The Nature of Leadership

Ideas for Building Inclusive, Sustainable Communities

CENTRE FOR CIVIC GOVERNANCE

Innovative Strategies Series
Volume 3

The Nature of Leadership: Ideas for
building inclusive, sustainable communities

Columbia Institute
Centre for Civic Governance, 2012

Edited by Pat Gordon and the Columbia Institute

Graphic design: Pete Tuepah and Nadene
Rehnby, www.handsonpublications.com

ISBN 978-0-9876730-0-8

CENTRE
FOR
CIVIC
GOVERNANCE

1200 – 1166 Alberni Street
Vancouver, BC V6E 3Z3
604.408.2500

www.civicgovernance.ca

Contents

INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt that we are living in a time of immense economic and environmental upheaval. While much public and political attention is focused on technocratic issues, the details of these conversations can slow action or halt it altogether. It is becoming clear that there are plenty of solutions to the large challenges of our era. What we need is leadership.

This volume of the Columbia Institute's *Innovative Strategies* Series highlights leadership stories from across the country and beyond. It relates stories of individuals and communities who are boldly confronting the myriad challenges of the present age and making the places in which they live more sustainable, more democratic, and more just.

Their leadership inspires the work of the Columbia Institute, and we hope that it will inspire your work as well.

Since 2006, the Centre for Civic Governance at the Columbia Institute has worked to inform, inspire and connect community leaders who are using progressive policies to build inclusive, sustainable communities. The chapters in this book are excerpts from presentations at our Annual Governance Forums and public events. Some are calls to action and others are stories of leadership taken and vision in action. Together they offer insights into effective strategies for building the inclusive, sustainable communities that are the backbone of our collective future.

— Charley Beresford, Executive Director, Columbia Institute

PART 1

Political Leadership

Political leadership is where the rubber hits the road. Visionary politicians marshall courage and commitment to build stronger, more just and sustainable communities.

PART 1.1

The Nature of Political Leadership

KEN LIVINGSTONE was Mayor of London, England, from 2000 to 2008. As the first Mayor under London's newly constituted Council, he established the world's most celebrated example of urban road toll, and he did it in the face of dire warnings and brutal opposition. When national leaders failed to show foresight in addressing environmental issues, Ken formed an international network of municipal leaders tackling climate change where the rubber hits the road — literally. He fought the privatization of the transit system.

Not only did he galvanize the environmental movement in London, but he also led efforts to maintain human rights across the city. Under his leadership the Greater London Council found ways to support marginalized and vulnerable people while the Thatcher administration was finding ways to cut them off. For 30 years, Ken Livingstone has made a career of moving forward when people said he couldn't; of saying yes to tough challenges, even when the odds were insurmountable; and of finding solutions where most only saw problems.

It's hard to know where to start talking about political leadership, but perhaps I should begin with one of the things we got right and that was London's traffic congestion. When we introduced the congestion charge in 2003, 40 per cent of people who had been driving cars into the centre of the city chose to stop doing so. That — after two and a half years of unremitting predictions of disaster from the press — was twice what we

Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London, England from 2000 to 2008, not only galvanized the environmental movement in London, but led efforts to maintain human rights across the city.

expected. What it also enabled us to do was achieve a general shift in modes of transportation.

London is the only large city in the world that has experienced a significant move away from private car usage to public transport. That shift allowed us to transform our failing, privatized bus system into a modern, efficient service. Buses had become the transport mode for people too young to drive, people too old to drive, and people too poor to drive. The congestion charge unleashed a general shift to public transit, and now we've got a proper mix of Londoners, wealthy and poor, riding the bus because it actually makes sense to do so.

London is the only large city in the world that has experienced a significant move away from private car usage to public transport. That shift allowed us to transform our failing, privatized bus system into a modern, efficient service.

My only worry in introducing the congestion charge was not whether it would work technically, but whether it would be politically acceptable. It appears that it was. In the 10 days that followed its introduction, my poll ratings went up by 10 per cent and allowed me to coast to a comfortable re-election.

The lesson from this success is not related to the actual issue so much as it is about the nature of political leadership. What earthly reason is there for being a politician if all you do is listen to the spin doctors and

the polling analysts telling you what people want, and then give it to them? If all you are doing is reflecting back the banal generality that dominates the media at any one time, well, you could have a well-trained dog do that.

Leadership is about actually deciding where we need to be going. It seems to me that political leadership requires you to be studying and learning, and constantly looking at what's happening in the world. It means communicating with people about where we need to go and then taking them in that direction. And it means that if you are overwhelmingly popular all the time, that you are most probably not doing your job.

> CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION IN LONDON

The big issue, and I'm finding our lack of progress on it quite depressing, is climate change. The tragedy of the Blair government was that it allowed itself to be effectively vetoed by polls and the newspapers, and nowhere was this more evident than on the issue of climate change. Blair was always saying what was needed, but didn't push through the changes needed in the way we do business, in the way we live our lives.

What earthly reason is there for being a politician if all you do is listen to the spin doctors and the polling analysts telling you what people want, and then give it to them? Leadership is about actually deciding where we need to be going.

What struck me as strange as I set up my administration was that the City had very little actual legal power within the sphere of environmental policy. So we set out to look at that, and to set up a Climate Action Plan.

Now, you find when you start talking about climate change that people complain. It's all very gloomy and miserable—ah, he's going to tell us to carve our own shoes out of tree bark, and grow our own muesli. My staff came back saying that we could reduce London's carbon emissions by 60 per cent in just 20 years, and none of it involved diminishing our quality of life. The 60 per cent reduction could basically come out of efficiency.

To begin with, we have only one generating plant in the city. Virtually whatever the form of energy generation, there is a vast plant a long way away on a coastline or river or some place where there is access to the large amounts of water needed for the cooling process. Nearly two-thirds of the energy generated is lost through the cooling process and through the transmission process. Of course, politicians don't want to suggest

> Q AND A WITH KEN LIVINGSTONE

Q. How do you get through the bit where you really have to be gutsy?

A. With the congestion charge, I had four years to make it work, and so I started right at the beginning of my term. I knew that you couldn't possibly go into an election promising to implement the charge or have a referendum on it. It was rejected in Manchester because people had been led to believe that they would be impoverished, business would leave, the city would collapse, the plague would come, and civilization would end. The stuff that the papers pour out is awful. And it is part of the political leadership problem.

So we moved quickly and the charge came in within a year. You can't just leave the bureaucracy to do this. You have to manage it; you have to drive it through. We met with our team every week and put them through the grill, challenged everything. And by the time we got to press the start button we knew it would technically work. But I also knew that people had to see it work before they went to the ballot box.

That's just one of the weaknesses of our political system. People are disillusioned. They just believe everything that politicians do is wrong or will cost too much or will be over budget. People were stunned that it came in and it worked. Sitting in a traffic jam costs people money. Within 48 hours papers had stopped reporting it.

LONDON TRAFFIC, PHOTO COURTESY ABEL VILCHES

> Q AND A WITH KEN LIVINGSTONE

Q. How would you address the housing problem, which means people have to commute long distances into the centre of the city for work?

A. Thirty years ago, the national government stopped building tenure housing, and now in a city of 7 million, 700,000 families are waiting for a home. And the population is growing. We need to build half a million affordable homes.

The good thing about London is that the areas of poverty are relatively small and mixed in. In most of London you've got very poor people just two or three streets away from rich barristers and television producers. We've got to preserve that. We can't repeat the mistake of Paris where the poor and the refugees are all on the periphery.

At one point the government agreed that half the housing in every development of over 15 homes had to be affordable. That's been set back, but we must insist on reinstituting the tenure building program. It might not be 50 per cent because the whole market has been transformed catastrophically, but we need to specify a good mix; not just of affordable and private housing, but a mix in terms of sizes, because the weakness of the 50 per cent bill was that the developers all built one and two person units.

We also have to specify that the most advanced stage of environmental technology be put into whatever is being built. It's completely unacceptable to come back in 10 or 15 years' time to retrofit the homes we're building now.

BRAMPTON, ONTARIO PHOTO COURTESY SEAN MARSHALL

local generation within a mile or two of people's homes, because there would be a big commotion about whatever form of energy is actually proposed. However, by generating energy locally we would be able to cut London's carbon emissions by 30 per cent, and of course make the energy much cheaper. I think it's an argument that we need to have.

The other 30 per cent reduction comes from fuel efficiencies, just by cutting out waste. I led the way on this once, hanging off the edge of my roof while we put voltaics and solar panels up. And we have just had the next stage done, insulating the walls. The results are stunning—I suspect our energy bill will be somewhere between a third and a half of what it was. I think improving home energy efficiency is the biggest single thing to do before we get on to other issues like transportation. Not only would that mean assisting average-income families, who are being crucified by increasing energy costs, but you would also be creating a decade of work for tens of thousands of people in a city where, like most cities in the West, working class jobs in manufacturing have been wiped out.

I think improving home energy efficiency is the biggest single thing to do before we get on to other issues like transportation. Not only would that mean assisting average-income families, who are being crucified by increasing energy costs, but you would also be creating a decade of work for tens of thousands of people.

Of course, moving people out of their cars and onto mass transit is absolutely crucial. My biggest project is to persuade the government to put up a third of the cost of building a new Underground line, which would increase the capacity of our system by 20 per cent. (That line was first proposed in 1968 or 1969. I don't know what it's like in Canada getting infrastructure works off the ground in reasonable time, but in Britain you die of old age and it's something you leave your children to do.)

There are other things to work on like cutting out the waste of water. We had a campaign to persuade people not to flush the toilet every single time they used it if they'd only had a pee … All of these things do not involve a worse quality of life, but they do involve us making little changes in the way we live. It seems to me that is the job of politicians, to provide that sort of leadership, to educate, to actually see where we're going.

> GLOBALLY SPEAKING

In the run-up to the 2009 Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen, I had not the slightest doubt that, after all the posturing and the huffing and puffing, there would be a deal. I found it inconceivable that intelligent individuals, who must have been briefed by their scientific advisors, could walk away from that conference having made no progress. And now, obsessed with our short-term economic problems, the Western nations seem to be forming a consensus: "Put this off to 2020."

> Q AND A WITH KEN LIVINGSTONE

Q. Where does the Occupy Movement fit?

A. Occupy seems to be broadly about injustice and unfairness, about the inequalities that have multiplied in the past 30 years. I think this is a spasm of anger that reflects very deeply held views of the majority of the population, even if they don't identify with the lifestyle. The big difference with 30 years ago is that none of these people have been through Marxist training. They haven't had to go to meetings night after night after night to discuss how global revolution is going to work. So, the Occupy Movement isn't necessarily focused on a coherent set of ideas; there is no agenda of reform. No, my heart is with them, but at my age I am not going to sleep in a tent in the middle of the city over winter.

OCCUPY LONDON PHOTO COURTESY WHEELZWHEELER

Climate change is the biggest problem that humanity has faced in its entire history. It is absolutely daunting that we are not making progress. We are seeing a catastrophic failure of political leadership on the national and international levels.

So, nothing is better placed to deal with this than the City. Mayors are sick and tired of waiting for their national governments to do something. I met the Mayor of Mumbai whose entire city, surrounded on three sides by the sea, is one metre above sea level. The city faces the overwhelming prospect of thirteen million people being inundated by flood waters at some point in this century. The mayor of New York, who actually has enough power and resources to take action, has already created a system to cope with the increasing power of hurricanes, expected as the temperature of the North Atlantic rises.

Cities can't wait for national governments. We need to start making changes in how we run our cities, how we supply their energy, how we reduce the carbon emissions, so that eventually, when national governments are finally forced to act, we've got infrastructures already there to build on and rapidly expand.

> DISTRACTION

Unfortunately, we're losing the initiative on this because the total focus amongst Western world leaders now is on the current financial crisis. In Britain the government's response has been to make massive cuts in the public sector, despite warnings that this isn't the way out of this scale of debt. If you actually look at history, making cuts like this doesn't lift you out of debt. It buries you deeper in it. And that's exactly where we now are. Growth in the British economy over the last year has flatlined. There just isn't an example anywhere of deep cuts working, except in Canada, who did that back in the 1990s at a time when the world economy was growing, and there was a demand for vast amounts of its mineral wealth. But that isn't a good template for the rest of us.

It shouldn't come as a surprise to anybody that cuts don't work. You only have to look at President Roosevelt's policies in the 1930s. When Roosevelt came to office, he massively accelerated and extended many of the great public works—the Hoover Dam, the Golden Gate Bridge—that had been started. At the end of his first term, GDP growth in America was 40 per cent—and unemployment had been cut from 25 per cent to 14 per cent. And then when he was re-elected, the Federal

Cities are the answer to our economic problems. They are the answer to our environment problems. If we have the confidence, we can make the future a progressive one. Now is the time to seize the debate and to change the direction in which humanity goes for the next century. VANCOUVER BIKE LANE PHOTO COURTESY JEFF ARSENAULT

Cities can't wait for national governments. We need to start making changes in how we run our cities, how we supply their energy, how we reduce the carbon emissions, so that eventually, when national governments are finally forced to act, we've got infrastructures already there to build on and rapidly expand.

Reserve, the politicians and the bankers all crowded in to say, 'You've got to stop borrowing money to put people back to work. The levels of debt are unsustainable.' And he fell for this. He cut programs and immediately America went back into recession. It took his entire second term to get unemployment back to the level it had been at the end of his first term. And then of course, there was a huge increase in public spending because of the War.

So now we're having a very intense period of debate in Europe between those saying you can cut your way out of this economic crisis, and those who are saying, no—put people back to work and you'll get sustainable growth in the economy that will pay back this debt. I think we're at a tipping point, the sort of thing that happens once or twice in a lifetime.

It seems to me there have been two previous tipping points in modern times. One happened with the broadly followed consensus that was established by Roosevelt in America and in Britain by the Attlee Labour government of 1945: strong government, a large state intervening to regulate and to redistribute wealth from rich to poor. Those interventions dominated the post-war period and led to 30 years of amazing growth in the West.

The second tipping point was the election of Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in America, whose policies were to smash the trade unions, deregulate business, and cut taxes on rich people and corporations to "unleash the dynamism of the private sector." In the 30 years since that policy was introduced in Britain and America, the truth is that we have never equaled the levels of investment or growth in GDP that we had in the three decades prior to that initiation.

> IF WE HAVE THE CONFIDENCE...

I think we're now exactly at another one of those points where everything is up in the air. How do we get out of the economic crisis and get on to the more urgent issues of climate change?

Cities can set the agenda where national governments are failing. By the middle of this century, three-quarters of the world's population will be living in cities. The solutions must come from mayors and local councils, whose focus is the day-to-day work of government and the delivery of services. We can create a whole range of new jobs built around tackling the problems of climate change, giving work to people who have seen their jobs eroded away. We can mitigate or even reverse the social consequences that flow from the Thatcher/Reagan agenda, and at the same time we can lay the foundation for long-term sustainable growth.

Cities are the answer to our economic problems. They are the answer to our environment problems. If we have the confidence, we can make the future a progressive one. Now is the time to seize the debate and to change the direction in which humanity goes for the next century.

PART 2

Engagement Leadership

Engaged citizens are a necessary part of building strong and inclusive communities. Citizen engagement makes a significant difference, both in election results and in a government's ability to follow through on promises and respond to community needs. This section features creative stories and tools for deepening citizen engagement.

PART 2.1

Leadership in the Public Realm

ADAM VAUGHAN was first elected to Toronto City Council in 2006 representing Trinity-Spadina. Home to more than 80,000 people and 3,500 businesses, this ward is one of the country's most diverse and fastest growing communities. Adam has championed community interests and engagement in land use planning to sustain vibrant neighbourhoods, which has achieved innovative approaches to public benefits within new developments. Before holding public office Adam worked as a political journalist and activist for over 20 years.

The notion that politics belongs to the people is something that we often talk about but very rarely put into actual practice. In fact, most of us spend a lot of time and energy getting elected, and then we centralize the power in our offices and into our councils and we rarely share or decentralize it.

When I suddenly found myself sitting at a Council seat, with an office and a ward to represent, a number of the theoretical ideas we had been debating suddenly became practical. What *is* public space? What *is* public participation? How does government create solutions rather than simply manage problems?

Unfortunately, many communities don't have the advantages of the ward that I represent. My ward is undergoing spectacular growth. Extraordinary investment by private sector individuals is driving a lot of economic activity into the ward. I'm not sure I would opt for this

growth, but it does allow one to harness that power and turn it back into community infrastructure.

The Council began by returning the ward to the residents. When I took office, one of the first things we did was assemble members of the Residents' Associations and the few Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) in the ward and connect them with leaders from the universities, community colleges, the hospital sector and other social movements. We said, "Look, here's the ward. What are we going to do with it?"

> COMMUNITY MAPPING

What emerged was a community mapping exercise. Combining a group of planning students from Ryerson University with members of the Residents' Associations (and the institutional memory that's embedded in those associations and the local businesses), we mapped every corner of the ward. Public space. Private space. Places you want to change; places you want to stabilize. Places that could be improved; places that were perfect. And for each neighbourhood we built a priority list of things we could fix if we had the opportunity.

Some common themes emerged from this exercise. To begin with, the usual planning process was completely confrontational, but it didn't need to be. If you think of planning as collaboration rather than as planning, it changes your complete outlook. Mapping these areas and bringing these communities together gave us a way of communicating across the ward. We also found that some agreement was emerging about how to deal with things.

We arrived at some basic principles. First of all, the community action lists are owned and created by the neighbourhood. People can check the ward website to find these lists. There are also checklists outlining how to measure and evaluate new projects that are proposed for the neighbourhood, and each neighbourhood has a unique set of project criteria. If a proposed change doesn't match the list, it's my job is try to bring the community and the change advocate together. We bounce it back and forth until the proposal becomes something that does fit the list.

The other piece of this system is the development list. We aimed to create an effective planning process within the list concept. If a developer buys into the list, the community gets out of the way and the project can move ahead very quickly. We urge the developers to ask the community how a parcel of land could be used so that we can actually prepackage

If you think of planning as collaboration rather than as planning, it changes your complete outlook. PHOTO COURTESY ATOMICWORKSHOP/FLICKR

a proposal before it gets to the planning department. By the time the developers need approval for their financing, the conversations have happened and the application has essentially been approved by the community. I figure we've saved the City $8 billion through this collaborative approach, and although that savings doesn't come back to my Ward specifically, it is a significant net savings to the City.

> VERTICAL NEIGHBOURHOODS, NOT VERTICAL SUBURBS

We campaigned on a family housing platform. It was a given that family housing had to be restored in the ward. We had 8,000 units of housing in City Place around Rogers Centre (the SkyDome) and only one tenth of one per cent were big enough to house a family. The project was leveraged to build two new schools, but there were no children in the area. We would have to bus kids into the downtown core to fill those schools, and we were going to have to close other schools right across the ward to do that. It's insane. That is a perfect example of what happens when the planning is done in the absence of the community. The message to developers is that we need to focus on how a building works in the community, not on how tall it will be.

What we are trying to do is transform these buildings from being vertical suburbs into being vertical neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods are about integration, not sprawl.

One of the interesting things about downtown Toronto is that food deserts are ubiquitous. Redevelopment usually closes the corner grocery stores, whose profit margins are minimal, and large grocery stores only move into a neighbourhood when it reaches critical mass. The usual population of our new developments has a huge preponderance of empty nesters and singles who go out to restaurants, and seniors who don't eat as much as younger people. Moving families into these new neighbourhoods changes the consumption pattern—suddenly you have

> Q & A WITH ADAM VAUGHAN

Q. How do you deal with factions within a community that are resistant to change?

A. We keep in mind two useful strategies. We have pockets of extreme affluence and poverty in our ward, though not to the same degree as in the rest of the City. One of the things we do is consciously stage the meetings inside public housing projects. We have three reasons for this:

1. You need to go to the low-income communities since residents of those neighbourhoods don't always have the resources to get to meetings outside of their communities.
2. We want to show people from affluent neighbourhoods what poverty looks like.
3. By being in the same space, people actually start to think together about their common problems. That begins to deconstruct the class barriers that crop up.

Another important piece is community engagement. When you start from broad principles, people buy in. When there isn't a particular project on the table that's going to impact a particular person, the response is generally much more mannered and much more open-minded. Then it becomes a question of how a specific proposal weaves into the neighbourhood, not how it displaces something else in the community. People understand how it is going to fit in

food stores and services repopulating the ground floors of the buildings. Moving in families creates stronger streetscapes.

Our problem with the way that we are intensifying our cities is that we focus on hard services. We fortify the train stations. We leverage the highway interchange. We take advantage of where the sewer pipes are. We don't intensify and build on the soft services. We don't build families around our libraries and hospitals. We don't look at the numbers to see where we need to invest children into the school system. This needs to change. We need to build tax bases into communities where our soft services are vulnerable.

The challenge of soft services gets to the idea of building strategic housing. Let's build housing near the hospitals for the nurses, orderlies and different service staff of the hospital sector. It would cut commuter time, which is environmentally beneficial and saves money in the hospital budget. It would also improve the quality of life for people working in those hospitals.

We need to look at this differently. If the incentives were placed around soft services, everything would become integrated around them. The planning and development industry is not interested in having that conversation; nor is it happening at the provincial level.

> PARKS ARE COMMUNITY SPACES

As we intensify we tend to overuse existing parks rather than create new ones. And the competition for the parks changes radically when the form of the neighbourhood is changed. We have only 128 kids in those 8,000 condominiums, but 34 per cent of the condominiums have dogs. A brand new school with a park was built, but it's overrun with dogs; we actually had to change one of the playing fields to a dog park.

Neighbourhoods really want to reclaim these spaces. We are setting up Park Improvement Associations that are modeled on the Business Improvement Associations. We have gathered both the businesses and the residents who live around the park, and asked them to set up a programing committee. Essentially we are asking the Park Improvement Associations to babysit their local parks, because quite frankly, due to budget cuts, the city has lost the capacity to manage the parks on a detailed level.

We have 16 parks that communities are managing in terms of concept development and actual construction. They've carried out

Essentially we are asking the Park Improvement Associations to babysit their local parks, because quite frankly, due to budget cuts, the city has lost the capacity to manage the parks on a detailed level.

KENSINGTON MARKET PHOTO COURTESY GYPSY AND THE FOOL/FLICKR

amazing surveys of children about playgrounds. They are also stepping into the role of managing the programs that are brought in, so that the delicacy of the parks is protected and the negative impact of large events on the neighbourhood is mitigated. You can't shoo the local daycare kids out of the park for three weeks to bring in an art installation.

> NON-PROFIT COMMERCIAL SPACE

Many of the brick and beam warehouses that are being replaced with residential condos previously housed artists and entrepreneurs. Commercial rents and occupancy costs in new construction buildings are significantly higher than comparable spaces in older buildings.

We have also worked on ways to create new non-profit commercial space. We have required developers to include commercial space at the street-levels of their projects. This presents a challenge to developers because in order to secure financing for a condominium, banks require that leases be signed for the commercial spaces. This is one of the reasons that you see large banks and Shoppers Drug Marts occupying the base of every condominium. Our idea is to take the space back from the developer and try to animate it.

We have worked with groups like the Toronto Arts Council and Artscape to secure new commercial space for artists and entrepreneurs in the base of new condominiums. The space is owned by the City and leased back to the Toronto Arts Council or Artscape at cost. We also worked to protect artists in the common charges agreements, and when we did so, we suddenly had 20,000 square feet of non-profit commercial space controlled by the Arts Council and Artscape. Jewelry makers,

To secure financing for a condominium, banks require that leases be signed for the commercial spaces. Our idea is to take the space back from the developer and try to animate it. PHOTO COURTESY DRUM188/FLICKR

dressmakers, small publishers, and a whole series of entrepreneurs whom most people would think of as artists are now gaining access to this space. We worked with the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) to help them establish an urban campus. Developers now come to us begging for clients because it's become a cachet, a way of selling a building. In the downtown core the simple presence of OCAD in the basement was powerful enough to sell out an entire building, which they rebranded "The Studio." All of a sudden Richmond Street, which once lay dormant in the downtown core, has a very active client playing in it.

Sustaining the economic diversity of the downtown core through social housing is something other cities—London and New York as examples—are doing. In Montreal you also can't build a project without negotiating some public housing. In Toronto we are beginning to say to developers, "If you want those extra five floors, two of them come back to us." We are also looking at rebuilding a business model within the cooperative housing movement.

We are reclaiming space and bringing it back into the public realm. And what we already have in the public realm, we are taking out of City Hall and putting back into the community's hands. In doing that, we have discovered an extraordinarily engaged public, one who sees its parks and its streetscapes as its own.

And what's really good about all these things is that they don't use tax dollars.

PART 2.2

Beyond the Usual Suspects: The Art of Civic Engagement

DAVE MESLIN is a Toronto-based artist and organiser. Multi-partisan and fiercely optimistic, Dave embraces ideas and projects that cut across traditional boundaries between grassroots politics, electoral politics and the arts community. In his work, he attempts to weave elements of these communities together. Dave has instigated a variety of urban projects, including the Toronto Public Space Committee, *Spacing Magazine, City Idol,* Toronto Cyclists Union, and Better Ballots. He is the author of *Local Motion: The Art of Civic Engagement in Toronto* (2010).

A while ago the Toronto City Council held a 24-hour budget deputation session. One of the conservative councillors tried to discredit the deputants by accusing us of being the "usual suspects."

What this councillor specifically said was, "They're the same people who show up every time. They're paid by the unions to show up. They don't represent anyone except special interest groups. *They're just the usual suspects*."

I became really defensive about that and performed some informal interviews. I asked, "Do you have a job? Have you been here before? Are you a usual suspect?" And sure enough, there were a lot of new, fresh faces.

That said, the conservative councillor is kind of right. The same people do show up repeatedly, and we're usually talking to ourselves. So what I've been trying to do with my work is determine how we get beyond involving only the usual suspects.

In a CBC interview a while ago they asked me, "Dave, do we really need to get more people involved? Is [increasing involvement] really an issue?" The answer is indisputable. Yes! In a city of two and a half million people is it exciting that 300 people show up? Is that how low we set our expectations? Is that engagement?

So I'm going to tell you a bit about how I've been trying to recruit the city of Toronto's other 2.5 million people.

> SLICK OR SLICKER

I love the activist scene. What I'm always trying to figure out is how to get people who aren't part of that scene into my work. And I think part of the problem is that we're scared. We're scared of marketing because we associate slick marketing ads with companies who are often doing things we don't appreciate, or doing things in ways we don't appreciate.

I try to take the opposite approach. I always try to be as slick as those companies, or slicker. For example, I never use photocopies. Everything is always in full colour. I put as much effort into developing a 'corporate brand' for my projects as I do into the research and the politics. In this way, I make myself a viable competitor.

The Toronto Cyclists Union was founded three years ago. Cyclists are often stereotyped as being aggressive, angry … reckless. So we spent a long time with a professional marketing group devising a logo to combat that stereotype. The logo we designed is a circle, using lower case and rounded fonts. There isn't a single edge or corner anywhere on the text. The message there? We're not angry. We're quiet. We're the Toronto Cyclists Union.

So, branding is one useful tool. Planning projects in creative ways draws more people out and thus moves involvement beyond the usual suspects. Klein vs. Klein was an event we almost planned some years ago. I was working with someone who had left then Premier Mike Harris's office and was doing some consulting. We met because this fellow had been sending out libelous press releases about me. The one thing that we agreed on was getting people talking about politics. I suggested holding debates

> RE-INVISIONING PLANNING NOTICES

We all know what a planning notice looks like. It's the one in the papers that you have to read half the notice before you find out which street they're talking about. You'll never see a Nike ad like that because Nike actually wants you to buy their shoes.

People are being intentionally excluded by those who are publishing the planning notices. I did a call-out to graphic designers in Toronto. I asked them to design an ad where the goal was not to meet the requirements of the planning act, but rather to attract an audience out to a planning meeting. I asked them to: use messages like, 'We want to hear from you'; include a colour-sketch of the proposed building; and have a big banner saying something like, 'Planning meeting coming up. Your opinion matters!' We featured their submissions in an art exhibition downtown.

People care enormously about their community and if they're invited in the same strong bold way that Nike tries to get us to buy their shoes, I think they'll show up.

that would be called "boxing matches" rather than the "Toronto Civic Speakers' Series." I would get the big left-wing boxers and he would get the big right-wingers. The first one we were going to do was Klein vs. Klein, Naomi vs. Ralph.

Unfortunately the timing didn't work out, but the example serves as a helpful illustration of how something we already do can be made so much more fun and colourful. People who aren't politicos are more likely to show up.

> TORONTO PUBLIC SPACE COMMITTEE

The Public Space Committee (TPSC) is a project that I ran for 10 years in Toronto. What we did was try to find fun ways to get people involved with the concept of reclaiming public space. 'Public space' can mean a sidewalk or a park. It can also be a metaphor for reclaiming City Hall. It means thinking of libraries and publically-funded daycares as shared space. It means feeling a sense of public ownership over the sidewalks right in front of our houses.

TPSC was voted 'Best Activist Organization' by *Eye Weekly*, a leading entertainment weekly in Toronto. We never had any staff—just volunteers. No office. No funding. Just using branding, good marketing, and creative ways to do things that people were already advocating for, but going beyond involving merely the usual suspects.

> THE POSTER BYLAW FIGHT

The Toronto Public Space Committee's first campaign was against a bylaw that would ban posters on public property in the city. At the time, huge electronic billboards were going up around the city. The first billboard was in Younge-Dundas Square and then there was pressure to put up 17 across the whole city, including residential neighbourhoods. People know how to "turn off" ads. They can change the channel on TV, turn the radio down when the ads come on, or flip the page in a magazine. To combat this ability, companies are resorting to advertising in intrusive places where they have a captive audience: in bathroom stalls, at gas pumps, in elevators, and along highways.

Meanwhile the City was trying to ban posters 8.5 by 11 inches because the Council considers it visual clutter! Essentially, what they

We started putting signs on posters to reach people: *Warning: your poster will soon be illegal. Come to our website*. PHOTOS COURTESY PETE TUEPAH AND KINGSTONIST/FLICKR

were trying to do was put a price tag on freedom of expression. You can say anything if you have $50,000 a month to put it up on a screen, but if you have a piece of paper you want to post somehow you're polluting the environment. So the TPSC launched a campaign, and it was exciting because many people got involved. Talking about large abstract issues such as the environment or even Occupy, is vague. But lots of people use posters, and lots of people look at posters. So, we started putting signs on posters to reach people: *Warning: your poster will soon be illegal. Come to our website.*

On our website we explained how people who teach piano lessons, or have a lost pet use posters; babysitters, political groups, and religious groups all rely on posters. We had artists who made campaign materials using cartoons and illustrations. We got groups to endorse a statement. Groups who probably had never signed a petition in their lives, or gone into City Hall, or even known that you could go to a City Hall meeting, suddenly had an issue that they cared about. We held a press conference with Billy Bragg. We got the attention of the *National Post*, the local paper, and City Hall.

> GUERRILLA GARDENING: VANDALIZING THE CITY WITH NATURE

Then the TPSC did something else to involve people other than the usual suspects. We found orphan public spaces and we invited the public to come and plant things. It doesn't sound exciting, but two things happen in situations like these: people show up and they plant. And, they're being exposed to a group that's also doing policy advocacy at City Hall. So they come to our meeting about the gardening, but then they hear about the poster bylaw and a whole variety of other things. And many are hooked.

Something also changes in people's minds when they participate in a community action. As soon as we do something like plant a boulevard, suddenly there's collective ownership. It changes the way that our brains are wired.

> THE DOWNTOWN DEFENCE PROJECT

Fences obviously divide neighbours. But more importantly, fences are a symbolic barrier between the City and individuals When you take down a actual fence, you are also dismantling that sense of separation, and your thinking shifts.

A lot of people got involved with these fun projects and then got involved with policy advocacy. And once they are involved with advocacy, suddenly everything is part of their City.

Compelled to act by these thoughts, TPSC launched the Downtown Defence Project. Volunteers put flyers on people's fences, and sure enough, people phoned us. This is one of the ways I recruited volunteers, who spent a few hours dismantling a fence with grinders and pliers. In an hour the fence is down and all these people have engaged with each other and learned about volunteering. They've had that wiring change in their head, understanding that our community can transform.

A lot of people got involved with these fun projects and then got involved with policy advocacy. And once they are involved with advocacy, suddenly everything is part of their City … That library should be open an hour longer … People shouldn't have to wait 20 minutes for a bus…. What's wrong here? How can I get involved?

> ART ATTACK

Another TPSC project was to take on commercial advertising in public spaces. Corporations can already advertise on TV and radio; they don't need more space. Public space is the one place where people can express themselves, where communities can put up their own signs and art.

It wouldn't have been effective to vandalize ads by throwing paint on them, or breaking the glass. For one thing the media wouldn't cover it, at least not in a positive way. And we wouldn't get volunteers or funding that way either. But what if we covered the commercial ads with community art?

So we hosted an event called Art Attack. We taped precut pieces of paper over ads. We received broad and positive media attention; for

example, MuchMusic put it on their national show. Tons of people showed up and learned about ownership and the malleability of public space.

Another related issue that TPSC took on was concerning bus shelter ads. Toronto used to have street names on our bus stops, which was a helpful indicator to transit users of where they were on the bus route. When the city sold off all our street furniture, the company who took over thought it was more important for everyone to know that Vicom owned the shelter than that people know their current location. We decided to take this on. We didn't ask people to sign a petition or phone City Council. Instead, we asked the public to create their own street signs for the shelters, put them up and send us a photo. And it worked.

When the city sold off all our street furniture, the company who took over thought it was more important for everyone to know that Vicom owned the shelter than that people know their current location. We asked the public to create their own street signs for the shelters, put them up and send us a photo. And it worked.

When people exercise their own creativity for public good, they become part of the group, they show up at meetings, where they hear about current relevant issues, learn about policy advocacy. Isolated individuals join forces to become a cohesive movement.

> WHO RUNS THIS TOWN?

TPSC also did some work to get people involved with the civic elections. I stole Nike's slogan and posted it on billboards everywhere with the added question: *Who runs this town?* Well, 45 people do. It's called City Council.

Our goal was to help people find out how to run for City Council, or how to get involved in other ways, including volunteering on others' campaigns. We were looking for city councillors, and we wanted people who were passionate about the City and who would represent greater diversity.

The final project of the campaign was called City Idol. The idea was to support young people who wouldn't typically know how—or have the guts—to run for office. The trick was that they would first compete in a competition like American Idol. We asked people to stand on a stage, and instead of competing with songs, they competed with their own ideas. I told the contestants if they win City Idol they get a campaign.

TPSC will raise funds for them. We'll make their signs and their flyers. They'll have training sessions. They'll be supported.

We had 70 people sign up to compete and 600 people in the audience. Both the candidates and the audience were incredibly diverse. We received tons of media attention and we had amazing candidates. If we had just called it 'Speech Night,' or 'City Council Contest,' no one would have shown up.

> KITE FESTIVAL

How do we promote wind power? Who's going to show up to a big rally for wind power? Well, two groups would: the people who already love wind power, and the Ontario wind interest groups. How do we intrigue more people? How about a kite festival?

First of all, lots of families will show up who don't care at all about energy—yet. But, once they're there, the kids are doing workshops on turbines, and learning about solar panels, and the parents can go to the Bullfrog tent and the Ontario Hydro tent.

> CAMPAIGNS ARE POWERED BY PEOPLE

The main resource that any campaign has is people. People have time, energy, and creativity. Think of your campaign volunteers as a set of batteries. To run a campaign, you need slots for nine volts, triple A's, maybe even a 12 volt car battery. If you create a campaign that has only nine-volt slots, others can't plug in and you lose an energy source. Your 'Nine Volt' is going to drain.

So if people have time on a weekday night for a one-hour meeting, make sure there's a meeting for them to attend. If they don't have time for a meeting but they can contribute financially, make sure they know how to do that easily. If they're broke and can't come to a meeting but have 10 minutes to phone their city councillor during the day, ensure they can find information on the issues and their councillor's phone number on your website. If someone doesn't have much time, but they can receive an assignment in the afternoon and do the necessary research at three in the morning, indulge them. You have to be able to accommodate people's fluctuating resource availabilities and skill sets.

You are more likely to attract people if you have a very friendly, happy message. People are busy, their work is already stressing them out, they might have stress at home, and the last thing they want to do with their one hour of free time is go to a group of angry people.

> CREATIVE MARKETING and INVITATION CHECKLIST

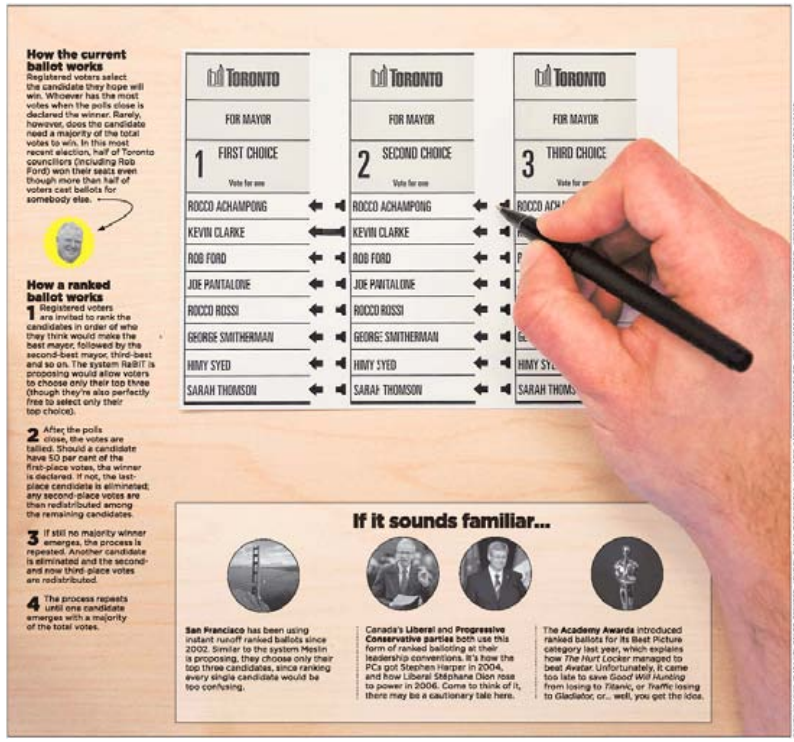
If we're always thinking about ways to get beyond the usual subjects by using creative marketing, we're going to attract a larger audience, and that's when change will really happen. When we think outside the box, we can energize more than those 300 people who show up at City Hall, and eventually capture the attention of all 2.5 million.

Create your own corporate brand:

- Always use good graphic design.
- Always think about colours.
- Always think about how to make it fun

Invitation checklist: 'People' details

- Is your marketing proactive?
- Is the venue accessible to your community?
- Is it happening at an hour when people can show up?
- Is there childcare provided?
- Is the invitation available in translation?



> BETTER BALLOTS

This is a campaign about voting reform, again attractively packaged. RABBIT (Ranked Ballot Initiative of Toronto) is a campaign advocating for instant run-off voting. No one would ever wear a button that said "We need rank ballots now!" or "Run-off voting is amazing!" But creating an acronym—RABBIT—allows us to use the Playboy logo. Phone companies use dogs and monkeys to sell phones. Why can't we use animals like rabbits to attract people to political ideas?

Hundreds and hundreds of people across the City of Toronto are wearing our buttons because of the sexy way the movement is being promoted. We give out beer coasters instead of flyers; you can slide one under someone's drink in a bar where people are hanging out. We have had great multi-partisan support for this campaign.

PART 2.3

Portland Placemaking

MARK LAKEMAN is widely known as an inspirational leader in the development of sustainable public places. In his journey of creative citizen engagement, Mark co-founded the City Repair Project in Portland, Oregon. City Repair is known an organization of citizen activists working to creatively transform the places where they live. Their work has inspired the creation of similar groups across the United States and beyond.

City Repair is very much an expression of Portland. It comes out of the visionary culture of activism that fused here during the 1960s and 1970s. When we started the group about 15 years ago, our intent as the emerging generation of leadership was to further the work of previous generations; to honour the work that had been done in transforming the city, and extend it.

Those of us who founded City Repair fully intend to experience world peace in our own lifetime. We don't really know what that will look like, and we don't really know how to get there. But we're not waiting around for the rest of the world to agree about it. You just have to start somewhere.

City Repair is about nourishing a place-based sense of community. Neighbourhoods all over Portland have felt the absence of gathering places, places where people connect and conduct their everyday lives. Our goal has been to help people realize that they are part of the city, and to help them find, or create, those gathering places.

The guiding principle of City Repair has always been to work at the grassroots level. We work in partnerships with municipalities, with neighbourhood associations … with anyone who wants to help.

From the beginning our intent was to do catalytic work, work that would generate an inspiring story that people could relate to, not only across the rest of our city but in cities across the country.

> CAUGHT UP IN THE GRID

Historically, American and Canadian cities across North America were impacted by the same approach to land development. Rapid westward expansion, underwritten by a mentality more exploitative than it was community building, required the adoption of national land development legislation. In Canada, that was the Dominion Land Survey; in the United States it was the National Land Ordinance of 1785. These two formulations were virtually the same. They were mandates to blueprint Roman colonial expansionist planning over the entire continent, indigenous societies notwithstanding. Like a net, these plans cast an imposing grid.

A few hundred years earlier, the Spanish had generated the Law of the Indies, a land ordinance that mandated public squares in the centre of every town. If you've gone to Mexico or lands farther south, you have seen there are plazas or zocolos in every single town or village. Canada and the United States are the first nations in the history of the grid to specifically omit the town square from the plan. No wonder the US has the most extreme phenomena of social isolation in the world. Per capita we have the smallest number of outdoor gathering places of all developed nations.

> PLACEMAKING

Let me offer a working definition of placemaking: it is the fusion of all of your concerns. When we get together with people that we live among, the values we share every day around the kitchen table get a chance to start taking form. When your community is trying to transform a 'placeless landscape' into somewhere that has a 'sense of place' and is functional, you are taking your ideas of economics *and* geography into account. You are trying to grow your community and reinforce it and make it sustainable, even if you don't know the word.

As opposed to our culture of regulations and zoning, placemaking can be quite a simple exercise.

One of the loveliest images I know is of a group of 20 African kids sitting in a circle, touching, feet forming the circle's inner ring. They are 'in school.' Each child tells a story about how the circle occurs 'in nature.' And as they go around and around in the circle they are teaching each other what they know: biological patterns, cosmology, mathematics and all forms of artistic expression. They are learning how to be storytellers and how to listen to each other. And, absolutely unlike our educational process that teaches us to have all the answers independently, when one little girl can't think of another way that the circle occurs, a friend either whispers or sings a song across the way. The game proceeds for hours and hours. The mentor thanks them for helping, and reminds them that they are, after all, one community. When they leave the circle, the children know that they *are* the circle, no matter where they go. This is deep identity building.

"Placemaking" is when your community is trying to transform a 'placeless landscape' into somewhere that has a 'sense of place' and is functional, taking your ideas of economics *and* geography into account.

Perhaps the most powerful thing the children in this circle learn is what they hold in common. They know what they know. In contrast, I don't think *we* know what *we* know. I think that's part of what we're trying to rediscover as we talk about sustainability.

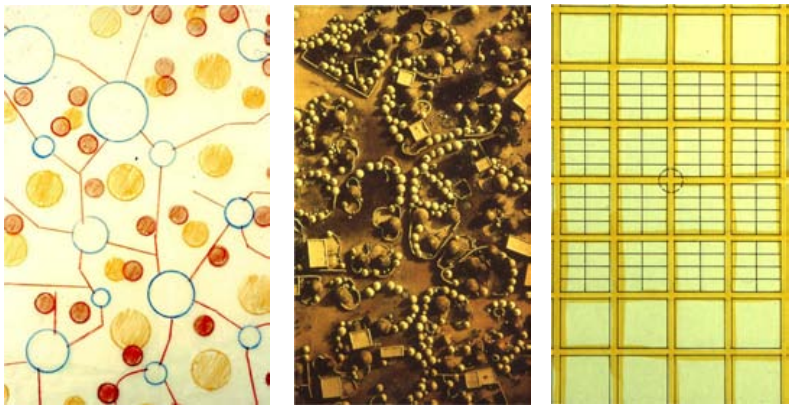
Those kids were doing what everybody in the world does when they start to create the central gathering place in their village. They aggregate active functions around a common space, which has at least three pathways leading in. The place they meet is literally an intersection; it is where their lives converge and they do what they do. They don't have

Sienna, in Italy, is a geomorphic village, generated to adapt to the landscape — to catch light, to capture water, and to establish a profound sense of place. MASSIMO CATARINELLA PHOTO

to talk about building community because they interact with each other as they go about their daily lives. This is how the most wonderful places on our planet still work.

One of the most beautiful and successful public spaces in all of the world is an intersection of the trade routes between Pisa, Milan and Rome, in the hills of Tuscany. It is the Piazza del Campo in the village of Sienna. This is a geomorphic village. It's been generated to adapt to the landscape—to catch light, to capture water, and to establish a profound sense of place. I am not romanticizing this village. I'm saying that place-based, imperfect people have generated this landscape for the most part as a reflection of themselves. It has endured for hundreds of years, and will surely exist for hundreds, if not thousands, more, because the people have invested themselves in it communally.

Sienna provides pretty much everything the villagers need, because it has been created by the people who live there. It's been adapted, taken down, and remade over time. This is a very, very different concept from the idea of developments that are generated by a few people, funded by a few people, built by many more people, who don't have any input, and then put up for sale.



Let's compare geomorphic villages and grid-based neighbourhood developments. In both cases you have pathways that meet and buildings that are aggregated into "blocks." But it is the intersections that are significant.

> GEOMORPHIC VILLAGES, ECOLOGICAL DESIGN

When we live in a landscape that has been generated as a product, a landscape that has been imposed without respect for natural systems, it is not surprising that we don't see ourselves as inherently of the earth. We easily recognize as natural the habitats created by bees, or foxes, or termites—species that interact with the environment. But, we can also recognize the human habitat as natural. When we look at a geomorphic village from high above, we see a pattern that is not unlike the inside of a wasps' nest or a termites' tower—these designs could be applied to the City of Venice or a small town in Central Africa.

Above is a diagram of the prototypical village. This is how a human habitat across the planet tends to look when it's generated by people who are connected to that place, irrespective of culture. It has nodes of connections at intersections and gathering places in the centres of blocks.

> THE GAME OF MONOPOLY

And what of the North American context? It is made up of gridscape: a world where arbitrary lines essentially establish what can happen where, and change is made through arduous processes.

At the beginning of the last century, Elizabeth Magie created the game of Monopoly as a cautionary device to help us understand the

consequences of our national land ordinances. Most of us have played this game. In it, you acquire houses. Then you gleefully tear them down and put in a hotel when you have enough money, without realizing that you are playing 'gentrification.' As the game proceeds, it might occur to you that the only public spaces are a jail and a parking lot. And further into the game you might realize that literally everything on the board is a form of commons—a Street, a Utility or a Railroad. This game is about the privatization of the commons. It is actually a condensed version of our national land ordinances.

This system of ours accounts for the absence of communal places. This is the Roman grid, after all, and the Roman Empire wasn't interested in building community and engendering communication. The emphasis is on economic capital. Not cultural capital. Not social capital. It is the geography of unsustainability.

> GEOMORPHIC VILLAGES AND GRID-BASED NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENTS

Let's compare geomorphic villages and grid-based neighbourhood developments. In both cases you have pathways that meet and buildings that are aggregated into "blocks." But it is the intersections that are significant.

In the geomorphic village the block has an open space, a functional commons. And where the pathways converge there's a widening of space, as if our lives are coming together at that place. This is where cultural, commercial and celebratory activities happen throughout the course of every day of the year.

By ordinance, the intersection of the grid is more a place where you might collide rather than converge with someone.

By ordinance, the intersection of the grid is more a place where you might collide rather than converge with someone.

So I'm going to present what may seem like a big stretch. The absence of 'place,' the absence of gathering space, hurts us absolutely as a democracy because freedom of assembly requires places in which to assemble. And if our cultures are missing these places so desperately, then what else are we missing? If we can't come together in the village heart to speak and listen and dance and do all the things people used to do, these things aren't being expressed and aren't being learned.

> THE FALLOUT

For most, the days in our cities begin with getting into cars. We flush from the housing zone to the working zone and then, after spending the day working with people we don't tend to know well, we head back into the home zone. We haven't even consciously realized that our lives are zoned, compartmentalized. Lately we have begun to understand that the cost of this arrangement is hurting more than our families — the oceans' and earth's temperatures are rising.

I think we have come to this as a consequence of our disengagement. A powerful, robust democracy has to be built upon people being engaged at the local level, at the roots.

Bradock, Pennsylvania is an example of the disastrous results of disengagement. The town is 90 per cent depopulated. The steel mills were closed, the board of directors divested in the community, and it began to implode. People who had owned homes returned to living with their parents, until finally nobody could afford anything and the vast majority of its residents abandoned the town.

I think the chief problem in Bradock was that the power was alienated. They relied too much on people who were not connected with the town, on people who didn't even necessarily live there.

Those of us who have been working on repairing our city of Portland have worked out a different economic formulation. We understand capital as social capital, natural capital and economic capital. Instead of focusing on money — needing it, making it, spending it, investing it — we focus on building our social capital — human relationships. And people get excited. They get connected to their place, and they start to share what they have. In the end we don't need much in the way of money to make things happen.

> THE PORTLAND STORY

In Portland placemaking began in the 1960s and 1970s with the reclamation of a 3 km long piece of industrial waterfront, and it became a people's park. We weren't really thinking about changing the world; the focus at the time was having such a place in the city. The project was borne from the recognition that such a place was long overdue.

Next, we turned our attention to getting a public square in the downtown. The mayor tried to stop it, but there was a great deal of

momentum for the project. We painted a brightly-coloured graphic to symbolize the future plaza on the rooftop of a two-storey parking garage downtown. The mayor was out there frantically waving his arms saying that he had all the power and we didn't; but we just kept painting anyway, and that perseverance was rewarded. Pioneer Courthouse Square was built, and it became the catalyst for the reinvention and the recreation of the whole city.

So many things have happened in Portland since.

> PORTLAND: MOST SUSTAINABLE CITY IN THE UNITED STATES

The residents of Portland, Oregon have really become an indomitable culture. In the last few decades the city has become the most sustainable in the United States. We:

- are first in declining car use per capita
- have the most green buildings
- have the most bike commuters and most bike lane miles, by far
- have the most and best micro breweries
- have the nation's strongest local food systems
- have the nation's toughest anti-sprawl ordinances
- are the first city to adopt a formal plan to reduce GHG emissions: Portland has met and exceeded the Kyoto Accord targets
- are one of the first cities to have campaign finance reform and publicly owned elections
- built the first streetcar system in the US in the past 50 years
- have the strongest and most active neighbourhood association in the US, and are the only district in the US in which citizen participation is increasing, not decreasing
- have 2.5 times the number of hybrid cars than any other city
- were the first to mandate biodiesel content in all diesel sold in the city
- have the most trees per capita
- have the most courteous drivers
- host the largest naked bike ride in the world

...The list goes on and on.

> CITY REPAIR

Some years ago, in a Portland neighbourhood, some kids crossing a busy street to get to were hit by a car. Five hundred parents got together and talked about the fact that from their houses, there was no place for their kids to go without crossing a busy street. At a community workshop, the group decided they wanted to put a circle — a bit of space — into the intersection. But they felt powerless, and were afraid that no one from City Council would care enough about their neighbourhood to help them navigate the regulations that needed to change.

Fortunately, a young woman (aged 13) had surveyed what everyone around our intersection did for a living, and put it on a chart. She handed out a bunch of colourful pencils and templates to the adults, and suggested that they collaborate to connect the dots. The people she surveyed included: an electrician, a plumber, a roofer, a designer, a landscaper, a carpenter, an architect, and an ironsmith. It was her belief that they all could be working together to incite change. The list of trades and professions continued. There was a chef and a doctor, and on it went. The chart became dense with all the connections. When they threw in the stay-at-home parents and all the kids, they realized that they literally were a village, but had never had a place to get to know each other.

I was part of the group instigated by the young woman. We approached the department of transportation with an idea — to reconstruct the concept of the village crossroad. We simply wanted to reinterpret the street so that it could have more than one use. Our goals were to slow down traffic, to beautify and to make the street and the neighbourhood a safer place for everyone. The engineers said no, and we decided to do it anyway.

A non-profit called Our United Villages runs the largest facility in the United States for taking materials out of the waste stream, reconditioning them and putting them back into the market. You can buy a reused two-by-four there for pennies on the dollar compared to Home Depot. The building itself is constructed out of recycled materials. Everyone who works in it comes from within walking distance. All employees make living wages, and have full health and dental benefits for themselves and their families. The place is run by the people who work there.

Our goals were to slow down traffic, to beautify and to make the street and the neighbourhood a safer place for everyone. PHOTO COURTESY CITY REPAIR

In two months' time City Council passed the Intersection Repair Ordinance, which made it legal in the entire city to build similar crossroads on an unlimited number of street intersections for free. On the day that it was passed Council acknowledged that communities were broken, in part because there were no natural gathering places. They decided to enable communities to repair their intersections into social places, and in so doing, repair themselves.

As a result, repaired communities are springing up all over Portland. Some families get together and create what they call "The world's first 24-hour, solar-powered, self-serviced tea station" on the southwest corner. On another corner there is a little self-service library and a place for notices.

And then people start to take down fences between their houses. They purchase houses that they had been renting. They replace lawns with urban agriculture systems. The city comes along and surveys the whole thing and finds:

As a direct result of the Intersection Repair:

- 87 per cent of respondents feel safer and say there is less crime.
- 13 per cent feel safety and crime has remained the same.
- 90 per cent of respondents say traffic speed through the intersection has decreased.

They have a birthday party in the intersection, complete with a piñata and a puppet show. The contents of the piñata spill into the street. The intersection belongs to the people.

> ANNE MARIE'S HOUSE

With successes like the one described above, the power of the community grows. An elderly woman, Anne Marie, who lived on the corner couldn't afford to paint her house. So, the entire community showed up one

> THE LIGHTEST ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

Along the way some homeless people in Portland decided to pick up these principles. Is this democracy an idea that is powerful enough to repair lives that are broken?

They began as nomads on residual public land at the end of a freeway ramp, where they decided to cluster their tents into circles. Each circle was represented at their Village Council. Portland City Council was very hesitant at first about this community development. However, at the same time, they were looking for a group who would take some leadership on global warming by practising voluntary simplicity. It was these homeless people who showed up.

To begin with, the new group laid out an infrastructure of pathways and centres and gateways, gathering places for work and utility, gardens and habitation. Their vision was to build them during the process of their own recovery, and to make the landscape utterly talkable and walkable.

With a little help from the City Council and lots of help from non-profits such as City Repair they were able to get the tools and materials to start. The houses are small, made out of light wood frames, in-filled with straw clay, and plastered with earth and plaster. They each cost less than $200. The walls of many houses are brightened by murals — one has a little portrait of every cat in the village. There are communal showers, and there is a community greenhouse.

I'm happy to report that the entire project is complete. The village is well kept — a beautiful, verdant place of food and abundance.

weekend and painted her house, in her favourite colours. Mary lives behind Anne Marie. Her house caught fire one day when she was at work, and before the fire department could even be called, neighbours had put the fire out. In all directions those sorts of things are happening.

And then it starts to happen all over the city. Each intersection repair is a different story. In one neighbourhood they turned part of a traffic island into a pedestrian performance amphitheatre. Another neighbourhood installed an effigy of penguins that had historical importance to them. In another we have "Freda's Tree." When Freda was a young girl she planted an oak tree on a corner. The day after she died, at the age of 100, the tree fell into the intersection. She remains a beloved character in the neighbourhood, and so every year the residents paint an effigy of "Freda's tree" in honour of her memory.

The village is made out of us. It doesn't really matter what it is made of physically. As soon as we look at each other in the eyes we've become it again. Sienna has 39 different piazzas. A typical North American neighbourhood hasn't any. Sienna has 10 times less crime associated with social isolation.

Our goal has been to get at least one of these catalysts in every one of our 96 neighbourhoods. Across the city we've executed smaller projects, like installing a trellis over a street corner sidewalk and activities with local Middle Schools. Urban agriculture is popping up. One resident's garage was turned into a community art centre. A public bike parking shelter was built on the grass strip between a sidewalk and a street. Another community is composting on shared land. In one low-income neighbourhood what was once simply a concrete courtyard has become a place with handball courts, trees, and barbeque pavilions. It was basically designed, built and funded by the neighbourhood… The list goes on and on.

Our eye is focused on the whole city, but our greater goal is outward looking. We hope to inspire other cities in the global network to look to Portland for inspiration and as a model for their own metamorphosis and growth. The process is expanding to dozens and dozens of other cities, from Seattle to places as far away as Sao Palo, Brazil.

It is our birthright, I would say, to eat together, to dance together, to do things that uplift the common life, and to wake up the next day with more courage in our hearts.

And at this point, now that Portlanders are actually getting married in the streets, it seems that the notion of world peace is much closer to us than we might have imagined.

PART 2.4

The Gabriola Island Commons

BY SHEILA MALCOLMSON | In 2007 the Gabriola Island Local Trust Committee received a proposal to rezone 26 acres in the Agricultural Land Reserve. The ALR is unique to British Columbia, established in 1973 to preserve farmland in BC for agricultural purposes. ALR rezoning discussions are often heated. In the Gabriola Commons story, the Agriculture Land Commission had given conditional approval to allow "non-farm uses," contingent upon the Trust's zoning approval, and with the understanding that the Commons would increase the agricultural capacity of the land.

Sheila Malcolmson, Chair of the Islands Trust Council, shares the vision of the Gabriola Commons, and explains how bylaw language was developed by the Islands Trust to preserve the vision. An attitude of co-operation emerges as the most important element in moving through the rezoning application process while keeping the Commons vision firmly in focus.

In the creation of their Commons, the community of Gabriola Island serves as an example of placemaking at work. The Gabriola Commons Charter is a clear pronouncement of the value of shared public space.

Community is, of course, the heart of the Commons concept. In 2005, under the wing of the Amazing Grace Ecological Society (which would later transfer ownership to the Gabriola Commons Foundation), 26 acres of land was purchased and donated by the estate of island activist Jay Mussel. The intent was clear. The Commons would be:

- A public trust; the assets would exist in perpetuity for the ongoing benefit of the people of Gabriola.

- ecologically sustainable
- socially sustainable
- governed through local democracy
- a place that would serve community needs.

Originally the land was a goat farm with profitable cheese production, but, at the time of the Commons proposal, had not been farmed for a long time. The suggestions for rezoning made in the application met diverse interests. The application proposed new uses for the area, including offices and storage for non-profits and community organizations, a gallery, social enterprise initiatives, commercial kitchen, skateboard park, artistic workshops, daycare, camping, food depot, public market, and hall rental space.

> THE GABRIOLA COMMONS CHARTER

"The Gabriola Commons is a source of ecological and community well-being that exists in perpetuity for the benefit of the people of Gabriola Island.

"As a source of well-being, the Gabriola Commons contributes to our sense of community, of belonging, and of our bonds to one another. It is a magnet that draws the community in, and brings members of the community closer to each other. It is a space for human creativity and social justice, for art and learning, and for fairness and openness.

"The Gabriola Commons demonstrates local community actions which enhance sustainability, preserve ecosystems and biodiversity, and contribute to the promotion of equity both on this island and the larger world.

"The land includes a number of significant natural gifts and community amenities in one contiguous property: rich wildlife habitats; a pond and wetland area; open vistas and meadows; cedar groves and forests; age-old pathways linking neighbourhoods; a rural agricultural heritage and landscape for farming and gardening; indoor gathering places for community celebrations and events, for solitude and sanctuary, performance and festivity.

"The property of the Gabriola Commons is a gift from an earlier generation which we in turn must pass on, undiminished and enriched, to those who follow us, as others will pass it on in perpetuity."

www.gabriolacommons.ca

> QUESTIONS

When this big, beautiful vision hit the zoning process, no one was clear about how to proceed. What authority do local governments actually have to carry out such a vision in zoning regulations? The land had been donated, not to the government, but to the Gabriola Commons Foundation. It was meant to remain in the hands of an NGO for perpetuity, and that was important to remember.

The Local Government Act stipulates that we can regulate the use of land, buildings and other structures. We found, as we did some research, that over the years when other local governments had tried to regulate users, they'd had their bylaws found by courts to be outside the bounds of the legislation.

So our first challenge was that we could regulate the uses with zoning but we couldn't guarantee who was going to be carrying those uses out in the future. We thought uses proposed in the rezoning application such as public assembly and commercial kitchen would be supported by islanders if they were carried out by a non-profit for community benefit, but not if they were to further commercial interests.

In some respects the popularity of the project presented additional challenges. A lot of support for the rezoning was based on the mistaken belief that we as local government could promise the land would always be in the hands of an NGO and not in the hands of those with commercial interests. Without being able to make such a guarantee, how could we ensure that we make the right decisions? And how could we get islanders to think beyond the current owners (whom they loved and trusted) and consider how they might view the same activities if carried out by a commercial operator?

Originally the land was a goat farm with profitable cheese production, but, at the time of the Commons proposal, had not been farmed for a long time.

We have encountered difficulties soliciting this valuable critical feedback. Island businesses articulated concerns privately that we were creating unfair competition, but they didn't want to speak out publicly because this project was so beloved by the community.

> CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

In the end we did adopt bylaws to approve the Commons rezoning, and through those bylaws we were able to express the Commons vision. We accomplished that by defining the uses in a way that focuses on things that for-profit users would not likely want to carry out. The bylaws permitted uses that serve community needs, protect the community through agricultural, environmental, recreational and social benefits, and exclude for-profit commercial enterprises.

I think Islands Trust planners found the balance between user-zoning and the spirit of the proposal. We enshrined in the Intention the statement that, "institutional uses permitted will include non-profit and not-for-profit enterprises that provide services and benefits for the residents of the Island," and also articulated that the Commons "will be a place for learning about agriculture, food production, and sustainability practices." In fitting with this, educational activities are now recognized as an important institutional use. This is something the Commons is

now developing; it is hosting workshops on "what we wished we had learned from our grandparents."

The bylaws identified a community of users whose primary focus is local cooperative food production using sustainable agricultural practices. Since the 1990s Gabriola's zoning bylaws were already very permissive of agricultural sales from all properties, and certainly growing food was permitted within the agricultural zoning, so the sale of produce in the Commons was a given. But these new bylaws captured a lot of the additional layers that were outside existing zoning.

> MORE TO COME...

An Elders' Ecovillage is the next rezoning application the Islands Trust anticipates for this property, something the Agricultural Land Commission has already approved in principle, if the Gabriola Commons Foundation can first demonstrate the agricultural output of the property has been increased.

The community of Gabriola Island, the donors of the land, and many volunteers have collaboratively created the vision and the reality of the Gabriola Commons. It is their hope to inspire future projects and other ways to build sustainable communities.

> THE ISLANDS TRUST OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Created in 1974 upon the recommendation of an all-party legislature committee, the Islands Trust of British Columbia is a unique form of local government. The mandate of the Islands Trust is "to preserve and protect the Islands Trust area, and its unique ecology and amenities for the benefit of the residents of the Trust area and for the residents of British Columbia in general, and in cooperation with others."

PART 2.5

Participatory Budgeting in Guelph

BY LEANNE PIPER | In Canada, interest in participatory budgeting is growing. Examples of places in which this process is being successful applied are: a public school in West Vancouver, Toronto Community Housing, and Guelph's Neighbourhood Support Coalition. These organizations can speak to the empowerment experienced by those who have direct involvement in local budgeting decisions.

Does Participatory Budgeting have the potential to build citizen engagement more broadly across our country? Can Participatory Budgeting, in fact, become a significant means of revitalizing local democracy in Canada?

In this chapter, City Councillor Leanne Piper shares how Participatory Budgeting has been effective in strengthening communities and community engagement in Guelph, Ontario.

We have been practicing participatory budgeting in Guelph since about 1999, 10 years after it started in Porto Alegre, Brazil. We didn't know that's what we were doing at the time. We called it "Community Allocations" or "Grant Allocations," and it wasn't until we started to do research and learn what was happening in Brazil that we realized what we were actually doing was a localized, adapted form of participatory budgeting.

> EVOLUTION

Guelph is a small city of about 125,000, but we're the fourth fastest growing community in Ontario, which means we're expected to assimilate an additional population of about 50,000 by 2,031. Twenty per cent of new residents to our community are also new Canadians, so as our population is growing, it also significantly diversifying.

In the early 1990s we formally delineated our city into identifiable Neighbourhood Groups. These groups had begun to form organically in that neighbourhoods were already organizing themselves; however, we facilitated a more formal and recognized organization. The City supports each Neighbourhood Group with funding, staff and meeting space. In 1997 five Neighbourhood Groups banded together to form the Neighbourhood Support Coalition as a way of sharing resources and knowledge. The Coalition has now evolved to include 11 groups.

> PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING CONTEXT

The Participatory Budgeting process originated in 1989 in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil. It was part of a larger reform platform aimed at addressing the city's enormous inequalities in living standards. Since its inception, the Participatory Budgeting movement has been steadily gaining momentum. It has been adopted by more than 1,200 municipalities throughout much of Latin America, Europe and in some parts of the United States and Canada.

Participatory Budgeting is "direct participation of community groups and individual citizens in the process of setting local government budgets." In practice it has many forms, variations that have evolved according to the needs, engagement and political culture of participating communities.

Community organizations and academic and international institutions — including the United Nations — have declared Participatory Budgeting a model for democratic government because it:

- gives citizens a direct voice
- leads to more equitable, locally-appropriate decisions
- leads to more active citizen engagement
- strengthens communities and community organizations
- builds relationships between local politicians and their constituents
- makes local governments more accountable

The Coalition didn't realize they were doing participatory budgeting when they first started talking about sharing some of the city funds that were allocated to them through a city grant process. Some groups had more funds than they needed. Some groups didn't have enough. Some groups were banking for the future while others were always scrambling to find what they needed, undertaking bake sales and other fundraising activities.

It wasn't until about the year 2000 that our City staff started to learn about participatory budgeting in Porto Algre and how it was developing all around the world. We began to change the language, and look at our process a little more holistically. Who was missing from the table? How could we evolve what we're doing and be even more inclusive?

There's a lovely story from an African anthropologist who was researching the concept of community. He placed a basket of fruit in the distance by a tree and asked a group of children to go and get it. He told them whoever got there first could have the fruit. When he said 'Go,' the children all joined hands and ran together to the tree. Then they sat in a group and ate the fruit. When he asked them why they had done this, one of the children responded, "Ubuntu." Loose Translation: "I am because we are." If one of us isn't happy, none of us is happy.

This whole concept of community — "I am because we are" — is really at the root of how participatory budgeting builds from the ground up.

> HOW DOES THE BUDGETING PROCESS WORK?

This year the 11 neighbourhood groups were allocated about a quarter of a million dollars from the City.

People who are volunteers in the Neighbourhood Group are elected to represent their Group at the Neighbourhood Support Coalition table and be part of the participatory budgeting process. They live in the community and are familiar with all of their neighbourhood programs and the finances supporting those programs. We provide training so that they are also familiar with the allocation/budgeting process.

The crucial task of the representatives in the budgeting process is making the case for the funds that are needed in their own neighbourhoods. Achieving this requires going beyond program titles and numbers to tell the story in real-life terms, based on outcomes and impacts.

People who are volunteers in the Neighbourhood Group are elected to represent their Group at the Neighbourhood Support Coalition table and be part of the participatory budgeting process.

There are three general funding categories that reflect the work of the Neighbourhood Groups. Each group lists its funding priorities in each category.

The representatives have the authority to make decisions on behalf of their Neighbourhood Group, and those decisions are binding. Council is deliberately entirely removed from this process, and in fact it's likely that most councillors do not even know where the money is ultimately allocated.

The representatives agree that their deliberations and decisions will be made in accordance with the Neighbourhood Support Coalition's vision, principles and operating procedures. A third-party facilitator

> FUNDING CATEGORIES	
Neighbourhood Groups determine funding priorities in each category:	
Community building	• One time events (BBQs, festivals, clean-ups)
Community engagement	• Newsletters, websites, town hall meetings • Volunteer management, training, fundraising
Neighbourhood programs and services	• Regular programs (after-school programs, homework clubs) • Food or clothing cupboards

> Q&A WITH LEANNE PIPER

Q: How did you move from five to 11 Neighbourhood Groups?

A. We have an established process for becoming a neighbourhood group. First of all there must be some engagement, some demonstration of interest. The group must have a constitution, a list of guiding principles, and a defined boundary. At that formative stage the group does not participate in the budgeting process, but members can observe the participatory budgeting process. They must reach the capacity-built stage, where they have all the volunteers and they're ready to run the program. We have groups that are currently in that formative stage. Sometimes, it can take a formative group several years to become a functioning group.

Q. I wonder about the gap between the 'have' and the 'have-nots.' How do you deal with that disparity?

A. At that big round table where 11 people sit during the budgeting night, it's the telling of stories that determines the outcome of the allocations. And often, the 'haves' will relinquish what they came to ask for because they hear the stories from their neighbours that trump their own wishes

I can give you an actual example. A neighbourhood group in a 'have' area wanted funds to put on a big costume parade and Halloween fireworks event for the neighbourhood at the Park. They told the story of how it was going to build community, and they made a good case for it.

Then the next, low-income, neighbourhood told a story about needing a breakfast program. They brought testimonials from the school children; additionally, a teacher who attended the meeting described how undernourished students are disadvantaged in the classroom.

The Halloween party representative said, "I don't need my party anymore.

The process really works itself out beautifully, and it's something I can't explain. But it's happening.

is brought in to manage the meetings, but they are participant-driven. Some agencies, such as the United Way, sit in as resources, but they do not make or influence decisions. They are there to answer questions or provide support where needed.

And always, a follow-up evaluation meeting is held very soon after the process concludes. The follow-up is an opportunity to review what went well, and what could be improved.

> LESSONS LEARNED

Lesson One: Consensus-based decision-making is an underlying principle in all these Participatory Budgeting processes.

We often think that when we send people in to scrap over money, it will be very, very hard to come to consensus because everyone's reason for being there is to come out with as much as they can for their neighbourhood group.

But it isn't like that.

Case in point: I have four kids. If I give one of my children $10, and I tell him he can spend it on whatever he wants, pop and candy are usually the first things on the list. But I've done an experiment. I gave all of my kids collectively $100 and told them to decide who needed it the most and for what use. I expected they would divide it $25, $25, $25 and $25. But surprisingly that didn't happen. I told them they each had to make a case for why they needed the money or a portion of the money. And they did. My older son said he needed new strings for his guitar. My daughter wanted to go to a movie with her friends. In the end, the consensus was to give the entire $100 to their younger brother who was going on a school trip to Italy and didn't have any spending money. I was totally shocked. He went to Italy, and he returned with souvenirs for each of his siblings.

A belief in inherent generosity is the underlying principle of participatory budgeting. It is not a gladiator scene. There's no "tyranny of the majority."

A belief in inherent generosity is the underlying principle of participatory budgeting. It is not a gladiator scene. There's no "tyranny of the majority." There is story-telling and there is 'give and take.' At the onset everyone agrees to the ground rules, and that means everything will be done by consensus.

It's not always pretty, I admit. There are times when someone is making a case for her neighbourhood and the others do not feel that it warrants the requested level of funding. They challenge each other. Sometimes the meetings go into a second and third night. Participants have to be able to decide at what point they need to continue to voice their disagreement and when they're prepared to withhold their opinions so that decision-making can continue. That's a learning process. Many of our community volunteers have been through this more than once and they've learned that skill.

In the end, whenever there's disagreement the participants pause and they talk about what is causing the disagreement. The process does not go forward until a consensus is reached. That's messy, let's face it. But democracy is inherently messy. And that's okay.

The long, sometimes arduous path to consensus is always worthwhile. It informs and it builds strength of understanding in the wider community. The power imbalances of higher and lower income neighbourhoods are thus lessened. Everyone has to consider all of the projects fully, and each has to describe and justify his or her own projects. Individuals can't just vote 'for' or 'against' and move on. It takes patient negotiation to find a balance and establish priorities.

> Q&A WITH LEANNE PIPER

Q. How do you get legitimacy? What's the process of the groups?

A. How to achieve legitimacy is an excellent question. The neighbourhood representatives who are sent are not elected through a formal process. They're not really self-appointed. They are 'focus' people. They have a whole committee around them telling them what to ask for and why. The representative is merely the voice. Before those 11 reps sit at the table, they are out in their communities asking people what their priorities are. That's when those groups within the community who might not be able to speak publically get their voice in. So, by the time the representative gets to the table, he or she has an assignment that's been given to him or her by a much, much larger, empowered group: the neighbourhood itself. And that's where the legitimacy comes from, because representatives are not speaking for themselves.

Lesson Two: Training is essential.

Our volunteers always have various levels of experience with the budgetary process. It is important to invest in training for the "technical" skills: how to complete reports for the process, elements of accounting and budgeting. There are also the soft skills: negotiation and how to participate in meetings successfully.

Lesson Three: Accountability and transparency.

Participatory budgeting is the best example of how to be accountable and transparent. There are also, however, formal reporting requirements. There is a relationship between the agencies and the City through which these groups deliver the programs that they promise.

Lesson Four: There's a high demand on volunteers.

Volunteers bear the burden of hours and hours of training, participating, and then recording.

Lesson Five: Processes are never perfect.

The processes must be open to change. Every year the program evolves just a little bit differently.

> PARTICIPANT EVALUATION OF THE BUDGETING PROCESS

In the evaluation process we hear all kinds of feedback. Participants feel a real responsibility to the community. They feel empowered. Although they didn't start out as such, they have become some of the most active community leaders.

During our evaluation, we use a guided process, asking a series of questions:

- How was the process, the training, the preparation, the presentation?
- How did the process make me feel?
- Why did things happen this way?
- What should we do about it?

We ask them about feelings. Some leave the budget process feeling that they've let their community down if they didn't get money for specific projects. They need to be prepared to return to their communities and present the rationale behind the budget decisions, and they need to have support in order to do this.

> THE BENEFITS

We know that the benefits extend well beyond the hundreds of community projects that are funded and implemented each year. If our only goal was to fairly divide up $225,000, there would be easier and more efficient ways of doing it!

Lots of new skills and leaders are emerging from the participatory budgeting process. The volunteers are learning negotiation, consensus building, accounting and budgeting, and meeting facilitation. They are acquiring real life skills that they can take to jobs and to their families,

> Q&A WITH LEANNE PIPER

Q. Have you seen any impact on community engagement? Has voter turnout increased significantly at all?

A: Guelph has about the same voter turnout as experienced throughout the rest of Ontario. However, we're finding the spillover from participatory budgeting is that the community now wants a bigger say in the overall city budget. Our gallery is usually full on budget night when we deliberate capital and operating budgets for the whole city. We have delegations that go well into the evening, advocating for a whole range of projects.

Although they are not in a decision-making role in the overall city budget, individuals within the community want a bigger voice in all the other envelopes that we manage because of the enhanced role they have now that we have opened the participatory budgeting envelope.

And I think it's time to respond positively to this interest and hand some of those envelopes to the community to peer into and have a role in unpacking.

Through the story-telling they are learning about other neighbourhoods and gaining new insights into, and a much broader view of, what's happening in our city.

Through the story-telling they are learning about other neighbourhoods and gaining new insights into, and a much broader view of, what's happening in our city. Perhaps most importantly, they are acquiring a skill set and sense of empowerment that will be the foundation for becoming the community leaders of the future.

> WHAT'S NEXT FOR GUELPH?

We want to take participatory budgeting to the next level. It's time to talk about allocating our Arts/Culture grants using this process, and another step would be to open up some of our operating budget for Parks and Recreation.

But we're starting to hear those usual excuses at Council:

"Citizens cannot possibly understand the complexities of budgeting process." Well, I'm an architectural historian with no financial or budgeting background. Why am I on Council? Why do I have any more experience in budgeting than the neighbourhoods who are delivering the services? Budgeting is a process; it can be learned. Accountability is more important than the technicalities of line-driven budgeting.

"Budgeting is our job." Hogwash. We delegate to staff on a daily basis. Of course we can give away part of our budget.

"There's no accountability." We hear that all the time. That's probably the biggest one, and I say 'horse-hockey' to that, too, because accountability is stronger with the participatory budgeting process. Those groups, those individuals, have to be accountable to the citizens that they serve. And they are very much held accountable by their neighbours. That kind of personal relationship is the highest form of accountability.

This movement to adopt a participatory budgeting method is catching on. If you are looking at any part of your portfolio to delegate to your community through participatory budgeting, I highly encourage you to move in that direction. All the challenges we have experienced along the way have been well worth the effort.

As someone noted, "Participatory budgeting is a game-changer." If we start with participatory democracy at the local level, maybe it will catch on nationally.

PART 3

Policy Leadership

Effective use of policy tools can help shift local culture and scale up those shifts to an institutional level. This section features effective policy leadership in two key areas that have the potential to create systemic changes for the benefit current and future generations.

PART 3.1

Vibrant Regional Food Systems

HAROLD STEVES has a long and distinguished track record of promoting farmland preservation, urban agriculture and food security. As an MLA in the mid-1960s, Harold was instrumental in the establishment of the "Agricultural Land Reserve" and, for the subsequent decades, one of its strongest defenders. A former Richmond school teacher and active rancher by profession, Harold has served on Richmond City Council continuously since 1977, serving, among other roles, as Chair of Agriculture for Metro Vancouver. Benefiting from Harold's constant, well-researched and effective leadership, Metro Vancouver's 2011 Regional Food System Strategy breaks new ground for public policy.

We are starting to do today what we should have done in the 1970s and 1980s. *The Agricultural Land Reserve Act (ALR)* passed in 1973, protecting agricultural land from encroaching urban and industrial development. It has taken 38 years to take the next step, which is developing a food security policy.

The Metro Vancouver Board has adopted a Regional Food System Strategy as part of its commitment to building a sustainable region. The vision for the Strategy is:

> *To create a sustainable, resilient and healthy food system that contributes to the well-being of all residents and the economic prosperity of the region while conserving our ecological legacy.*

RICHMOND, BC, 2005: In 1956, Council rezoned half of Richmond overnight: 12,500 acres of land would be residential; 12,500 acres would be agricultural. CITY OF RICHMOND/WAITE AIR PHOTO

> THE RICHMOND STORY

Up into the 1960s and 1970s, Richmond was comprised of hundreds of small parcels of land, each parcel generally containing small farms of five to eight acres. These farms produced food, which was handled by the 26 or so processing companies that were operating in Vancouver at the time. Our small family farm grew strawberries; while we sold some of them at a roadside stand or as 'Pick Your Own,' most of our strawberries went to Empress Jams. Our neighbours grew pickling cucumbers that went to Nally's. Royal City Foods canned local fruit and vegetables. Basically, we were a community that produced our own food and consumed our own food.

In 1956, Council rezoned half of Richmond overnight: 12,500 acres of land would be residential; 12,500 acres would be agricultural. It was so quick, no one realized what had happened. One day shortly after the rezoning, my father went to City Hall to get a building permit to build a new dairy and was refused. Suddenly, he was in a 'residential' zone despite the fact that we were surrounded by small farms; in fact, there was only one house between our place and the airport.

Very quickly after the rezoning, all of west Richmond started filling up with houses, and by 1973 there was only a little pocket left around our property; the rest had been developed. Our farm still exists today,

HAROLD STEVES: Our farm still exists today, protected by the ALR, but we're surrounded by houses on three sides and a wildlife management area on the fourth.

protected by the ALR, but we're surrounded by houses on three sides and a wildlife management area on the fourth.

In 1973 BC's Lower Mainland was producing 86 per cent of our own vegetables and small fruits. Today we're producing 43 per cent. And that's despite the protection offered by the Agricultural Land Reserve.

> STILL LOSING GROUND

When the NDP government was elected in the 1970s, it was determined that what happened to Richmond would not happen to Delta, or any place in the Fraser Valley. Plans around building the Roberts Bank Superport threatened to open the door to industrial development all along the south side of the Fraser River, from the mouth all the way to Hope, 160 km. Thankfully, the introduction of the ALR stopped that.

Today the Richmondization of Delta is beginning because developers have found loopholes; the biggest loophole is that senior levels of government can overrule the ARL. For example, the Tsawwassen First Nation Treaty, signed by the provincial and federal governments, exempted land from the ALR. I have no objection to the commercial and residential areas zoned for the Tsawwassen people, but there is also zoning for industrial land. The Vancouver Port Authority wanted an industrial area, so they used the treaty process to obtain it. Then BC Rail used its spur line to start appropriating property. And since this industrial area was approved,

they have planned the South Fraser Perimeter Road. In my estimation we are losing approximately 1,000 acres in the Tsawwassen-Delta area to development and the road.

My message is that local government can step in. In February, 2011 Metro Vancouver adopted a Regional Food System Strategy. Part of that strategy is to protect agricultural lands.

> IT'S A HUNGRY WORLD: RATIONALE FOR A FOOD SYSTEM STRATEGY

The Vancouver Metro Food System Strategy was developed to meet growing demand for food in our region, and the growing demand for food worldwide.

Countries around the world are having difficulty feeding their citizens. This has political ramifications. For example, the Egyptian government fell because the price of wheat increased by 70 per cent and became unaffordable for people who earn $2 a day. On the other hand, in China and India, increasing affluence for some of the population has given rise to demand for foods that are more expensive in terms of the world's resources.

So we need to produce more food and we need to produce it more sustainably. Now, my father never industrialized. He never took up chemical fertilizers, and I never learned how to use them. So, by default I guess, our family farm has been organic for over 100 years. I remember many years ago one of my professors at UBC said that farms that didn't change to chemical agriculture and the green revolution would not survive. Well, our farm is still here!

Local governments also need to offer consumers more nutritious, healthier choices. If we have healthy food, we'll have healthy people. Consequently, we'll save money in the health system.

All levels of government need to entirely rethink their food policy. Metro Vancouver has the richest agricultural lands in Canada. We have Class 1–3 soils and we are one climate zone warmer than any other place in Canada. Because we did save a lot of the smaller farms, we also have resident experts in growing locally. We just don't have the wherewithal to get the local producers and the consumers connected.

The public is really interested in local food production and urban agriculture; our younger generation is really concerned about where their food is coming from.

> GOING LOCAL

There are several ways that we can produce nutritious local food for householders:

- Direct Marketing: we want to see cities and municipalities encouraging farmers' markets.
- Urban agriculture: we can encourage gardening. The current generation gaps can be closed and we can turn a generation raised on processed foods to one that grows its own.
- Conventional food production: we want to encourage local conventional producers to provide food for restaurants, retail stores and householders, and encourage those restaurants, retail stores and households to support local producers.

You might think that it would be easy to involve conventional farmers in production for local consumption, but it isn't. When the small farms disappeared with urbanization—about three or four thousand in Richmond alone—we lost the processors. We have had meetings with the Delta farmers who said they would love to ship to Vancouver, but there aren't any processors and distributors available to take their produce.

After discussions with both the local producers, and the local restaurants and retailers who are keen to have access to local food, it is clear there needs to be some government support to get a local system going. We have recommended that Vancouver develop agricultural industrial areas in the region—on existing industrial land—and give tax breaks for businesses who to want to process and distribute locally.

> THE REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM STRATEGY

So what does the Strategy look like? How do we go about building a sustainable and resilient regional food system? We've refined it to include five major goals.

Goal One: Increase the capacity to produce food close to home.

1. *Protect agricultural lands for food production.* In the Regional Growth Strategy we have set an urban containment boundary for Metro Vancouver that coincides with the ALR boundary.

We are also recommending establishing an agricultural land trust to buy threatened lands and ensure they are put into agriculture.

2. *Restore fish habitats and protect sustainable sources of seafood.* We need marketing processes for the "bycatch," (fish caught unintentionally) which is currently thrown away.
3. *Enable the expansion of agricultural production.* We can succeed in this through intensified agriculture. Our estimates are that feeding a family of four in Metro Vancouver presently requires about an acre and a half of land, or about five or six city lots. With bio-intensive agriculture, the same can be achieved in the space of one lot.
4. *Invest in a new generation of local food producers.* In Richmond we are setting up a farm school, and we are providing land owned by the City of Richmond for incubator farms.
5. *Expand commercial food production in urban areas.* We can be more creative, as people were in the past and are in other locations. In World War II, for instance, food production in Canada and the United States was increased by 42 per cent in two or three years, using land on byways, empty lots, and backyards. In Detroit they are currently converting empty parking lots to growing areas, using composted food waste from the City.

> INCREASE CAPACITY TO PRODUCE FOOD CLOSE TO HOME

- Protect agricultural lands for food production.
- Restore fish habitats and protect sustainable sources of seafood.
- Enable the expansion of agricultural production.
- Invest in a new generation of local food producers.
- Expand commercial food production in urban areas.

Goal Two: Improve the financial viability of the food sector.

1. *Increase the capacity to process, warehouse, and distribute local foods*. To meet this aspect of the goal, it will be necessary to set aside urban industrial areas for processing, with enticing tax breaks for new businesses.
2. *Include local foods in the purchasing policies of large public institutions*. If every municipal, provincial, and federal government building, every hospital and every school, had a local purchasing policy, we could dramatically change agriculture in British Columbia.
3. *Increase direct marketing opportunities for local foods*. We need to support farmers' markets.
4. *Further develop value chains with local food sector*. Buying locally provides local jobs through the distributors, and the money circulates in the community.
5. *Review government policies and programs to ensure that they enable the expansion of the local food sector.* This includes policy reviews at *all* levels of government.

> DECLINING NUTRIENTS

A few years ago I caught a ride with a truck driver hauling tomatoes north out of Mexico. On the trip, I learned a lot about Mexican tomatoes. They are grown in vast fields that were plowed and cultivated 50 years ago. The soil is depleted, and the tomatoes are fed just three elements: NPK (Nitrogen, Phosphorous, Potassium). Purchasers of those tomatoes are getting half the vitamins and nutrients they would have had 50 years ago. Buy local, from a farmer that rotates their crops and puts compost in their fields, and you'll get nutritious food.

Goal Three: Encourage people to make healthy and sustainable food choices.

1. *Enable residents to make healthy food choices.* We need good labeling, such as we had with "Buy BC." We can't require it on a local level, but we can tell businesses that marketing "local" works.
2. *Communicate how local choices support sustainability.*
3. *Enhance food literacy and skills in schools.*
4. *Celebrate the taste of local foods and the diversity of culture.*

Goal 4: Ensure that everyone has access to healthy, culturally diverse, and affordable food.

1. *Improve access to nutritious food for vulnerable groups.*
2. *Encourage urban agriculture.*
3. E*nable non-profit organizations to recover nutritious food.*

In Richmond we have developed Terra Nova Rural Park, where we've turned the land largely over to agriculture. The park offers allotment gardens for residents, and a very large area where the Poverty Response Committee and the Richmond Food Security Society are growing food for the Food Bank.

Another effort we are making is recovering nutritious food. When food at the supermarket passes the saleable date, the company loads it on a truck and takes it to the dump. The difficulty we are currently encountering is convincing local supermarkets to give it to the Food Bank, even though it is going to people who can't afford to buy it elsewhere.

Goal 5: Develop a system that is consistent with ecological health and increases local capacity to produce food.

1. Protect and enhance ecosystem goods and services.
2. Reduce waste in the food system.
3. Facilitate adoption of environmentally sustainable practices.
4. Prepare for the impacts of climate change.

Climate change is already here. We have to adapt to it and the inevitable changes it has brought and will continue to deliver. There is a constant battle over the land that feeds us, and that will go on

as development continues. It's going to be a decade or so before that argument is won or lost.

In the meantime, the world is running out of food, partly because it is being used to create biofuel. We're doing all kinds of horrible things to our food supply, and these actions impact other places' peoples and ecologies. We shouldn't be taking food from people in South America or in Mexico or even in California, where—believe it or not—they're running out of fertile land: they irrigated to plant in the desert, and now poisonous salts have risen to the surface.

So we have to be prepared for the changes that are coming, and that is what prompted us to undertake a study of our regional food system.

> ON THE GROUND AND RUNNING

The next step for Metro Vancouver is to start working on actions that support the Strategy and develop an Action Plan with partners. Metro Vancouver will work with other governments, the private sector and community organizations to identify priority actions to start immediately to strengthen the local food system.

In our first year of action we are concentrating on two projects. The first is to survey all of the lands in Richmond, Delta and the whole of Metro Vancouver to find out which land is being farmed, and which isn't.

DELTA: The first is to survey all of the lands in Richmond, Delta and the whole of Metro Vancouver to find out which land is being farmed, and which isn't. PHOTO COURTESY ECSTATICIST

Metro Vancouver has acquired Colony Farm, established 100 years ago to teach the new agriculture of the day to the BC farmers, and then abandoned, by the federal government.
PHOTO COURTESY GEOFFERY KEHRIG

In Richmond, of the original 12,500 acres that were placed under the protection of the ALR, we know that while all are still in the reserve, only 7,000 acres are actually farmed. For instance, highways built on land that is still counted as agricultural. We want to establish the same kind of data for Delta, but the difficulty is that developers and speculators, because of the region's attractive rates, are purchasing much of the land. The only way we'll know the actual condition of the land is by going to the land registry office to see who's buying it, since we aren't permitted to actually examine the land itself. Then we'll know with whom we are going to have to do battle tomorrow.

Our second immediate focus is taking over Colony Farm. Colony Farm was established 100 years ago to teach the new agriculture of the day to the BC farmers. It became one of the best experimental farms in Canada that was run, and then abandoned, by the federal government. Metro Vancouver has acquired the Farm, which will become an Agriculture Academy, a place where people can learn and teach the agriculture of the future.

You can find the Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy report on Metro Vancouver's website under Planning > Regional Development > Agriculture and Food. I think we could recommend this report to municipalities, and to all the regional districts who could set up similar programs.

Resource: *Metro Vancouver: Regional Food System Strategy,* www.metrovancouver.org/planning/development/AgricultureAndFood/Pages/RegionalFoodSystemStrategy.aspx

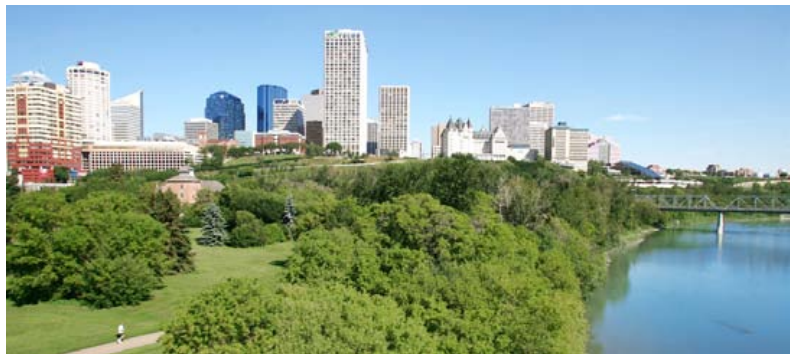
PART 3.2

Tools for a Biodiverse Community

BY GRANT PEARSELL | The City of Edmonton is an international leader in biodiversity policy and planning. The first city in North America to formally sign on to the international Local Action for Biodiversity initiative in 2007, Edmonton has adopted a policy of actively conserving nature at the highest order of city planning, and biodiversity has been implemented in 30 of the city's neighbourhoods. In this chapter, Grant Pearsell, Director of Edmonton's Office of Natural Areas, shares the what AND the how, with an overview of his department's "Tools for a Biodiverse Community: Four Strategies to Advance Your Municipal Nature Conservation Program."

I'm an urban planner. My role is to translate some of the science, some of what the public wants and some of what the politicians want, within a government structure that also has its constraints. My job is to balance all of these and still advance the protection of nature.

It's been about a decade since the City of Edmonton consciously changed its direction to conserve nature. We've learned collectively as a city, sometimes through the school of hard knocks. I'd like to share what we have learned and the four strategies we have adopted in our pursuit to conserve nature.



Edmonton and the North Saskatchewan River PHOTO COURTESY ICLEI WORLD CONGRESS

> STRATEGY ONE: ADOPT A NATURAL AREA CONSERVATION MODEL THAT WORKS FOR MUNICIPALITIES

I think every municipality should have a natural areas conservation model that is geared to work in cities and towns. Edmonton's experience in settling on a model was one of evolution from ad hoc conservation to systems thinking.

> *Organisms, ways of life, and interactions in the biosphere in general, exhibit complexity of such an astoundingly high level as to color the general outlook of ecologists. Such complexity makes thinking in terms of vast systems inevitable.*
>
> — Arne Naess (1912–2009]

As has been common practice in many other places, we started with isolated protected natural areas in both our suburban areas and in what we call the 'Tablelands'—the upland area outside of the North Saskatchewan River Valley and ravines. This approach was opportunistic. People would band together to protect an area, or there might have been a government initiative, or an area might just happen to have been put aside.

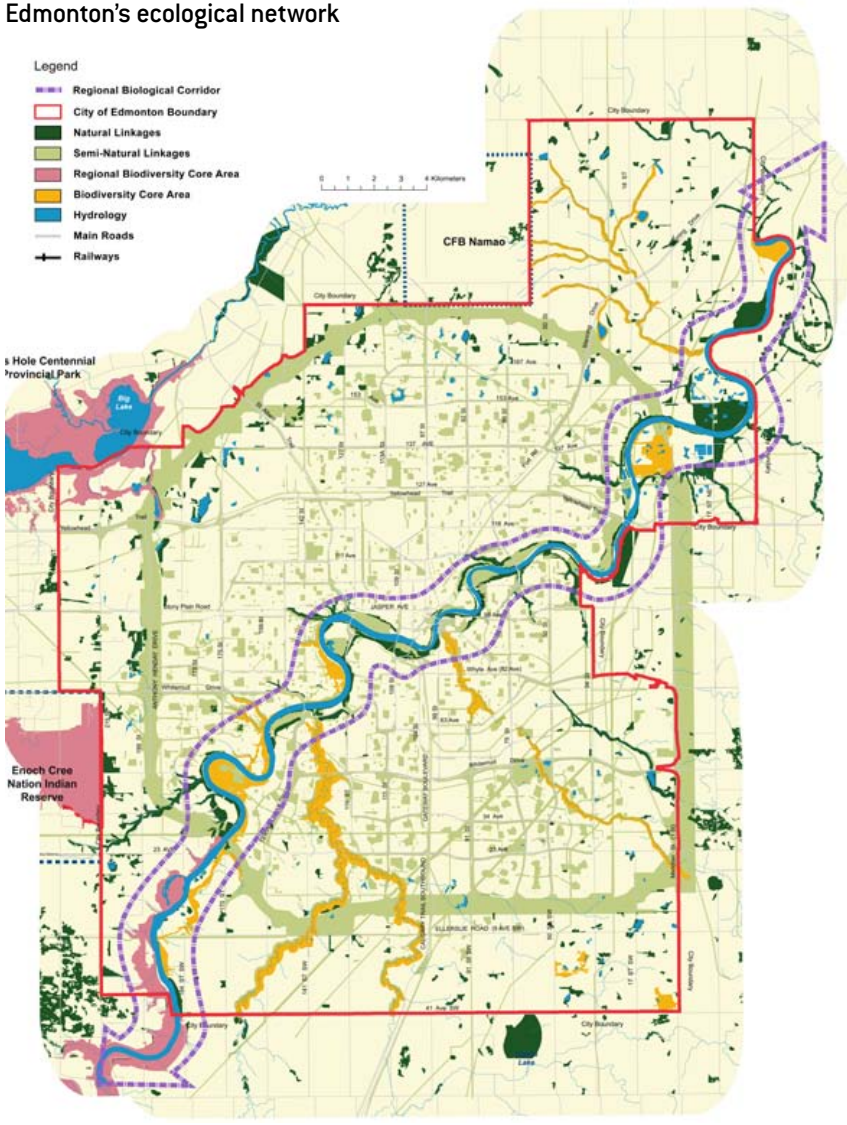
Then in 1995 we moved toward the special areas idea. We selected environmentally sensitive areas that were valuable natural areas. However, this approach has limitations too because the conservation areas are still isolated. It's a sort of triage. We pick the best ones and forget the rest.

What science has told us is that we should move to a connected system; that is, use systems thinking. Many people in many cities throughout

the world are adopting an ecological network approach because it's inherently systems based.

One of the good things about the ecological network approach is that it works on all scales. It brings in: different constituencies, different levels of government, different countries, and different regions. It moves from the continental scale down to the neighbourhood scale. Birds fly across continents, from the Arctic all the way down to Mexico and even to the

Edmonton's ecological network



bottom of South America; air quality and rivers cross national borders; provincially we share watersheds.

Locally you can design your neighbourhoods to be better connected and be better places for nature. That's where we've focused a lot of our work in the last five years.

Start to think of your city as an ecological network, and build from there.

A Functioning Ecological Network

So what is a functioning ecological network? According to Richard Forman, the person who essentially developed landscape ecology, there are four basic components:

- A wide vegetation corridor along major watercourses: Most cities have this — a lake or a river or some other source of water.
- Several large natural areas known as core areas.
- Connectivity for movement of species among the core habitat areas, either through wide, continuous corridors or a series of 'stepping stones.' As animals move through the city they have places to go, places to eat, places to rest.
- A diverse mixture of natural areas throughout the developed parts of the city that can serve as wildlife habitat or connect other, larger natural areas.

So we applied a natural area conservation model to our city. Running through Edmonton is the North Saskatchewan River, which is the wide vegetation corridor. We also have some large core vegetation areas that support species, and it just so happens they are favourite places for people as well. There are also smaller places. We have to remember the value of all sorts of other green spaces in the city — such as our conventional parks — and how they support biodiversity.

Taking this approach, we asked our land developers if they could develop a network of linked nature or open space. This map is an example of a neighbourhood in northwest Edmonton.

Within this area we have a pipeline corridor, which is a natural linkage through the neighbourhood. There's also a bit of a ravine system with a little lake. There's a huge wetland. And we have some more natural areas, some city parks and a golf course. (Golf courses have a good role to play in conservation if they are managed properly.)

Developers started to take it to the next level, planting native species, doing wildlife-friendly lighting, creating spaces through which everything could be linked.

Once the developers started to think about this they took it to the next level. They started to plant native species. They started to do wildlife-friendly lighting. They created spaces through which everything could be linked.

Since we started, 30 neighbourhoods have been designed this way. It's become the standard for neighbourhood design, and the standard neighbourhood. What's really great is that it works for the developer, it works for the people, and it works for biodiversity.

Why is this a powerful model?

- It provides greater resilience to the natural area systems. The natural system can better withstand shocks of different kinds, such as disease or fire.
- It promotes systems thinking. The engineers might not understand ecology, but they are systems thinkers and understand networks. We can engage with the engineers on a whole different level.
- It places biodiversity decision-making on the same footing as drainage networks and transportation networks. Sometimes the drainage network supports the ecological network. Sometimes the transportation network and the ecological network are diametrically opposed, and we have to work it out. We're devising tools to do this. For instance, we have developed some wildlife passage engineering design guidelines to give the engineers a way to sort out the problematic vehicle and animal interactions.

> STRATEGY TWO: INTEGRATE BIODIVERSITY POLICY AND OUTCOMES INTO THE HIGHEST LEVEL PLANS

A city can be so complex. When we first started, the city's practice reflected a little municipal policy on the conservation of nature here and bits of strategy scattered there, but nobody got to see the whole picture. So we made a conscious effort to move these into the highest level plans of the city.

> *"The materials of city planning are: sky, space, trees, steel and cement; in that order and that hierarchy."*
>
> — Le Corbusier (1887–1965)

We started with the Natural Connections Strategic Plan, 2007, which lays out our strategy, the ecological network approach, and the outcomes that we wanted for our city. We engaged 2,500 Edmontonians in the process, and when it went to Council, the Plan was met with unanimous approval. This gave us a very good footing for moving forward. The implementation plan, Natural Connections: Biodiversity Action Plan, 2009, followed two years later.

We separated developing the plan into two stages: strategic and implementation. The fighting starts as soon as you move from big ideas to implementation. Who's going to pay for it? How are we going to do this?… So we got general agreement on what we're going to do, and then we figured out the specifics of how we're going to do it.

Moving to Action: Policy Integration

So how do you move this into your higher level plans? In Edmonton we have a plan hierarchy. At the top we have the 'City Vision,' which we call The Way Ahead. The city staff asked the council and the Mayor how they wanted to see the city in 10 years. What were their high level goals? They came up with six objectives:

- Preserve and sustain Edmonton's environment
- Improve Edmonton's livability
- Transform Edmonton's urban form
- Shift Edmonton's transportation mode
- Ensure Edmonton's financial sustainability
- Diversify Edmonton's economy

The council and the Mayor put the environment above other issues, above livability and all the other goals. That made it a focus.

We have worked hard to make sure that we get biodiversity policy in each of the six goal areas. There are different branches and departments that have to implement all of this. It's our role to get those policies up there. Once those policies are into the plans, we are able to ensure they are implemented.

> STRATEGY THREE: ADOPT A PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT SYSTEM FOR NATURAL AREAS

We need to have some data, some numbers that we can put in front of everybody to say, here's the good, here's the bad, here's the ugly; now, what are we going to do about it? If we report the numbers on an annual basis, we know where we stand, and then we can evaluate where to go next.

Performance Based Implementation

The diagram below represents a standardized performance and implementation system.

This system allows us to clarify the city's conservation goals and strategic directions. This is where we figure out who's going to do what, when, with how much money, and what will tell us how well we've

done. Then we can adjust our strategies and start again, so that there is a constant re-evaluation.

One of the ways we make this information accessible is through our Ecovision Annual Report, which is available to the public.

Securing Natural Areas

The department closely monitors how much land is secured for nature and how much natural area is left. In 1977 we had 10 or 12 hectares of Tableland secured; we're now approaching 400 hectares. Our land costs are huge, sometimes hitting $500,000 a hectare, and a lot of this we have to buy.

We predict that by 2024 we will be in our end state. We will have secured or lost as much natural area as there is in Edmonton. It is the legacy of this generation to protect as much as it can. If the land is not secured for nature, there's no way to go back and get it.

So what does the City Council want the end state to be? With our data in hand, we're going to ask them for a target and we're going to ask them for money. Based on our projections, by 2025 we will have secured 690 hectares, and we will have lost another 425. This is going to be an interesting discussion because there are a lot of other pressures: light-rail transit, better sewers, different types of parks, social services. It's a big balancing act.

Walkable Nature

We want to measure other aspects that people can relate to. We've mapped the city, taking 800 meters as about a 10-minute walk. Under the best possible conditions, two thirds of our city could be a 10-minute walk from nature. At this point we're almost at 50 per cent of that goal.

> STRATEGY FOUR: JOIN A NATIONAL OR GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY NETWORK

Joining a network of other cities that are working on biodiversity protection gives really good returns. It's about learning together, finding out what's happening around the world and bringing it back home. And it's also about sharing what you have with others.

In 2007, Edmonton joined the Local Action for Biodiversity (LAB) initiative, which is a project of the International Council for Local Environmental Initiative based in Cape Town, South Africa. They have a five-step program that is feasible for every city worldwide to adopt. (There's a "light" version if you don't have the time or the money but still really want to get into it.)

LAB Step Program

Step 1: Production of a biodiversity report

Step 2: Acceptance of the Durban Commitment

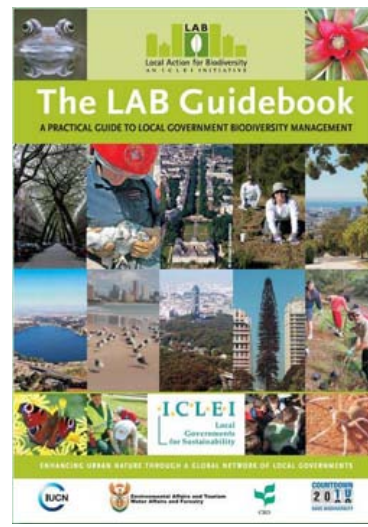
Step 3: Production of a Local Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (LBSAP)

Step 4: Acceptance of a commitment to the LBSAP

Step 5: Implementation of five new or improved biodiversity initiatives.

This has been compiled into the *LAB Guidebook: A Practical Guide to Local Government Biodiversity Management*. These are the best practices from around the world. It gives you lots to think about; by holding ourselves up against this guide, we found some of what we're good at and some of what we're not so good at.

In 2010 a study was undertaken by ICLEI Canada for the federal government. In their report, Cities and Biodiversity Case Study Series, they looked at what has been done in dozens of municipalities across Canada. I think it's clear that Environment Canada really wants to get the cities and towns involved in protecting biodiversity.



The *LAB Guidebook: A Practical Guide to Local Government Biodiversity Management* highlights best practices from around the world. By holding ourselves up against this guide, we found some of what we're good at and some of what we're not so good at.

> BEYOND THE BASIC FOUR

The four strategies outlined above are essential for a good biodiversity program in your city, but they are not sufficient. Here are an additional four:

- Develop a community engagement strategy. If you don't have the community engaged, or mechanisms in place to talk with the public, your plan will not get off the ground. Some tools to engage your city might include a public advisory committee, a learn-and-serve stewardship program, or more formal community engagement around the development of biodiversity plans and policies.
- Enact a governance model for biodiversity in your city administration. This is so important. How are you going to make decisions? Who will be involved, and what role will they play?
- Create a securement strategy. What are you going to do to protect your remaining natural areas, and how are you going to pay for it? Which goals are you going to go after? Who are your partners going to be? What are the tools you are going to use?
- Develop a natural area management plan. Now that we've managed to get several thousand areas protected, we have another problem. How do we manage all of this huge asset with the money that we have?

There is an important perspective that comes out of networking. You don't compare yourself with people who aren't doing anything. You compare yourself with the people who really want to get something done.

Resources

City of Edmonton: Natural Connections Strategic Plan, 2007

City of Edmonton: Natural Connections: Biodiversity Action Plan, 2009

ICLEI: LAB Guidebook: A Practical Guide to Local Government Biodiversity Management

ICLEI: Cities and Biodiversity Case Study Series

PART 4

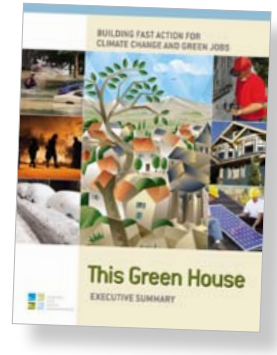
Energy Leadership

Assessing and recalibrating the ways in which our communities use energy are keys to taking effective action on climate change. Dropping greenhouse gas emissions by retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency holds much promise. This section features leading initiatives in Canada and examines two promising paths for municipal leadership.

PART 4.1

This Green House

By Robert Duffy and Charley Beresford | Energy use in buildings is one of the largest sources of GHG emissions at the local level. Fortunately, reducing energy use in buildings is something that can be done in a timely manner, provides green jobs and passes energy savings on to the consumer.



To avoid catastrophic climate change, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change named 2015 as the year greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions must peak and begin a downhill slide. The IPCC calls on developed countries to lower emissions from 1990 levels by 25 to 40 per cent by the year 2020. Canada, the world's 9th largest economy, is failing spectacularly at this goal. Canada's current goal, adjusted to 1990, amounts to a 3 per cent reduction. And we're not meeting that. Emissions continue to rise in Canada.

Forward thinking municipal leaders are not waiting to take action. All across Canada early adopters are developing climate action plans, looking ahead to manage climate impacts like sea level rise and taking action on clean energy.

Energy use in buildings accounts for a significant portion of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada. Statistics released by the United Nations show that 33 per cent of energy used globally is tied up in buildings. Further, 33 per cent of current global resource use is directed to new

construction. That adds up to a very interesting profile for climate action and buildings. It's a very practical place where local governments can make a difference.

Energy-efficiency retrofits offer a fast and affordable way to cut GHG emissions conserve energy and save consumers money on their utility bills. In fact, the bonus for individual homeowners, besides lower energy bills and increased comfort, is that their home increases in value with energy retrofitting.[1]

There are community bonuses too. Money invested in retrofitting stays in the local and regional economy and retrofit programs result in jobs and training opportunities.

In addition to direct cuts in emissions from energy conservation, retrofit jobs are green jobs. They perform well in environmental terms. As an example, construction jobs produce 180 times less in emissions per job than those in oil and gas extraction.[2]

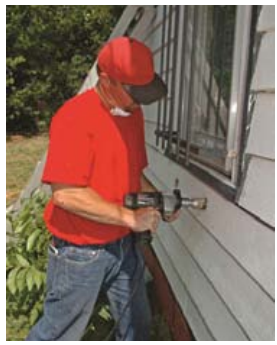
Unlike some other measures, retrofits can be started right now, using existing skills and technologies

Municipalities can take action on climate change, stimulate their local economy and help homeowners save money on energy bills, live in increased comfort and add value to their homes all at the same time.

Energy-efficiency retrofits offer a fast and affordable way to cut GHG emissions conserve energy and save consumers money on their utility bills. The bonus for individual homeowners, besides lower energy bills and increased comfort, is that their home increases in value with energy retrofitting.

> ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF ENERGY-EFFICIENCY RETROFITTING

- A $7,000 retrofit in Canada can reduce the average detached home's energy use by 23 per cent to 26 per cent,[3] and cut the average household's GHG emissions by approximately 3.1 tonnes per year.
- Widespread investment in efficiency retrofits could cut GHG emissions in the buildings sector by 27 per cent.[4]
- This means GHG reductions in the range of 19 megatonnes (mt) of CO2e per year, slicing off about 2.6 per cent of Canada's overall national total.



> COMMUNITY BENEFITS OF ENERGY-EFFICIENCY RETROFITTING

- Retrofitting creates between 13 and 16 direct jobs for every $1 million of increased economic output —that's 50 to 60 times the job creation rate of oil and gas extraction.[5]
- Dollars invested in retrofitting stimulate the local and regional economy and stay in local and regional circulation several times over.
- Financing programs can be run at full cost-recovery for the municipality.

> HOMEOWNER BENEFITS

- Homeowners can save $700 a year on a $2,000 annual heating bill by implementing home retrofit recommendations from the existing federal home energy audit program.[6]
- Homeowners will increase the value of their homes.
- Homeowners will live in increased comfort.

> MODELS FOR MUNICIPAL FINANCING PROGRAMS

Two promising models for Canadian municipalities have emerged: Local Improvement Charges for energy efficiency and Utility On-Bill financing. Both models are essentially types of low-cost financing to help homeowners overcome barriers to home energy-efficiency retrofits, and both can be run as full cost-recovery programs, at no net cost to the municipality.

Both are designed to help homeowners overcome the key financial barriers to energy retrofits: upfront costs, expensive consumer credit and home ownership lengths that are too short to realize cost savings from a retrofit.

1. Local Improvement Charges for Energy Efficiency (or "Property Assessed Payments for Energy Retrofits")

- Municipalities provide low-cost financing for homeowners to pay the upfront cost of approved energy-efficiency retrofits, and participating owners repay the city over time as a special assessment on their property taxes.
- The special assessment can be attached to the property rather than the owners upon resale of the property, responsibility for any remaining repayments are passed to the new owner.
- Repayments can be scheduled to balance out with energy bill savings, so that repayments are cash-flow neutral for participating homeowners during the financing period.
- The special assessment can be secured with a lien on the property in the event of default, similar to what happens in the case of failure to pay property taxes. Default rates have been very low in similar programs elsewhere.
- Program participation is entirely voluntary and does not affect the property taxes of non participants.
- Two Canadian cities have launched variants of the LIC model. Vancouver's pilot program was launched in 2011 and the Halifax began taking applications for their program—solar hot water heaters—in early 2012. There should be no trouble with Halifax meeting the target of 500 installations—the office was flooded with 1,200 applications almost immediately.

2. On-Utility Bill Financing (or "Pay as You Save")

- Energy consumers borrow money to carry out retrofits and then pay back the loan as a charge on their energy utility bills.
- Repayment is usually designed so that monthly payments are approximately equal to (or even less than) the savings in energy costs resulting from energy-efficiency measures.

- At the municipal level, on-bill financing programs are most viable for municipalities that own their local energy utilities. Other municipalities could play a role through partnerships with provincial public utilities or even private energy companies.
- The City of Nelson BC launched the first such program in Canada in April, 2012.

> WHAT DO CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES NEED TO MOVE FORWARD?

Legislative and regulatory changes

- Municipalities need clarification from provincial governments about the use of Local Improvement Charges (LICs) to finance energy-efficiency measures on private property. In some provinces, this may require changes to existing municipal legislation and regulations.
- In provinces with ambiguous legislation or regulations governing the use and scope of LICs, clarification or official authorization from provincial municipal affairs ministries would open the door to municipal retrofit programs.
- In provinces with explicitly restrictive legislation governing the use of LICs, legislative amendments will likely be necessary. Legislation enabling the use of LICs to finance residential renewable energy and efficiency retrofits was passed by the province of Nova Scotia in December 2010 and provides a precedent for similar changes in other provinces.

Potential capital sources

While the financing programs can be designed to be full cost-recovery and thus revenue-neutral, municipalities will nonetheless need sources of capital to back retrofit financing programs. Possibilities include:

- Low-interest borrowing via provincial municipal finance pools.
- The establishment of a federal or provincial energy-efficiency loan fund.
- Municipal/community bonds.

- Credit-enhanced capital pools.
- Partnerships with credit unions or other financial institutions.
- Energy utilities as "banks "for municipally administered retrofit financing.
- Pilot-project funding from the FCM's Green Municipal Fund.

With Vancouver, Halifax and Nelson leading the way, this all adds up to exciting possibilities in Canada. With the necessary regulatory changes and financing structures in place, municipalities can action on the building stock in their communities through retrofit programs. Cities and towns can slow down global warming, stimulate their local economy and make life more comfortable for community members. This is truly a green economy building block and a sweet spot for public policy.

For more on this topic, see the Columbia Institute's *This Green House*, available on-line at www.civicgoverance.ca

Notes

1 Appraisal Institute of Canada. RENOVA webpage. December 2008. Web. <www.aicanada.ca/cmsPage.aspx?id=70>

2 Lee, Marc and Carlaw, K. *Climate Justice, Green Jobs And Sustainable Production in BC*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, BC Office. September 2010. Web. <www.policyalternatives.ca/greenjobs>

3 Ryan, D. *Explaining Energy Savings under the EnerGuide for Houses Home Retrofit Program*. Canadian Building Energy End-use Data Analysis Centre (CBEEDAC). May 2009. Web.

4 Granade, H.C., Creyts, J., Derkach, A., Farese, P., Nyquist, S., Ostrowski, K. *Unlocking energy efficiency in the US economy*. McKinsey Global Energy and Materials. July 2009. Web. <www.mckinsey.com/clientservice/electricpowernaturalgas/downloads/us_energy_efficiency_full_report.pdf.>

5 Lee, Marc and Carlaw, K. *Climate Justice, Green Jobs And Sustainable Production in BC*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, BC Office. September 2010. Web.<www.policyalternatives.ca/greenjobs>

6 Environment Canada. "Get Involved: Spring Greening with ecoENERGY — Improve your home's energy efficiency with an ecoENERGY Retrofit!" *EnviroZine, Environment Canada's Online Newsmagazine*. April 10, 2008. Web. <www.ec.gc.ca/envirozine/default.asp?lang=En&n=BD591C8F-1>

PART 4.2

Generating Nelson's Energy

BY DONNA MACDONALD | In April 2012, Nelson Hydro launched EcoSave, an on-utility-bill financing program for retrofits, making Nelson, in the Kootenay region of British Columbia, the first municipality in Canada to use this form of innovative financing. Nelson Hydro is wholly owned by the City of Nelson. Donna Macdonald was first elected to Nelson City Council in 1988. Since this time she has gained wide-ranging knowledge about how the City and her community operate and about the municipal world generally. While Nelson is known for its heritage and unique characteristics, Donna is particularly proud of the story of Nelson Hydro, now powering the region into its second century. This is not a story about megawatts, power lines and bottom lines. It's about public wealth, self-reliance, sustainability and opportunities.

In 2012 Nelson, BC celebrated the 116th anniversary of a very important part of our community, something that has been absolutely critical to our prosperity and our sustainability—Nelson Hydro. It's our very own, City-owned hydroelectric utility. It generates and distributes nice, green electric power to about 10,000 people in Nelson and the surrounding area.

And, thanks to Nelson Hydro, we have been able to launch a new energy retrofits program called EcoSave.

Nelson Hydro's station at Bonnington Falls, built in 1907 PHOTO COURTESY ALEX DESOUSA

> THE STORY OF NELSON HYDRO

I want to boast a little bit about Nelson Hydro because it's such a neat story.

The story begins in February 1896 with a little plant on Cottonwood Creek. It was the very first hydroelectric generating plant in the Province of British Columbia. One of its primary purposes was to provide street lighting for the community. Everyone was given a 50-watt porch light free of charge, and those lights illuminated the streets. We were known as the 'City of Light' and the 'Electric City.'

After two years this company was sold to the newly incorporated City of Nelson. It soon became obvious that Cottonwood Creek would not produce sufficient power for our growing city, and so a water licence and property were acquired down the Kootenay River at Bonnington Falls. The new plant started operating with one generator in 1907. By 1950 three more generators had been added, and our newest generator was installed in 1995. The vintage 1907 generator has been retired.

Nelson Hydro generates about 55 per cent of our customers' needs. We purchase the rest of the power we need from FortisBC. Our power is inexpensive; even with the blended rate, Nelson Hydro rates are at about 90 per cent of FortisBC's rates. And it's a very green plant—very low impact. It is more or less a run-of-the-river plant.

So what has it meant to the City of Nelson to own Nelson Hydro?

Well, obviously we've been getting pretty inexpensive power. But more than that, as a former mayor of Nelson once quipped, "Without Nelson Hydro, we'd still have dirt streets."

And that's because it is *our* utility. Every year Nelson Hydro transfers a dividend to the City operations. This year it will be $2.275 million, which is a lot of money for a little city that only collects $8 million in property taxes. Nelson Hydro also contributes about a half million dollars to our capital reserves, and a grant every year to our recreation complex. So, we just love Nelson Hydro.

But Nelson Hydro has aspirations beyond being a hydro utility.

When Selkirk College recently renovated old dormitories in Nelson, the college administration was aiming for some level of LEED certification. Nelson Hydro was contracted to install a geothermal cooling and heating system, a new venture for them. They did it, and that system's been in operation since September 2011.

As well, we're looking at the exciting prospect of developing a district energy system. The proposal is to use heat exchange from the lake (which seems counter intuitive because this lake is freezing cold—it's fed by glaciers!). The system would service a sector of higher density and bigger users that are situated along the waterfront. We've also determined that we can use biomass instead of gas for the backup boiler. A business plan will be completed in 2012 for this project.

Nelson Hydro is also considering adding micro-hydro power generation. Because we're built on a mountainside, our water system is gravity-fed. Our water rushes down through the system, and we need pressure-reducing stations along the way so it doesn't blow people's taps off. Because of the high water pressure at those sites, they are prime locations for micro-hydro generation; as we upgrade those pressure-reducing stations, we're installing capacity for future energy production.

Built on a mountainside, Nelson's water system is gravity fed. Pressure-reducing stations are prime locations for micro-hydro. generation.

Through the Low Carbon Path to 2040, we learned that buildings use up about 60 per cent of all the energy consumed in Nelson, and they are our second largest emitters of GHGs, after transportation. PHOTO COURTESY SYOWOE/FLICKR

> ECOSAVE: NELSON'S ENERGY RETROFITS PROGRAM

Our newest exciting venture, made possible by Nelson Hydro, is our EcoSave Energy Retrofits Program. This program was officially launched on April 23, 2012.

The EcoSave program is a direct outcome of our Low Carbon Path to 2040: Community Energy and Emissions Plan. As we are required to do under Bill 27, we established our greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets in our Official Community Plan. Among other things, we want to reduce our per capita emissions from seven to three tonnes by 2040, and EcoSave is a big part of that. Doing retrofits creates huge opportunities for reducing emissions and energy.

EcoSave is a two-year pilot. It's costing $168,000, financed partly by Nelson Hydro, and partly by our partners, Columbia Basin Trust, Natural Resources Canada, and FortisBC. We have also received advice from the provincial Ministry of Energy and Mines. These groups all have an interest in developing similar programs and learning from our experience.

Through the Low Carbon Path to 2040, we learned that buildings use up about 60 per cent of all the energy consumed in Nelson, and they are our second largest emitters of GHGs, after transportation. We

also learned that we have an unusually high proportion of pre-1960 buildings. They are beautiful heritage buildings, and they provide great opportunities for improvements in energy performance.

Our goal over the next two years is that at least 200 homes will participate in EcoSave, at least to the extent of having energy assessments done, and that 100 homes will complete the program and have energy upgrades effectuated.

> SIMPLE PROCESS AND ON-BILL FINANCING

It is extremely important to have an exceptionally simple process for homeowners to go through. We have pared it down to seven steps, and it only requires walking through one office door:

1. Register with EcoSave.
2. Energy assessment by a certified energy advisor, provided at a subsidized rate through EcoSave. This gives recommended upgrades and expected energy savings.
3. Owner chooses work to be done, gets contractor quotes.
4. On-bill financing may be applied for at this time.
5. Retrofit work completed.
6. Post-retrofit assessment verifies the work.
7. On-bill financing to repay the loan. If provincial or federal rebates apply, these are applied to the loan by the homeowner.

The unique element of EcoSave is that we are able to do on-bill financing through Nelson Hydro, so your loan repayment goes onto your electric bill. And in an ideal world, your retrofit gives you energy savings that cover the cost of your loan to do the work, so that your utility bill remains much the same. Of course once the loan has been repaid, you are going to notice big savings. That's how on-bill financing works. A similar program is being developed in BC, known as PAYS, which stands for Pay As You Save.

The unique element of EcoSave is that we are able to do on-bill financing through Nelson Hydro, so your loan repayment goes onto your electric bill.

> KEY ASPECTS OF THE ECOSAVE PROGRAM

1. *Simple Process*. We have an EcoSave coordinator to assist homeowners throughout the process: initial registration, on-bill processing, and sign-off. The certified energy advisor will also help with the paper work and ensure that people have the information they need about rebate programs such as LiveSmart BC Efficiency Incentive Program..
2. *Easy and Low-Cost Financing*. The program will loan up to $10,000 per home at a low interest rate, with the repayment scheduled over five to 10 years. There are no extensive credit checks.—the homeowner will qualify as long as the taxes and electric and sewer bills for the last year have been paid. The lending rate will be somewhere around the financing rates of the Municipal Finance Authority (MFA). The City will use some of its reserves for the financing pool. MFA is also willing to lend for this project.
3. *Transferability.* This is very important because a lot of people don't want to commit if they are not sure about staying in their houses long-term. Under EcoSave, if the home is sold, the loan would have to be paid out. But the new owners will be offered the opportunity to re-finance the loan and continue the on-bill financing. The retrofit work will of course increase the value of the home.
4. *Administration.* EcoSave uses the expertise that we already have in place at Nelson Hydro for billing and administering.
5. *It's a local program*. We know that BC Hydro and FortisBC are looking at developing their own programs. The benefit of ours is that we can promote it, and design it the way we want to within the rules of the Community Charter. We decide who qualifies. We decide what is covered: windows and doors, furnaces, hot water heaters, low-flow toilets, insulation, and so on.
6. *It's very low-risk for the City.* If someone doesn't pay his or her electric bill we have ways to get it out of that person. If the owner defaults on the loan, we can take measures just as we do if the individual defaults on his or her electric bill (e.g., warnings, cut off electricity, put outstanding amount on property taxes).

> CHARTING NEW GROUND

This is very much a work in progress, and there are still some interesting challenges that need to be faced.

One example has to do with constraints. The Community Charter contains a prohibition on providing financial assistance to businesses. This has raised some interesting questions. What if I own two homes and rent one of them? Is that a business? Does that rental house therefore not qualify for the program? Unfortunately the answer, according to the legal advice we're getting, is yes. Unless it's an owner-occupied home, it's considered a 'business,' and therefore we can't provide the on-bill financing under this program.

So we're going to start with owner-occupied homes, which can include a secondary suite or duplex as long as the owner lives in the house. Then we will look at how we can expand the program to multi-family rentals, stratas and the commercial sector. There are some tools, such as partnering agreements, that we've been advised to consider under the Community Charter. These agreements may provide a mechanism through which we can provide financing.

We really want to include businesses and rental properties, but we have to figure out how. In the meantime, they can participate in the EcoSave program, without the on-bill financing which is not available to them.

Another challenge is that some of Nelson Hydro's customers are outside of the City of Nelson. Because the financing for the first part of the program is coming from the City, we're not prepared to give people outside the city access to City capital. We have approached the local credit union about the possibility of handling loans for these customers; we would provide them with access to the rest of the program elements (discounted energy assessments, access to the full information package, etc.)

This year and next, 2012 and 2013, are the pilot years for EcoSave. We're going to learn a lot. We're going to confront challenges we expected—and ones we can't foresee—and find solutions for them. In spite of these challenges we're enthusiastic because it's *our* program. We can make it fit *our* community. We're very excited to be involved in this innovative pilot, for our own community and for the lessons to be shared with others.

PART 4.3

Greenest City Aspiration and Action

BY ANDREA REIMER | Vancouver, British Columbia has no small ambition — to be the Greenest City worldwide. To achieve this lofty goal, city leaders pulled together a team of expert advisors and crafted a detailed action plan. Councillor Andrea Reimer puts the goal in context and outlines the City's Retrofit Energy Efficiency Financing Program, which was launched as a proof of concept for a future on property tax bill green energy financing program. The program began accepting applications early in 2012. It's a first in Canada.

The best place to start talking about the future of cities is in their distant past. For many thousands of years we had very simple civilizations. We were completely constrained by having to follow our food, which meant that our housing and our infrastructure also had to be able to travel with us, or be produced from whatever was at hand.

As we saw the rise of agricultural societies, we began to see the rise of cities. Once cities were in place, we could no longer simply move. We had to start building infrastructure to support those cities, and have it function properly for whatever number of people were there. Cities grew and grew, which allowed us to put more time into the arts, science and politics. And the results were wonderful.

But consider that every single city — whether a cluster of huts or a great civilization — has dealt with the same twin challenges. The first is getting everything that people need into the city: water, food, computers

TWIN CHALLENGES: Getting everything people need into the city – and getting the waste out.
PHOTO COURTESY MARY/FLICKR

and iPhones. The second is how the waste will be removed once all those things have been consumed.

Whether it was the Mayans, the Incas, the Greeks, the Egyptians, or Chinese dynasties, every great empire tried to expand and develop technologies to try to meet those two challenges. And every single one of them failed. The task requires thinking about environmental impact on a scale that hasn't been done before. If present-day civilization succeeds in developing Green cities, we are actually succeeding where no one before us has. If it feels challenging, that is because it is in fact challenging.

> GREENEST CITY INITIATIVE

In modern day Vancouver we face the exact same two challenges growing cities have always had to confront. How do we get all of these things that citizens need — food, water, iPhones, computers, energy sources — into the city? And then, how do we get all the waste products — including GHG emissions — out?

Vancouver's City Council has developed what we have broadly called the Greenest City Initiative. Our goal is to be the greenest city in the world by the year 2020. It's not because we want to be greener than anyone else. We'd actually love to lose this race. But we'd love to lose it because people are racing to the top, and because we're setting new and better standards for green policy.

There are four elements critical to our work on this: leadership; a written plan with measureable targets; action; and partnership.

> LEADERSHIP

My little egalitarian brain has a hard time with this one, but leadership really does matter. In Vancouver we have had councillors and myriad city staff who have been committed to moving green issues forward. But having the person at the very top completely invested in the outcome makes a huge difference to what you are able to do. If you are that leader, or if you can be that leader … or if you can support that leader … do it now. It can shape the future of your community.

> PLAN

You also need a plan, and not just any plan, but a plan that is written down in a nice coil-bound format of some sort. And, the plan must have clear, measureable targets.

The public wants to know how to hold you accountable. It's not good enough to say, 'We're going to do better' or 'We're going to reduce emissions.' How much reduction? By when? And how will it be tracked?

Ten is a recurring number in our Greenest City 2020 Action Plan: 10 years, 10 areas, 10 targets. None of our goals, all posted on the City's website, is independent of the others.

One of the 10 goals is to reduce GHG emissions by 33 per cent. We are targeting buildings: all new buildings will be carbon neutral, and the efficiency of existing buildings will be improved by 20 per cent. We are also working to double the number of green jobs.

> ACTION

The big question, of course, is that once you've written down the plan and you have it sitting somewhere on the shelf, how do you actually put it into action? What it takes to be the greenest city in the world is not rocket science. You just look at the benchmarks out there and write them into a plan. The harder part, of course, is how to execute the plan.

Vancouver City Council's action began before we actually had "the Plan." We wrote a *Quick Start Report* and got to work even as we were writing the official 10-year plan. We did this so that the public could

see that this initiative wasn't just about what we could possibly do, but it was what we were actually able to do.

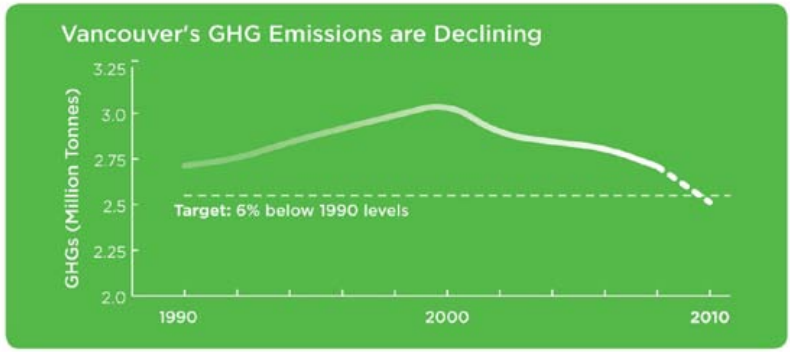
Since the *Greenest City Action Report* came out we have completed 79 separate actions and different green initiatives. Some of these initiatives are outlined below.

> GREEN BUILDINGS

Buildings are a particularly huge part of the climate puzzle for Vancouver and there is a very good reason for that. Back in the late 1960s and early 1970s we had a group of communities that were quite exercised about the idea of a freeway, and they successfully organized a "stop the highway" project. Consequently, for the last 40 years we have had to plan our city without a freeway, which means that our transportation emissions are quite low. We try to build compact, complete communities, and as a result of that we rate pretty fabulously in global GHG emissions ratings. In fact we're the only city in Canada meeting Kyoto targets, on track to be 6 per cent below our 1990 target.

Because we've done so well on transportation, we can focus our energies on developing green buildings. If we can't figure out how to deal with buildings, then we can't figure out how to reduce GHG much further than they already are in the city of Vancouver.

So, we have the highest green building standards in Canada for new buildings. By the year 2020 we will expect new buildings to be



The problem rests with the city's pre-existing buildings. How do we deal with those?
PHOTO COURTESY I.A.M. FLICKR

completely carbon neutral. In some cases buildings may actually put energy back into the grid. We have a neighbourhood energy utility, which lifts energy from the city's sewage as it goes through the pipes, and uses it to heat the buildings at the Olympic Village.

All of these wonderful actions relating to new buildings receive great media attention and get everyone excited, but they will only reduce our GHG emissions by 1.6 per cent. LEED and Carbon Neutral and other programs, though we should still do them, are not going to solve our short-term problems.

The problem rests with the city's pre-existing buildings. How do we deal with those?

> RETROFITS

By far and away the largest single piece of the puzzle that we're dealing with is building energy retrofits. Our goal is to reduce the energy footprint of existing buildings by 20 per cent.

We completed a pilot retrofit program through EMBERS, a community-based economic development organization that offers job training to people facing systemic barriers to employment. As a result, 60 homes have been retrofitted and 20 youths are now trained to execute weatherization and eco-energy retrofits.

In a city where affordable housing is by far and away the biggest challenge, being able to claim energy efficiency for your building in the rental market is a significant advantage.
PHOTO COURTESY CONCERT PROPERTIES

However, what we really wanted to accomplish with this pilot was to set a benchmark for building and funding a larger retrofit program. How long will the work take? How much will it cost? How can we actually start pegging the financing for it?

From the pilot we have learned that the payoff time for homeowners will be shorter than we initially expected. Accordingly, we expect the retrofit program to be a very attractive option for owners of 'single family' dwellings, that is, homes that stand by themselves. Once the retrofit program is active we will run a pilot with multi-residential buildings. In a city where affordable housing is by far and away the biggest challenge, being able to claim energy efficiency for your building in the rental market is a significant advantage.

> FINANCING PARTNERSHIPS

Unfortunately there is not a lot of legislative or financing help to achieve a municipal retrofit program. In many respects the constitution and the charters really are deficient in dealing with the modern challenges in cities. The only way forward is through partnerships, from which we can collect resources that the legislative authorities don't provide.

We have pulled together some financing partnerships for our energy efficiency program, including the City of Vancouver, Vancity Credit Union, and the energy auditing program run by the Government of Canada.

Our hope is to be able to fund this program using the Local Improvement Charge, which will require a change at the provincial level. Through a phenomenally complex financing arrangement it may be possible to create a template that can be used to craft a community charter that will allow this to happen. We all need to lobby the Province of BC for the kind of changes we need.[1]

> CAN VANCOUVER BE THE GREENEST CITY IN THE WORLD BY 2020?

About three months into working with us, our City Manager was becoming somewhat frustrated by the quick pace at which the new counselors and I wanted to achieve things. She said, "We overestimate what we can accomplish in a year, but completely underestimate what we can accomplish in five years."

That's been the experience of the work that we've done on Greenest City, even in just two and a half years. What we can accomplish now versus what we could when we were first trying to get retrofits or bike lanes or other ideas off the ground is exponentially different. We're now able to move things further and further, and faster and faster.

So what works? Leadership. A plan with *measureable* targets. Actions, already up and running. And creating partnerships. All things are possible.

Note

[1] More information on Local Improvement Charge mechanisms can be found in the Columbia Institute's *This Green House* report. You can download the full report from the Centre for Civic Governance website. www.civicgovernance.ca

Resource:

vancouver.ca/greenestcity

PART 5

Equality Leadership

Many community leaders become actively engaged because of a deep belief in the worth and dignity of people. Taking leadership on issues of equality naturally flows from this. Equality leadership is about creating spaces for everyone to flourish in their own ways. It makes for stronger people and more connected communities. This section features Aboriginal and LGBTTQ communities.

PART 5.1

First Nations Education: Identity as a Foundation for Success

BY ROBERT MATTHEW | Chief Atahm School is a Parent-Operated First Nation School in the Interior region of British Columbia. It has a strong public profile for its record of academic success and an equally strong focus on language and place. Principal Robert Matthew is a member of the Simpcw First Nation. He has a Master of Education, and is a past First Nations Schools Association board member. He believes that a strong positive cultural identity will foster an inner strength that will enable First Nations students to meet challenges as adults.

In Aboriginal communities we are going back to our original names, the *real* names that we called ourselves. It makes sense, because that's who we are. I was raised in the North Thompson Band. We've changed our name to Simpcw, which means 'river.' We're the River People. We have lived in this area for five, eight … 10,000 years.

I've spent 15 years in the public schools, and 17 years as principal in a small Band-run school. I'll probably stay in the field of Aboriginal education for as long as I can. When you have been in education this long, your heart is there. You are in it for life.

In the last 35 years there has been a huge change in Aboriginal education, with the closures of the residential schools through the 1970s and 1980 and the move to public schools. But the changes did not result in

KAMLOOPS: In the last 35 years there has been a huge change in Aboriginal education, with the closures of the residential schools through the 1970s and 1980 and the move to public schools. But the changes did not result in much improvement.

much improvement. If we look at the statistics now, they are not very good. Look at the failure rate, literacy rate, numeracy rate.

How did we get here?

> A QUICK HISTORY

People were living for thousands of years in our area … happy, laughing people. Then things happened. There were epidemics and the fur trade. And there were the residential schools, which opened in 1870, 1890, and which only began closing in 1970.

We were not even allowed to go to high school in the first 50 or 60 years of aboriginal education. High school education for Aboriginal students in Kamloops began in 1948. The first high school graduates were in 1952.

If you want to get an idea of why aboriginal education started out so badly, read the book *A Narrow Vision*. It talks about the education policy in Indian Affairs. One of the founders of this policy was Duncan Campbell Scott. In the 1920s there was some lobbying for high schools. Scott is quoted as saying, in the context of Aboriginal education, "Any money spent on high school is an extravagant waste of money."

So you have this incredible low expectation of Indians for 100 years. You can't help but think that at some point we must have inherited some of that low view of Aboriginal peoples that was bred in the culture of Indian Affairs and the Residential schools—that set of low expectations.

How did we end up where we are? At the turn of the last century, some people decided where we were going to be: at the bottom of society. The policy was very deliberate. We would be legislated there by the Indian Act and educated by the residential school system to remain at the bottom.

Well, those people are gone. Most of those policies are gone. My point is that we need to be just as deliberate in achieving the opposite.

If wiping out our identity was the primary goal of the residential school system, then we as educators must have the reverse policy. In every way possible, our school system needs to make positive identity a very explicit goal.

We have to be deliberate. We have to say, "This is our vision." Then we have to fund it. Then we must supply the in-service that will teach the teachers, and provide them with top-notch, high quality learning resources.

When we go to our dentists do we want them to use something that is 40, 50, 60 years old? No. We want the best. It's the same with Aboriginal education. What are the newest and best learning resources? What are the newest and best teaching practices? What is the newest and best way of working with parents and traditional leaders?

> A POSITIVE IDENTITY

Our identity? It wasn't even an identity. It was a non-identity. The government kept us as non-persons because then we would not deserve a rightful portion of this country's wealth. What is my definition of who we are? We are contemporary, we are unique, and we belong.

We are contemporary. 'Contemporary' means 'living at the same time as.' Sure we may have traditional knowledge, but we live at the same time as everybody else. We don't want to be put back 100 years. No, I don't wear buckskin. I wear leather, and have leather shoes on my feet. We're contemporary people. Cultures change, things change, we change. And change is okay. Change is good.

We are unique. We're unique in our history, in our language, in our land base. That's all that really separates any group: your language and your homeland. If you don't have a homeland and a language, then

who are you? We want the kids to know who they are; where they are from; what is their language. They may not know it, but they should know *about it*.

We belong. There seems to be an idea that we live on reserves and we're separate. No; there is belongingness. We are part of the social fabric, and we belong.

It took me a long time to find out that the first postal carrier in our area was my great great-grandfather. He brought the mail from Kamloops to Blue River Indian men from Adams Lake who brought the logs down the Adams River. The best baseball players were Indians. There were also Indian miners and Indian ranchers.

We might have been pushed out of the economy in the 1930s and 1940s, but prior to that we helped build this country. We are a part of it. Where are we in the history? Where are we in the social studies? Where are we at the in-service? Why don't people know these things?

We have to be deliberate. We have to say, "This is our vision." Then we have to fund it.

Contemporary. Unique. Belong. To me, that's an identity that can grow.

There was a time in the 1970s, when I was on the picket line, that I had to be anti-government, anti-modernization, anti-church, anti-*everything* to be more Indian.

Well, what happens when you get rid of the residential school? What happens when the Department of Indian Affairs moves out? All those people I depended on to be angry at leave, and then what happens? I have no identity because I was handcuffed to them.

So we, a whole group of us, said no. We need a better identity—not an angry one but one that can grow. We are contemporary, unique and belong. Traditionally we say things four times. I am going over this four times because I want you to remember it.

> SO, WHAT'S MY JOB?

When parents entrust their children to us they hand us a huge job. They give us their children for 12 years. With nursery school and kindergarten, it's 14 years. It scares me. I have the power to shape their education. I have the power in my little school to *make* their environment: what they see when they come in; what they are taught; what values they learn.

In the Band schools we have a bit more freedom. We have no Schools Act. We use best practice and our children are taught by degreed teachers. PHOTO COURTESY THE TYEE

The most precious thing is this trust that parents have: giving me their children. Trusting that I'm going to do the best job. Trusting that when their children leave my school they are going to have a strong sense of values, identity, problem-solving skills, English skills, and a sense of respect for things, for the elders, for the land. All these things they've told me to do. It's hard. It's a challenge.

But in the Band schools we have a bit more freedom. We have no Schools Act. We use best practice and our children are taught by degreed teachers. We have had delegations go out to New Zealand and Hawaii; we have Mohawk people advising us; we've looked at immersion programs.

So we can reach out. If you copy from one, it's plagiarism. If you copy from a bunch of places, it's good research! That's what we're trying to do—good research on indigenous education around the world.

What makes us different? Our language and our homeland. So we put that into our school. I think it was George Bernard Shaw who said, "Tomorrow hasn't been decided." I love that. I'm not going to spend any more time on the past. The past is the past is the past. You can't do a damn thing about it.

Shaw said, "Tomorrow hasn't been decided." But it has been if we use the same curriculum, the same beliefs, and the same dysfunction of the past. Yes, if you choose, then tomorrow is going to be the same.

We don't choose that in our school. So tomorrow is blank. We go back to the original question: what is a human being? What's that perfect person? If you have this child for 14 years, what is your vision of him leaving when he's 17, 18 years old? He won't be perfect, but your vision, your dream for him has to be perfect.

What's worth teaching? That also means what is *not* worth teaching? What skills do teachers need to teach the things that are worth teaching?

> PARTNERSHIP

We are in partnership with our parents. We can either undo each other's hard work or we can complement one another's efforts.

It's hard to get your parents out to your school. I'm finding it harder every day, though we are making every attempt. You can provide childcare for younger kids. You can give door prizes, food, everything you can think of. We can't stop trying because it's their children. Theirs—not ours.

The school at which I am a Principal is a parent-run school. Every year we go out to parents and revisit our vision. Parents tell us what they want us to do with their children in our school.

> WHAT ARE SOME OF THE HARMFUL THINGS THAT WE TRY TO GET RID OF?

In a Social Studies textbook from the 1960s, that we used in school when I was growing up, there is a story about John Todd in Kamloops who saves the fort from the Shuswap—my people. In this story, he threatens the Aboriginal peoples with smallpox, and tells them to raise their hands if they are going to instigate war. He infects them, putting the vaccine extra deep into their arms. And he saves the fort. The Indians in this story come across as pretty stupid.

The teacher who taught me this dwelt on it for an entire year, how incredibly stupid the Shuswap people were to be outsmarted by John Todd. That's what I learned.

My parents went to residential school, and learned to bury their past. So they didn't teach me anything. So you suffer through this image.

You are in grade four and what is pounded in your little head is how incredibly stupid your people were.

When I hit university I was asked many questions about Indians and I didn't know the answers. My sociology prof would ask me in class about the Shuswap people, about where we lived, status, land claims, and so on. I said, "Don't ask me any more of these questions," because I didn't know the answers.

Since then I've learned how to answer these questions and I teach them, with a team, to our students.

What is funny is that nobody ever asks me these questions in public anymore. But that doesn't matter. What matters is that you know.

Answering the question of who you are is very important, because that question uses up part of your soul and your energy. It is the same with children. If you answer the question, then you have all that energy to apply to making a future and your life.

So check on the learning resources in your classroom and your resource centre. Do we need the word 'squaw' in Sign of the Beaver or the word 'savages' in Copper Sunrise? Indian in the Cupboard—do we need to see how helpless Little Bull is? Let's chuck those books out. Being an award-winning book in New York or London doesn't make it a good learning resource. Get some good books in there.

Make school a reflection of the home. Make school a reflection of the culture. Reinforce the values of the local community.

There's a boy I went to see recently who hated school. He was angry; he wanted to quit school. He was the only Aboriginal in a white school and I brought him the book, *We are the Shuswap*. He looked in the book, and lo and behold, there is a picture of his grandmother. It changed his life instantly, and mine. He wouldn't let go of the book. He carried it for days and showed it to everyone. It didn't matter that everybody had the same book. Suddenly school's okay, the teacher's okay, Social Studies is okay, everything's okay.

So can we make that happen? Suddenly, everything is okay because of one picture in a textbook? Can we make school a reflection of the good part of the community? That's what we try to do at our school.

Reference

E. Brian Titley. *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada*. Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1986.

PART 5.2

Maamawe: All Together

BY ANDREW FOULDS AND JOHN HANNAM | Confronted with the need to determine the municipality's responsibilities to urban Aboriginal peoples, and acknowledging the barriers to municipal services and programs that they face, the City of Thunder Bay has signed a joint statement with the Fort William First Nation. Thunder Bay's experience offers insight for municipal leaders who want to ensure Aboriginal peoples' inclusion and participation in their communities.

Andrew Foulds is a City Councillor and a High School teacher in Thunder Bay, in Northern Ontario. John Hannam is the Thunder Bay City Clerk.

Despite its growing numbers, the Aboriginal community in Thunder Bay has been sidelined for too long. An early City report from the 1990s outlined the need to "establish relationships" and "build understanding and trust between the Aboriginal community and the City Administration."

The way that our municipality finally became serious was to embed the development of an Aboriginal liaison strategy in our Strategic Plan.

The word *Maamawe* appears on our logo. *Maamawe* is an Ojibwa word that means 'all together' and it captures the collaborative approach we've tried to take.

> ABORIGINAL LIAISON

Through previous collaborative efforts with the Aboriginal community, City Council had a certain amount of understanding of the cultural context within the community and how that community runs. And it runs, not surprisingly, like the rest of ours: on relationships and trust. It was obvious that was where we had to begin.

So we got to work. After a bit of research and networking with folks in other communities we realized that we needed someone on the ground that could connect with the Aboriginal community; we identified the need for what we wound up calling an 'Aboriginal Liaison.'

As part of our efforts to carefully establish the position, we asked the executive director of the Thunder Bay Friendship Centre to be part of the interview panel. For the first time we had someone who wasn't a city staff member on a city hiring committee. We received countless applications from tremendously qualified candidates—an indication of the considerable strengths within the Aboriginal community.

We were fortunate in our decision to offer the position to Anna Gibbons, who has done some amazing work as our Liaison.

> *The Aboriginal Liaison has become a 'connector' for the Corporation to the Aboriginal community and vice versa. This has established a tone of collaboration, inclusion and teamwork. Our Aboriginal Liaison has been able to clarify the City's roles and responsibilities as they relate to the Aboriginal community and to guide the Corporation and the Aboriginal community to creating the foundation for the City of Thunder Bay's Aboriginal Liaison Strategy.*

> CLARIFYING COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Anna came to our community and did a tremendous amount of listening. It sounds simplistic—going out, asking and listening. But it was a tremendously successful method for building positive relationships.

> THUNDER BAY STRATEGIC PLAN

Thunder Bay took a strategic approach to make the most of our City's strengths and to meet the needs of our community. Our 2007–2010 Strategic Plan focused on building:

- a stronger and more diversified economy;
- a cleaner, greener, more beautiful and proud Thunder Bay;
- a high quality of life;
- one of the best-run cities in Canada."

As a broad community we devised a priority list (no doubt many of these are the same priorities for your community):

- employment
- youth
- service gaps
- communication/awareness
- leadership
- services for seniors
- economic development
- racism
- one-stop access to services/cultural centre.

We did some research into the differences between adult priorities and youth priorities, and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. Interestingly, the number one priority for both youth groups was education. But, significantly, when we moved on to number two, the issue for Aboriginal youth was racism.

And so what do we do as a municipality to engage, to enlighten, and to understand each other? That's not an easy question to answer.

> ELDERS' ADVISORY COUNCIL

Receiving guidance and support from elders in the Aboriginal community is essential. We found people who were already recognized in the

> THE ABORIGINAL LANDSCAPE IN THUNDER BAY

Thunder Bay has a diverse, multicultural population. It also has a rapidly rising young Aboriginal population. The Aboriginal landscape of the area includes three treaties and the Fort William First Nation, the Matawa First Nation, the Métis Nation of Ontario, the Red Sky Métis and the Urban Aboriginal Community.

Successes in the Aboriginal community include some employment in Aboriginal-run business and social service agencies, a higher-than-provincial-average completion rate at the college and university levels, and average attendance (although low graduation rates) at the high school level. Challenges consist of poverty, mental health issues and a high rate of debilitating diabetes.

community as elders, and invited five of them to be part of an Elders' Advisory Council. And we asked City Council to formally welcome and endorse this group as the city's Elder Advisory Council.

We work with the Elder Council quite closely. We meet with them formally on a monthly basis, and several times regularly in between those scheduled meetings.

> FEET ON THE GROUND: UP AND RUNNING

Underpinning all the work we have done has been the desire to maintain a respect and recognition for traditional practices. We can list many successes, most of them begun in our first year.

Logo Design

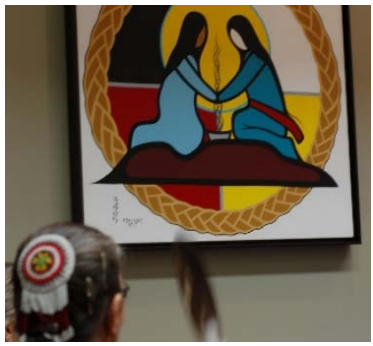
One of the Elders' Advisory Council's first efforts was to develop a logo. That was an interesting process. A local artist worked with the elders to determine possible concepts. Then we took the results to a local graphic marketing firm, who tried to encourage us to go with something more simple and stylized. The elders stood firm, rejecting the suggestion.

During our meeting with the designers, a full-sized copy of the proposed artwork was displayed on the table. The elders suggested that we simply reduce it on the photocopier. One of the graphics people remarked that there was too much detail which wouldn't show up if it were shrunk.

But we took it to the photocopier anyway and reduced it down to letterhead size. The elders looked at it, triumphantly passed it across the table to the graphics people, and said, *See?*

And that was a lesson for us, too.

The logo is an expression of who we are in the community. One face is white and one is brown, to represent inclusion. The red sash represents the Métis. The little base they are kneeling on is the Sleeping Giant, our famous local landmark.

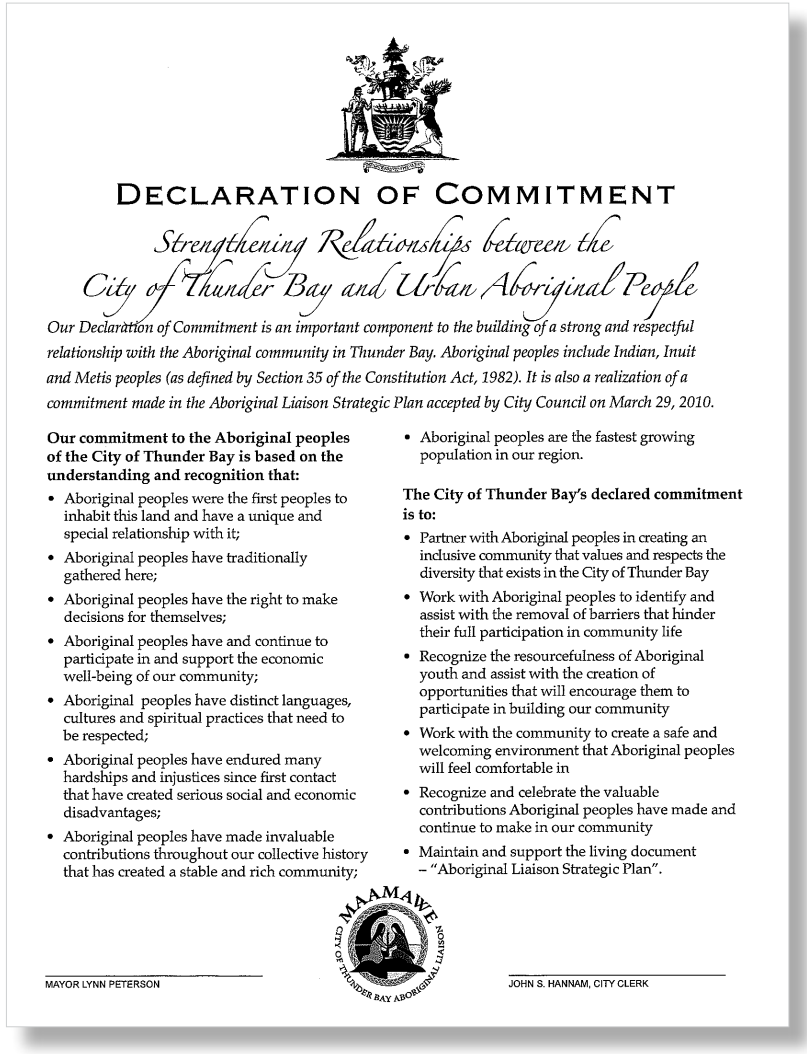


One of the Elders' Advisory Council's first efforts was to develop a logo. That was an interesting process. PHOTO COURTESY JAMIE SMITH TBNEWSWATCH

A smudge pot between the two figures recognizes traditional Aboriginal practice. In the background are the medicine wheel and the four elements, and around the outside is a seagrass braid.

Declarations and Historic Joint Meeting

Council signed a Declaration of Commitment to the Aboriginal community, which was formally adopted on National Aboriginal Day in 2010.



DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT

Strengthening Relationships between the City of Thunder Bay and Urban Aboriginal People

Our Declaration of Commitment is an important component to the building of a strong and respectful relationship with the Aboriginal community in Thunder Bay. Aboriginal peoples include Indian, Inuit and Metis peoples (as defined by Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982). It is also a realization of a commitment made in the Aboriginal Liaison Strategic Plan accepted by City Council on March 29, 2010.

Our commitment to the Aboriginal peoples of the City of Thunder Bay is based on the understanding and recognition that:

- Aboriginal peoples were the first peoples to inhabit this land and have a unique and special relationship with it;
- Aboriginal peoples have traditionally gathered here;
- Aboriginal peoples have the right to make decisions for themselves;
- Aboriginal peoples have and continue to participate in and support the economic well-being of our community;
- Aboriginal peoples have distinct languages, cultures and spiritual practices that need to be respected;
- Aboriginal peoples have endured many hardships and injustices since first contact that have created serious social and economic disadvantages;
- Aboriginal peoples have made invaluable contributions throughout our collective history that has created a stable and rich community;
- Aboriginal peoples are the fastest growing population in our region.

The City of Thunder Bay's declared commitment is to:

- Partner with Aboriginal peoples in creating an inclusive community that values and respects the diversity that exists in the City of Thunder Bay
- Work with Aboriginal peoples to identify and assist with the removal of barriers that hinder their full participation in community life
- Recognize the resourcefulness of Aboriginal youth and assist with the creation of opportunities that will encourage them to participate in building our community
- Work with the community to create a safe and welcoming environment that Aboriginal peoples will feel comfortable in
- Recognize and celebrate the valuable contributions Aboriginal peoples have made and continue to make in our community
- Maintain and support the living document – "Aboriginal Liaison Strategic Plan".

MAAMAWE CITY OF THUNDER BAY ABORIGINAL LIAISON

MAYOR LYNN PETERSON

JOHN S. HANNAM, CITY CLERK

Additionally, for the first time in our history, we had a joint meeting with Thunder Bay City Council and the Fort William First Nation Council. With some ceremony, we signed a declaration of commitment.

It was very powerful experience. It took a lot of work and a lot of time to get there, but it really felt that we had done something important.

Fall Feast

In the Aboriginal community there is a tradition of a fall gathering and feasting for the community. For the past three years the city has hosted the feast, and it has now grown into a partnership of community groups, with added elements such as the traditional pow-wow and a competition pow-wow.

Biindigaate Film Festival

Some good Aboriginal film work has been coming out of Alberta, and there is also an Aboriginal film festival in Toronto. Could *we* do one?

Anna sought out a couple of local filmmakers and we provided the huge sum of $1,500 to help kick off the budget. The next thing you know we had a full day of Aboriginal film. And it's now a full weekend of Aboriginal film. It's kind of like unleashing the energy. We're in our third year and it's actually a profit-making venture, a tremendous success in a short time span.

The thing that we're beginning to learn about the Aboriginal community is that while there are huge capacity challenges, there is also already huge capacity there.

Employment Intern: Hiring Practices

In this past year we've had an employment intern in our HR department who's been looking at our hiring practices in respect to Aboriginal

applicants. We are trying to determine if we are indeed getting Aboriginal applicants for jobs across the departments, and — where we are not — we are building strategies to make that happen.

We're also looking at whether or not we have had racism in our hiring practices. That's a challenging thing to do. Sometimes, for instance, applications are set aside based on name recognition — we are policing ourselves to determine if we avoid short-listing names that are assumed to be Aboriginal.

Partnerships in Capacity- building

We are one of 13 cities that is partnering with the Urban Aboriginal Strategy, the first significant move by the federal government to address the urban issue.

The Indian Act is aimed at reserves and that's where all the resources go. However, 70 per cent of status First Nations people in Canada don't live on a reserve. They live in an urban setting. Also, there are Métis, non-status Indians and Inuit, and the vast majority of them also live in urban settings.

We are one of 13 cities partnering with the Urban Aboriginal Strategy, the first significant move by the federal government to address the urban issue. The UAS Committee of Thunder Bay has been a tremendously positive presence in the community.

The Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) Committee of Thunder Bay has been a tremendously positive presence in the community. Several programs are running under their umbrella, including efforts with the NCBP (Neighbourhood Capacity Building Program), which supports work with school children.

Not Monopoly – 'Aboriginology'

We have developed a game called "Aboriginology," a simulation tool for building understanding of the Aboriginal perspective. The objective of the game is to become an accepted member of the broader community. The game demonstrates how difficult that is.

The game has arbitrary elements. That is, arbitrary in the same what that the Indian Act is arbitrary. It has 'Stereotype Cards,' 'Issue and Success Cards,' and 'History Cards.' It's a creative way for people to experience some of the obstacles that others deal with.

> BROADENING THE PLAN

Our 2007–10 Strategic Plan started with one objective. In Council's new Strategic Plan for 2011–2014 our objectives have been broadened, and we have six different areas where aboriginal issues are specifically identified.

There are three principles underlying those specific goals:

1. Ownership across the Corporation

We need to integrate learning and education within the Corporation. And to engage all divisions of the Corporation, we are trying to recruit champions within each of the city's departments. We've been particularly successful in bringing our transit division into play.

When kids come in from northern reserves — some of them for high school — most have never been to Thunder Bay before. They have lived in small communities, some with only three, five, or six hundred people. Coming in to Thunder Bay is a full cultural experience.

Guess what? They don't have buses in those northern communities. Our transit people have been very active in the last couple of years hosting school forums on public transit. They bring the kids together to do an orientation session to explain the bus system.

There is a story about a kid who came down off a northern reserve and was billeting with a family to go to high school. He was given a bus pass. On his first day he walked down the street to the bus stop and waited. The buses came and went every 20 minutes; they stopped and opened the door, but he didn't get on. After an hour the first bus returned and someone finally realized he needed help. No one had actually showed him how to get on a bus. Here was a great big vehicle he had never seen before in his life and he was terrified.

So we're working with people in all the divisions that these kids need to interact in to enable them to function in the community. We need to build this awareness even into divisions such as the planning and building departments. We need to make sure everyone knows how to access the services.

2. Strengthening Community Partnerships

3. Continuing to Build Relationships and Understanding

We continue to work under the guidance of the Elders Advisory Council. This past year, we had an Aboriginal cultural component in our inaugural ceremony of Council after municipal elections.

After the meeting we were sitting in the back room with Anna and the elders, and they were positively glowing. Being part of the inaugural ceremony was hugely significant for them. They were almost in tears, saying, Now we belong here.

And then we handed them the program and they asked, "Where's our logo?"

So … a continuous learning experience—and a tremendous one—for us all.

On a note of caution, we only have one person doing all of this liaison work. As we proceed on a go–forward basis, we need to ensure that we have sufficient resources. Frankly, that involves more city staff and, of course, funding to support it.

> LOOKING OUTWARD

In every community in Ontario there are Aboriginal communities, either within a municipality or near it. After giving a presentation last year, Anna spoke with a senior administrator who said there really wasn't a significant aboriginal population in her jurisdiction. The largest single reserve community in Ontario, population-wise, is 20 minutes outside of the senior administrator's city's boundary.

We recently spoke with a councillor who said, "Oh we really have a great relationship with our First Nations. We're really into doing things." This raises the questions, what are you doing with them? Do you have any joint economic development projects underway? Are you using the strengths that both of you have to benefit the broader community that you both share?

So there are lots of opportunities for good work.

To achieve success, you need to have champions on your council who will stand up and say, No, this isn't good enough. And you need champions in your administration as well. If you combine the strength of the political arm with the strength of the administrative arm, you really can move the show.

Convince your civic colleagues to reach out respectfully to include and involve your Aboriginal community. It is the right thing in terms of a healthy future for all of our communities.

> BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIPS: TEN BEST PRACTICES

- Maintain respect and recognition for traditional practices.
- Establish a strong Aboriginal Liaison from the community.
- Establish and endorse an Elders' Council of acknowledged leaders.
- Establish community priorities: go out, ask, and listen.
- Look for strengths in the community, and build on them.
- Encourage and expect leadership within all Corporate divisions.
- Examine Corporate hiring practices for racism.
- Find partners, for funding and expertise.
- Focus on trust.
- Evaluate and celebrate!

PART 5.3

Safer Schools

BY CHARLEY BERESFORD | A National Survey of Canadian High School students published in 2011 reported that 2/3 of LGBT students and 2/3 of students who have LGBT parents feel unsafe at school. The same number report regularly hearing homophobic remarks such as "That's so gay!" 51 per cent report being verbally harassed, 27 per cent physically assaulted. 45 per cent of youth with LGBT parents report being sexually harassed at school. A growing number of School Districts are taking action to keep safe and celebrate students from the full rainbow spectrum of sexual orientation and identity.

The following three chapters detail cutting edge anti-homophobia policy in school boards that are making schools safer for all students. Change making is challenging. These three stories offer lessons in leading policy development that can spark heated debate.

In this chapter Charley Beresford, Columbia Institute Executive Director and past Victoria School Trustee, tells the story of implementing an anti-homophobia policy in the Victoria School District, the first in BC.

During my second term as a school board trustee in Victoria, BC there was a beating death in Vancouver's Stanley Park. Aaron Webster was beaten that November night in 2001 until he died — He was beaten because he was a gay person in the wrong place at the wrong time. That struck home because I have a delightful son who is gay. He was at that time maybe 15. I thought to myself, "What if that were my son? What if there was a situation where my son was in an unsafe place, what would the outcome be?"

In the following days, there was a memorial service for Aaron Webster. My son was the designated youth leader speaking at the service, calling for the end of homophobia. In the lead-up to the service, he bounced his speech back and forth with his Dad to polish the words and I was privileged to be a sounding board as he developed his delivery. It was really very good and was a tremendously powerful experience for us all. He was amazing.

Additionally powerful was the speaker who said, "What is it about our education system? How is it that we are failing in our education system, that such hate could still be possible within our hallways?"

And I thought, "Well … I'm a trustee. I can do something about that. That shouldn't be too terribly hard." So I set about doing some work around trying to make some changes in the system. As it turned out, it wasn't an easy path we were embarking on.

We were lucky enough to have a group of teachers and community members in the District who were interested in the issue. My first step was to talk with them. The group signed on to help and we set out to find policies from other places to build on.

In preparing the ground work for the Board meeting, I approached a key assistant superintendent. At first he wasn't convinced that we needed to introduce a specific policy. I wasn't able to open his mind until I quoted the terrible statistics on mental health and suicide among gay youth. Linking that grim picture to the Greater Victoria School District's Mission statement, proclaiming the Board's commitment to each student's success in learning within a responsive and safe environment moved him further.

We devised a plan. It was a three-part strategy. We would bring a policy forward by supporting an amendment to the District's Student Bill of Rights, tabling a motion to create an Anti-Homophobia policy and another to establish an Action Plan and an Implementation Advisory.

Collaborating with the support group, we did some preliminary work and then brought forward to the Board the motions that would start the work in earnest. Finding established policies to reference was difficult as there were so few in existence. Vancouver's policy was then under development. Toronto had some documents as did San Francisco and Boston, but there was not very much else.

We went to the School Board meeting well-prepared and I went into the meeting with a mover and seconder for the motions. The support group and I had reached out to the other trustees in the lead up to the meeting to encourage their support.

Still, it wasn't a given that the motions would be supported by a majority.

The room was packed with supporters, which is a good thing if you're trying to get a controversial democratic motion off the ground. Our Board routinely made time for public presentations at the beginning of each public meeting. That night it took three hours from the start of the first presentation to the end of the debate before the board said yes. Yes, we would amend the policy for the Youth Bill of Rights; yes, we would develop an Anti-Homophobia policy; and yes, we would develop an action plan for implementation.

By this time, it was the end of the school year. When September and the new school year arrived, we started the work. We struck a committee with representation from all of the partner groups in the District: students, parents, teachers, special student assistants, councillors, custodians, principals, and members of the community. We met every week for a year and grew our policy from the ground up. Our vocabulary enhanced. We found out about heterosexism. And we learned the meaning of transgendered and intersexed, two-spirited, questioning and queer.

The room was packed with supporters, which is a good thing if you're trying to get a controversial democratic motion off the ground. It took three hours from the start of the first presentation to the end of the debate before the board said yes.

A full year from that pivotal board meeting, our committee brought the policy and the action plan back to the Board. And again the room was crowded. During the discussion which lead to the formal adoption of the policy and action plan that night, one of the trustees, who had been most opposed to developing the anti-homophobia policy, commented, "Well, I have to tell you that after a year, I understand, and I am really glad that we are moving forward and developing this policy." When it came to a vote we had almost unanimous support. It was a magical evening. That night our board received a standing ovation and that was unique in my entire 12 years as a trustee.

The policy framework has been very, very useful. For example, I heard from a Middle School teacher who said, "You know, I went to my principal to see about establishing a Gay-Straight Alliance, and he said he couldn't do it. And I said, yes you can. Here's the policy that says you have to do that." That school's Gay-Straight Alliance followed shortly thereafter.

The District is now one of two in British Columbia with a staff person available to support key initiatives such as International Day of Action against Homophobia and the student-led Day of Silence, both of which challenge the homophobia that is still in our schools.

Discrimination Policy 4303 was foundational in advancing anti-homophobia work in School District 61 and beyond. The District is now one of two in British Columbia with a staff person available to support key initiatives such as International Day of Action against Homophobia and the student-led Day of Silence, both of which challenge the homophobia that is still in our schools. These are in place because of the policy and the support of a community and a Board of Trustees that moved ahead to make a difference for vulnerable people.

Ten years on, I still get comments about the work we started. I just had an email from my friend Jessie who's a young gay man living in Australia. He said, "I really want to tell you what a difference it made for me, that leadership for justice."

What a gift it is to be able to do that work.

PART 5.4

Sexual and Gender Minorities: Respected and Included

SARAH HOFFMAN and **CHRISTOPHER SPENCER** are Board Trustees for the Edmonton Public Schools. Edmonton is the first school board in Alberta to implement an anti-homophobia policy.

> CHRISTOPHER SPENCER

We in the school system have an obligation to help all of our children. On some level, we all know about bullying in schools, and we know many of the ways in which kids on the margins are at risk. We support anti-bullying programs and adopt anti-discrimination policies in our school districts.

But a generic policy on discrimination is not enough for students in our schools who are LGBTTQ—Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Two-Spirited, Queer.

Schools are learning that homophobic comments hurt all vulnerable students, gay and straight. According to a recent, rigorously conducted survey, 70 per cent of students in Canada hear expressions like "That's so gay" every day in school. The same survey reports that almost 10 per cent have reported having heard homophobic comments from teachers daily or weekly.

There are reasons why it has taken so long for educators to grapple with this issue. The topic is personally uncomfortable for some. Lack of knowledge and vocabulary, fear of how the community may react, lack

of support from administration, and religious and moral objections all combine to steer teachers, schools and Boards away from taking action. In Alberta the duality of Catholic and public school systems, and once-private Christian schools who have come back under the public school umbrella, bring religious arguments to the table.

It is interesting, however, that the younger generation has become increasingly comfortable with LGBTTQ issues. In many ways young people have been the leaders when it comes to this issue. Projects such as "It Gets Better" have provided opportunities for young people to use social media to reach out and connect with each other. When we looked around for leadership on LGBTTQ issues, and we had delegations to our Board, very often it was our high school and junior high school students who came to us.

But problems of bullying, including online bullying, and violence remain. Egale (Canada's LGBTTQ Human Rights organization) surveyed

> CONSEQUENCES

Of course serious consequences for LGBTTQ students can result from these experiences. When it comes to children at risk, the second most relevant category is LGBTTQ. Below is a list of possible impacts for at-risk students:

- Truancy or dropping out
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Increased peer victimization
- Withdrawal from social and school activities
- More experiences of dating violence
- Higher pregnancy rates
- Significantly higher rates of bullying and sexual harassment
- Running away from home
- Turning to sex work and/or living on the streets
- Depression, self-harm, mental health
- Increased suicide ideation or suicide attempts

The statistic that we know most about, of course, is the suicide rates. Studies vary on how high that is. The more conservative estimates are that LGBTTQ are twice as likely to attempt suicide as straight youth. Some surveys indicate that the statistic is as high as seven times more likely.

3,700 students from across Canada, with an average age of 17.4 years. The survey was concerned with the challenges facing LGBTTQ students within our schools. They found that one in five LGBTTQ students report being harassed or assaulted. Students identified locker rooms, washrooms, and hallways as dangerous spaces in schools. Over 52 per cent of LGBTTQ students reported feeling unsafe at school, compared to only 3.4 per cent of the rest of the student population. These numbers are quite shocking. On every measure the situation was worse for trans youth, students from same-sex parented families, and for female sexual minority students.

So what our school district is aiming to do is build some resiliency. It is our responsibility to ensure that resources are in place to support children. That is where the resilience comes from. It's our duty to provide resilience as opposed to expecting the children to have it automatically.

There are a number of important elements to work with:

- Inclusive policy and positive representations in the school
- Family and community acceptance
- Positive peer and school relationships
- LGBTTQ support networks
- Comprehensive sexual health education
- A variety of coping strategies (resiliency mindset)
- Higher self-esteem/social-esteem

What research seems to show is that generic policies are not particularly effective. That if you are addressing a specific problem—in this case the safety and success of LGBTTQ youth, we have to have policies that are specifically designed to support that problem.

Recommendations on a how-to list for achieving greater resiliency include:

- Multi-sectoral support for intervention programs and services: Bullying prevention, mental health, high school completion
- Curricular inclusion/discussion
- Ongoing professional development
- Viewing challenges for LGBTTQ students as safety and health concerns rather than as a moral or political issue

> THE IMPORTANCE OF VOCABULARY

LGBTTQ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Two-Spirited, Queer.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION = an individual's enduring sexual, psychological and emotional feelings of attraction towards another person.

GENDER IDENTITY = a person's internal sense or feeling of being masculine or feminine.

Part of the journey is learning and understanding the vocabulary. There are acronyms that have several more letters. We use 'queer' as sort of a catchall word. For example, there are asexual people. There are pansexual people. We don't want to exclude those individual identities.

An important idea that has not been historically understood is the idea that sexual behaviour and sexual identity are distinct. We sometimes hear that sexuality is a life-style choice as opposed to something that is the central part of a person. Sexual behaviour is not the same thing as sexual identity.

Sex and gender are distinct categories. Gender identity is a relatively new social phenomenon, which schools are only beginning to become aware of. Two-spirited is a concept that you find in many aboriginal cultures around the world; it conveys the idea that some people may have masculine and a feminine sides.

> SARAH HOFFMAN

During the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) elections last term, candidates were surveyed by a number of groups including LGBTTQ Solidarity in Edmonton. They asked specific questions. Will you create a policy on homophobia? What are your stances on inclusion? What are your stances on ensuring safety for all of our kids?

During the election campaign mass suicides were happening in the US, and the "It Gets Better" campaign had begun. Our reaction was, "We can't just *tell* them it gets better. We have to *make* it better. "

The first thing we did when the nine of us were elected to Edmonton's Public School Board was to rework the District's mission statement. A few key words point directly to our commitment to LGBTTQ students:

We work with families and community partners to provide safe, caring, healthy, diverse, inclusive and equitable learning experiences that engage students to achieve their full potential in an increasingly interdependent world.

The vote to approve this new statement was unanimous.

In December 2010, Trustee Chris Spencer asked, "What is our district doing to support LGBTTQ youth?" It took a few months for us to be able to satisfactorily answer that question, but a policy advisory started to be developed right away. This happened without even a motion—just a question to start the conversation. So we had very strong support from the Board even at the initial stages. In March, 2011 we passed a motion to create a policy regarding the safety of LGBTTQ students and employees.

Next, a committee drafted a policy and presented it to the public. There were hundreds of responses.

When we sorted out the objections to our policy, clear themes had emerged:

- Policy is not necessary, as sexual minorities only comprise less than 2 per cent of the school population.
- A stand-alone policy is redundant and should be included in a policy about bullying.
- Will lead to 'policy creep': concern about what teachers might be told to instruct.
- Policy excludes heterosexuals and affords LGBTTQ individuals special treatment.
- Affirming the LGBTTQ community is a violation of Freedom of Religion and Parental Rights.

In response, the policy committee amended the original policy, changing a few of the trigger words that seemed to offend some people. None of the changes actually compromised the intent of the policy. Nobody had any concerns with us saying we want all of our kids to be safe; we want all of our kids to be included; we want all of our kids to be respected. Nobody had issues when we talked about what the policy was actually supposed to do.

Policy-building wasn't the EPSD's first foray into LGBTTQ issues. The District had previously created a joint document with Edmonton Public Library about resources that could be used in school or taken home for the family. The Board participated in Pride, with an information booth about Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), and youth from the GSAs were marshals for the parade.

> COMING OUT AGE NOW 16

In 1998 the average coming-out age was between 23 and 25. At that point many LGBTTQ youth had become completely independent from their families — and communities — for financial and social support. They were on their own and making their own lives.

In 2012 the average coming-out age in Canada is 16. Probably one of the reasons is the Internet. Ours is an increasingly interdependent world. The kids know that they are not alone. They know there are many opportunities for connecting socially with other LGBTTQ people so that they can find a community and support, even if they often feel alone.

We have a responsibility to make it better *now*. LGBTTQ students are present in our schools. We need to support them.

In the fall we took the revised policy to the Board. A lot of Edmonton residents showed up to speak. The usual period for public comment was extended from 20 minutes to two hours. We heard from the teachers' union, MLAs, religious leaders on all sides of the LGBTTQ debate, the Dean of Education, Public Interest Alberta, staff, students, and parents. The number of people who spoke in support of the policy was overwhelming, and far out-numbered those speaking in opposition to it.

It was such a good experience to have kids stand up and tell their stories; they told us why it was so important to them that they not just have the Gay Straight Alliances but that we must have a culture of inclusion and acceptance within their school and all Edmonton Public Schools.

The policy was passed unanimously just one year from the time we were elected to office.

Notes, Issues and Questions

It was reassuring to us and to the public to have two supportive and accessible academics from the University of Alberta, Dr. Kristopher Wells and Dr. André Grace, working with us. With their input, we were guided by credible research and assisted with the development of materials. Credibility in the face of controversy is invaluable.

It was also important to be attentive to legal considerations. There are some key relevant legal cases, one of them being an Alberta case involving a teacher at a private Christian college who was fired when he came out. This was the first charter case relating to treatment based on sexual orientation. The outcome was that there can not be differential treatment based on sexual orientation.

In installing this policy, we and the public considered some big questions:

- Can we balance freedom of religion and equality rights of sexual minorities?
- Is there a clear and pressing reason to limit rights or freedoms?
- Is permitting discrimination against sexual minorities reasonable to protect freedom of religion?
- Does inclusion of sexual minorities in school board policies restrict the rights of parents?

We wanted to make sure that this wasn't about limiting rights or freedoms; that everyone knew that this was actually about enforcing the right of individuals to be accepted and respected in their individual schools.

It was about stopping discrimination against sexual minorities; it was not about infringing on religious rights. It just meant that you can't be mean and hurtful to kids in your school.

Ongoing Work

We still have work to do as a Board. We need to align this policy with all of the other Board policies. We need to liaison with staff to develop curricular links. We are engaging with the Alberta School Boards Association, the district is developing regulations, and an advisory committee has been established to support implementation of those regulations.

And we have an obligation to provide leadership, whether it is supporting Camp fYrefly (a leadership camp for LGBTQ youth), attending Queer Prom, or participating in the Pride Festival.

Perhaps the biggest thing is creating and protecting resiliency within the institution, making sure people have voices and that there are supports in place.

> QUOTABLE STATISTICS FROM EGALE CANADA

- 26 per cent of non-LGBTTQ students reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual expression
- 14 per cent of youth self-identified as LGBTTQ
- 62 per cent of youth stated they were "completely comfortable" or "very comfortable" with LGBTTQ issues
- 23.8 per cent witnessed an act of violence or verbal abuse directed toward a LGBTTQ person his or her own age. (In the 15-19 age groups the rate increased to 27.5 per cent.)
- 21 per cent of LGBTTQ students reported being physically harassed or assaulted about their perceived orientation or gender identity over 52 per cent of LGBTTQ students report feeling unsafe at school.

PART 5.5

Leadership Isn't Always Easy

LARRY HAYES is Chair of the Burnaby School Board. In Burnaby, the creation an anti-homophobia policy ignited fierce opposition and support in the months leading up to the school board election. The school board trustees running for re-election remained firm in their commitment to the anti-homophobia policy and were handily returned to office.

The steps taken in developing the Burnaby School District's policy on homophobia, making small changes in its wording, and listening to delegations were generally similar to the Edmonton experience. It is similar to what many districts have done in developing a policy that specifically addresses homophobic behaviour.

However our experience was very different in some very significant ways.

The opening of our official policy statement:

> *To ensure that all members of the school community work together in an atmosphere of respect and safety, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, the Board of Education will adopt appropriate administrative regulations and strategies that promote respect for human rights, support diversity, and address discrimination.*

The original statement was worded a little differently. We changed some of the words that were too 'loaded,' though the changes did not affect the intent and impact of the final statement.

Originally, we naively thought it was such a warm, fuzzy statement. How could anybody be against what this policy was trying to establish?

We found out very quickly that even though we in Burnaby prided ourselves on being a district that somewhat flew beneath the radar, trying to institute a policy on homophobia in schools really brought the worst out in people. It got down and dirty.

Originally we were approached by a number of staff who were union reps in the city, asking us to put a committee together to develop some specific policy. The Board was happy to set up the LGBTQ ad hoc committee. The large group was comprised of representatives of all stakeholders, and they had diverse opinions. They worked together for over a year, before the policy began to take shape. Eventually a committee involving three trustees and others drafted the policy.

Our District had always had a code of conduct, as many do, generally covering bullying and harassment. We were comfortable with what the research showed us we needed to do. In the early stages we obtained input from external presenters who had been suggested by the committee. There was emphasis on student voice and student safety.

We found out very quickly that even though we in Burnaby prided ourselves on being a district that somewhat flew beneath the radar, trying to institute a policy on homophobia in schools really brought the worst out in people. It got down and dirty.

Once the policy had taken shape, it was distributed to partner groups; five days before it was to be put on the Board agenda, it was posted in the policy section of the website. We were confident. We thought we had it on the go.

By the end of six weeks, the policy was gaining a lot of attention, and we saw that we were going to have to do a lot more work with the public. A concerned group rallied very quickly. We worked on the wording of the policy to present it in such a way that it would be acceptable to everybody.

The issue gained momentum. The website was deluged with emails, for and against the policy. There was a very organized group against the policy. The objections had common themes: religious grounds, taking away parent control, already adequate protection for students.

Four months from the policy's arrival on our table, we'd had 200 emails, many addressed to all of the Board members. There were form emails from all different parts of Canada, even from as far as Europe. The Catholic Civil Rights League challenged us.

A lot of misinformation was being promoted. Some of the organizers of the protest groups were putting out misleading information to the Asian community: the teachers would make the boys dress like girls; we were going to do away with separate washrooms.

Troops and vitriol rallied and flew on both sides. We had 500 people on the front lawn: lots of kids in many colours from their Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), and many others with signs saying, "Down with 5.45" (the policy number).

Some people were dismayed that we were carrying this issue on our backs right into the fall election. The group opposing our policy formed a political party, the Burnaby Parents' Voice, which ran five trustees against us.

When you think about it, election time is probably not the best time to start bringing in controversial policy. But the policy had been on the back burner and in the works for two years. It had been in the paper, we disseminated information, and we felt that this was really the time that we had to get this policy done.

Some of us knew that we were doing the right thing. And we felt that if we lost the election based on what we were doing, that was going to be fine because we were standing on principle. There is no better time to come out to the front, stand up and say, "This is what we want."

It was incredible at the end of the day. The culmination of the election was that the Parents' Voice group was wiped out. We won all our seats on the Board. It was the silent majority that came out and supported us.

The policy was passed unanimously in June. The news was celebrated by groups across the country.

PART 6

Big Ideas

In our rapidly changing world, thinking through systemic challenges on a big scale takes creativity and innovation. This section includes some thought provoking ideas about public education and democracy.

PART 6.1

Building Democracy Before Age Six

BY SHARON GREGSON | Many countries have found that a high quality, universal, democratic and accountable system of early care and learning benefits children, families, communities and the economy well.

In 2010, the deepening childcare crisis in British Columbia and the province's introduction of full school day Kindergarten for five year olds served as a catalyst for the Coalition of Childcare Advocates of BC (CCCABC) and the Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC) to develop a plan for an Integrated System of Early Care and Learning in BC.

In this chapter, active childcare advocate and former School Board Trustee Sharon Gregson outlines that plan, which offers "a concrete, innovative and ambitious way forward and provides a framework for significant and lasting change."

When we introduced this plan to integrate early care and learning, we thought we would be pushing a boulder up a big hill. Instead, we have been overwhelmed by the level of interest and support that the Plan has generated, and not just from within the childcare sector. Parents, grandparents and people from every walk of life have seen that this is an achievable way forward out of the crisis that families now experience in childcare.

Parents and those working in the school system know all the benefits from investing in the early years.

> WHY GET INVOLVED?

Parents and those working in the school system know all the benefits from investing in the early years, not only around brain development but how that investment brings more than a two and a half dollar return for every dollar spent. School readiness issues, community support issues, early intervention issues, and myriad other issues are why it is important for us to be involved and to care about such public investment.

When you ask Canadians where they think we would rank internationally for investment in the early years, most Canadians would likely say we are in the middle of the pack.

In fact, Denmark, Sweden and Norway are far above us with about 2 per cent of their GDP invested in Early Childhood services. Then we move down to France, Austria, and the UK in the middle, and then the United States. And then there is Canada, at the bottom of the barrel according to the OECD, with too few spaces, insufficient quality, high cost, and inadequate inclusion.

British Columbia is even lower than the Canadian average, until we add in the expansion of full school day Kindergarten. That puts us up just slightly above the Canadian average but far, far below the international examples and far below where the OECD (Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development) says we should be; the average is 0.7 per cent of GDP. The UNICEF and EU benchmark is 1 per cent.

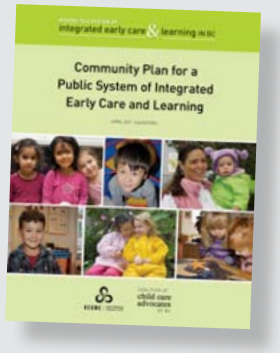
The disaster of BC's poor investment and consequent lack of accessibility shows up in five measurements of vulnerability: cognitive, language, speech, social, and physical. We are seeing high levels and increasing vulnerability for children in our province as measured when they reach Kindergarten. The goal from the provincial government's own service plans is to reduce childhood vulnerability by 15 per cent by the year 2015. We are far away from that at about 30 per cent vulnerability.

> THE PLAN

The Plan is a community response to what the childcare coalition would consider to be failed Public Policy.

Some of the contributing factors to that failure:

- *Inadequate Investment.* Canada ranks last out of a list of 25 industrialized countries for investment in early childhood and the access that we provide for services to young children.
- *Lack of respect for 'women's work.'* Caring for young children is often considered to be babysitting or something that women just do naturally; related to this, a commonly held view is that there shouldn't necessarily be good pay or benefits associated with it.
- *Lack of political will* to make the investments that are necessary.
- *Lack of a plan.* The current provincial government has not demonstrated a plan for moving from the crisis we have now to where we need to be in the future.



- *No adequate or stable public funding.* The recent one-time only announcement from the MCFD (Ministry of Child and Family Development) of about $45 for every childcare space for three and four year olds is almost an insult, appearing to be a sort of a rounding error at the end of fiscal year. It is not a sufficiently substantial amount to be of any practical help with building a childcare system.
- Childcare as a service has not thrived in a child protection ministry.

The Plan is a community response to BC's on-going childcare crisis.

If you are a parent or a grandparent, if you work in the field with young children, or if you are a Kindergarten teacher who sees children coming to school, you'll know that there is a crisis. Consider:

- *High fees for daycare*. At my daycare, monthly fees for a two year old are $1,195. Unless you are wealthy, that's not an affordable service.
- *Low wages*. The wages are low for people who work in the field. A typical hourly wage after 20 years in the field is $16. You wouldn't have a pension plan and your medical/dental plan would be minimal.
- *Few spaces*, particularly for school age children and those under three. For children under three in BC, there are only enough licensed childcare spaces for 6 per cent of the province's children.

At my daycare, monthly fees for a two year old are $1,195. Unless you are wealthy, that's not an affordable service.

- *Big box corporate childcare*. EDLEUN (Education Learning Universe) is buying six childcare centres in British Columbia, its first foray into our province. They claim they want to be the biggest childcare provider in Canada. This suggests a trend toward the corporatization of childcare services, and our experience is that the only way to make a profit in childcare is with high fees, low wages, or cutting corners on quality.

The Plan is a response to the implementation in BC of full school day Kindergarten for five year olds and promise of 'pre-Kindergarten' for three and four year olds.

To date, despite the expansion of full school day Kindergarten, there has been no consultation with the childcare sectors and certainly no plan to meet the needs of working parents. I am being deliberate in calling the program a school-day Kindergarten because a working parent knows that 9:00 to 3:00 is not a full day.

The Plan is a community response to the national and international trend toward a growing role for Ministries of Education in early learning.

International policy lessons suggest that care and learning should be integrated under one lead ministry; further, they indicate that where integration is pursued, keeping them in an education ministry is the most effective.

A strong and equal partnership between care and learning sectors is required. We're being very deliberate when we're talking about 'early care' and 'learning.' We often run those two terms together, but we chose to put the 'care' first because learning is best done with good care.

'Early learning' has more cachet. 'Childcare' is still often seen as a custodial, church-basement business.

It is very important to be aware of the discrepancy between what is spent on K–12 education, and the public dollars invested in childcare for the early years. We are all familiar with the $8,300 per pupil that is invested into the K–12 system. And while we know that is insufficient, we have to compare it with the childcare rate of $382 per child 0–12. We often say that children are our greatest resource—our future. You certainly wouldn't know it when you look at how we invest in young children.

Context matters.

Implementation of the Plan would not happen in a vacuum:

- There needs to be strong family policy in place, including services, time and resources. We hear a lot about 'time poverty' for families.
- There are both provincial and federal responsibilities in the Plan.
- First Nations and Aboriginal communities must have their own community control.
- The Plan will require new investment. This is not just about an administrative change and reassigning some dollars. Implementing the Plan will require a new and adequate, stable budget.

> HIGHLIGHTS OF THE COMMUNITY PLAN

I. New Early Care and Learning Act

We are proposing a new piece of legislation. This legislation strengthens the childcare sector so that it is a strong and equal partner with the learning sector. The Act we propose legislates the rights of:

- All young children to access services that respect their unique developmental stage;
- Families — particularly those in the paid labour force — to quality affordable care and learning that meets their family's needs, which they can choose to utilize on a voluntary basis;
- First Nations control over their own services.

Services for young children don't belong in the School Act. Early care and learning is not a downward extension of our school model for young children.

II. New Home for 'Care' in the Ministry of Education

The Ministry would be responsible for all community and school-based early care and learning programs. The Ministry of Education has advantages that are not available to the childcare sector:

- *Universality.* Whereas all children are welcome in K to 12, such is not the case in childcare. With so few spaces, parents have to be either wealthy or lucky to get one. We want the same universality seen in the school system extended to young children.
- *Public funding.*
- *Democratic control.* In the same way there are elected trustees on Boards of Education, there needs to be democratic control for a childcare system in place of the fragile isolated services that currently exist.
- *Public understanding and support.* People understand the role of teachers, but they don't have a picture of the early childhood educator's job.
- *Respect and fair compensation.* We want respect and fair compensation for people who work with young children.

- *Infrastructure to deliver services*. When the government announces that there will be full school-day Kindergarten in two years for every five year old, school boards have resources to make that happen. Today, if our Premier said there are a billion dollars set aside for childcare, we would struggle because we don't currently have infrastructure in the child care sector.

III. New Early Care and Learning Plans

Boards of Education would be mandated and funded to govern the new Act and local Early Care and Learning Services. Boards would:

- *Develop and implement Early Care and Learning Plan*. To date, there is no level of government that is responsible for planning. Nothing exists to prohibit one preschool from opening up next door to another even if it's not particularly needed in that community. The current system is completely ad hoc—and shifts whenever individuals or organizations decide that they can gather together the resources to meet the needs. So plans would be developed under the local Board's guidance, in cooperation with the local community and existing services.
- *Dedicate staff to support EC&L*.
- *Establish standing and staffed EC&L committees*.
- *Ensure appropriate facilities, on or off school sites*. This does not mean to suggest that increasingly younger children should go to school. There may be appropriate facilities on school sites that are appropriate to develop for young children. But otherwise they would be in the community.

IV. New "Early Years Centre" Networks

At present we have an ad hoc system of services caring for children: family daycare, family childcare, group childcare, daycare centres, supported child development centres and preschool. The coalition is suggesting that everyone begins to use the same term, 'Early Years Centre' (EYC).

- EYCs are more appropriate than 'pre-Kindergarten.' We are NOT suggesting three and four year olds in a pre-Kindergarten situation in schools.
- EYCs would integrate and evolve from existing licensed childcare into neighbourhood EYC Networks.

- Boards of Education would be responsible for developing and delivering all new EYC Networks.
- EYCs would be staffed by qualified Early Childhood Educators in the community unless appropriate space is available in or on school grounds. Even if the EYCs are on school grounds, we are not suggesting teachers work with younger children.
- There would be support for existing providers through an application process to become an EYC network.
- EYC Networks would be key players in coordinated Early Childhood Services. EYC Networks would be good places potentially for a range of services that families could access: family place drop-in centres, speech-language therapy services, and so on.
- Providers can remain independent as long as they meet licensing requirements, but as such would not be able to access new public funds tied to the new accountability measures.

We are talking about substantial public investment in this new system, which would total approximately $1.5 billion when fully implemented. We don't shy away from that number, which would be reached incrementally. The number comes from research executed at Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at UBC, and there would be immediate and long term returns on the investment.

Of course, in order for operators to be able to access substantial new public dollars, there need to be strong accountability measures:

- *Cap parent fees at affordable levels*. Right now parents are paying about 75 to 80 per cent of the cost of providing care for children. In most cases, the fees are higher for childcare than they are for post-secondary education. Under the Plan, the maximum parental contribution would be 20 per cent, which is the international standard.
- *Meet improved wage and training levels*. Wage and training levels would have to be improved.
- *Include ALL children*. Children would not be turned away because they have special or unique needs.
- *Meet identified community needs*. Gaps in services would be filled.
- *Create a program that is consistent with the Early Learning Frameworks*, which outlines the holistic development of children and developmentally appropriate care.

V. Enhance Kindergarten/Grade 1

In the Plan, school entry would remain at age five, the same as it is now. What the Plan suggests is enhancing Kindergarten so that teachers work with Early Childhood Educators. This would mean:

- *More professional adults working with children.*
- *Greater coverage for the full working day/year*. The team could provide care for an extended day in the same location. It also allows for care over the full year, so that working parents are not scrambling on school closure days and in the summer.
- *Bringing ECE practice into schools*. We think that having Early Childhood Educators in schools enhances practice in those schools. Grade 1 would be enhanced with the same team approach because we know that children don't develop in neat little 10-month segments.

VI. School-Age Care — Grade 2 and Up

School-age care would start from Grade 2. In this part of the plan:

- Boards of Education would assume full responsibility for school age-care.
- Existing school age childcare providers would be integrated into the new system, with accountability measures to access the new public funds.
- New programs would be developed and delivered by Boards of Education.

VII. Workforce Development

The sixth and final highlight and the one that has generated the most attention is our plan for workforce development. Obviously, if we're talking about an expansion of services for young children, we're talking about:

- Enhancing the quality of service.
- Respecting the expertise of Early Childhood Educators.
- Moving towards parity with teachers.

To accomplish these goals, we want to set the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education as a new educational standard for the sector.

To accomplish these goals, we want to set the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education as a new educational standard for the sector.

Capilano University offers a Bachelor of ECE. We are looking at that being expanded and applied in the same way that nursing and teaching has developed over the decades. This step is the maturation of our profession.

We also want to set the Diploma as the minimum standard for group, family and school-age care.

Further, various incentives and a support system would have to be worked out to encourage the sector to receive more training. Mature, experienced providers could continue to operate until they chose to retire or move on.

> IMPLEMENTATION

Where do we start?

1. Get broad commitment to embrace and implement the Plan.
2. Enact the Early Care and Learning Act.
3. Develop a five-year stable budget.
4. Develop community ELC Plans, with the priority placed on programs that meet the needs of working families.

Change is here

There is no question that change is here. Full school-day Kindergarten is already in place, and the Ministry of Education is moving towards services for three and four year olds.

And, momentum is building for our Integrated ECL Plan. We have been giving briefings by invitation in communities all over the province. We have hundreds of written responses and endorsements from many groups, including city councils and school boards. The response is overwhelmingly positive. Yes, people have questions, but for the first time they see some concrete solutions to the crisis.

This Plan means change for everybody; change for: people in the Early Care and Learning field now, people who work in preschools and daycare centres, people who are trustees and parents. The Plan calls for change from everybody to think differently about how we deliver services for young children.

We realize that this is a cultural shift and will take a generation to achieve. We want our new early childcare educators to have an expectation not only of higher qualifications and better pay, but also greater respect.

And, we want better services for young children. It's not good enough to read on the front page of the *Vancouver Sun* about a childcare situation where a woman is providing daycare to 32 children in a converted garage, or to hear about parents who are so desperate they turn a blind eye to possible problems at a particular centre, or to know that parents are turned away because they can't afford $1,195 a month.

Anyone who is working with young children knows there's a crisis. Ask the waiter in the restaurant what he's doing for childcare. He'll say, "Well we've worked it out. I'm working day shift and my wife is working night shift. We can't afford childcare for our baby."

We have a responsibility to do something about this crisis, and we must ensure that the Early Care and Learning community is included in making the changes. It will take patience. We know that the integration of care and learning is a process. And it will take vigilance. Plans are not guarantees.

We urge communities to take action and compel their own decision makers to take it on.

www.cccabc.bc.ca
www.ecebc.ca

PART 6.2

Equity and Public Education: Lessons from Finland

BY BRUCE BEAIRSTO | Finland garners consistently high scores on international tests assessing Kindergarten through Grade 12. Interestingly, Finland achieves this outcome as a by-product of their strong focus on equity, which is in contrast to the competitive nature of much North American education.

Bruce Beairsto completed his doctoral work in Finland. He is interested in what the Canadian education system can learn from the successes of the Finnish approach and offers an intriguing analysis of the two systems. Bruce has been an educator for over 35 years, serving as the Superintendent of the Richmond (BC) School District for six years. He is an adjunct professor at Simon Fraser University in the Faculty of Education, where he teaches and supervises graduate students.

People in education often want to talk about 'that Finnish thing,' the consistent high achievement level of students in Finland, as measured by the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results. No one, least of all the Finns, seems able to explain their amazing results, although there are some theories.

Finland supports a culture of innovation. It has a strong university system, respected worldwide in the areas of medical and nuclear research. PHOTO COURTESY TIMONOKO/FLICKR

> WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT FINLAND?

To unravel the puzzle, it seems important to know a bit about the country and the culture of its citizens. Finland is a small, communal and fairly intimate sort of country. What elements might be relevant to the evolution of its successful education system?

Finland's overall history is one of alternating invasions by the Swedes and Russians. More recently, through their opportunistic involvement with the Germans as a means of shrugging off the Russians during World War II, Finland suffered heavy reparations. As a consequence, although the nation was not officially behind the Curtain, it was completely under the thumb of the USSR after WWII. The Soviets provided oil and gas; the Finns generated heavy industry. Most of their production and all of their attention was focused on Russia.

With the collapse of the USSR, Finland suddenly went broke. The oil tap was literally turned off, and the entire economy had nothing to do and nowhere to go. Facing up to 30 per cent unemployment, the Finns made a 180 degree turn towards Europe. In a relatively short time, they reinvented themselves as an outward-looking nation, and a very successful one.

Geographically, Finland is not a very big place; it is approximately the same size as the Yukon. Situated at the same latitude as the Yukon, Finland has long, dark winters, but is relatively warm due to the influence of the Baltic Sea. Like the Canadian Shield, the area is rich in minerals and forests, but Finland also has significant heavy industry, such as shipbuilding, and high tech companies.

Most of Finland's 5 million residents live in smaller cities and towns scattered across the country. Aside from Helsinki, which is an international centre and often host to high profile meetings, and Espoo, which is the headquarters of the electronics giant Nokia, a large Finnish town would have a population of less than 100,000.

Finland supports a culture of innovation. It has a strong university system, which is respected worldwide in the areas of medical and nuclear research. Further, the country has produced leaders in the field of electronic communications. (Interestingly, the story of Nokia began with the merger of three small companies: a forestry company, a mining company and a company that made rubber boots and inflatable rafts for the Russian army!)

Culturally Finland is exceptionally vibrant. The majority of Finns speak three or more languages, and most play a musical instrument. Nearly every major town in Finland has its own philharmonic orchestra. Lahti, for instance, is a very typical 'large' Finnish town, a little under 100,000 people. Within that population it has three universities, a philharmonic orchestra and four major museums.

> DEMOCRATIC TRADITION

It's socialist or something, isn't it?

Actually, Finland is a democratic republic, similar to the United States. They elect a president every six years; they elect a parliament, which in turn elects the prime minister, every four years. It has a representative, multi-party system with proportional representation. It may be significant to the way policies are determined that governments here are almost always coalitions.

The municipality is the seat of governance most relevant in the day-to-day lives of Finns. There are 336 separate municipalities in Finland, and those municipalities provide about two thirds of the social services: education, health care, family services and so on. The federal government has limited powers, in areas such as defence and the international trade.

There is a very active democratic tradition at the local level. In Lahti there are approximately 50 people on the Council representing at least a dozen different parties of every stripe and variety. If you get enough votes, you get some representation. The Council, based on proportional representation, picks the mayor and the Executive Council. While the Executive Council tends to daily operations, policy-driven decisions come back to the full Council for debate. It's a 'town-hall' kind of institution.

The level of social services provided by the state is very high. It is supported by a tax system not unlike Canada's. There is a progressive federal income tax up to 30 per cent and a flat municipal tax of about 20 per cent. The chief difference between the Finnish system and the Canadian tax system is that the Finns tax consumer products (through Value Added Tax (VAT)), corporate profits, capital gains and dividends at 25 per cent. Considering the services provided, the overall taxation rate is not out of line. As a percentage of the GDP, Finland's taxation rate comes in at 42.5 per cent, about the middle of European countries.

> SO WHAT DOES THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN FINLAND LOOK LIKE?

Children in Finland begin their formal schooling at the age of seven, one year later than in Canada, and have fewer hours of instruction than in Canada, yet consistently achieve among the highest world standards in reading, mathematics and science.

The education system is structured so that:

- There is local control. There is a federal Ministry of Education and a national curriculum, but the schools themselves are operated by the 336 municipalities, some of which are very small. So while school districts are distinct as legal entities, operationally they tend to cluster together in regions and provide regional services.
- There is a very strong vocational/polytechnic strand as well as university strand. Students chose one of these strands at age 16. However, it is possible and common to oscillate between these streams all the way through to the doctorate level. For the most part, skilled trades and degreed professions have similar status, and students may attend programs provided by the same institutions.

- There is allowance for versatility in this system. A professor that I worked with had originally apprenticed as a machinist. He went back to school eventually and received a degree in engineering. Then he went sideways and got a doctorate in education, and now he's the municipal manager of one of the provinces.
- There is accessibility for all. Education is free right through the doctorate level and, in fact, after high school students may receive a state stipend to ensure they can focus on their studies and not have to work to support themselves. There is even subsidized food, right from Kindergarten through to university.
- There is a strong Continuing Education system. As an adult you can choose from subjects ranging from how to make felt hats to how to repair your car or do drafting—or just about anything you want. All free.

> WHAT'S THE SECRET OF FINLAND'S REMARKABLE RESULTS?

While everyone has an opinion, no one, including the Finns, really knows why their system is so successful. When the first PISA results came out, the Germans had a complete national breakdown and launched a major educational overhaul. The Finns came out on top and said, "What? We didn't know we were doing so well!"

In the wake of the PISA results, delegations from other countries have been arriving steadily to study Finland's education system. While no single theory seems to explain why it works so well, some relevant facts may be pointed out.

- Education is highly valued in Finland. As a small country in a hostile northern climate, it recognizes that education is the way forward. It is critical as a nation to be engaged in the world outside and to have an educated population that is creative and inventive.
- There is rigorous training program for teachers. All teachers in Finland must have a master's degree. Only 10 per cent of people who apply to education are accepted. It is a highly competitive entry because teaching is a prestigious job and is relatively well paid. As the one who raises children, the local teacher is a respected and important part of the social fabric.
- There is a high level of autonomy, with no standardized testing. There is a national curriculum, but teachers are given a lot of freedom in determining how best to achieve it with their students.
- Schools are local and relatively small, as are classes. Research on class size demonstrates that incremental reductions in class size have little effect on student experience until the class size shrinks to about 19 students. When you get to the point where the teacher actually behaves differently, and is able to work in a more tutorial and individual manner, then you get a dramatic change. And having been in Finnish classrooms a couple of times, I have seen that there is a very intimate atmosphere. It's as if the teachers are in partnership with the kids.
- There is very generous parental leave, and if you choose to stay home you get a government allowance until your children are three years old. Families are strongly encouraged to have one of the parents at home with the kids.
- Daycare is subsidized. Municipalities by law must provide daycare and they must provide it in Swedish, Finnish and Sami, the First Nations language of the north. There is a voluntary half-day option for preschool at age 6.
- Daycare staff are well-educated and highly trained.

> EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY

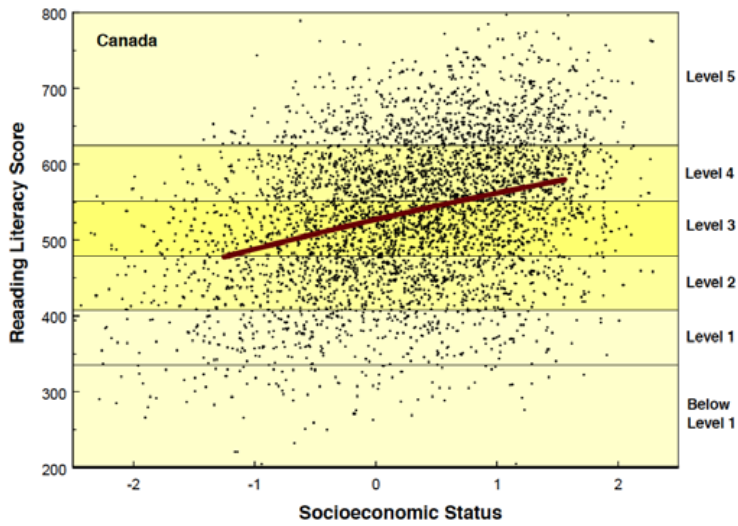
Now you might guess, as I do, that Finland's success isn't just about the education system. It's about the way families are structured. It's about the size and nature of communities. It's about a country that has a generally communal sense to it. It is about extremely strong social services. It's about very low levels of social and income difference; the socioeconomic stratification (SES) is very much lower in Finland than in Canada. There is more equity.

Here's an example of Finnish equity. Finland has the honour of having given the world's highest traffic fine. Fines are calculated as percentage of your income, based on the difference between the posted speed and your actual speed. A young man was pulled over in Helsinki for travelling at 80 km/h in a 40 km/h zone. He happened to have inherited a large amount of money, and had an annual income of approximately $7 million. His fine was $170,000.

So there's something much deeper than the education system that is the foundation for Finland's success. The fact that teachers have autonomy and are given respect is interesting and important, but it's part of a much bigger picture of an equitable society.

These are PISA results for Canada in reading. The line through the middle is a generalization, but every dot is a student. When people talk

PISA Reading literacy scores and socioeconomic status in Canada



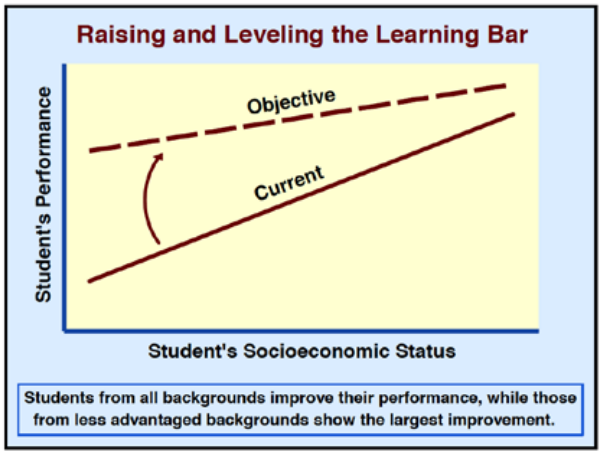
about national results, they talk about the line, but results are people. There is someone below the line who is really in trouble, but there's someone almost at the top with exactly the same socioeconomic status. Whenever you draw one of these lines it's very easy to accidentally fall into the trap of believing that "average" means "typical." There is no typical. Every child is an individual, so when you make generalizations about socioeconomic status, you have to be very careful that you're not stereotyping everybody.

Our line has both a location and a slope. The slope is the equity. If there is a steep slope, then your level of SES status has, on average, a huge effect on what is going to happen to you in school. If it's flat, the effect will be less. Finland's bar is very flat. The United States has about the steepest bar in the world because the levels in difference of inequity in that country are huge. In an American school, you can get the best education in the world or you can have an absolutely atrocious experience.

So equity is all about raising and leveling the learning bar. When provincial governments publish a report they only present the average—that is, the height of the bar. They don't report the slope.

The most important thing, if you really want to increase your percentage—if it's important to you that your percentage is higher, that the number of graduates is higher—is to tilt the bottom of the bar up. Leveling the bar is a much stronger strategy than raising the bar, because that's how the average goes up. Figure out whose average isn't up there, get it up, and boom—you've got significant improvement.

Raising and Leveling the Learning Bar



> WHY DO WE CARE ABOUT EQUITY?

Besides the fact that increasing equity will significantly improve our average, and make individuals in the education system look better on somebody's table when the results are on the front page, there are a few reasons we care about equity:

- Ego. We all like to say we're good, we're better, and we're number one.
- Ethics. Obviously, this is foundational: who do we want to be?
- Economics. The argument is that school systems drive the economy. The evidence for this is correlational: the higher education level, the higher income, and the stronger the economy. However, there is no causal evidence that this is true. It's a convenient, but not terribly strong, argument.
- Enlightened Self-Interest. Ethics is the foundation, but I think the argument that swings the most lead is that everybody benefits when you have more equity.

My experience with this was in Richmond, BC where, starting in the late 1980s, the district moved quite aggressively to promote an inclusive school system. It was 20 year journey.

What we found, in a nutshell, is the more you focus on inclusion, the higher the standards go. The higher your results, the better your teaching is. There are many reasons for this and one of them is that teachers simply have to rise to the task. Bringing a broader spectrum into the classroom makes the job is difficult, and it takes a really talented and energetic person to do it; however, the quality of teaching rises significantly when the diversity of the population goes up because you can't get away with weak practice. You must be on top of your game.

So when teachers were given a high percentage of ESL kids in their classes, the standard rose. Why? Because the teachers started pre-teaching vocabulary, not making any assumptions about what the kids might know from last year, checking it out and responding to the needs. They used more visuals. They made fewer assumptions and checked for understanding more often. They just became better at their craft.

So there is an enlightened self interest in this. Equity is better for everyone.

> CAN IT WORK?

In Richmond we had seriously begun our quest for inclusion to address the issues of integrating students with Special Needs before we encountered a sudden and unexpected increase in our ESL population. We had stretched ourselves in terms of our capacity and our acceptance and our thinking. We had adapted our way of organizing around children who were demonstrably needy. Then our ESL population exploded. In one summer between academic years, our ESL population went from 300 to 1,000, and nobody expected it. Within five years over 40 per cent of our students were in ESL programs.

And it worked. Everybody had to labour like stink and learn, and it worked. Standards rose; there was no dislocation; and the kids were well received in the schools.

As you go further and further on the road to equity, your concept of inclusion becomes broader and broader and deeper and deeper, until it embraces not just inclusion of some particular students but diversity as a fundamental and natural fact of life. EVERY kid is different.

So I have to start with the premise of vast difference and work with it, as opposed to thinking that the diversity is what is making my day hard. And the more I get my head and my heart around that, the more natural it becomes. Then, if I am working with a bunch of kids who happen to be learning English, well, that's just part of the issue. So I change the way I teach. I plan differently. I arrange the room differently. I arrange for some assistance to come in. That's my job. I just get on with it. Working with students who are probably going to do well anyway is not the job; working with the kids who need me the most—that's the job.

Once we start down this road of equity, it improves things for everybody.

> STRIVING FOR EQUITY

When you think about striving for equity, these are categories that probably spring to mind: students with special needs, First Nations students, students in poverty, LGBT students, and diverse student personalities and learning styles.

And it's true. In each one of these cases you need to have very specially charted programs and interventions. You need to go through periods of

thinking and maturing and growing; you need to be more sophisticated in yourself and in your practice in order to get your head around the issues as experienced by the children who represent them.

While all the above is true, I think the most important thing is to know that most vulnerable students are not in any of these categories. Most vulnerable students come from a "typical" home in a "typical" neighbourhood. They're not necessarily poor, they're not First Nations, they don't have special learning needs.

The fundamental fact is that our children within every group represent a diverse set of personalities and learning styles. If every kid in the class was born on the same day and raised in the same block, you would expect to have at least a five-year spread of developmental difference in one grade level, because that's human. When your kids are growing, do you get all frantic because your kid's not above average height and weight, according to the child-rearing books? There's a huge spectrum of normal. So if they're in grade five, you should expect that every grade five class has a kid reading at the grade three level and one reading at the grade seven level. That's normal.

Most vulnerable students come from a "typical" home in a "typical" neighbourhood. They're not necessarily poor, they're not First Nations, they don't have special learning needs.

And effective teachers deal with the reality of diversity.

When you can get your head around diversity as the starting point for everything you do as the natural course of events, equity begins to be established. I don't think equity is an add-on. It is the result of inclusive behaviours from the ground up.

And I think that's probably Finland's secret, because in a way that they don't quite articulate, that is how they live their lives. There is an assumption of inclusion: we are a community, we live together and we look after each other. Their education system is valued, well-supported and vigorous. But those deeper, more inclusive assumptions upon which people are living their lives are what shape the way they approach child-rearing and the nature of their schools.

Resource

"Finland's Education Success," BBC report: www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlYHWpRR4yc

PART 6.3

Restoring Democracy

JOEL BAKAN is a renowned thinker, educator, writer and filmmaker. His 2004 book and subsequent film, The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power, analyzes the evolution and modern-day behaviour of corporations, winning 25 international awards. His latest book, *Childhood Under Siege: How Big Business Targets Children*, was published to rave reviews in August 2011.

Joel's work is relevant to the leadership challenges of our time: from the financial crisis, to trade agreements, to Occupy, the role of corporations in local community and education is increasingly at the forefront of public discourse. While some of these issues may fall outside of the legal jurisdiction of local governments, they are all within our larger democratic jurisdiction.

There is a conscious strategy out there aimed at weakening our system of democratic governance. It's known as "starve the beast." As you may know, this is a term used to describe a set of tactics, indeed an entire approach to politics and policy, that dominates right-wing, and increasingly mainstream, thought and politics. And though the term originates in the United States, I think it's painfully operative in Canada today, as evidenced by recent federal policy.

The notion is that you roll back taxes, especially on corporations and the wealthy; you create fiscal crises and deficits; and that in turn justifies cutting the budgets of publicly funded programs and agencies. The programs and agencies, starved of adequate funding, can't help but fail—they don't have the resources to survive, or at least they are forced to perform poorly. Their failures and poor performances are

Joel Bakan: There is a conscious strategy out there aimed at weakening our system of democratic governance. It's known as "starve the beast."

then marshalled as evidence that public institutions don't work; that they're inefficient and deficient.

And the solution, the rabbit out of the hat, is to get rid of those public institutions—or at least diminish their operations—and then hand over their responsibilities to private providers, usually for-profit corporations.

It's a brilliant strategy, "starve the beast." It's working. And it's convincing as long as you don't think about it too much. Because if you do think about it, even just a little bit, you realize that its logic is kind of illogical, sort of like blaming a car for not running if it runs out of gas.

> ATTACK ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

Take education. Our government here in British Columbia has made no secret of the fact that it disdains teachers' collective bargaining rights, that it is happy to trample all over those rights even if that means trampling all over our constitution and all over our international treaty obligations.

Now my fear is that these maneuvers are not just some isolated problem but that they are part of a larger attack on public education. When I look south of the border, where "starve the beast" tactics are currently rampant, those fears are heightened. Over the last 30 years in the United States, public schools—especially those in inner city and poor districts—have been starved of adequate funding, and they've deteriorated as a result. Everybody, left, right and centre, agrees that the system is in crisis. But if you listen to mainstream media and most school reform advocates in the United States today, the reason behind the crisis is not chronic underfunding, but rather supposedly unaccountable, greedy and incompetent teachers. It's almost blood sport today in the United States to attack teachers, and inefficient public systems.

And if you listen a bit further, the solution that is always proposed is to make schools run more like businesses. So you need market incentives for teachers; you need to fire underperforming teachers; you need

to close schools that aren't performing well. And you need to ensure that more schools are actually run by businesses, by what are called EMOs—education management organizations.

In the spring of 2008, a symposium was held at Chicago's exclusive Mid-America Club to celebrate the first years of the city's school reform program, "Renaissance 2010." The name of this symposium, "Free to Choose, Free to Succeed: the New Market of Public Education," captured its animating idea that public schools should be governed by private sector values. Arne Duncan, then Chief Executive Officer of the Chicago Public Schools, was the symposium's star attraction.

"We're trying to blur the lines between the public and the private," he told the audience, mainly representatives from corporations, right-wing think tanks and school privatization groups. "I am not a manager of 600 schools," he said. "I'm a portfolio manager of 600 schools. And I'm trying to improve the portfolio."

The over-arching effect of "Renaissance 2010" was to transform a quintessentially public institution—public schooling—into a market-driven partnership with business.

Now, while Duncan had overseen "Renaissance 2010," he handed over the detailed drafting of the plan to the Commercial Club of Chicago, the voice of the city's business elite. That organization had declared that its aim was nothing short of reshaping Chicago's school system to reflect a "private sector perspective." Sixty schools were closed, and 100 new ones were opened in their place. The new schools were all run by private organizations, including for-profit companies, and unlike the schools they replaced, none of them had unions. The over-arching effect of "Renaissance 2010" was to transform a quintessentially public institution—public schooling—into a market-driven partnership with business.

Unfortunately, this approach is not isolated to Chicago. It's now become the model for the entire United States. Indeed, President Obama's national education policy, called "Race for the Top," incorporated most of the key elements of "Renaissance 2010." I suppose that really isn't much of a surprise, given that the person President Obama chose as his Secretary of Education was none other than Chicago's Arne Duncan.

What is going on in US schools is a classic "starve the beast" strategy. Tax cuts lead to revenue crunches. Revenue crunches lead to underfunding of schools. Underfunding causes dysfunction: crowded classrooms,

What is going on in US schools is a classic "starve the beast" strategy.
PHOTO COURTESY KEN ROBERTS

broken-down buildings and furniture, too few and burned out teachers and staff, outdated textbooks and materials. Dysfunctions make it difficult, if not impossible, for teachers to teach and for students to learn. And inevitably schools fail.

But the blame for this failure is not placed on inadequate funding. It's teachers and it's their unions. It's the fact that the public school system is public, rather than run by market principles.

And it's not better funding that is proposed as a solution. It's privatization. It's more industry and corporate involvement, more market-driven incentives and sanctions.

Not surprisingly, the main backers and proponents of all of this come from the ranks of big business. Indeed, the person at the helm of this market-driven school reform movement is Bill Gates. There are huge amounts of money to be made by for-profit companies in an area that historically they have been excluded from — public schooling. And now they want a piece of it. Actually, they want all of it.

"Unimaginatively vast" is how Beno Smith Junior, a major player in the American education industry describes the new market in education. "Education," he says, "is bigger than defense, bigger than the whole domestic auto industry. Only health care has a larger segment of the American market place."

So corporations can, and they currently do, make money—lots of money—from schools. These publicly-traded companies, these EMOs, are running more schools in the US than ever before. For-profit companies are becoming increasingly involved in training teachers, providing standardized tests and curricula, wiring schools with software and hardware, providing food, janitorial, transportation, and security service. All of these create an enormous and rapidly growing market.

> REGULATORY SYSTEMS, TOO

"Starve the beast" strategies aren't limited to public services like education. They extend as well to the public regulatory system. Deep funding cuts are destroying public sector jobs in regulatory agencies that are aimed at protecting important public interests.

The inevitable effect of the cuts is to make it difficult, and sometimes impossible, for agencies to do their jobs effectively. The agencies are then criticized and denigrated for being ineffective and efficient, just like the schools that have been defunded. It's classic "starve the beast" strategy, and the solution again, we're told, is to privatize.

But it's a little bit different here. In this case what happens is you privatize regulation by deregulating, rolling it back and saying, "We can trust corporations to regulate themselves." 'Self-regulation' is the latest craze. Samir Gibara, former Chair and CEO of Goodyear Tire, described this tendency in an interview. He said,

> *Corporations need to become more trustworthy because there has been a transfer of authority from the government to the corporation, and the corporation needs to assume that responsibility, and needs to really behave as a corporate citizen of the world; needs to assume the self discipline that in the past governments required from it.*

Well that presumes, of course, that corporations *can* be trustworthy, and that corporate trustworthiness *can* be a substitute for public regulation. In light of the self-interested, psychopathic institutional nature of the corporation, that is, at best, a fantasy.

I think Willem Buiter, an academic and the chief economist at Citigroup, hits the nail on the head when he speaks of this self-regulation craze:

Self-regulation stands in relation to regulation, the way self-importance stands in relation to importance and self-righteousness stands in relation to righteousness.

Whether we're talking about public services, such as schools, or we're talking about the public regulatory system, "starve the beast" strategies are devastating to the capacity of public institutions to protect and promote public goods and interest.

> LEGITIMATE DISTRUST

Historically social democrats have believed that democratic government can and should play a positive and proactive role in meeting public needs and serving public interest. But the last 30 years of deregulation, privatization, slashing of public services, increasingly cozy relationships among governments and industry, and of course "starve the beast" strategies, has had the effect of turning the hero of our story — Government — into a villain, or at least an accomplice of villains.

So on the Left there is a lot of legitimate distrust today of governments, a sense that they have become part of the problem and that they are no longer part of the solution. And that means the very people in constituencies who would be fighting for progressive governance have turned to other places to do their politics: to the streets and social media, as with the Occupy movement; or to non-governmental organizations; or even to the 'corporate responsibility' movement.

People have lost faith in government: while the Right distrusts government because it threatens to restrain capital, the Left distrusts government because capital restrains it. And the net result, no one trusting government, is of course a complete victory for corporations and industry, whose best interests have always lain with distrusted, and therefore weak and ineffective, governments.

Democratic governance, civil and political rights, good jobs, reasonable incomes, social equality, environmental protection, workers' rights, clean water, shelter, food — all of these are necessary building blocks for a society in which people can lead full and healthy lives. For corporations, for industry and for markets, these values and social goods have no intrinsic worth. They may be superficially endorsed in public relations and social responsibility campaigns, but are just as likely to be

vigorously opposed—at least behind closed doors—when they clash with corporate interests.

Creating a good and just society necessarily requires commitment to certain values and social goods that can only be realized through the robust and proactive initiatives of healthy public institutions. Democratic governments are really the only institutions we have in our current society that have the authority, legitimacy, and mandate to set and enforce necessary publically-oriented rules, standards and policies.

To the extent we abandon governments, to the extent we distrust them rather than working to make them trustworthy, we abandon our hope for creating a good and a just society.

So the question is, of course, what do we do?

> LOCAL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

What we must do is restore the legitimacy and the practice of public democratic governance. We need to revitalize the ideas and the practices of citizenship; we need to re-embrace the rights and the duties of collective stewardship that citizenship entails. And I believe that local democratic governance is the key.

Local governments are in unique positions to bolster democracy, particularly social democracy. No other level of government can so closely combine people's tangible sense of what they need in their immediate communities with the public and democratic exercise of state power. No other political community is composed of citizens who quite literally live amongst each other, sharing, and caring about, the same physical environment. And no other political community can so easily come together to address issues of common concern.

For instance, the citizens in São Paulo, Brazil worked through their local government to ban the blight of commercial advertising in public space. According to 2012 polling, five years after its implementation, the ban is supported by 70 per cent of the population. The city looks unlike any other city. Devoid of any commercial detritus, it is amazing to behold.

Take another example, closer to home. I asked Phillip Owen why as a mayor of Vancouver he had been so passionate about creating a safe-injection site when it seems that his moral and political instincts would have pulled him in the opposite direction. His answer was that when he saw the needless suffering and illness in Vancouver's notorious

I asked Phillip Owen why as a mayor of Vancouver he had been so passionate about creating a safe-injection site when it seems that his moral and political instincts would have pulled him in the opposite direction. His answer was that when he saw the needless suffering...heard the stories... he simply could not ignore the obvious.
PHOTO COURTESY SQUEAKY MARMOT/FLICKR

Downtown Eastside, when he heard the stories and perspectives of those who lived there and of those who work with drug users there, he simply could not ignore the obvious.

There's something about being rooted in the local, where people's political communities are also their actual lived communities. There's something about that which, for both citizens and politicians, makes it harder to ignore realities of injustice, of suffering, of degraded environments. In local politics, "the People" that we so often hear about when we're talking about democracy is not some philosophical abstraction. It's not some geographically dispersed idea. It is the actual folks you're living with, and that makes local politics unique.

Take another example of local democratic governance. In San Francisco in 2010, the Board of Supervisors, the city's legislative body, banned fast-food restaurants from giving away toys with children's meals. There's a lot of social scientific evidence that shows that these toys are a particularly manipulative strategy. The manipulation is obvious and so they banned that particular promotion. Among other results, the proscription made the sale of McDonald's 'Happy Meals' illegal. Three days after the vote, the Mayor announced that he would veto the ban because it interfered with the freedom of parents to make a choice. The veto was overturned and the law prevailed. The Board of Supervisors believed that the ban actually promoted parental freedom by countering that powerful source of pressure on parents to buy unhealthy food for their kids.

> THE TANGIBLE BECOMES SYMBOLIC

Like San Francisco's toy giveaway law, Vancouver's Insite, and Sao Palo's billboard law, the concrete and tangible effects of these and a hundred other initiatives by local governments are undoubtedly important. But they have another kind of effect as well, a symbolic effect that is equally, if not more, important. When we see local governments engaged in active, progressive initiatives, we are seeing tangible, actual realizations of what democracy can do.

Here is another very inspiring example. There's a growing movement among civic governments in the US to pass resolutions condemning the Supreme Court's recent decision in a case called 'Citizens United.' This decision grants unlimited rights to corporations to make electoral campaign contributions. It basically bars Congress from placing a cap on the amount that corporations can contribute to the political process. Needless to say, this is a straight jab at democracy. It gives big business even more leverage over the political process than it already had.

But people are fighting back, and the really interesting thing is that they are fighting back through their local governments. Although civic governments lack the authority to overturn a Supreme Court decision, nonetheless they have become the official voices of popular opposition to the Court's decision. These actions of local governments are purely symbolic, but they are of crucial importance. There are 150 cities across the United States that have taken on this issue, including large cities like New York, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, Portland and Orlando. It's an inspiring movement, and one that illustrates my point that in both concrete and symbolic ways, local governments can play crucial roles in bolstering democracy.

Let me conclude, briefly, by saying that as a society we are really at a crossroads. We're facing a choice. On the one hand, we can continue to weaken our public governance systems; continue to privatize; continue to depend more and more on corporations to govern themselves. Our other choice is to revitalize our democratic governance by bringing it closer to its justifying ideals; by making it more effective; by making it better able to protect the public interests that it's meant to protect.

I think we can agree that the latter scenario is where we want to end up. Local governments are uniquely situated to help us get there. Local initiatives promoting social justice, social welfare and sustainability could not be more important. And could not be more timely. This work may be the salvation of democracy itself.

The Nature of Leadership is the Third Volume in the Innovative Strategies Leadership Series for locally elected leaders. Inspired by conversations at our Centre for Civic Governance forums, this handbook is intended as a resource for your own innovative and inspiring work.

Inside you will find provocative articles and stories about:

- Political leadership: Where the rubber hits the road
- Community engagement beyond the usual suspects
- Vibrant energy policy
- Bold leadership on issues of equality and inclusion
- Big Ideas to take your work further

"Local governments are in unique positions to bolster democracy. No other political community is composed of citizens who quite literally live amongst each other, sharing, and caring about, the same physical environment. And no other political community can so easily come together to address issues of common concern."

— excerpt from Chapter 6.3 Restoring Democracy, by Joel Bakan, author of The Corporation

Columbia
INSTITUTE