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## Vision Vancouver's Biggest Funder: Who is Renewal Partners?

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Mayor Robertson, Mr. Solomon and Mr. McMillan,

As you know, for more than a year now, I have been trying to inquire about some of the campaign funding of Vision Vancouver and whether a substantial amount of that money originated indirectly, from Tides Canada and the Endswell Foundation.

One of my central questions is whether Renewal Partners is, in essence, part and parcel of the Endswell Foundation. I notice, for instance, that the salaries of the senior staff at Renewal Partners were also on staff at Endswell, and their salaries were paid by Endswell - to the tune of \$2.3 million (2004-2009). It surprise me that an "investment firm" would have its salaries paid for by a registered charity, unless of course, they are two sides of the same coin.

The article below outlines the basis of my concerns, opinions and questions.

If I have presented anything here that is factually incorrect, or if I have missed any important points, please let me know this week.

As before, I can be reached at 604.618.8110.

Sincerely,  
Vivian Krause

# The Biggest Donor to Vision Vancouver: Who Is Renewal Partners?

As the municipal election season gets underway in B.C., voters, as always, need to know who funds who. In the case of Vision Vancouver, voters may want to know about Renewal Partners and Tides Canada, a registered charity.

Back in 2008 when Vision Vancouver came to power with Mayor Robertson as the helm, the party was brand new and yet it ran the most expensive municipal campaign in the city's history. The [biggest donors](#) to Vision Vancouver were Renewal Partners and Strategic Communications, a P.R. firm which calls itself a "[partner](#)" of Renewal Partners. They contributed [\\$188,062](#). In a municipal campaign, that's a lot of cash.

Renewal Partners calls itself "[an independent investment company operating under the Renewal group of organizations.](#)" But U.S. tax returns may reflect a different story.

Since 2003, the senior staff at Renewal Partners were also on staff at the Endswell Foundation ("Endswell"), a registered charity, and their salaries were paid by Endswell - to the tune of [\\$2.3 million](#) (2004-2009), according to Endswell's U.S. tax returns. *What kind of "investment firm" has its staff salaries paid for by a registered charity?*

Renewal Partners and Endswell [share a web-site](#). They have their offices in the same building as Tides Canada and they use the same law firm.

Endswell says that through the 1990s, it was [the largest B.C.-based charitable foundation funding environmental issues](#). Endswell, like Tides Canada, is federally registered in both Canada and the U.S., and files tax returns with both Revenue Canada and the Internal Revenue Service (I.R.S).

The [president of Renewal Partners](#) is Joel Solomon. He is also the [current treasurer](#) of Endswell, a long-time director and [former chairman of the board](#) of the U.S. Tides Foundation ("Tides USA") and the [vice-chair of Tides Canada](#). Solomon is also involved in other Tides-affiliated charities and businesses.

Solomon has a reputation as a "millionaire philanthropist." In fact, he's been described "[a modest version of the later generations of the Kennedy/Rothschild/Rockefeller class](#)." But again, U.S. tax returns may reflect a different story. Since 1997, Endswell has paid a total of [\\$979,527](#) to Mr. Solomon and his company, U.S. tax returns say. Of that, \$598,031 was paid between 2006 and 2009. *What sort of "millionaire philanthropist" pays himself nearly a million bucks out of the charity that supposedly he founded?*

Since 1997, U.S. tax returns for the Endswell Foundation do not show any contributions from Mr. Solomon. If he contributed to Endswell, it may have been prior to 1997.

Renewal Partners has invested in [over 75 companies](#), Solomon says. I could only find information regarding [26 companies](#). These included pizza and organic yoghurt companies in New Hampshire and other companies for cosmetics in New York, cleaning products in Vermont, wild seafood in California and music publishing in Colorado. Of the 26 companies that I could find, more are located in the United States than in Vancouver.

One of the companies in which Renewal Partners "invested" is [Village Real Estate](#), a real estate company in Nashville Tennessee ([www.villagerealestate.com](http://www.villagerealestate.com)). U.S. tax returns say that Joel Solomon, a native of Tennessee, has [10 percent ownership](#) in this real estate company.

If Joel Solomon's is so concerned about advancing sustainability in Vancouver, why has he invested in more companies - including one of his own - in the United States, rather than in Vancouver?

The B.C.-based companies in which Renewal Partners has invested include [Happy Planet](#), the fruit juice company with which Mayor Robertson is involved, an organic coffee company, a sprout company, a re-usable maxipad company, two grocery delivery companies, two publishing companies, a P.R. company and a real estate company. These may be good companies but aren't there higher priorities for sustainability than fruit juice, organic coffee, re-usable maxipads and so on?

Beyond Renewal Partners and Strategic Communications, there are also questions about campaign finance contributions from Interdependent Investments Ltd., Convergence Communications and [Communicopia](#) - all of which have received payments from Tides Canada and/or Endswell.

Endswell and Tides Canada are legally distinct but for practical purposes, Endswell appears to be part and parcel of Tides Canada. For most of the 2000's, the senior leadership at the two charities was the same, including the treasurer. Furthermore, between 2003 and 2009, fully [99 percent](#) of the funds granted by Endswell went to Tides

Canada, a total of \$8.7 million.

Tides USA and Tides Canada are also legally distinct entities but again, the senior leadership was the same for many years. Drummond Pike was the founder and CEO of Tides USA for 34 years until he quietly stepped down in September of 2010. Pike is also the [founding chair](#) of Tides Canada, the chairman of the board of Endswell and a [senior advisor to Renewal Partners](#). *How autonomous are charities whose founder and chairman of the board are the same person?*

Mayor Robertson was a board member of Tides Canada [from 2002 to 2004](#), immediately prior to his entry into politics with the provincial NDP, in 2005. Robertson isn't the only one in his political party who has a long history with Tides Canada. The treasurer of Vision Vancouver, Martha Burton, is a [senior advisor to Tides Canada](#). Mike Magee was a senior advisor to Tides Canada [from 2002 to 2007](#) before he became Chief of Staff at Vancouver City Hall.

Endswell's annual office expenses increased from about [\\$172,000 in 2003 to \\$765,000 in 2008](#). Why did Endswell even need an office while it was simply transferring money to Tides Canada?

Staff costs at Endswell increased sharply from about [\\$45,000 in 2000 to \\$606,000 in 2007](#). And yet, during 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2009, Endswell didn't make a single grant to any organization other than Tides Canada. During those years when Endswell didn't make a single grant except to Tides Canada, *what were the staff doing?* Were the charity's employees working at Renewal Partners, the "investment firm" that has been Vision Vancouver's biggest funder?

Tides Canada's lawyer has clearly stated, "No funds or support whatsoever have been given by Tides Canada to any political party or candidate for public office." 'No surprise there. It hasn't been suggested that Tides Canada contributed directly to Vision Vancouver. That would be too obvious. The question is whether Tides Canada has indirectly supported the political career of Gregor Robertson through Endswell and a series of "investment firms" and P.R. companies that have served, for lack of a better term, as a front. *And if so, why?*

Tides Canada says that it is a non-partisan, national public foundation that supports social and environmental philanthropy. But perhaps there's more to it than that.

Since 2000, Tides Canada has been paid about [\\$60 million](#) by American foundations, according to the tax returns of Tides Canada's American funders. Of that, 90 percent was from the billion dollar foundations created by the founders of tech giants, Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, and Intel. The Hewlett foundation and the Packard foundation, both created by the founders of Hewlett-Packard, paid [\\$29 million](#) to Tides Canada over the past decade. The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation paid Tides Canada [\\$26.6 million](#). Moore is the co-founder of INTEL. Tides Canada has also been funded by the Wilburforce Foundation, created by one of the founders of Microsoft, [Gordon Letwin](#). The Wilburforce Foundation funded Organizing for Change, a project of Tides Canada which sought to influence the B.C. Liberals choice of leader to replace Gordon Campbell as premier of British Columbia.

In 2010, [more than half](#) of Tides Canada's \$14.5 million in revenue was from foreign sources, Canadian tax returns say.

Through Tides Canada, American foundations are funding multi-million dollar campaigns to "reform" the resource-based industries that are the backbone of Canada's economy: forestry, mining, aquaculture and most recently, the Alberta oil industry. These campaigns would make Canadian industries less competitive and less profitable while protecting U.S. market and trade interests - all in the name of protecting the environment. For example, the campaign against farmed salmon sways market share towards "wild" salmon, most of which is Alaskan. The campaign against oil tanker traffic would block oil exports to Asia and continue the virtual monopoly that the United States has on Canadian oil exports.

According to my analysis of Tides Canada's U.S. tax returns for 2009, [about half](#) of Tides Canada's grants went towards addressing Canada's energy sector and for projects on the north coast of B.C. Obviously, something about that relatively small but very strategic part of Canada's coastline - the gateway to Asia - is very important to Tides Canada.

The Hewlett foundation and the Packard foundation have spent a staggering total of [\\$72 million](#) to "address" the oil and gas industry in Canada and to establish a huge park on the strategic, north coast of B.C. This park, however, isn't called the Hewlett-Packard Park. Instead, it's called the Great Bear Rainforest and it's now being used as a pretext for banning oil tanker traffic. No oil tankers means no oil exports to Asia. Whether or not this was the plan all along, the Great Bear Rainforest has become The Great Trade Barrier.

Incidentally, the Wilburforce Foundation paid Tides USA to get the Dogwood Initiative, a B.C. grassroots movement, "[to devolve control over land on B.C.'s central coast](#)" to First Nations and communities in the interest of long-term habitat protection." Of all the countries in the world, are the first nations on the B.C. coast really the most in need of American philanthropy to re-gain control of their traditional lands? Or is there something else going on here?

The area covered by the Great Bear Rainforest extends from the northern tip of Vancouver Island to the southern tip of Alaska, covering the entire area that is the gateway to Asia. This is precisely the same area that is covered by the [Pacific North Coast Integrated Management Area \(PNCIMA\) Initiative](#), a project for which the Moore Foundation has granted [\\$30 million](#) to B.C. environmental organizations.

In September, [Tides announced](#) the purchase of a million-dollar, 150 acre property known as Hank's Beach on Cortes Island. This was then donated to the Strathcona Regional District to become a park. What didn't get mentioned is that this land is right next door to ocean-front property owned by Treedom Ventures Ltd. which is owned, at least partially, by Mayor Robertson. Drummond Pike and Joel Solomon also own property within walking distance of Hank's beach.

Tides USA says that Hank's Beach was purchased in the mid 2000's by Renewal Partners. U.S. tax returns show that Endswell paid about [\\$660,000](#) for the "maintenance of protected property" between 1997 and 2002. Was that Hank's Beach?

Of all the countries in the world where the Tides USA could purchase a million dollar property and turn it into a park, why Canada? Why Cortes Island? And why Hank's Beach? This beach is a favorite of some of the locals, but it's far from pristine. It's been logged. One thing is for sure, it won't hurt Mayor Robertson's property value to be next door to a 150 acre park.

In 2009 and 2010, Tides USA paid [\\$8.4 million to 43 organizations](#) for their involvement in a "Tar Sands" campaign, U.S. tax returns say. For general support, Tides USA paid a further \$1.8 million to these groups for a total of \$10.2 million over two years.

Back in 2004, U.S. tax returns show that the Hewlett Foundation paid Tides Canada \$70,000 "for the development of a strategic plan to address the oil and gas industry in British Columbia." Since then, the Hewlett Foundation has granted [\\$25.7 million](#) to Tides Canada and Tides USA for projects to "address" the oil and gas industry in Canada. That's a lot of money, and it raises a fair question: *What was the strategic plan?* Did it involve funding a large number of small environmental organizations to campaign in concert against Canadian oil, and in particular, against Canadian oil exports to Asia? Did it involve huge payments from American foundations to First Nations but only on the strategic, north coast of B.C.? Did it involve supporting a particular politician? Or a particular political party?

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