



Abundant Housing Vancouver

s.22(1) Personal and Confidential

June 20, 2019

Vancouver City Hall
453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Dear Mayor and Council,

We write as Abundant Housing Vancouver (“AHV”) regarding a comment made by Councillor Hardwick during the public hearing for 4575 Granville Street on June 13, 2019.

At this hearing Councillor Hardwick asked a speaker whether they had been “contending” with an “astroturfing campaign”. She clarified that certain websites had “skewed the input”. In response, the speaker specifically referred to AHV’s website in response to Councillor Hardwick’s comments.

In the context of the hearing as a whole, it appears that the comments were made to insinuate that AHV is an “astroturf” group.

Astroturfing is defined by Merriam Webster as:

organized activity that is intended to create a false impression of a widespread, spontaneously arising, grassroots movement in support of or in opposition to something (such as a political policy) but that is in reality initiated and controlled by a concealed group or organization (such as a corporation)

The accusation that a group is engaged in astroturfing is a serious accusation designed to undermine its credibility, legitimacy, and – ultimately – its ability to participate in public processes.

This accusation is, of course, spurious. AHV is an all-volunteer organization with minimal resources, as set out at the following webpage:

<http://www.abundanthousingvancouver.com/finances>

Tools to make it easier for the public to participate in democratic processes – such as AHV’s letter generator – are a healthy method of encouraging civic engagement and intended to

improve the accessibility of the process to the public. It is the opposite of an astroturf campaign, which (as the name suggests) is nothing but fake grass. Letters sent through AHV's letter generator are genuine comments which deserve being given due consideration by our elected officials. Many current councillors campaigned on the importance of public engagement and consultation; that must include comments with which individual councillors disagree.

We recognize that not all of Council holds our views, but have worked hard to establish respectful relationships with them, regardless of opposing views. If there was any intention to implicate AHV as an astroturf group, and/or if letters sent through AHV's website are being dismissed under this pretense, this raises concerns as it is contrary to the duty of elected officials sitting in a public hearing.

Section 1.5 of the City of Vancouver's *Code of Conduct* provides:

Respect: Council officials, staff and advisory body members must conduct public business efficiently, with decorum and with proper attention to the City's diversity. They must treat each other and others with respect at all times. This means not using derogatory language towards others, respecting the rights of other people, treating people with courtesy and recognizing the different roles others play in local government decision making.

While we do not seek to file a formal complaint regarding this matter, we must note that the speaker's accusation that a volunteer organization such as AHV could be engaged in "astroturfing" is derogatory language. Such conduct is highly unfair to AHV's members and supporters – who we must emphasize are simply regular members of the Vancouver community trying to get involved – especially as the accusation was made when AHV had no opportunity to respond.

We trust that all elected councillors will keep their duties of impartiality and respect in mind regarding accusations such as this and hope to continue to have transparent, mutually respectful relationships with Council and city staff moving forward.

Sincerely,

Directors of Abundant Housing Vancouver Society

Daniel Oleksiuk, Thomas Falcone, Rachel Selinger, Stuart Smith, Roman Lisagor, Brendan Dawe, Jennifer Maiko Bradshaw, Albert Huang, Reilly Wood