

2018-14 Yang vs Vancouver Sun

*March 6, 2018 – For immediate release*

The National NewsMedia Council has dismissed a complaint about bias and error in a Vancouver Sun article about a temporary modular housing project.

The complainant, Jack Yang, said the February 11 2018 Vancouver Sun article, “Vancouver unveils Marpole temporary modular housing”, showed bias, failed to include important information, and contained factual error in mis-stating the distance of temporary modular home from schools.

The complainant said the student spokespersons cited in the article don’t live in area and can’t represent elementary students, and objected that the news media made no attempt to seek the neighbours’ reaction to the project.

In a subsequent email, the complainant took exception to the Sun’s balance in reporting on the Marpole homes issue. He objected to reporting that the Mayor attributed opposition to the project to some in the community and misinformation, saying the information was provided by the city. He also faulted the news outlet for failing to describe the prospective tenants or the alternate sites the neighbours suggested.

The Vancouver Sun acknowledged that the reported distance to the schools was incorrect, and stated that an online correction was made.

The news outlet said the article included acknowledgement from the mayor about local neighborhood concerns. However, it noted the focus of the story was on the opportunity to tour the modular homes, which are part of a larger plan to address the city’s affordable housing crisis.

Referring to the student spokespersons, the paper denied any factual error and re-affirmed they are from the high school as stated.

Regarding the complaint that the news media failed to describe the home’s tenants, the Sun responded that tenants are yet to move in. It said that when they do move in, the Sun will report on the true mix of tenants, the services in place to support them, and neighborhood reaction.

It also noted that previous stories have focused on the conflict between those who support and oppose the location of the temporary modular housing and the potential mix of tenants, and cited two relevant articles.

Reviewing the materials presented, the error in stating the distance to the schools was corrected in a timely manner and appropriate fashion.

Council found no evidence in the article about where the students live, nor that they do not attend the school in question. It also found no allegation that the students claimed to represent elementary students. On that basis, Council dismissed this portion of the complaint.

Regarding the complaint that the mayor or city misinformed citizens, the NNC found the specific nature and source of information or misinformation was not addressed in the article or complaint.

The Sun stated the article was intended to give readers a 'tour' of the newly-opened temporary modular housing project, and indicated that other stories it has published covered the controversy around the homes. It is within the news media's editorial latitude to decide how to cover a story. Writing a story describing a newsworthy municipal facility is well within journalistic standards.

Council found it is not obligatory to cover all aspects of an ongoing story in each article, and in this case the news media's statement that it intends to do follow up stories on tenants, services, and residents' reaction indicates that part of the controversy will not be left out.

In light of the above, Council found no grounds for the allegation of bias or failure to include important information, and no breach of journalistic standards, and dismissed the complaint.