individually with Brian and the two Telus individuals - none of whom wanted to discuss the real issues, questions and concerns with the proposed tower. Among other evasions they managed to pull off, a local electrical engineer tried to educate Brian on Safety Code 6 with its outdated thermal effects studies, but Brian flatly refused to even talk to him!

So Brian and co basically got the format they wanted, with small groups of two or three gathered around each well-spaced-out Telus marketer guy. However, a number of people who came and went told us that they had come expecting a presentation, and a proper question and answer session, and they expressed their disappointment (and in some cases disgust) at this sham "public consultation meeting" where they did not feel that their concerns had been heard at all. In the end, we came home from this second meeting with a definite sense of dissatisfaction, but we did manage to give out quite a few handouts, and at least we again did what we could to help inform the public.

Disappointingly, neither of the property owners showed up at the meetings to hear the public sentiment and answer questions. If these meetings are meant to fulfill the Regional District's "public consultation" obligation, IT SHOULD BE A REQUIREMENT FOR THE LANDOWNERS TO ATTEND!

Near the end of the evening, Brian said to one local woman at the Comox meeting, "We were wondering if this was going to be like a travelling road show. Are these people going to show up wherever we go now?" Reflecting on Brian's comment, the woman's husband later said, "Wouldn't that be great - you should have said 'What a great idea! Can I get a list of where you'll be next?' "

In conclusion, our advice to all who will be facing similar situations is to ORGANIZE AHEAD OF TIME so that you arrive together on time, come with a strong appointed MC and armed with sound equipment or loud enough voices, have your lists of questions prepared and your research documents ready to pin them down, and don't allow them to get away with being evasive. Now that we in the Comox Valley have set a precedent, they will no doubt be much more on guard about losing control. BE COURAGEOUS and demand the public consultation meeting that we all deserve!

NOTE: Our next steps are to encourage all our new sign-ups to contact (1) the local body that has the power to grant or not grant concurrence and the siting permit, and (2) our local MP, instructing her to take our concerns to federal authorities. Along the lines of Dr. Magda Havas's BRAG PROJECT, we also plan to start documenting EMF readings (with video evidence of date/time/reading/location) on properties around the proposed towers so that we have a baseline of comparison should the towers go ahead. This is strong empirical evidence that could be used in court if needed.

Submitted by the Comox Valley team against towers.