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"she is the uniquely gifted one" *Philip Glass*

## ARTS

# Taxes take toll on arts biz

> BY PIETA WOOLLEY

Ask almost any owner of a small Vancouver arts business about property taxes and wait for flames to start shooting out of their ears. The city's taxes are way too high and it's killing the arts, is the well-known chorus. Just a few examples:

The owners of the Ridge Theatre can't renew their lease at the end of December, due in part to the \$40,000-per-year property taxes.

Granville Book Company closed in July after the owners were hit with an extra \$12,000 property-tax bill.

At Art Works Gallery, Deanna Geisheimer is afraid her 19-year-old business, with \$1.2 million annually in sales, will fold if property taxes continue to climb.

"I'm paying \$46,000 in property taxes this year," she told the *Georgia Straight* at her Yaletown gallery. "That's double in four years. My sales have not doubled in four years."

The even scarier thing is, if Vancouver's mill rate and property-value patterns continue, taxes could more than double again by 2010.

Even Leonard Schein, spokesperson for the Fair Tax Coalition, understands that some businesses need more immediate action than the coalition's proposal: a 20-year rebalancing of the business and residential tax ratio. He offered a different solution.

"The city could have a rebate for businesses under a certain size," the man who owns the Park and Fifth Avenue movie theatres said. "The property tax that I pay...is disproportionately high to what it should be."

There's no easy answer, though.

Even if the business mill rate (how much tax a business has to pay per year per \$1,000 of assessed property; in 2005, it's \$29.40 per \$1,000) were

to stay the same, property taxes could still jump significantly by 2010.

For example, at Art Works, Geisheimer pays one third of her building's 2005 property taxes of \$152,857. Five years ago, the whole building paid \$60,130 (so Geisheimer paid about \$20,000).

Theoretically, in 2010, the building will pay \$351,592 in property taxes. In other words, Geisheimer's annual tax bill will more than quadruple in 10 years, from approximately \$20,000 to \$117,200.

If the city reduces the mill rate by one third (not likely; even with the exploding value of property from 2000 to 2005, the mill rate still rose by about \$3 per \$1,000), the Art Works building's taxes would still rise by \$86,000, to \$239,260.

That scares her. She can't afford it. "I'm willing to support whatever candidate will take on this issue," she said. "I'm now at the stage when my business is supposed to pay off. But now I have to work harder than ever to make ends meet."

It's not only Art Works's predicament. The Ridge complex's value almost doubled from 2000 to 2005. At Havana, Commercial Drive's combined restaurant, gallery, and theatre space, the building's value has jumped by a third since 2000. The Vogue's value doubled since 2000. The Douglas Reynolds Gallery's building also rose by a third.

If those numbers don't dazzle, consider this: the Vogue, the Varsity, Centre A, the Ridge, and other long-time Vancouver arts businesses have either moved or closed or changed hands this fall alone, due at least in part to property taxes.

The three big parties agree that something needs to be done. But what? This is what three Vancouver city council candidates suggested:

**RAYMOND LOUIE**

Vision Vancouver  
(family business and union background)

*The problem:* The cost of property taxes is hurting small businesses.

*The solution:* Possibly add a new tax class to separate out small business and charge a different rate from bigger businesses. And the city can adjust the business/residential tax ratio.

*Memorable quote:* "We don't have a Fair Tax Coalition for residential, which it [the off-loaded business taxes] would ultimately be poured onto."

**COLLEEN HARDWICK  
NYSTEDT**

Non-Partisan Association  
(owns a small business, works at home)

*The problem:* Commercial and residential tax classes are outdated and don't accommodate the new realities of live/work and telecommuting.

*The solution:* An overhaul of the entire property-tax system. The new system would also take into account the role of a business in a community.

*Memorable quote:* "It's unfair, and it's unfair because it's old."

**TIM LOUIS**

Coalition of Progressive Electors  
(owns a law practice)

*The problem:* Small and big businesses pay the same amount of tax in Vancouver.

*The solution:* Separate the tax classes, and offer small businesses a much lower rate than big businesses.

*Memorable quote:* "Business thrives when the environment is well looked after, when arts and culture are well looked after, when social services are well provided for. Businesses decide where to locate based on education, culture, vibrant night life, and whether it's a safe city." ♦

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| by Francis Poulenc |

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