

# The Night the City Became a Stadium

*INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE  
2011 VANCOUVER STANLEY CUP PLAYOFFS RIOT*

*EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*



*John Furlong and Douglas J. Keefe, Q.C.*

*CO-CHAIRS*



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*CO-CHAIRS: John Furlong and Douglas J. Keefe, Q.C.  
Vancouver, British Columbia  
August 31, 2011*

*DEDICATED TO THOSE PEOPLE WHO TOOK BACK THE STREETS.*

August 31st, 2011

**Solicitor General and Minister of Public Safety,  
Province of British Columbia**  
P.O. Box 9053, Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, BC V8W9E2

**Mayor of City of Vancouver**  
453 West 12th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

**Chair of the Police Board**  
2120 Cambie Street  
Vancouver BC V5Z 4N6

Dear Review Sponsors,

***Final Report of the Independent Review of the 2011 Vancouver Stanley Cup Playoffs Riot***

We are pleased to deliver our Final Report to you, as required in the Terms of Reference established for the review.

The report addresses 1) the learnings from the 1994 riot and how were they integrated into our planning for this event, 2) the foundational elements of the VPD/City plans for the event and the relationship of those plans to what transpired in the lead-up and during the riots, 3) the availability of liquor at public events and the contribution this made to the events that unfolded, and 4) looking forward, a framework for how the City of Vancouver and the VPD work with the appropriate partners to optimize the safe, inclusive and enjoyable participation of our public in celebrations in the public spaces for which Vancouver is world-renowned.

Yours very truly,



DOUGLAS J. KEEFE, Q.C.



JOHN FURLONG



# Executive Summary

## **FOREWORD**

We accepted an invitation by the Province, the City of Vancouver, and the Vancouver Police Board to review and comment on four matters in two months.

The time allotted imposed discipline on us. Our mandate was unambiguous and we stuck to it. We portray the essentials of what happened and suggest ways to reduce the chances of it happening again.

## **THE RIOT**

Every year more than 600 events from block parties to impromptu demonstrations and celebrations take place in the City of Vancouver. Perhaps 15 draw 100,000 or more people and one or two may reach 300,000 attendees.

On June 15 there was a riot. People who either wanted to make trouble or thought it looked like fun caused it and people who stayed to watch became a shield, and prolonged it.

The same number of people – estimates are unreliable but a consensus seems to have formed around 155,000 – could be in the same place on another night and it would be very crowded but there would be no trouble. The problem with that number, in that venue, is that when trouble starts emergency services can't get to it. A general sense of lawlessness prevails, causing anxiety in some and excitement in others.

The question then is not the cause of the riot – troublemakers deliberately caused it – but the conditions that gave them the opportunity. The key ingredients were congestion and free flowing alcohol.

## **REVIEWING**

We were given the cooperation we were promised with a degree of openness and candor we frankly did not expect. That does not happen without courage and leadership; we saw in the people we interviewed a determination to learn, adapt and move forward.

Hindsight is the established summit for reviews such as ours. We use it to understand what could have been done better. But we recognize that the decisions we reviewed were made without its benefit. And the challenges of converting downtown streets into a safe venue should not be underestimated.

In our personal lives the usual starting point for a party is the decision to have it and invite our guests. In this instance, the people were coming; the parties were to give them something to do. They invite themselves, so their numbers are unknown in advance. They will be jubilant or downcast, and many will be drunk and ready for trouble.

Unlike many large events, this one had no venue or forum to control the size of the crowd and help with crowd management.

What was intended as a family affair turned out to be organizing a series of Olympic-sized street parties with a few days in between. Things could have been done better but not without more time to plan and practice. Playoff hockey does not allow for that.

## **1994 RECOMMENDATIONS**

There were five reports on the 1994 riot and together they produced over 100 recommendations, many overlapping, some superseded. The events of 1994 and 2011 have as many differences as they have similarities, so direct comparisons are not all that helpful. A lot has changed in 17 years, in technology and in the region. Overall the City and region are much better at crowd management and control in 2011 than in 1994. In 1994, 200 police (including the downtown patrol) faced a crowd of between 40,000 and 70,000. Help poured in from the region and ranks grew to 500. In 2011, 446 police (not counting the regular downtown patrol) faced 155,000. Precautions were in place to better coordinate regional resources and the total number of police eventually reached 928. The City's 1994 report may be summarized in three points:

- » on occasion there will be impromptu gatherings downtown;
- » if the people have something to do the chances of trouble will be reduced; and
- » if there is no one to host the event the city should.

The 2011 Live Sites are a continuation of the implementation of that recommendation. Planning and communications technology are significantly more sophisticated than in 1994. All of emergency services in Vancouver use a common communications system. The majority of emergency services in the region do as well. They all ought to.

The problems we found in 2011 were not systemic, as before, but showed the need to maintain skills in working together, developed by police services during the Olympics.

Recommendations regarding command facilities have all been addressed and worked well.

VPD's approach today to crowd management is consistent with the recommendations and works well under most circumstances.

And, although there were individual equipment failures and problems with equipment caches, the overall quality of crowd control equipment and training is markedly improved.

## **2011 PLANS AND OUTCOME**

Vancouver tried to do a good thing and found itself in an almost impossible situation.

There were too many people, not too few police. No plausible number of police could have prevented trouble igniting in the kind of congestion we saw on Vancouver streets that night.

The VPD had a good plan to police the game and the aftermath. That is when trouble can be expected and that is when it occurred. The plan had changed little from previous games when it had worked successfully except that the number of officers assigned had increased from just over 200 to 446. The police came on time. The problem was that a great many people arrived early; and great numbers were drunk when they arrived or drank openly after they got there.

VPD's crowd management strategy is good but is predicated on setting and maintaining a tone of responsible celebration. The opportunity to set a tone passed before there were enough officers to set it and congestion prevented its later imposition. But it is likely that, even if police presence had been established early, it could not have been maintained in the congested streets.

When the situation started to deteriorate the decision to go to riot gear was correct and timely but the transition was slow due to communications problems and location of the riot equipment in the packed streets.

The riot was really a series of running hot spots over a large area. Once underway the riot was handled well by police and reinforcement from police services in the region was swift and massive. However, better public order planning and practicing for large regional events is required.

The temporary Live Site venues would probably have been fine for the number of people they were designed to contain – about 34,000. They might have managed for 50,000. They had worked reasonably well in earlier games and when there had been problems the City made adjustments. The problem on June 15 was that the venues, particularly security checks for alcohol and eventually the fences, were overwhelmed.

Essentially the City core became a stadium holding 155,000 people but without resilient infrastructure, time, or capacity to manage the crowd.

## **ALCOHOL**

The second factor is alcohol. Alcohol fuelled the riot.

Alcohol consumption and binge drinking are significant problems in society and on June 15 they were like gasoline on a fire. Binge drinking is a high-risk problem in itself but opens the door to high-risk activities such as fighting, setting fires, and other dangerous behaviours. Alcohol fuelled nasty behaviour and triggered law breaking that surprised and galled us all.

Liquor interdiction efforts were overwhelmed. There was open drinking on transit and on the streets.

We suggest special event measures to reduce illegal consumption of alcohol at major regional events.

## **FUTURE**

Large gatherings will continue and some of them will be impromptu. We trust the Canucks will compete again for the Stanley Cup in 2012 and the streets will fill again to take it all in.

Social media and regional transportation make large impromptu gatherings more likely and less predictable. Translink estimates it carried an extra 200,000 people on June 15. At the peak it delivered about 500 people into downtown every 90 seconds by train alone.

The city's policy of taking ownership when there is no official host is correct, but the City and community partners need to build the capacity to plan and execute events the size of Game 7 night. The City and its partners can put good events together on the fly – the first six games of the Stanley Cup finals are proof of that. But Game 7 is proof that the risks cannot be managed without dedicated resources, planning and preparation.

Well-designed venues are crowd management tools. Streets are not primarily intended for large numbers of people so crowd management relies more heavily on temporary measures and people – usually the police.

It was made clear by the parties to this report that the city wishes to celebrate publicly and that there should be full enjoyment of Vancouver's public spaces. We have determined that to achieve this kind of success the City needs some additional planning tools. We provide a planning proposal to help the City perfect its approach to these inevitable, impromptu, but important public occasions.

We looked at key questions around significant factors such as public transport, the media, social media, the Vancouver Canucks and the use of volunteers and while a guarantee about the future is not possible we contend it is possible to narrow the gap toward eliminating a repeat of June 15th.

The streets should not be surrendered to thugs and villains. People should be able to congregate downtown in harmony without the need for police on every corner.

Vancouver has the capacity to be great at this...it has been shown time and again. Vancouver is a magnificent city with remarkable public servants, a dedicated police force and remarkable citizens with a right to feel proud and to expect the best.

This report is best viewed through the lens of when the facts and a unique atmosphere collide.

Some things we will never know but perhaps we really don't need to. We know what we know and how we felt and that we would rather not feel that way again. Enough, we think, to build on.



DOUGLAS J. KEEFE, Q.C.



JOHN FURLONG

*Vancouver, BC*

*August 31, 2011*





2011 Stanley Cup Game 7 Canucks Live Site Photo ©2011 Ronnie Miranda, gigapixel.com  
(The image is a compilation of separate photos taken over a 15-minute period.)