

## 2012-2013 Vancity Correspondence re "We Want Our Co-ops Back"

*This is an archive of correspondence between Vancity Credit Union and Mark Latham, from May 2012 through February 2013, regarding Vancity's governance. The letters from Patrice Pratt were in encoded pdf files, so the only way I found to put all the correspondence into this one file, was to make this an encoded pdf also. Unfortunately that makes it hard to copy and quote parts of it.*

from: Mark Latham  
to: Virginia Weiler  
cc: Board\_Directors@vancity.com  
**date: Wed, May 9, 2012** at 3:27 PM  
subject: Feedback on Vancity election process

Hi Virginia --

Good to meet you at the AGM yesterday. Thank you for inviting my feedback on Vancity's election process. So far I've written two blog posts about it, so I've appended them below. In case pdf format may be more convenient, I've also attached a pdf with the same two blog posts.

I'm sure I have a lot to learn about the governance of Vancity, and why it has evolved to its present form. I welcome any feedback from and discussion with you, other board members, or Vancity staff. Please feel free to contact me by email or phone.

Regards,  
Mark Latham  
[These two posts linked below were appended to this email:]  
[@Vancity credit union election: Who I plan to vote for & why](#)  
[@Vancity credit union election results: biased by info control](#)

from: Virginia Weiler  
to: Mark Latham  
cc: Thomas Dolan, Allen Garr  
**date: Wed, May 9, 2012** at 11:34 PM  
subject: Re: Feedback on Vancity election process

Mark,

It was great to meet you last night and thank you for writing in to the board as we discussed. I am passing your comments onto the nominations and election committee. I will fwd PDFs by separate email.

Best regards,

Virginia Weiler

from: Mark Latham  
to: Virginia Weiler, Allen Garr  
cc: Board\_Directors@vancity.com  
**date: Wed, Sep 12, 2012** at 11:09 AM  
subject: Re: Feedback on Vancity election process

Virginia, Allen --

I appreciate your openness to Vancity member input via email and at the 2012 AGM. I'm following up on our previous emails below. Does the Board or the nominations and election committee have any responses to the issues I raised in my two blog posts (in email below), and to my suggestion at the 2012 AGM to have a year-round online forum, hosted on the Vancity website, for logged-in members to discuss any Vancity issues with each other?

Thanks...

-- Mark

from: Mark Latham  
to: Virginia Weiler, Allen Garr  
cc: Board\_Directors@vancity.com  
**date: Mon, Sep 17, 2012** at 4:44 PM  
subject: Re: Feedback on Vancity election process

I've expanded my earlier blog posts into the attached paper and spreadsheet. I'd be happy to get any feedback on it, including corrections, other perspectives, advice etc. Today's blog post below.

-- Mark

[We Want Our Co-ops Back @MEC @Vancity #CIRA](#)

Today I released the first draft of my paper We Want Our Co-ops Back, along with a spreadsheet Co-op Democracy Scorecard. From the paper:

We can reform all our large voter organizations, including democracies and corporations, by starting with reforming our co-ops (including financial co-ops such as credit unions). Most large institutions lack effective democratic control by voters. Even though citizens of democracies can vote, corporate shareowners can vote, and co-op members can vote, those voting rights are ineffective if voters lack the information, insight and nomination rights necessary to elect the best leaders. This paper outlines how we can better implement the fundamental co-op principle of democratic member control, even when co-ops grow very large. Later we can apply these ideas to our democracies and corporations.

This paper proposes rules to improve the democratic accountability of co-op leaders to members, organized in nine topic sections. To contrast these proposals with existing rules, I cite examples from three Canadian organizations where I am a member: Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC), Vancity Credit Union, and the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA).

I welcome your comments!

Posted by Mark Latham at 12:42 PM

Labels: CIRA, Cooperatives, Credit Unions, Democracy, MEC, Vancity

2 attachments —

WeWantOurCo-opsBack.pdf

Co-opDemocracyScorecard.xls

from: Virginia Weiler  
to: Mark Latham  
**date: Thu, Sep 20, 2012** at 7:37 PM  
subject: Re: Feedback on Vancity election process

Dear Mark,

Thanks for your note and research paper which Governance is reviewing. You'll hear back from us soon...

I wonder if you're a member of the Vancity online my2cents panel?

There are a couple thousand Vancity members and although it historically has had more of a market feedback focus, they have also canvassed on governance.

If you are interested, let me know.

Best regards,

Virginia

from: Mark Latham  
to: Virginia Weiler  
**date: Fri, Sep 21, 2012** at 10:25 AM  
subject: Re: Feedback on Vancity election process

Thanks Virginia for suggesting that I join the my2cents panel -- good idea! I found the website (my2cents-vancity.ca) and will register when it reopens for new members on Sept 26.

-- Mark

from: Mark Latham <mark@votermedia.org>  
to: Virginia Weiler <Virginia\_Weiler@vancity.com>  
**date: Fri, Sep 21, 2012** at 10:25 AM  
subject: Re: Feedback on Vancity election process

Hi Virginia --

Yesterday I signed up with my2cents, and look forward to contributing there.

I'm continuing to revise my paper and spreadsheet, so I've attached the latest versions FYI. Here's a paragraph I added on page 22:

In January 2012, the British Columbia Credit Union Governance Task Force submitted its report Advancing Governance to the B.C. Financial Institutions Commission (FICOM). It contains many valuable recommendations, but seems lacking in effective ways to reinforce the accountability of boards. I have submitted this paper to FICOM, with the summary of democratic features in the scorecard spreadsheet, as a way to fill that gap.

-- Mark

Board of Directors:  
Virginia Weiler, Chair  
Jan O'Brien, Vice Chair  
Anita Braha  
Teresa Conway  
Allen Garr  
Greg McDade  
Patrice Pratt  
Bob Williams  
David Wong

October 18, 2012

Via Email

[mark@votermedia.org](mailto:mark@votermedia.org)

Dear Mr. Latham,

Thank you for your recent emails regarding the Vancity Board of Directors' elections.

I understand that you have previously spoken with Virginia Weiler and Allen Garr about the Vancity election process. As Virginia and Allen's terms of office end in 2013, I have been asked to update you in my capacity as both Board member and Chair of this year's Nominations and Election Committee ("NEC").

I have reviewed your email correspondence and subsequent paper entitled "*We Want Our Co-ops Back...*". I found your paper most interesting and will distribute it to the NEC to read as part of its review of the feedback and recommendations that arose from the 2012 election. The NEC is now working on the process for next year's election and, as part of that, will conduct a review of the election material. We will, for example, look at improvements in the way we communicate with candidates and members or, as you stated in your paper, how to provide the membership with an "*information-rich election process*".

Specifically:

- The NEC will be updating the Election Guidelines. These will be posted on Vancity.com year round as a useful tool for those running in next year's election and future prospective candidates.
- We will review how to better explain the criteria for ideal skills and attributes. I see this as particularly important given the feedback we received from members after the last election: there were definite gaps in how this component was communicated and most of our members were simply not aware that Vancity is guided by the law and its regulator to maintain a strong and efficient governance structure. I know that the NEC is keen to ensure that members are also better apprised of the correlation between the skills and attributes criteria, the candidates (especially in terms of recommendations) and what this ultimately means for voters.

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- The NEC will also review how all candidates are presented in the election material, and will consider a recommendation from last year's committee to permit candidates to publish testimonials from their supporters and those who have nominated or endorsed their campaigns.

There was some concern expressed during last year's election about candidates being unable to speak openly to voters. As part of its review of the Election Guidelines, the NEC will seek to clarify the information and instructions for candidates on this issue. Essentially, candidates are permitted to discuss anything with members, take questions and even agree to take issues to the Board if elected. They simply cannot commit the Board to a specific course of action.

I acknowledge that you have made other suggestions in your correspondence and would reassure you that, although I have not referenced them here, these will be considered as part of the NEC's overall review.

I always appreciate the opportunity to engage with our members and, thanks to all of the feedback received from members after the last election, I truly believe that voters in the 2013 election will be better informed than ever before.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patrice Pratt".

Patrice Pratt  
Vancity Board of Directors

from: Mark Latham  
to: Board Directors <board\_directors@vancity.com>  
**date: Fri, Oct 19, 2012** at 10:17 AM  
subject: Re: Feedback on Vancity election process

Dear Vancity Directors --

Thank you for this response. Do you have any objection to my sharing it publicly?

Regards,  
Mark Latham



Board of Directors:  
Virginia Weiler, Chair  
Jan O'Brien, Vice Chair  
Anita Braha  
Teresa Conway  
Allen Garr  
Greg McDade  
Patrice Pratt  
Bob Williams  
David Wong

October 23, 2012

Via Email

[mark@votermedia.org](mailto:mark@votermedia.org)

Dear Mark,

Thank you for your inquiry about sharing the content of our response to you. The response was sent to you and intended for your information. You are free to draw on this for your own use. We intend to continue listening and sharing any changes we make to our election process with our members over the next months as is our usual practice.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrice Pratt".

Patrice Pratt  
Vancity Board of Directors

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Vancouver City Savings Credit Union

from: Mark Latham  
to: Board Directors <board\_directors@vancity.com>  
**date: Tue, Oct 23, 2012** at 2:26 PM  
subject: Re: Feedback on Vancity election process

Dear Vancity Directors --

Thank you for your October 23 response, saying I'm free to draw on your October 18 response for my own use. Do you have any objection to my also sharing it publicly? You expressed no objection to that. If you do have an objection, what is it?

Regards,  
Mark Latham





Board of Directors:  
Virginia Weiler, Chair  
Jan O'Brien, Vice Chair  
Anita Braha  
Teresa Conway  
Allen Garr  
Greg McDade  
Patrice Pratt  
Bob Williams  
David Wong

October 26, 2012

Via Email

[mark@votermedia.org](mailto:mark@votermedia.org)

Dear Mark,

Apologies for not being clearer in our previous response. No, we don't have an objection to you sharing our correspondence with others.

Sincerely,

Patrice Pratt  
Vancity Board of Directors

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[vancity.com](http://vancity.com)



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Vancouver City Savings Credit Union

from: Mark Latham  
to: Board Directors <board\_directors@vancity.com>  
**date: Mon, Dec 3, 2012** at 3:39 PM  
subject: Year-round info & engagement for Vancity members

Dear Vancity Directors:

Thank you again for Patrice Pratt's October 18, 2012 response (letter attached) to my feedback on Vancity's election process. I'm looking forward to potential improvements being considered for the 2013 election process.

I also appreciate Patrice Pratt taking the time to review my paper "We Want Our Co-ops Back" (attached). As she mentioned in her letter, "I acknowledge that you have made other suggestions in your correspondence and would reassure you that, although I have not referenced them here, these will be considered as part of the NEC's overall review."

Some of the key recommendations in my paper advocate a year-round system for informing and engaging Vancity members, not only during the election process. Since this goes beyond the NEC's purview, I would like to ask you:

Do you plan to create a year-round online member forum? Do you plan to create a competition for informing members, in which members vote to allocate award funds? For both these questions: If so, when? If not, why not?

As I have shared my questions and concerns with Vancity members, I likewise plan to share your responses with them. I look forward to continuing our exchange of ideas on how to improve Vancity's governance.

Sincerely,  
Mark Latham

Board of Directors:  
Virginia Weiler, Chair  
Jan O'Brien, Vice Chair  
Anita Braha  
Teresa Conway  
Allen Garr  
Greg McDade  
Patrice Pratt  
Bob Williams  
David Wong

January 3, 2013

Via Email

[mark@votermedia.org](mailto:mark@votermedia.org)

Dear Mr. Latham;

Thank you for your letter and your interest in Vancity's election process.

We do not have any plans for an online member forum at this time. We are actively engaged and involved with our members in person, in our branches and Member Services Centre and at a great variety of events each year. In addition, our member research activities, website and social media are examples of other channels where we are gaining our members' insights and answering their questions.

This year we completed the installation of digital signage in each of our branches and this has provided us with another great way to update our members on what is happening at the credit union.

As a financial cooperative, members elect the Board of Directors who, on behalf of all our members, guide the development of strategy for Vancity. The Board then provides oversight of the implementation of the strategic plan.

The process for allocating Shared Success funds is an important part of this overall strategic plan, and is focused on creating as much impact with the funds in areas of need throughout our branch network as is possible. We fund initiatives that contribute to the overall well-being of our communities and that grow the local economy in a sustainable way.

As such, we do not plan to use a voting system to determine the allocation of Shared Success funds. We already use a voting system with our EnviroVisa granting program and with the Vancity Foundation web-based holiday e-card campaign. Based on our experience the variety of allocation methods currently in place are appropriate to achieve the community impact goals set in our strategic plan.

Thank you again for your suggestions. Kind regards and best wishes for 2013.



Patrice Pratt  
Vancity Board of Director

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[vancity.com](http://vancity.com)



from: Mark Latham  
to: Board Directors <board\_directors@vancity.com>  
**date:** Tue, Jan 8, 2013 at 1:49 PM  
subject: Re: Year-round info & engagement for Vancity members  
Dear Vancity Directors:

Thank you for Patrice Pratt's reply (letter of January 3, 2013).

I agree that Vancity's existing member communication systems are valuable for you to gain members' insights, answer our questions, and update us on the credit union. But as my paper ("We Want Our Co-ops Back") explains, it's also important for Vancity to facilitate communications among us members. So I'm disappointed to hear that you have no plans for a member forum at this time, and hope that you will reconsider this issue before long.

It's interesting to hear that you do not plan to use a voting system to determine the allocation of Shared Success Funds, and that we already use a voting system with our EnviroVisa granting program and the Vancity Foundation web-based holiday e-card campaign. As you mention, those programs are aimed at community impact goals.

Informing members is a different goal from community impact. So my question remains: "Do you plan to create a competition for informing members, in which members vote to allocate award funds?"

I appreciate your taking the time to consider the issues I raise. I hope this process will contribute to enhancing our credit union. As mentioned in my paper, I think we can set an example for how to improve other organizations, including democracies and corporations.

Sincerely,  
Mark Latham

from: Board Directors <board\_directors@vancity.com>  
to: Mark Latham  
**date:** Wed, Jan 9, 2013 at 9:38 AM  
subject: RE: Year-round info & engagement for Vancity members  
Dear Mr. Latham,

Thank you for your response to Ms. Pratt's letter. I will pass along your email to Ms. Pratt and will contact you shortly.

Sincerely,  
Office of the Vancity Board of Directors

from: Mark Latham  
to: Board Directors <board\_directors@vancity.com>  
**date:** Wed, Feb 6, 2013 at 2:17 PM  
subject: Re: Year-round info & engagement for Vancity members  
Dear Vancity Directors:

This is just a reminder that I'm still looking forward to a response to my January 8 email below. I asked only a few questions in my December 3 email (also below), and would appreciate answers to these that remain:

"Do you plan to create a competition for informing members, in which members vote to allocate award funds? ... If so, when? If not, why not?"

Patrice Pratt's January 3 letter talked about Shared Success funds, which are for different purposes than what I am asking about.

Thanks...  
Sincerely,  
Mark Latham

Board of Directors:  
Virginia Weiler, Chair  
Jan O'Brien, Vice Chair  
Anita Braha  
Teresa Conway  
Allen Garr  
Greg McDade  
Patrice Pratt  
Bob Williams  
David Wong

February 28, 2013

Via Email

[mark@votermedia.org](mailto:mark@votermedia.org)

Dear Mr. Latham;

Thank you for your follow-up letter and my apologies for not adequately answering your original questions.

We have past experience with a year-round on-line forum with Vancity's [ChangeEverything.ca](http://ChangeEverything.ca), a site where anyone, including Vancity members had the opportunity to discuss topics of their choice, or participate in discussions about featured topics with each other. The site was launched when the social media landscape was very different from what it is today and while it was very successful in its time, it has now been discontinued and we have no plans for a new online forum.

A note of interest, during the 2008 Director's Election, we opened up the Change everything forum to our candidates to generate discussion in support of their individual campaigns.

As we now have robust social networking tools and platforms like Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook available to us, we made the shift from hosting our own online community to joining the conversation 'out there'. Vancity is active on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/vancity), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/vancity), [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/vancity) and [Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/vancity) and also posts all the options for joining us in person through the listings in our [events calendar](#).

Nevertheless, we continue to add to the tools and two-way communications channels that we use to connect with our stakeholders. This year, we will start four new advisory groups to generate discussion and innovation in support of how we serve our members and help to build their communities.

We have no plans at this time to create a competition where members vote to allocate award funds. Vancity's operates as a representative democracy, in which members elect other members to represent them on the Board of Directors. Once elected, board directors bring their skills, attributes and judgment to collectively make decisions on behalf of all members.

Thank you again for your questions and the opportunity to provide more information.

Kind regards,



Patrice Pratt  
Vancity Board of Director

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