

Gregor Robertson takes calls in telephone town hall

None of the questioners criticized Vision Vancouver

MIKE HOWELL / VANCOUVER COURIER
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Robertson took questions on many of the issues he is well versed on and has publicly attempted to advance since he was elected mayor in 2008, including improving transit and promoting a subway from the Commercial Drive transit hub to the University of B.C., getting more services for mentally ill people, building affordable housing, questioning Kinder Morgan's oil pipeline proposal and strengthening Vancouver's technology and innovation economy. File Photo Dan Toulgoet

Mayor Gregor Robertson's so-called telephone town hall meeting Tuesday night had up to 10,000 listeners tune in to the 70-minute question-and-answer program, according to the mayor's political party.

Stepan Vdovine, executive director of Vision Vancouver, said the party counted the number of listeners via technology operated by Strategic Communications Inc., a consulting firm heavily involved in previous Vision campaigns.

"It was a good night for us," said Vdovine, whose party promoted and paid for the event run out of Vision's offices at Seventh and Burrard.

Vdovine said the party relied on a list of its members and supporters to call in to the program but also used a city phone book to randomly call residents.

Participants had the choice to listen in or press a number on the phone that would take them to a phone bank of volunteers, who placed the questions in a queue.

Vdovine said the mayor, who sat with host Marcella Munro, chose the questions based on topic. Vdovine said he didn't know whether any of the 19 callers who posed questions were Vision supporters.

None of the questioners criticized the mayor, although "Sandra" in the West End asked Robertson what he will do to "change or correct the perception" that he and his ruling Vision council aren't listening to residents.

"I do feel some sensitivity around this because I do feel that we've tried to keep people engaged and involved every step of the way as we try to make the best decisions at city hall — and we still find people are saying we're not listening," Robertson said. "But politics is also about leadership, setting those priorities and making a clear call. Sometimes people aren't happy with that and they can crank up the rhetoric from there."

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Those issues include improving transit and promoting a subway from the Commercial Drive transit hub to the University of B.C., getting more services for mentally ill people, building affordable housing, questioning Kinder Morgan's oil pipeline proposal and strengthening Vancouver's technology and innovation economy.

A poll conducted during the program returned a result of 30 per cent of listeners identifying affordable housing as their top priority. They chose from a list that included homelessness, rapid transit on Broadway, public safety, arts and culture, the economy and a "green" city.

Another poll found that Robertson and his Vision councillors had a 62 per cent approval rating among callers and listeners, who were also asked during the program to donate money and get involved in the party.

The next civic election is November 2014.

mhowell@vancourier.com

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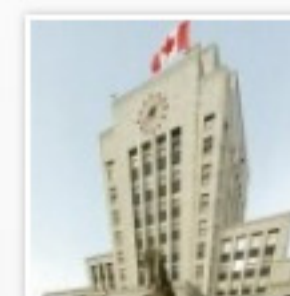
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