

## Reformist changed city's direction

Quality of life, creation of neighbourhoods became priorities during time as Vancouver mayor

BY DOUG WARD, VANCOUVER SUN; WITH FILES FROM KELLY SINOSKI AND JESSICA BARRETT MARCH 30, 2013



Art Phillips and Carole Taylor were the city's most glamorous couple and gave the False Creek residential development instant credibility as a place to live. **Photograph by:** Peter Battisoni, Vancouver Sun Files, Vancouver Sun; With Files From Kelly Sinoski And Jessica Barrett

Art Phillips, who as mayor in the early 1970s set in motion Vancouver's later emergence as a model for livable downtown density, has died.

He was 82 years old.

Phillips is credited with laying much of the foundations of the livable, neighbourhood-oriented city Vancouver is today. Under his watch, the south shore of False Creek was developed and the Orpheum Theatre was saved from the wrecking ball.

His death Friday came shortly after the Vancouver park board had agreed to rename the former Discovery Square park at Burrard and Dunsmuir in his honour.

Longtime friend Michael Francis, who spearheaded the renaming effort, said Phillips was beloved by many citizens of Vancouver who appreciated his years of service to the city.

"I spent the last year immersed in people who love Art," said Francis, former chairman of the Simon Fraser University board of governors. "They all love him for different reasons. They love him because he saved the Orpheum, they love him because they saved the

entrance to Stanley Park, they love him for False Creek. There's just a myriad of people who want to tell you why they love him."

A dedication ceremony for the newly named Art Phillips Park, where the former mayor often walked his dog, had been expected to take place this spring when the park's cherry blossoms were in full bloom. But it was delayed when Phillips' health started to decline, said Francis. Phillips died from complications resulting from an infection.

Francis said the park is another area of the city the former mayor saved from development when he convinced the Bentalls and the Royal Bank to buy the space and hold it for rapid transit - a decade before rapid transit was a reality in Vancouver.

"He was a visionary," Francis said.

Mayor Gregor Robertson echoed that sentiment, calling Phillips a "visionary leader" in a statement released Friday.

"He helped shape Vancouver through his vision and commitment to public service," Robertson said. "He was a champion of livability and inclusivity."

Phillips became mayor in 1973, at a time when urban reform movements were reshaping civic politics and planning in many North American cities. In Vancouver, these reformist forces created TEAM (The Electors' Action Movement) - and Phillips, as mayor, was its leader.

"He was a remarkable golden boy for that time," said Gordon Price, a former city councillor.

"He was a striking guy, almost matinee-idol handsome. But with the gravitas of an investment manager."

Phillips assumed power at city hall after making a fortune with his investment firm, Phillips, Hager and North.

In contrast to previous pro-developer regimes, the centrist TEAM led by Phillips kept real estate development on a tighter leash and made sure city planners took into account environmental and quality of life concerns - not just the wishes of developers.

Phillips and TEAM helped establish a new consensus about development that crossed all political lines - one that stressed local neighbourhood planning, public consultation and inclusive neighbourhoods with mixed income.

#### SET FOUNDATIONS

"It so clearly defined the movement of the city from one era to another," said Price.

"He and TEAM set the foundations for the city that are still serving the city today."

Under Phillips and TEAM, highrises and freeways were out, livability and local neighbourhood planning were in.

Coun. Geoff Meggs said Phillips fundamentally changed the way Vancouver made planning decisions.

"(He) made it much more community based and community directed and saw potential where others saw problems," he said.

Michael Geller, a real estate consultant and media commentator, noted the former mayor had one lament: that he'd hoped to see issues of poverty and homelessness resolved in the Downtown Eastside.

"While he was proud of the city, that was one of the areas where he saw a need for improvement." Geller said. "He was just troubled by the poverty and poor living conditions."

The city's 32nd mayor was given the city's highest honour, Freedom of the City, by Robertson in 2010.

Asked about Phillips' time in office after the honour was announced, former mayor and

premier Mike Harcourt told The Vancouver Sun: "That was when we marched to a different drummer, when we said no to a freeway and yes to a livable city.

"Art was so much the person behind all of this."

Phillips and his party came to power on a wave of citizen activism, which had forced previous mayor Tom Campbell (dubbed Tom Terrific) to kill plans to build a freeway through Strathcona and Gas-town, among Vancouver's most significant cultural and architectural neighbourhoods.

Campbell came to be seen as the conservative nemesis of Vancouver's vibrant '60s counterculture. Phillips was seen as the anti-Campbell, more in tune with the new baby boom generation that was beginning to flex its demographic might.

TEAM's approach was an abrupt switch from that of the long-ruling Non-Partisan Association, which had promoted the freeway and continued industrial development of False Creek.

## NEIGHBOURHOODS

Phillips, along with other TEAM councillors like Walter Hardwick, had a different vision for the south shore of False Creek - a neighbourhood that would become mixed income, high density but non-highrise.

The redevelopment of False Creek and adjacent Granville Island were federally funded but were planned under Phillips' TEAM.

The planning approach nurtured during Phillips' two terms as mayor would later inspire what became known worldwide as Vancouverism - the creation of high-density neighbourhoods with plenty of community amenities around the central downtown core.

Phillips also created the property endowment fund, which protectively holds all of the city's investments in lands and leases, in response to what he saw as previous councils' wrong-headed sales of land in order to balance annual budgets.

Phillips' star quality was cemented when he married Carole Taylor, a striking broadcast journalist from Toronto. The two met when Taylor interviewed Vancouver's mayor for CTV's W5. A long-distance courtship ensued, followed by marriage and two children. Taylor would become a successful politician in her own right, first as a city councillor and later as provincial finance minister.

## FALSE CREEK MOVE

Journalist Allan Fotheringham said Phillips and Taylor "were the city's glamour couple. They were the city's version of John and Jackie Kennedy or Brian and Mila Mulroney."

Shortly after their marriage, the couple moved to a condo in the fledgling False Creek South neighbourhood, immediately giving it credibility.

"People were skeptical about whether anyone would want to live in False Creek South," recalled Price.

"But once Art Phillips and Carole Taylor bought a townhouse in Leg in Boot Square, it became popular."

Phillips was born Sept. 12, 1930. He attended Lord Byng secondary school in Vancouver and studied commerce at the University of B.C. The tall, athletic Phillips was a basketball star at both schools.

Shortly after graduation, Phillips married his first wife, Patti. They had two girls and three boys.

Phillips is survived by Taylor, his children, several grandchildren and one great-grandchild. A celebration of his life will be held in April.