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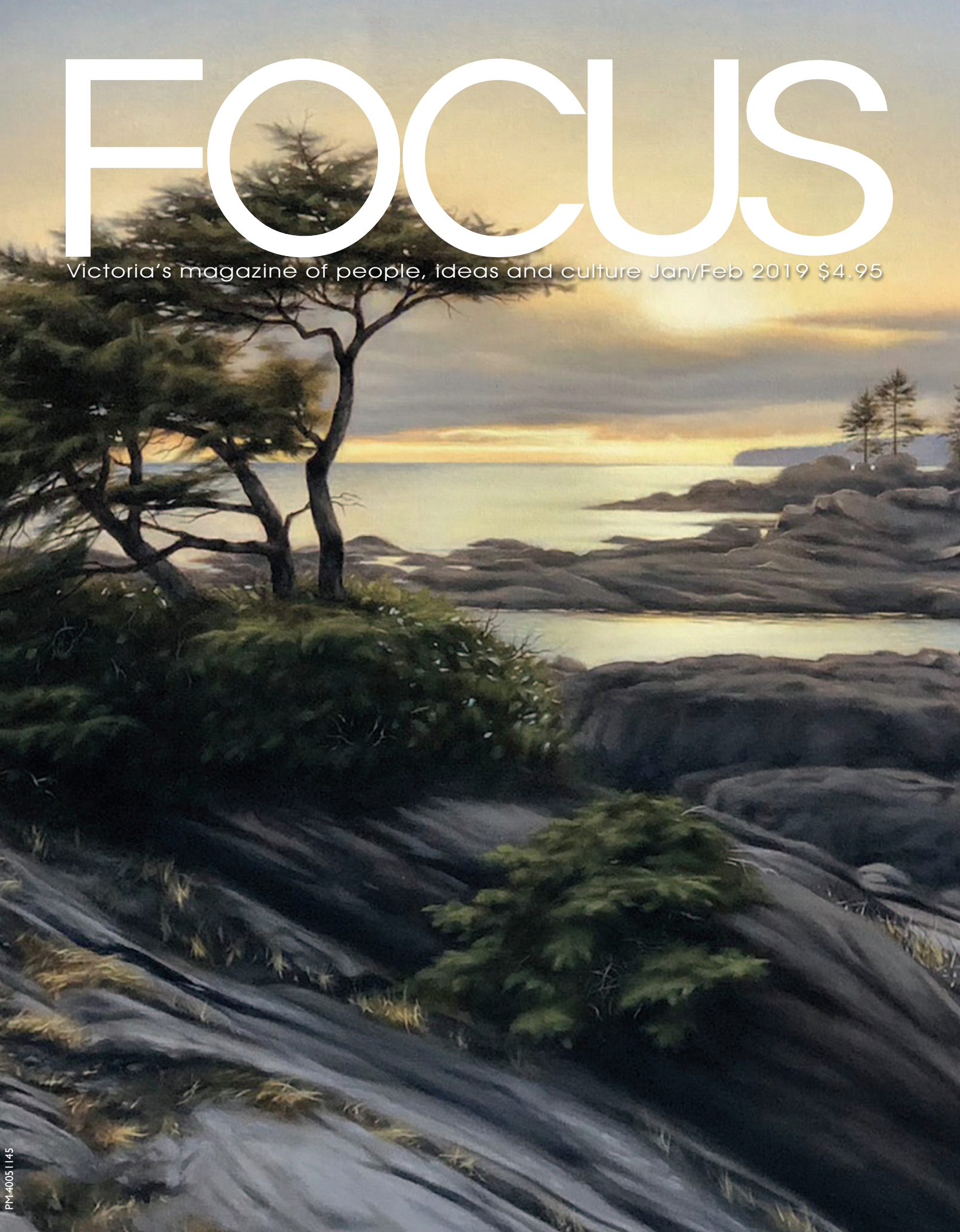

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"Botany Bay Lookout" (detail) by Ray Ward, 24 by 30 inches, oil on canvas. See story on page 30.

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Victoria's diminishing urban forest

LESLIE CAMPBELL

Residents are mobilizing to protect one of the city's greatest natural charms, increasingly threatened by development.

PHOTO: DAVID BROADLAND

The ironically-named Bellewood Park development will see the removal of 29 trees, including Garry oaks and the two giant sequoias in the background

I recall during my first year here in Victoria, as a transplant from Winnipeg, sitting in a small James Bay park noticing its many different species of very large trees. I was in heaven! It seemed so exciting, so exotic and luxuriant.

I may have become more blasé about it 34 years later, but I still know what a blessing—and a defining characteristic of this city—all those big trees are. And I am obviously not alone. Witness the growing crescendo of concern over the city's loss of mature trees. Pressures from development, summer droughts, wind storms, sewage pipelines, and simple aging are among the reasons residents are noticing the demise of more and more trees.

Citizens, regional councils, and municipal parks employees all seem to recognize the central role the urban forest plays in making Victoria what it is—a beautiful, healthy, prosperous place. Many of us now understand how trees, especially mature ones, provide ecosystem services like water filtration, cooling shade, and carbon sequestration. How they contribute to our health by absorbing both air and water pollutants; they even filter particulates out of the air by trapping them on their leaves and bark, thereby reducing asthma attacks. Did you know that trees increase the value of our homes from 3-15 percent? Or that shading from trees prolongs the life of asphalt by 10-25 years? Trees also act as useful wind buffers. By sheltering many other species, they increase biodiversity.

Look out your window and imagine the city without trees: it would be a very different, bleaker place entirely. No birds would be singing.

Ironically, those very trees and their many charms have helped attract development, which has boosted land prices so much that trees are being sacrificed to make room for more and larger homes.

The real estate boom and its impact on our urban forest seems to have caught us off guard, without adequate safeguards in place. As a result, every year thousands of mature trees—along with the many services they provide—are being lost throughout the Capital Region. In this article, I will focus on the City of Victoria, where a weak bylaw means, for example, that removal of non-native trees with a diameter at chest height of less than 80 centimetres—or 31.5 inches—does not require a permit. (More on this later.)

At a City of Victoria council meeting on November 22, a half dozen speakers from the recently formed Community Trees Matter Network showed up to give presentations to the new council. Their website (housed under the Creatively United for the Planet website) contains numerous articles about the many benefits of and threats to the urban forest.

Nancy Lane MacGregor, in her presentation, took Victoria council on a tour of a block in her Rockland neighbourhood: "On Moss Street, a Garry oak blew over in a storm…At Moss and Rockland, a 350-year-old Garry oak was cut down, its roots too close to homes on either side. At Langham Court, a healthy 162-year-old giant sequoia was taken down because its roots were entwined with a sewer pipe. Around the corner on Linden, apartment balconies face a wasteland through standing dead trees, the first phase of a development. At 1201 Fort Street, a luxury condo and townhouse development…will destroy 29 mature trees including a remnant Garry oak meadow,

> "A BARELY ADVERTISED 'Tree Appreciation Day' draws only a handful of citizens to witness the mayor planting four trees, then pack up for another year…Trees are not considered in the push for densification." —*Nancy Lane MacGregor*

Verna Stone (l), Nancy Lane MacGregor and Frances Litman

giant sequoias and other protected trees. Up the street, at Central Middle School, a large Garry oak fell in a windstorm…"

Frances Litman, founder of Creatively United for the Planet, reminded council of the many services trees provide a city: "Trees clean and cool the air, create oxygen, decrease carbon dioxide, provide essential habitat for birds and animals, and save this city a lot of money [$2 million in 2013] by processing and filtering hundreds of thousands of gallons of water that would overtax our storm sewers." She charged today's developers with "scraping the land bare of every earthworm and living thing, despite the footprint of the building and without regard to how this impacts the natural ecosystem and surrounding neighbourhood."

Litman urged council to implement the recommendations of the City's own 2013 *Urban Forest Management Plan*, and "budget for a qualified coordinator to oversee, educate and implement it department-wide."

A week after that council meeting, I met with Litman and MacGregor at Verna Stone's art-filled apartment at Fort and Moss Streets. A coffee table was set with a smorgasbord of sweets and Philosopher's Brew tea was steeping. Stone was wearing her tree dress, a lovely tunic featuring an appliquéd Douglas fir. She too is a member of the Community Trees Matter Network.

The story of how they came together—along with a number of others—to form the Network includes the outrage they experienced as they each noticed too many trees falling victim to disease and development. Serendipity and basic networking also brought them together. When Litman was put in touch with so many other tree-lovers, she thought, "Oh my god, I've found my tribe." She manages the Network's website and email and said she can barely keep on top of the interest: "It's exploding!"

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Indeed, soon after I talked with them, Litman was interviewed on CHEK TV about the planned removal of at least 29 mature Garry oaks—and endangerment of 20 more—on Grange Road in Saanich due to the CRD's sewage pipeline. The neighbourhood was in an uproar over this loss. Fortunately, the ensuing publicity nudged the CRD to figure out how they could shift the pipeline a bit and preserve the trees.

Network members have investigated what the City of Victoria has been doing and think it's just not enough. "A barely advertised 'Tree Appreciation Day' draws only a handful of citizens to witness the mayor planting four trees, then pack up for another year," said MacGregor, adding, "Trees are not considered in the push for densification."

Though an upbeat group, cynicism about governments near and far was apparent. In discussing how Transport Canada recently removed all the trees along the south side of the Inner Harbour at Laurel Point Park to clean up contaminated soil from a paint plant once located there, Stone suggested the federal body is just attempting to look good on the cleanup front so it can allow more oil tankers to ply coastal waters.

The women were looking forward to hosting expert speakers, art events, speaking at other council meetings, and fanning out to various neighbourhood associations to connect with tree defenders in different areas. They want to "harness the power of an integrated network of people," said Litman. Stone, an artist, never expected to be an activist, but, quoting a friend, said, "Activism is the price you pay for living on this planet."

THE CITY OF VICTORIA ESTIMATES there are about 150,000 trees within its borders, with 33,000 of them on City boulevards or in parks. There's an inventory of these on the Open Data Portal of the City's website (I found it, but only with considerable help).

In the City's 2013 *Urban Forest Management Plan*, it's noted that the City's "tree canopy cover ranges from a low of 3.4 percent in the Downtown area to a high of almost 34 percent in Rockland." Overall, Victoria's canopy was, in 2008, estimated to be 17.6 percent. Navdeep Sidhu, assistant director of Parks and Recreation, told me the City is currently in the process of planning the next canopy coverage study.

The *Urban Forest Management Plan* is, at 98 pages, a wealth of information and supports the activists' arguments for more care being taken with Victoria's urban forest. For instance, it notes that "The Garry oak and associated ecosystems that shape Victoria's landscape are home to more plant species than any other land-based ecosystem in coastal British Columbia. Many of these species occur nowhere else in Canada. At this time [2013], because so much habitat has been lost or degraded, approximately 100 species of plants, mammals, reptiles, birds, butterflies, and other insects are listed as 'at risk' in these ecosystems. Many of these species at risk are found in Victoria—from tiny poverty clover in Barnard Park to the iconic great blue herons that nest in Beacon Hill Park." The authors also note, "Garry oak ecosystems have been dramatically affected by land development. It is estimated that in 1800, Garry oak ecosystems flourished on 1,460 hectares of the City. By 1997 that had dwindled to 21 hectares of fragmented and degraded habitat." And certainly less now, nearly 20 years and two real estate booms later.

Management of the urban forest in the City of Victoria falls under the Parks and Recreation Department, in particular the 20 employees of the Arboriculture and Natural Areas section. They have their hands full with the maintenance of those 33,000 trees in parks and on streets

Garry oaks on Pemberton with protective construction hoarding

and boulevards. They prune 600 of them a year, plant 900 native plants, and give five years of extra care to young saplings they've planted. They maintain the tree inventory, remove invasive species, respond to over 1200 calls for service of public trees each year, and review "development-related and other various permit applications for impacts to the Urban Forest."

I had hoped to speak to an employee in the City's arboriculture section, but was instead urged to send a questionnaire to Parks and Communications managers. The full Q&A is on *Focus*' website.

Parsing some of the answers provided as to why trees are "removed," the spokespeople cited increased stress, including from drought, that increases "impacts of disease and insect pests." Trees' defense mechanisms fail and pests are attracted to weakened trees.

They also noted that, "A large number of street trees planted in the 1950s and 1960s are now nearing the end of their lifecycle. They are decreasing in vigour and not as adaptable to changes in the environment around them. The last several years of summer drought conditions have put additional stress on many trees." Additional stress on these trees comes from damage by humans: "wounds to trees from mowers and weed eaters are detrimental to tree health and can be infection points for fungal wood decay pathogens. Nailing, screwing, bolting or attaching things to trees can cause damage to the tissues within the tree and the bark." Soil compaction is also an issue for trees lining streets where people park or store materials in the root zone of a tree.

The Parks people assured me that "we always look for ways to retain the tree as long as possible…Generally, when dieback of the crown is above 40 to 50 percent, removal is recommended."

In the first 9 months of 2018, the City had removed 327 trees and planted 265 trees on City property. Since then, they have removed at least a further 29 trees in Stadacona Park, adjacent to the 1400 block of Pandora Avenue, and 12 more in Fernwood.

Increased numbers of tree removals in the last year or two are likely due to the City's strategy to manage high-risk trees. As the Parks people explained: "The City of Victoria completed an inventory of trees on City property in early 2014 and recorded information including species, size, condition, geographic location and maintenance needs. Trees that were identified through this process to have significant

safety hazards or that were at risk of imminent failure were removed immediately. The inventory identified trees that require further assessment to determine risks, which may result in pruning, removal or other hazard mitigation techniques. Staff further assess these high-risk trees to determine if they can be retained, or if they must be removed. In 2019, 392 trees will require assessment." Judging from recent years, these assessments will lead to a good number of trees being removed.

Pressures on the urban forest on private property (which comprises about 75 percent of Victoria's urban forest) are more difficult to assess. I was told Parks had an average of 111 requests annually for removal of "protected" trees over the last couple of years. About half of the requests are denied—so about 55 protected trees were removed each year by private property owners.

That doesn't sound like much, and seems at odds with the perceptions of many tree watchers. But one just needs to read the City of Victoria's Tree Preservation Bylaw to understand what's *not* being counted.

This is a bylaw that most agree needs revision. It currently puts restrictions on the type and size of trees that can be cut down on private property. Certain species—Garry oak, arbutus, Pacific dogwood, Pacific yew—if over 50 centimetres in height, are "protected." Western red cedar, big-leaf maple, and Douglas fir must be over 60 centimetres in diameter at chest height to be protected. Any tree on private property with a trunk over 80 centimetres in diameter is also protected under the bylaw and cannot be removed or altered without a permit. A lot of big trees slip through these size requirements and can often be removed without any permission, fees or civic involvement. Contrast this to Vancouver, where trees over 20 centimetres in diameter are protected.

A permit involves getting one of the City's arborists to assess the situation. If they agree there is a problem warranting removal (e.g. it is severely diseased or poses a danger), you'll pay $30 for a removal permit for each tree up to three trees, then only $5 per tree after that. If you do not obtain a permit and remove a protected tree, penalties for first-time offenders are $250-$1500. Updating this bylaw is an objective of the City's new Strategic Draft Plan.

In my mind the biggest gap in the tree bylaw is that in practice it fails to protect *any* tree when their removal is deemed "necessary for the purpose of constructing a building, an addition to a building, or construction of an accessory building" or a driveway, off-street parking, utilities service connections, or "the installation, repair, or maintenance of public works." A permit may be needed, but man-made things seem to have priority over saving trees.

Brooke Stark, manager of Parks Operations told me that in 2018, "there were approximately 126 trees lost to development and capital projects." The department will track these categories separately in 2019, but could not get more specific for 2018 data.

Not included in that tally are the 29 trees approved for removal at the somewhat ironically named Bellewood Park, a 2-acre, 83-unit development at 1201 Fort Street. These include some big Garry oaks and two giant sequoias (still standing as *Focus* went to press). Last April, MacGregor wrote to council about these magnificent sequoias, which can live for over 2,000 years: "[They] have historic importance, planted from seed in the 1860s by the Attorney General of the Colony of BC, E.G. Alston." In that letter, MacGregor noted some of the 22 trees being retained by the developer might not survive blasting and construction. She quoted the arborist's report on the excavation for underground parking: "If it is found that large structural roots must be pruned…it may be necessary to remove additional trees to eliminate any risk associated with them." The developer has agreed to plant 83 new trees, but most of those will be varieties of small trees.

ANOTHER FOUNDER OF THE COMMUNITY TREES MATTER network, Grace Golightly, has been writing thoughtful and detailed letters to City Hall about trees, often copying them to *Focus*, for a couple of years. She has taken particular issue with the tree bylaw's modest requirements of planting two replacement trees and paying a token $30 fee when removal of a protected tree occurs. Among other reasons, she has pointed out that mature trees provide far more carbon sequestration than younger trees.

The research backs her up. A 2015 study reported in *Nature* looked at 403 tree species and showed that "for most species mass growth rate increases continuously with tree size. Thus, large, old trees do not act simply as senescent carbon reservoirs but actively fix large amounts of carbon compared to smaller trees; at the extreme, a single big tree can add the same amount of carbon to the forest within a year as is contained in an entire mid-sized tree."

Golightly herself has cited Ohio State University research suggesting it would take a total of 269 two-inch-diameter trees to replace the carbon sequestration provided by a single 36-inch-diameter deciduous tree.

Forests in general are one of the world's largest banks for all of the carbon emitted into the atmosphere. As much as 45 percent of the carbon stored on land is tied up in forests according to NASA scientists.

With the City of Victoria's professed concern about climate change, maintaining a robust and growing urban forest, in large measure made up of mature trees, should be a priority. A first step would be analyzing how much total carbon sequestration is being provided by our forest. Oak Bay, for instance, has calculated that its trees sequester 3,270 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually and store 97,490 tonnes of carbon.

On public lands, the Victoria's Parks department told me they plan to plant only 250 to 300 new trees per year. This does not even replace on a one-to-one basis recent removals of mature trees from City-owned land. And on private land, only certain tree removals need to be accompanied with replanting of, at most, two saplings.

At such unambitious replanting rates it's clear that Victoria's leafy canopy and the important services it provides, will fade away. Golightly's and others' advocacy for a much more vigorous replanting schedule seems warranted. She wrote, "When I mentioned the need to plant a lot more trees to one of the Parks administrators, he said there was nowhere to plant them. However, we must plant them, and a little thought can generate lots of ideas." She mentions offering trees at a discount to residents (as Nanaimo, Saanich and Vancouver do). She points out that most schoolyards and many other institutions could also accommodate more trees. She suggests planting more trees along the Galloping Goose—and in many parks, particularly if volunteers cleared out invasive species. The other day I noticed barren parcels of land around the Johnson Street Bridge begging for trees to at least replace the dozen or so removed years ago for the new bridge.

Golightly goes further: "I think it's essential that the City purchase well-treed properties that come up for sale. They can either be covenanted and re-sold, or made into mini-parks where more trees could be planted to increase the carbon storage and benefits to the neighbourhood."

On that score, the South Jubilee Neighborhood Association has urged the City to consider purchasing a large corner lot at Leigh and

The City is being urged to purchase this private land to preserve the Garry oaks

Bank Streets which has never been developed and boasts 26 mature Garry oaks. "We are also keenly interested in planting more trees on the property to turn it into a true urban forest or 'clean air' garden," writes board member Matt Dell.

Along such lines, the City's own *Urban Forest Management Plan* (*UFMP*) suggests the City establish a capital fund for the acquisition and restoration of lands for new urban forest.

Of course, it is not as simple as just plunking more trees in the ground. The Parks department told me: "All restrictions of the site, physical space, soil volumes, overhead or underground services, soil quality, site exposure, expected available water, levels of wind and sun, pest resistance and aesthetics play a part in tree selection. Selecting a tree variety which is going to be successful long term is critical." Increasing densification and more extreme, climate-change-induced weather patterns will just make maintaining a healthy urban forest more challenging—and more important.

The City's six-year-old *UFMP* predicted all this: "Finding space for significant amounts of urban forest within these high-density [neighbourhoods] is a challenge. Other types of 'greening' such as green roofs and green walls, as well as smaller trees and shrubs in planters will make important contributions. However, this will not achieve the same level of benefits that large, mature trees provide. Urban planners, developers and the design community should be encouraged to find ways to incorporate large-canopy trees into these settings, such as has been done in Portland." (In 2014, Portland had a 29.9 percent canopy cover and was aiming at 33 percent.)

The *UFMP*, written before the recent real estate boom, continues: "The single greatest impact to the urban forest comes from the incremental loss of greenspace associated with development and densification. In addition to removal of large mature trees, there is a loss of soils and space that could be used for future generations of trees. It takes a significant amount of space to grow a large tree. As land uses change and neighbourhoods are redeveloped, *it is critical to ensure that adequate greenspace is being reallocated on-site or elsewhere to sustain the future urban forest.* Failure to do so will result in a forest that is diminished in size, more fragmented, less productive and more vulnerable to change—the antithesis of sustainability." [italics added]

An earlier densifying boom in the 1970s gave rise to numerous three- and four-storey apartment buildings that had big setbacks allowing for wide lawns, bushes and large trees. The more recent boom, in an effort to maximize return on high-priced land, has created buildings right up against sidewalks. The Parks people put it this way: "Most original homes in Victoria were not built to the zoning setbacks or built to maximize allowable Floor Space Ratio. New construction tends to maximize both."

If the powers-that-be had been thinking faster, or just more holistically, they'd have figured out a way, during the recent boom, to plan developments in tandem with urban forest expansion. This is not as unlikely as it might sound. Other cities have done it or have at least planned how to accomplish it. Duncan is aiming at a 40 percent canopy and knows that means planting 3,729 trees by 2020; Seattle is aiming at 30 percent coverage within a 30-year period; Vancouver's 2020 plan sets a target of 40 percent canopy and calls for 150,000 new trees by 2020. Victoria's, recall, was 17.6 percent in 2008.

Other cities are establishing volunteer programs to assist in maintaining urban forest health. Melbourne has a very successful program involving over 400 volunteers doing meaningful work for the urban forest—mapping, creating inventories of landscape features, and eco-assessments. Closer to home, Saanich's "Pulling Together" program involves volunteers in ecological restoration in 40 of its parks. Community members can participate in invasive removal and replanting activities on a casual drop-in basis or as "lead stewards" and "restoration assistants." There is no similar program in the City of Victoria.

IN THE RAPIDLY GROWING FIELD OF URBAN FORESTRY, trees are viewed as essential "green infrastructure" that deliver environmental, health and economic services. These include those mentioned in relation to carbon storage, pollution reduction, stormwater management, the provision of wind-buffering and shading, and public health.

The director of UBC's Bachelor of Urban Forestry program, Professor Cecil Konijnendijk, recently told CBC that too many cities are letting development drive city-wide growth. "Stronger planning frameworks that actually guide developments [are necessary]; cities should be stronger in really making sure development is done in the right way…" Konijnendijk has agreed to speak in Victoria in the new year—watch the Community Trees Matter website.

Urban foresters advocate for good strong policy and enforcement, more funding to support city arborists, and education so citizens understand the wide array of services provided by a healthy urban forest. They know that a mobilized citizenry is essential to encourage the political will to get the right policies in place.

Fortunately, Victoria has both a mobilized citizenry and that 6-year-old *Urban Forest Master Plan* in place. Most of its 26 recommendations have not been implemented, the very first of which advocates creating "a position for an Urban Forest Planner/Coordinator, who is empowered to work with other departments to achieve the City's urban forest goals and to report annually to council." That seems a good place to start—along with direction from council to make an increased tree canopy a reality.

Leslie Campbell loves walking the well-treed streets of Rockland—just by viewing trees our stress levels drop. Note City Hall's January sessions for citizen input on the draft budget and strategic plan at Victoria City Hall.

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Future proofing Victoria

Ross Crockford's eloquent post-mortem on Victoria's civic election ("Great politics vs. good governance," November/December 2018) notes that the new council will need to move quickly to address "a mess of detailed, practical issues." Heading the list is affordable housing, the Crystal Pool, and fendering on the Johnson Street Bridge. If these issues are successfully "juggled," as he puts it, and City Hall is seen to be well run and financially stable, our mayor and council "will bring Victorians together."

I wonder if this is true—and I wonder because none of these issues genuinely matter to the future of our city.

We are living at the edge of an inflection point in human history, a time of significant change, a turning point. The smoke from forest fires that enveloped our city—and so many others—this summer was a visceral reminder that climate change is real, it is happening now, and we are not immune to its effects.

Similarly, radically advanced robotics and artificial intelligence are re-shaping the employment landscape worldwide, but they are doing more than that; they are changing the ways in which humans interact with each other and the world around us. As a bona fide technology hub (albeit not so much in robotics or AI), this could be an opportunity for Victoria to showcase how it is using (or will use) AI to facilitate smart urban development, for example, but neither our mayor nor any member of the new council campaigned on a future-focused strategy of how this might be done.

The issues that command our immediate attention, such as affordable housing, or the fate of the Crystal Pool, are real enough and yet they also seem parochial; too small to define the conversation about the path Victoria is travelling through time. Each of them is most properly cast as an objective that, if approached intelligently, would support the realization of something greater: a city that is resilient in the face of change; a city that excels at pattern recognition and the seizing of opportunity; a city that future proofs itself and its citizens.

What exactly does future proofing mean? It is the conscious, intentional decision to do certain things—and crucially, not to do others—that insulates the city against economic, environmental and social change that might otherwise be de-stabilizing. This is especially important for island communities. We are vulnerable to many of the global forces that are playing out in distant places—though in our complacency we delude ourselves into thinking that we are sustainable. Our energy and our food, for example, come to us from the Mainland, and are susceptible to supply chain shocks. Imagine the chaos if either our energy or our food supply were interrupted for even a few days? Beyond these obvious supply chains, there is another, less well-known attitudinal chain, that is equally important. What is the collective attitude about Victoria today? What do we think about when we think of the future? Do we even know what the future means to us anymore, or have we forgotten?

Without memory we have nothing.

The decisions local governments make about infrastructure—be it buildings, bridges, roads, or sewer and water mains—leave an indelible physical imprint on the city that endures for a century or more. Equally, those decisions shape the emotional experience of this place, the feeling sense that each of us has as we walk around Downtown. There is a good deal of development taking place here, but what is the narrative or story that it tells? What does it say about the atmosphere of Victoria at this moment in its history? What does it say about what makes Victoria special?

Victoria needs to incubate a conversation about the future, about what this city could mean to us (and others) a generation from now. What are the forces laying in the shadows that we need to confront? What is our vision, distinct from any other city, that conveys a sense of uniqueness and palpable civic pride? Better still, how might Victoria recover the sense of community that is ultimately the most potent competitive advantage any city can have and use it to inspire each of us to reach for the stars rather than muddle through. Now if we could make progress on that kind of agenda, then I think we'd truly bring Victorians together.

Rob Abbott

Orcapocalypse

I remember looking forward to Stephen Hume's conscious and eloquent *Vancouver Sun* articles. What an honour to have his gift at *Focus*.

"Orcapocalypse" stirringly articulates the planet's dire condition.

Four films together present a simple vision and strategy to end the eco-catastrophic era. Watch *Living Downstream*, *What the Health*, *Cowspiracy*, and *Stink* (the latter three on Netflix).

About that nagging climate change dilemma: UK's Paisley University Social Sciences Emeritus Professor John Foster insists that neoliberal policies, including those enshrined in European Union treaties and directives, preclude the action necessary to combat climate change effectively. "Such an urgent, radical transformation is not possible without large-scale public ownership, investment and planning, which means a revolutionary advance to socialism," Mr Foster argued. Doesn't Mr Foster know socialism "always fails"?

Larry Wartels

As Stephen Hume (November/December 2018) alluded to, and David Broadland (November/December 2017) noted, "Rivers running into Puget Sound have perennially low returns of Chinook salmon—currently estimated at just 10 percent of their historic levels—even though many of them are enhanced with hatcheries. Last year, scientific research connected this decline to secondary sewage treatment plants discharging partially-treated effluent into Puget Sound."

Jay Inslee, Washington State's governor, wants $1.1 billion to pay for a state effort to help recover the critically endangered Southern Resident population of killer whales. With 100+ secondary sewage treatment plants on Puget Sound in critical need of upgrading, will any of that $1.1 billion be used in this regard? Or is even the mention of the pollution in Puget Sound somehow to be avoided, not

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only by Washington State, but by our government in Victoria?

I expect such a task would gobble up that billion dollars and then some—which means that any effort envisioned by the governor is at best tinkering around the edges.

Richard Weatherill

Landslide Lisa's record

The structure of the "City Family" and the conduct of its business should come as a surprise to no one (*Focus*, November/December 2018), and probably doesn't. A bit more surprising, though, is the suggestion of one correspondent that "Reconciliation is of supreme importance to all of us."

Arguably what should be of far more importance to all of us is the issue at hand that can't be even mentioned in public: race politics. A long and ugly practice, with harrowing results, particularly when politicians get aboard, as we now see in Victoria.

Brian Nimeroski

Everything we do counts

As ever more dire climate disruption is reported by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), it was encouraging to read Trudy Duivenvoorden Mitic's last two "finding balance" articles about that very subject and what we as individuals can and must do. Her list includes a multitude of individual actions that can add up to a fair-sized difference, with little sacrifice and a growing sense of what really matters. I thank her for contributing to the crucial conversations we all need to have amongst ourselves and our political representatives.

My experience over the last 35 years has taught me that there are far more gains than losses in choosing greener options, especially with those hot-point issues that seem so daunting, like "giving up my car" or "paying more at the gas pump." Here's how a few little mishaps inadvertently led me to ride my bike to work and live happily ever after.

In the 1980s, as a busy single parent living in Lethbridge, Alberta, I drove the 1.75 kms to work every day without thinking. Everyone did. Then one winter morning my car wouldn't start, so I had to catch the bus two blocks away. It was surprisingly pleasant not having to warm up my vehicle, or worry about icy intersections, and I had a blissful few minutes to sit and relax. So I rode the bus after that, saving money on gas, and enjoying my brisk walk to the bus and back.

Then one day I missed the bus. After a quick calculation of time and possible shortcuts, I decided I would get to work sooner by walking than by waiting for the next bus. So off I trotted, arriving surprisingly refreshed and only a few minutes late. Why not walk home too? That became my new routine every day after that, saving more money, sleeping better, feeling more vibrant and alert, and enjoying the sights, sounds, smells and greetings of my community. Even in the wind and rain. Even in snowy and minus-30-degree weather. When I got to work, co-workers would say incredulously, "You walked to work this morning?" and I would reply, equally amazed, "You drove?"

An added bonus occurred one morning in 2002, when my path crossed that of a fine man walking to his workplace. We continued to walk together until he retired and my office moved too far for me to reasonably walk. So that is when and how I came to ride my bike to work, and for errands, and for the sheer joy of it.

To this day, Sidewalk Man and I routinely walk or ride our bikes instead of driving. If we can't walk or ride, we take the bus (where texting is both safe and legal, by the way). Only when no other options work do we get in the car and drive. Now our home is Victoria where there is so much to see and do, but even our "adventures" are mostly within a 30-kilometre range. We do not feel deprived. We are both well over 65, never were and still aren't what you would call athletic, but our main form of day-to-day transportation is active and much preferred to the hassle of driving and parking. Plus, a wide choice of tasty calories provides our fossil-fuel-free fuel.

I was lucky to be led by chance to a finer way of living. The climate imperative before us all requires bold and urgent action to drastically reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. Failure to do so is not a viable option. Neither is continuing to delay. For inspiration, hope, and bright possibility, I encourage you to check out online Canada Post's proposal "Delivering Community Power," just one of many leaps in thinking waiting for the political green light to move us forward into a sustainable economy and a better future. Discover for yourself that saving life on this planet holds many gifts, and is not to be feared. Let's do it together. There's no time to lose.

Gail Meston

Transportation in Victoria's urban core

It should be obvious to residents of Victoria that there are too many cars on the busy streets Downtown. Rush hour now can be any time between 7 am and 6 pm depending on the day. This situation will only worsen as densification of this area continues. Thousands of living units will have been added in the period from 2014 to 2024. Not all of the residents of these rental units and condominiums will have cars, but most of them will. Add to these the increasing population of the Greater Victoria area, as well as off-island visitors, and you have a big traffic problem. The problem will exist whether we have bike lanes or not.

Therefore we have to look to the future when deciding on the best way to move people within the urban core (Inner Harbour to Quadra, Belleville to Chatham). Using cars for this purpose is not efficient or appropriate; they are a convenient means of transportation but they have a high social cost. For example, they occupy much more space than a pedestrian or cyclist and, except for electric vehicles, they pollute. This is most obvious on the busiest streets at the busiest times of the day. As well, the more cars there are on the streets, the longer it takes to get anywhere, the more exhaust fumes spew into the air. Where to park and how much valuable core land should be devoted to parking cars are other important issues.

Public transportation vehicles such as buses are less convenient than cars but have a lower social cost. Large buses are particularly appropriate for destinations such as the University of Victoria, the Western Communities, and the Peninsula. The Douglas corridor is making it easier for these buses to move people into and out of the core. However they are large, noisy and spew exhaust (until they become battery operated). They are not appropriate for providing convenient transportation within the urban core.

The core could more appropriately be served by smaller public transit vehicles, "people movers" (PMs). The PMs that I envision are rubber-tired, electric mini-buses that have a maximum capacity of 20 or 30 passengers. They would run frequently, depending on the anticipated load, at different times of the day. They would have more loading zones than are available now for buses. They would be accessible by the elderly and disabled. The fare for these vehicles would be low, perhaps a dollar for a day pass that would be good for these vehicles only. A monthly pass would also be available at a slightly lower daily price.

Prototype of 15-seat German-made PM

Anybody with a pass for the large buses would not need a special one for the PMs. This system would encourage people to be a bus user all over the city, transferring to a PM when in the core area.

These passes would be marketed to tourists as well. With one of these passes the vehicle would essentially be a "hop on, hop off." It would be easy to get quickly to all parts of the core. They would be convenient for shoppers, tourists, business people, employees of Downtown businesses, and government employees.

A district that would particularly benefit from these PMs, rather than big buses or cars, is James Bay. It is possible to walk to the core from James Bay, but it is not always convenient. One route that would be important would originate from Ogden Point. This would be popular with cruise ship passengers, multifamily residences, and future development at Ogden Point.

In large cities such as Montreal and Toronto, this kind of service is accomplished to a large extent by underground trains. In Edmonton, LRT trains run underground in the core, above ground outside of it; in Calgary they run above ground. We used to have electric streetcars (trams) running on surface rails in our core, and to outlying residential areas. These were efficient people movers at the time, but they were replaced by large gas buses.

Residents of Greater Victoria have to realize that there is no future for the car as the primary means of transportation within our core. We have to accept this as a fact for our city and pressure the civic, provincial and federal governments to support initiatives to replace cars with efficient, convenient, non-polluting alternatives such as the People Movers that I have suggested. It isn't the only alternative but I think it is a good one.

Errol Miller

LETTERS
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Focus presents: iHealth's Priti Jadiya

ADVERTISEMENT

Focusing on your dizziness and balance issues

Did you wake up one day and find everything around you spinning? Or do you find yourself drifting sideways as you walk? Do you fear falling? Is it dizziness or just your perception? Is it because of medications? Did you hit your head? Is something wrong with you or is it just ageing?

"This cobweb of thoughts can be very disturbing," says Priti Jadiya.

A physiotherapist at iHealth Group, Priti received special post-graduate training in Mumbai, and also during her practice in Edmonton, that enables her to help people with dizziness and balance issues, whether caused by age-related factors or minor head injuries from accidents.

She is passionate about her work because she has seen the positive transformation it can make in people's lives.

Dizziness is a term used to describe a variety of sensations like light-headedness, swaying, spinning (vertigo), disorientation, and loss of balance. It is the number-one reason for physician visits by individuals over the age of 65 years.

There are many conditions that can cause dizziness and poor balance, so it's imperative to get a detailed history and description of the symptoms, says Priti, to form a diagnosis. Causes for dizziness include cardiac abnormalities, neurological dysfunctions, visual deficits, psychogenic issues, medications, vestibular system disorder, musculoskeletal issues, and head trauma.

Fifty percent of all cases of dizziness are caused by disturbances in the vestibular system (inner ear). Fortunately, these are usually easily resolved.

As Priti explains, the imbalance in the inner ear is caused by the dislodgement of calcium carbonate crystals. This causes a spinning sensation, nystagmus (involuntary eye movements), nausea, imbalance and compromised gaze stability. Called BPPV (Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo), research shows "it does not require fancy investigations. The diagnosis can be made with a clinical test done by a trained professional."

Treatment of BPPV is similarily straightforward. Says Priti, "We use specific repositioning maneuvers followed by some simple exercises to stabilize the vestibular system and balance. The repositioning maneuvers can create balance in the system in 3-4 sessions with a gradual reduction in dizziness." Efficacy of this approach is over 93 percent depending on the ear canals involved. Gentle home exercises assist in recovery and maintenance. "Awareness and education," says Priti, "are the most important parts, and then self-care after diagnosis."

The other 50 percent of people with dizziness and balance problems could be suffering from visual system disturbances, an inflammation of the vestibular nerve, or impairment of signals to the brain from different parts of the body (proprioceptive system). The latter can occur, for instance, when someone has neck pain.

Physiotherapist Priti Jadiya

It's not just older people who experience dizziness or vertigo. Priti has treated many young people who, as a result of head trauma, usually from sports or automobile accidents, experience dizziness, sometimes years after the accident. "A mild brain injury cannot be seen on an MRI," notes Priti. Post-concussion syndrome is an all-too-common problem, however, interfering with life in a myriad of ways, including headaches, brain fog, poor concentration, dizziness, fatigue and irritability. She can educate patients on how to help the brain recover through a process of rest and gradual activity.

Regardless of the source of your dizziness-related problems, Priti can sort out what is going on and advise you of next steps. Unfortunately, many people have had numerous time-consuming tests, to no avail, before reaching her. Besides being able to diagnose the cause of your problem, she knows which (if any) specialists may be needed—from neuro-optometrists to neurologists, ENT specialists and other professionals on the iHealth team (who take a collaborative, patient-first approach). In many cases, appropriate, timely guidance will be all one needs to get on the road to recovery.

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Sex, lies and triple-deleted emails

DAVID BROADLAND

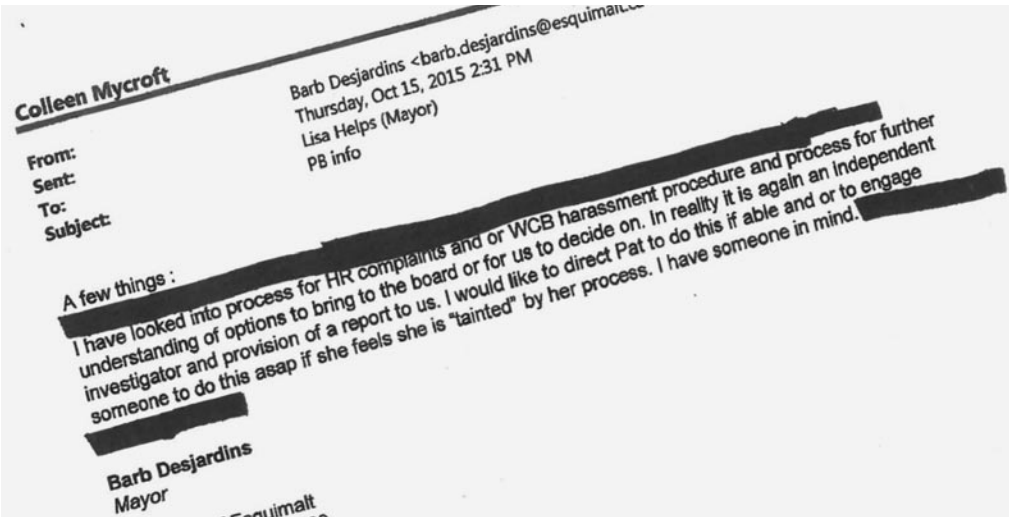
An email unearthed by an FOI request raises questions about the Elsner investigation and the Lowe Report. So do all the deleted emails.

Police Complaint Commissioner Stan Lowe's September 2018 report on the investigations into former Victoria Police Department Chief Frank Elsner excoriated Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps and Esquimalt Mayor Barbara Desjardins for the way they conducted an initial investigation of Elsner in 2015. Lowe asserted that the mayors "had predetermined the outcome of the internal discipline process from the outset, and set about navigating a course to allow the former chief to remain in his post."

He provided much evidence to support his contention, but the mayors disputed his conclusion. Both claimed they had been libelled and made veiled threats of legal action against Lowe. Lowe's office invited the mayors to call for a public inquiry. Deputy Police Complaint Commissioner Rollie Woods stated, "we have a considerable body of evidence we would be willing to provide at any public inquiry so the truth would certainly come out."

Did the mayors have any evidence that would support their claims? They weren't offering any, so *Focus* filed an FOI for the communications between the two mayors during the three months of their investigation of Elsner. The Victoria Police Board released those records to us in mid-December.

That release contained only one email written by Mayor Helps to Mayor Desjardins during September, October and November 2015 when they conducted their investigation. Helps' one email consisted of three words. On September 4, 2015, shortly after the mayors had been informed about salacious Twitter messages from Elsner to the wife of a subordinate VicPD officer, Desjardins copied Helps on an email to Elsner wherein she asked him for a meeting about "a personal matter requiring your assistance..." About five hours later, Helps emailed Desjardins and asked, "Did he respond?" Within an hour Desjardins wrote back to Helps: "Got auto response he is away unt [sic] the 8th have got a phone number and will call tomorrow." And then, for the next three months, Helps was apparently silent, never communicating with Desjardins by email on this subject.



Colleen Mycroft

From: Barb Desjardins <barb.desjardins@esquimalt
Sent: Thursday, Oct 15, 2015 2:31 PM
To: Lisa Helps (Mayor)
Subject: PB info

A few things :

[redacted] I have looked into process for HR complaints and or WCB harassment procedure and process for further understanding of options to bring to the board or for us to decide on. In reality it is again an independent investigator and provision of a report to us. I would like to direct Pat to do this if able and or to engage someone to do this asap if she feels she is "tainted" by her process. I have someone in mind. [redacted]

Barb Desjardins
Mayor
Esquimalt

Mayor Desjardins appears to have wanted a second investigation into harrassment allegations against Elsner

By way of an explanation for the scarcity of records of the two mayors' communications, VicPD's Collette Thomson noted, "A limited number of records were accessible due to email retention schedules." By that she seems to mean the emails the mayors exchanged were deleted.

The scant record that remains appears to have survived only because paper copies of a few emails gathered for a previous FOI request—made by an unknown entity—were kept by the Township of Esquimalt. All of Helps' emails related to the first three months of the internal investigation have been deleted, even though it took place just over three years ago. All of her emails go through mailboxes hosted on City of Victoria servers and retention of the mayor's email records is the responsibility of the City of Victoria.

If the mayor's emails have been deleted, that means that in less time than the 4-year term of an elected City of Victoria mayor or counsellor, critical records of what they did while in office are being destroyed by the City. That's what Thomson's explanation implies.

If you are thinking, "Well, that doesn't seem right," you're correct. The City of Victoria's "Records Retention and Disposition Authority" for the Mayor's Office requires that both electronic and paper records that are created to "document the operations of the mayor" must be "retained for 10 years overall, and then transferred to Archives for selective retention." The Police Board has no written policy regarding "email retention schedules," and, in any case, the emails were never in its physical control or custody. They were in the physical control and custody of the City of Victoria. Regardless, according to Thomson, those records are gone.

It's difficult to imagine why any City employee other than the mayor herself would delete the mayor's Elsner investigation emails from the City's electronic document storage system. We are left with the presumption that the mayor may have deleted these emails before they could be put into long-term storage.

To understand in a fundamental keep-democracy-healthy kind of way why the communications between Helps and Desjardins matter—and why they should have been preserved—consider what former BC Information and Privacy Commissioner Elizabeth Denham wrote in her investigative report *Access Denied: Record Retention and Disposal Practices of the Government of BC.*

Denham conducted her investigation in response to a case in which a person in the BC Premier's Office "triple-deleted" emails in order to hide his conduct from public scrutiny. Her report described in detail how emails could be triple-deleted. The commissioner noted that "In conducting this

> "DEMOCRACY DEPENDS ON ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNMENT. Citizens have the right to know how their government works and how decisions are made."—*Former Information and Privacy Commissioner Elizabeth Denham*

investigation, it has become clear that many employees falsely assume that emails are impermanent and transitory, and therefore of little value. What this investigation makes clear is that it is a record's content and context that determines whether a record is transitory, rather than its form."

Ironically, Denham released this report on October 22, 2015, right at the time Helps and Desjardins were conducting their own investigation into Elsner. At that time, Denham wrote, "Democracy depends on accountable government. Citizens have the right to know how their government works and how decisions are made."

Our "right to know" translates into a right to access government records, such as Helps' and Desjardins' emails. But, Denham wrote, "Access to information rights can only exist when public bodies create the conditions for those rights to be exercised. Government must promote a culture of access, from executive leadership to front-line employees. If they fail to meet this obligation, the access to information process is rendered ineffective."

If Helps deleted 100 percent of her emails, which appears to be the case, then she rendered access to information 100 percent ineffective. According to Denham, that means there's zero accountability. With no accountability, the City of Victoria resembles more an authoritarian regime than a democratic institution. Evidently, City Hall has some vital work to do to meet its legal obligations around information access.

The Township of Esquimalt did preserve some records of the email conversations between Desjardins and Helps. One of those emails seems to challenge a claim Lowe made about the mayors and it topples a claim Helps made about the mayors' investigation.

In the analysis that follows, I'm going to focus on just one aspect of Lowe's case against the mayors, the question of whether or not they buried allegations of harassment made against Elsner by two female VicPD members. The harassment allegations were made, we later learned, soon after the existence of Elsner's sexually-charged tweets with the wife of a subordinate officer was made known to the mayors.

Lowe's description of what the mayors did with these allegations amounts to a claim that they hid them from his office in order to protect Elsner from any repercussions. But Helps told *Focus* last August that investigation of such allegations was outside the mandate of their investigation: "We were authorized to deal only with the issues of whether Elsner had engaged in an inappropriate relationship with the wife of a VicPD member and whether Elsner had improperly used police social media accounts," Helps wrote in an email.

Lowe, though, has written, "It was my expectation that if the investigation revealed evidence of conduct that could constitute a disciplinary breach of public trust, the [mayors] would raise the matter with our office." Lowe says they never did. His report shows that the mayors rushed to make a decision about how to discipline Elsner after they were informed the story would soon appear in the media. Lowe was given no information about the mayors' decision, but requested details after both mayors made statements that attempted to mislead reporters on whether an investigation had taken place. The records the mayors turned over to Lowe contained no mention of the harassment allegations. Lowe learned about these additional allegations only after the Victoria City Police Union brought them to his attention.

There is no doubt the two mayors emailed back and forth about these allegations. Lowe's office secured some of those communications through its legislated power to obtain records. The full record of their back and forth communications would help us understand exactly what the mayors were thinking and whether or not Lowe's assessment of their actions is correct. Indeed, what the Township of Esquimalt released shows the mayors did communicate by email, and I'll get to that in a moment. But first, let's consider whether the additional allegations were serious enough that it is reasonable to expect the mayors would have taken action, including informing Lowe, as soon as they had been made aware of the allegations.

Three additional allegations were brought forward by two female VicPD employees. The descriptions below were included in the judgment made by retired Judge Ian H. Pitfield as part of the external investigation of Elsner's conduct ordered by Lowe in December 2015. Release of Pitfield's judgments had been delayed by Elsner's legal maneuverings until September 2018, when Lowe released his report. Had the mayors followed up on these allegations themselves, presumably they would have come to a similar understanding as Pitfield did. Here are Pitfield's descriptions:

First allegation: "[Elsner] pressed his groin against her buttocks, and his chest against her back in what [Officer A] described as a 'nuts to butts' maneuver… She told investigators she was shocked that 'my new Chief would stand behind me and from a female's perspective it's almost like an oppressive position in a, in a way, like just was very inappropriate, awkward.'"

Second allegation: "Officer B said that the day of a police Mess Dinner in 2015, the former chief approached her in a hallway at the VicPD headquarters and held her by both arms with her back against or close to the wall for about a minute. She told investigators that she felt uncomfortable that the former chief was 'in her space' and holding her by the arms."

Judge Pitfield described the third allegation: "The third allegation also involved Officer B. It arose at a use-of-force training session in 2014 at which the former chief was paired up with Officer B to practice lateral neck restraints; that involved close body contact. Officer B said: '…when she applied the restraint to Mr Elsner, or him to her, he said things like *you are so warm, don't stop,* or, *I could do this all day, you're so warm.*' She said the comments were made multiple times. She stated that while the comments were not overtly sexual, she felt they had a sexual tone as they were made at the time when their bodies are touching during the use of force scenarios."

In hearings before Pitfield, Elsner denied all of these allegations. But Pitfield made it clear that he believed the women, and found that "because Mr Elsner was the Chief Constable, the members were his subordinates, he stood in a position of power and responsibility vis-a-vis both members, and the three instances constituted breaches of VicPD workplace policy and the terms of his employment contract, I consider the misconduct to be well advanced on the seriousness scale."

So let's circle back to the question of whether there's evidence beyond that provided by Lowe's report that the two mayors tried to bury these allegations.

As mentioned earlier, the surviving record of email communications between the two mayors during September, October and November 2015 is sparse. The only surviving records were obtained from Esquimalt. From its records, one email stands out (see page14). For one thing, someone has run a black felt pen through two sections of text, hiding part of Desjardins' message to Helps. This wasn't an ordinary redaction permitted or required by BC's privacy and information law. Rather, this was done by somebody trying to hide something. Even though the content of the email has obviously been tampered with and so is likely to be regarded with suspicion, it has still been brought forward. To me this suggests that someone wanted us to see the other part of the message—the part that isn't blacked out.

The part that's still readable suggests that by October 15, 2015, just over a month into the investigation of Elsner's salacious tweets, the mayors knew about the additional harassment and bullying allegations against Elsner. It suggests that Desjardins believed those allegations needed to be investigated. She wanted to ask "Pat" to take that on, but had someone else in mind if necessary. "Pat" is Patricia Gallivan, QC, the Vancouver lawyer who conducted the mayors' investigation.

Note how this seems to conflict with Lowe's claim that the two mayors "had predetermined the outcome of the internal discipline process from the outset, and set about navigating a course to allow the former chief to remain in his post." The readable part of the email seems to suggest that Desjardins was pushing to have the harassment allegations investigated. Of course, we don't know if that's an accurate interpretation of Desjardins' intended meaning since part of her message has been blacked out.

Len Statz, manager of investigative analysts for the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner, told *Focus* in an email that Lowe's office had not seen Desjardins' email previously. Statz wrote: "In the Commissioner's view, the email provided to *Focus Magazine* provides further support for his position that the Mayors were aware of the allegations of harassment, did not fulfill their duty to inform the Commissioner and, arguably, continued on a path that would see the former chief remain in his post. We note that the covering letter to Pat Gallivan's preliminary report, dated November 16, 2015, summarized the allegations of harassment (including one of the allegations that was later substantiated by Discipline Authority Pitfield) and offered to investigate those allegations, indicating that investigation would take about a week. There is no documented action to take her up on that offer and there was no notification to our office."

(For the record, the email shown here was provided to the Police Board's Collette Thomson by the Township of Esquimalt, according to Thomson. It had apparently been found as part of an earlier FOI search of Helps' records, which were printed out in paper form and preserved by Esquimalt. Those records were originally gathered by City of Victoria employee Colleen Mycroft, which is why her name appears at the top of the email. Both Helps and Desjardins were asked to comment for this story. As of our deadline, neither had responded.)

Six days after suggesting they should do a second investigation, Desjardins sent to Helps, without comment, VicPD's policy papers on "Workplace Harassments & Improper Activity," "Workplace Violence," and "Code of Ethics." Again, if there was a response from Helps, it has been deleted from the City's records.

The records provided to *Focus* don't include any other communications between Desjardins and Helps for the rest of October or November 2015. But the records released by Lowe's office show that on November 16, 2015, a full month after Desjardins suggested an investigation of the harassment allegations, Gallivan wrote in a letter to the mayors: "I understand that you are considering how to address those allegations. As previously stated, should you wish to expand our mandate to include an investigation of those matters, in light of my schedule and given the need to deal with these matters expeditiously, I would need to engage the assistance of one of my partners to complete the investigation. I have discussed this matter with my partner…and she advises she would be able to set aside a week to conduct the witness interviews."

To summarize, then, Desjardins apparently believed an independent investigation of the allegations should be done, she thought Gallivan should do it, Gallivan had been approached, and Gallivan had offered her company's services to do it "expeditiously." Yet the investigation never took place. Why? Again, Helps says now: "We were authorized to deal only with the issues of whether Elsner had engaged in an inappropriate relationship with the wife of a VicPD member and whether Elsner had improperly used police social media accounts." But it's now evident that neither Desjardins nor Gallivan believed that to be the case. They were both ready to proceed with an investigation into the harassment allegations.

Why did Helps resist this direction? We don't know for certain because her emails have been deleted. But it's evident that Helps weighed the allegations made by the two women against something she believed to be true about Elsner. Her position on Elsner is a matter of public record. On December 4, 2015, when Helps was asked on Global TV if there was "any truth to it that there's an investigation going on with the chief," Helps replied, "No. The board has full confidence in our chief. He's the best thing that's happened to this town and Esquimalt in a long time."

So Helps weighed the allegations of the two women, plus the evidence of Elsner conducting "an inappropriate relationship" with the wife of a subordinate officer, against something else and decided in favour of Elsner. What outweighed the allegations of the women?

Soon after the investigation of Elsner broke into public view in December 2015, there was talk on social media about the Twitter allegation against Elsner being a retaliation by VicPD personnel who opposed the new "community policing" direction in which he was taking the department. There was said to be opposition to Elsner's shift away from some of the policies of former Police Chief Jamie Graham. That shift included, for example, a freeze on promotion of officers based on arrests and ticketing, and a move toward promotion based on community engagement and contact.

Did this idea—that Elsner was being punished for being progressive—tip Helps' judgment in favour of Elsner and against the women who accused him?

Indeed, the two mayors had directed Gallivan to determine whether there was "misconduct by any other employee of [VicPD] or if there were any security issues with respect to [VicPD's] information system." The mayors apparently wanted to know if any improper action had led to Elsner's tweets being brought to their attention.

After investigating the matter, Gallivan reported, "I have no reason to believe that there was any misconduct" on the part of VicPD members. But even if it had been true—that Elsner was punished by VicPD members because he was progressive—it's difficult to see how that would cancel out Elsner's documented misconduct involving women.

After Lowe's report was released last September and many more details about what had happened during the mayors' investigation circulated in the community during the civic election campaign, Helps and Desjardins both claimed they had been libelled by Lowe. To

understand why Helps might not want to openly acknowledge that she had sided with an accused abuser and stood in the way of an expeditious investigation of the allegations of harassment, consider a statement made by Sonia Theroux, Helps' campaign manager. Theroux made this comment on social media shortly before the election: "I'm a multi-time survivor; I'd never support a mayor who tried to protect an abuser. Full stop."

Theroux had apparently been told by Helps that a "second letter [was] on its way to the OPCC re new allegations when media intercepted," back in December 2015. "There was no intention to 'cover up' the allegations," Theroux wrote.

Helps has never made any public statement about such a "second letter." If such a letter had being contemplated, wouldn't the mayors have secured a record of it in case it was ever necessary to prove they intended to pursue the harassment allegations?

But Helps' own words back in December 2015 make it clear how unlikely the existence of a "second letter" was. Again, recall her statement: "The Board has full confidence in our chief. He's the best thing to happen to this town and Esquimalt for a long time."

How could Helps make that "best thing" claim while, at the same time, she was writing a "second letter" to Lowe to inform him that the mayors were going to begin an investigation of Elsner's "nuts to butts" maneuver with his female staff.

While Gallivan was investigating the salacious tweet allegation against Elsner, Elsner committed three additional acts of serious misconduct. He lied to Gallivan about what he had done, he attempted to obtain false testimony from a subordinate police officer, and he misled a fellow police officer. The first two of those actions were each judged to merit dismissal from policing; one of those was considered tantamount to an obstruction of justice by retired Judge Carol Baird Ellan. In other words, Elsner's attempt to *cover up* the tweeting and "nuts to butts" maneuver were what made him forever unemployable as a police officer. One has to wonder whether Mayor Helps' attempt to delete her way out of her own predicament will, in a similar fashion, eventually catch up with her employability as a politician.

Focus has requested that the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner review the matter of the mayor's missing emails. We will continue to report what we learn.

David Broadland is the publisher of *Focus*.

Alarmed

ROSS CROCKFORD

Downtown residents question the $34-million deal for a new fire hall.

Critics have issued their lists of the best TV shows of the past year. For high stakes and dramatic twists, though, it's been hard to beat the live stream of recent City of Victoria council meetings.

"We have one of the most difficult decisions we will probably have all term in front of us today," Mayor Lisa Helps told councillors on November 15. For nearly three hours they debated sites for a new Crystal Pool, before voting 7-2 to keep it in the southwest corner of Central Park, the location City staff had already spent two years and $2 million planning for, despite the objections of its neighbours. The following week, at the November 22 council meeting, they looked certain to ratify that decision. A group of North Park residents marched down to City Hall to show their opposition. And then the council stunned the audience.

Helps said she'd had a conversation with RG Properties' Graham Lee, who leases the Save-On arena, and that he was "enthusiastic" about exploring a partnership for a public swimming pool on the arena's parking lot. "My report back to the public and council is that meeting went well, there is an interest, and I'm not going to say anything further because that would be motivating one way or another." But that was enough: councillors voted unanimously to pursue discussions with Lee, even if it meant blowing the January deadline for a first crack at federal-provincial infrastructure cash, and risked losing $7 million in grants the City had already accumulated.

"What tipped the balance for me is even if we get some federal and some provincial funding, we'd have to hold a referendum [to borrow money] and we could have the North Park residents forming the 'no' side," Helps told Victoria News. "We all know what it's like to do a large infrastructural project that the public doesn't support, like the Johnson Street Bridge, and I don't want to do that again."

There may have been other factors (a new geotechnical report showed significant bedrock and groundwater at the Central Park site), but the official story is that councillors listened to the neighbourhood, and changed course. Now, with the pool on hold, their attention will turn to Victoria's next big undertaking—a new No. 1 fire hall—which appears to be following a similar early plotline. City crafts megaproject. Proponents sell plan to neighbourhood. Conflict ensues.

IMAGE: HCMA ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN

A new fire hall could be topped by affordable housing, but the deal requires concessions from the City

LAST MARCH, THE CITY ANNOUNCED a remarkable deal. After 18 months of closed-door negotiations, it signed a contract with Dalmatian Developments, to pay them $33.7 million upon completing a 41,700 square-foot fire hall as part of a new mixed-use building on Johnson at Cook, on land that's currently the back end of a parking lot for Pacific Mazda. The fire hall, built to the latest post-disaster earthquake standard, would include six bays for fire vehicles, Victoria's first purpose-built emergency operations centre, and space for BC Emergency Health Services to operate four ambulances. The old fire hall on Yates would remain open while the replacement was being built, and the City would use money from its financial reserves, so there'd be no associated tax increase.

It was great news, Helps told reporters. Moving the fire hall Downtown made sense with more residents in the area, and it was cheaper than the City building one on its own. (In 2012 CFB Esquimalt erected a fire hall of similar size for $27.3 million, but it didn't have to buy land.) When CTV asked if there was a risk of cost overruns, as with the "fixed-price" Johnson Street Bridge, Helps replied: "How could it go like the bridge went, when a private-sector developer is building the project? The City will pay when it's done."

But members of the Downtown Residents Association (DRA) started digging into the deal, and didn't like what they saw. The fine print of the City's announcement said the agreement was "subject to Dalmatian Developments bringing their overall project through the rezoning process"—and that "overall project" turned out to cover the entire Pacific Mazda property.

Dalmatian is a partnership between Jawl Residential and Nadar Holdings, a company owned by the family of the late Victoria Mayor Peter Pollen, who bought Olson Motors at 1060 Yates in the 1960s. (He ran it as a Ford dealership until 1988, when it became Pacific Mazda, but it remains in the Pollen family.) The property, consisting of nine parcels of land, is oddly zoned. The eastern half is designated S-1, which permits buildings up to five storeys covering no more than 60 percent of the land, with a floor-space density up to 1.5:1. The western half is R-48, which allows up to 10 storeys, but doesn't limit coverage and says nothing about density; Dalmatian says that effectively gives the western half a huge "theoretical" density of 9.8:1. Neither zone permits a fire hall, so some rezoning is needed. Dalmatian proposes spreading the R-48 density around the site, and erecting four mixed-use buildings: the fire hall, limited to 12 storeys because of its seismic requirements, and three connected towers, 14 to 17 storeys tall.

> "WE JUST WANT THE CITY to lead by example, and respect its foundational planning documents."
>
> *—Ian Sutherland, chair of the Downtown Residents Association's land-use committee*

Last summer, Dalmatian revealed the fire-hall building's design, crafted by HCMA (the architects also working on the new Crystal Pool), and the DRA held a community meeting in the Mazda showroom to discuss the plans. Ninety-three residents turned up, and they were peeved—not with the developer, but with the City for letting the project get this far before consulting the public. "I'm beginning to feel like I'm part of a social experiment, to see how much noise, how much disruption I can take before I will be pushed out of this area," said a guy who lived on the north side of Johnson. Several said they saw no benefit to their neighbourhood, just five or more years of construction, and then sirens. "This is just cramming more and more buildings in. We've got no green space, and this is supposed to be Harris Green," another complained. "Where's the City of Victoria's planning department on this?" he demanded, to applause from the audience.

"We just want the City to lead by example, and respect its foundational planning documents," says Ian Sutherland, the chair of the DRA's land-use committee. The Official Community Plan considers the area "core residential," allowing a density of only 5.5:1; the proposal has an overall density of 6.8:1. There's no legal right to swap densities around to different parcels, Sutherland says, and doing so would set a dangerous precedent. It would also give a huge "lift" to the total value of the property, one that would be largely missed by the paltry $12 per square foot the City currently requires in community amenity contributions (CACs) for densities above 3:1. "As soon as this zoning happens, that's it, the money's collected, and then they can build whatever they want in the future as of right without any further CACs at all."

Sutherland wants the City to enforce the 5.5:1 density in the OCP and R-48's 10-storey limit. He's worried, however, that councillors may think they have no alternative to what's proposed. He got a copy of the Dalmatian contract via FOI, and though heavily redacted, its text makes clear the deal to build the fire hall is contingent on a rezoning of "all of the Development Lands," and permitting "any density not used in connection with the [fire hall] Project to be used on the Nadar Remainder Lands."

IMAGE: HCMA ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN

Dalmatian's proposal includes a building containing a fire hall (centre back) and three other towers

Consequently, on November 22 he wrote to councillors on behalf of the DRA, appealing to them to respect the neighbourhood's concerns. "The signing of the contract for this Fire Hall was made by the previous council without any public knowledge or assent and has locked the City into terms that are highly questionable. The public is invited to participate as an afterthought but is told that the deal has been struck; it's this or nothing. But we propose this is a false choice and that this application is not the only way forward. We ask our new council to consider themselves not bound by the terms of this contract as written."

VICTORIA CERTAINLY NEEDS A NEW No. 1 fire hall. The existing one, built in 1959 and only 26,700 square feet, is so cramped that the department's largest trucks barely fit into its bays. (Worse yet, a 2010 report said the entrances could collapse in a quake, making it impossible for the trucks to leave.) Firefighters sometimes have to drive against one-way traffic on Yates to get onto Fort and reach the eastern part of the City.

The proposed site isn't perfect. It's west of the "recommended" area in a 2016 report, but fire trucks can travel quickly east on Johnson, and north and south on Cook. A third-party evaluation said the driveway is too short to let fire trucks safely turn into traffic on Johnson; controlled lights can stop cars up the street. But what about the noise?

David Jawl, a development manager for the fire hall project, says he's confident the fire service will be an excellent neighbour. "They can be a 24/7, eyes-on-the-street safety presence," he notes, and they have experience operating stations next to apartments, on Yates and in James Bay. (The department says it won't turn on sirens until a vehicle reaches Cook.) Besides, Jawl adds, "we plan on developing the future phases right next to the fire hall. So any concern a neighbour across the street has about noise or disruption, we share those concerns."

Jawl Residential has added a public plaza at the corner of Yates and Cook, plus several levels of underground parking, to help win over the neighbourhood. The potential element likely to sway councillors, though, is affordable housing. In November, the Province announced that it is giving Pacifica Housing $19 million to build 130 mixed-income rental units Downtown, and Jawl is seeking approvals to put all of them over the fire hall. (Calgary has a fire station with an 88-unit affordable-housing tower, and last year Vancouver opened a fire hall with 31 apartments for vulnerable women and their children.) "We wanted to stick our necks out a bit," Jawl says, "and [show] that we could try and do a beautiful-looking affordable housing project."

Getting all this, Jawl says, requires master-planning and rezoning the entire property instead of just doing it in pieces. That would also ensure that the plaza, the parking, and the requirements in the City's Downtown Core Area Plan—which permits up to 17 storeys on the western half of the property, he notes—around tower separation, view corridors, and setbacks, all get enshrined in the bylaw generated by the rezoning. "We feel it provides an amazing opportunity for the whole neighbourhood to blossom into this mixed-use, vibrant hub of Downtown."

David Jawl is Peter Pollen's grandson. His mom, Kathy, is Pollen's daughter, and his father Michael is related to the esteemed Jawl development clan; Jawl Residential is run by Michael, David, and his siblings Elizabeth and Peter. David says his grandfather, a passionate advocate for a healthy Downtown, started family discussions about transitioning the Mazda property 10 years ago, and in 2015, when the City put out a call for interest in building a new fire hall, he gave his blessing to their proposal. "So we have a lot of connection to this land," Jawl says. "We feel a lot of responsibility in how it gets developed."

Ross Crockford wishes everyone, including Victoria's politicians, a happy 2019.

Environmental assessment reconsidered

JUDITH LAVOIE

BC's new *Environmental Assessment Act* needs teeth and scientific certainty to avoid disasters of the past.

The washed-out tailings pond dam at the Mount Polley Mine in the BC interior near Quesnel Lake

Rebuilding public trust in environmental assessments is a tough sell, given BC's recent history. Environment Minister George Heyman, who has shepherded the new *Environmental Assessment Act* into law, is doubling down on efforts to convince British Columbians that it represents a new era of science-based decisions.

The new rules are being intensely scrutinized by scientists, environmental groups and Indigenous communities looking for assurances that science will truly be the priority and that decisions will be made transparently and without bias.

While there is general agreement that the new legislation is a vast improvement over the old rules, written by the former Liberal government in 2002, there are gaps that critics say will continue to give undue weight to the findings of experts paid by industries with deep pockets, exacerbated by the lack of mandated peer reviews, and the possibility that government could approve projects without Indigenous consent.

Environmental assessments of major resource and development projects over the years have been marked by accusations of shaky science, First Nations anger, and glaring omissions of vital local information, all of which have fed suspicions that decisions are influenced by industry-paid experts whose self-interest lies with ensuring projects are approved, rather than protecting the environment.

Those suspicions are justified, according to University of British Columbia researchers who studied 10 recent assessments of major projects in BC and found that thresholds for environmental damage were exceeded or skirted, but projects were still given a green light.

"For us, and I think for a lot of people, the biggest implication of our work is showing the bias and unscientific practice used in the environmental impact process," said Gerald Gurinder Singh, UBC senior research fellow of the Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries. "The process ostensibly uses science as a mean to evaluate impacts to make informed recommendations, and what we show is that the science is incredibly flawed," said Singh, one of the authors of two studies looking at environmental impact assessments. He noted that one of the biggest problems is the conflict of interest involved in having proponents hire consultants.

Such findings will come as no surprise to many British Columbians, who have witnessed the systemic dysfunction. Think back to the Mount Polley tailings dam collapse, which sent 24 million cubic metres of sludge and mine tailings into nearby waterways and lakes—something an expert panel later concluded was due to a flawed dam design. Or recall the Shawnigan Lake contaminated soil dump that was approved after expert engineering advice from a company that was later found to have a profit-sharing deal with the proponent. Or the Prosperity Mine proposal, which was twice rejected by the federal government, but approved by BC despite First Nations objections to a highly controversial plan to drain a lake to store waste rock, engendering well-documented adverse environmental effects.

Then there was the claim by experts hired by Pacific Northwest LNG that there were no salmon in the eelgrass beds at Flora Bank, despite clear evidence the area was used as a nursery for juvenile salmon.

Heyman is emphasizing that the new measures will bring about a strong and transparent environmental assessment process, based on science. Experts and professionals who provide advice on a project will be more carefully regulated than in the past, and Indigenous communities will be involved from the early stages of a proposal, allowing potential hurdles to be identified before full hearings get underway. "The general public and Indigenous communities will be able to participate meaningfully and companies will be able to get good projects reviewed and ready more quickly," Heyman said in a statement.

The First Nations Leadership Council acknowledges that the new rules set the stage for a different relationship, but also notes

> "HE WHO PAYS THE PIPER calls the tune…I think the lynchpin of this thing is the lack of assurance that the body of evidence is going to be objective. You can't have a body of evidence that is solely paid for by the company and expect to get an objective analysis."—*Calvin Sandborn, University of Victoria's Environmental Law Centre*

the proposed *Act* needs to go further to meet standards of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as it still allows projects to proceed if consent is withheld by Indigenous Nations. "[But] it represents an important step and, if properly implemented, will lead to fewer legal conflicts and better developed projects by fully including First Nations at all stages of development," said Robert Phillips, a member of the First Nations Summit's political executive.

The legislation, which passed in November, will come into effect in the fall of 2019 and is now awaiting regulations, meaning changes and tweaks can still be made within the basic framework.

Critics want the regulations to strengthen scientific independence and tighten loose language that says government must "consider" elements such as community input and greenhouse gas emissions, but allows wriggle room to ignore that information.

"One concern we voiced right at the beginning is the lack of requirement for scientific rigour," said Simon Fraser scientist Michael Price. Price was one of a group of 180 university academics and science professionals who wrote to Heyman in November recommending that information used to assess environmental risk should be collected by qualified, independent professionals—not those with a vested interest in the project—and then reviewed by scientists. All information and data leading to a decision should then be made public, the letter recommends.

The letter says the scientists are encouraged by the changes, but "the continued lack of scientific independence, peer review and transparency in the evaluation of a given project's risk to the environment will serve only to further undermine public confidence."

"If you read the bill, when it comes to the input of science, it is always an *option*," said Price. "That will continue to undermine public trust and put the environment at risk, which boggles my mind a little," continued Price, who fears that, if decisions are not based on transparent, sound, independent science, disasters of the past, such as Mount Polley, could re-occur.

Stronger language would have gone a long way to building public trust, Price said. "I'm not sure we are going to get there when things remain options rather than requirements."

BC Environment Minister George Heyman

That ambivalence is echoed by Gavin Smith, West Coast Environmental Law staff lawyer, who notes positive changes, such as First Nations involvement, but believes the lack of requirements is a red flag. Greenhouse gas emissions must be *considered*, for instance, but, Smith pointed out, ministers can then decide to ignore the evidence, and there is no approval test or binding criteria for ministers to approve or reject a project, so decisions can appear arbitrary, politicized and unjust.

A ministry spokesman said it will be mandatory to consider the impact of projects on climate targets, and ministers will be required to provide reasons for their decisions.

Another area involving concern around options rather than requirements is the need for studies of cumulative impacts, as opposed to looking at a single project in isolation—something vital in areas where mining and other resource development has turned the landscape into a patchwork of roads and industrial development.

Calvin Sandborn, legal director of the University of Victoria's Environmental Law Centre, agrees the new rules are an improvement, but he too sees a series of flaws. He's especially concerned that proponents could provide the bulk of the evidence. "He who pays the piper calls the tune…I think the lynchpin of this thing is the lack of assurance that the body of evidence is going to be objective," he said. "You can't have a body of evidence that is solely paid for by the company and expect to get an objective analysis."

Under the new system, Sandborn noted, proponents will produce their experts and the information will then go to a technical advisory committee, but that will be made up largely of government scientists who are unlikely to have the specific expertise of the company experts. He predicts, "these company experts will be able to dance around the technical experts."

A ministry spokesman said the technical advisory committee could be made up of government and non-government experts.

A truly objective process—although one that is unlikely to gain political support—would see the government fund critics of a project to the same extent that the company is funding their experts, Sandborn suggested. "It is absolutely wrong to have multi-national companies spending multi-millions on experts, and then have that expertise vetted by experts that are hired on the basis of cupcake sales," he said.

The bill requires a community advisory committee to be formed for each project. Sandborn said those committees need to be able to name experts who are sensitive to community issues to the technical advisory committee.

Gerald Singh of the Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries suggested one solution would be for industry to pay into a central fund, administered by government, which is then used to hire experts to review projects. "I think in terms of first steps, that would be good. There needs to be more oversight on the quality of the research being done, and an independent body of experts is one way," he said.

As criticism and cautious optimism solidify, all eyes will be on the regulations and how many tweaks government is willing to make to address the concerns. The devil will truly be in those details, said environmental lawyer Smith.

Judith Lavoie is an award-winning journalist specializing in the environment, First Nations, and social issues. Twitter @LavoieJudith.

CleanBC plan looks nice onscreen, but has serious problems

RUSS FRANCIS

The BC government's concerted efforts at message control nearly overwhelm its new climate plan.

The good news is that the BC government has now stated publicly that it really, really cares about climate change. While jurisdictions from Ontario to Brazil are thumbing their respective noses at the looming annihilation of life as we know it, the BC government released plans to move towards a low-carbon economy.

While there are numerous holes in the plan, the "CleanBC" document, released December 5, 2018, is substantial. It lays out a road map as to how the Province will attain its legislated target of a 40 percent cut in GHG emissions from 2007 levels by 2030. Despite the government's unfathomable decision in 2018 to bend over backwards for the liquefied natural gas (LNG) industry, considerable credit is due for pulling together so many parts of the climate puzzle.

CleanBC is "aimed at" reducing greenhouse gases (GHGs) while creating more jobs and economic opportunities, according to the news release's opening blurb. It is now standard government jargon for policies to *aim* at doing something, rather than to actually do it. If a plan merely aims at a reduced GHG emissions target but ends up missing it, the government can still say it carried out the plan: it tried.

Under 2018's *Climate Change and Accountability Act*, BC set a reduction of 25.4 megatonnes (Mt) in annual GHG emissions by 2030, compared with 2007. CleanBC—if implemented according to projections—is expected to take us to an 18.9 Mt reduction, leaving another 6.5 Mt yet to be found.

That's far from the only big "if" in the plan. For instance, the plan claims that taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and storing it, known as "carbon capture and storage" (CCS), will help reduce annual GHG emissions to the targeted levels in 12 years. It's a great idea, but one that has yet to work, other than in small demonstration projects. As British author George Monbiot put it in a November column in *The Guardian Weekly*, the only proven CCS process that works on the required scale is allowing trees to return to deforested land. And that means some big changes in the way most people live, of which the most important, globally, is eliminating meat and dairy from our diets—a suggestion that rates not even a passing mention in CleanBC. (See Briony Penn's story in this edition for an analysis of what is and is not happening in BC's forests.)

Given the immediacy and seriousness of climate change, one has to wonder why natural gas remains in the CleanBC picture for the foreseeable future. After all, methane, the prime component of natural gas, is one of the very worst of all GHGs, between 25 and 36 times worse than carbon dioxide in its global warming potential, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency. Making the indefinite continuation of the huge natural gas industry even more troublesome are fugitive emissions: those from the production, processing, transmission, storage and delivery of methane not used to generate useful energy. They include leaks, deliberate venting into the atmosphere, line cleaning, and other emissions that do not make it to the other end of the pipeline.

How big are such fugitive emissions? According to government figures, BC's oil and gas industry released 3.47 Mt of fugitive emissions in 2016, a figure that even the government suggests is unreliable.

A group of scientists from the David Suzuki Foundation and St Francis Xavier University used a "sniffer truck" to measure actual emissions at more than 1,600 well pads and facilities in the huge Montney gas field in northeastern BC, which is planned to supply LNG Canada's Kitimat plant. The scientists' results, published in the January 2018 issue of the journal *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics*, point to actual methane emissions that are at least 2.5 times higher than what the BC government reports.

Deforestation in coastal British Columbia—like that on islands in Johnson Strait (above)—is rapidly diminishing Earth's natural carbon capture and storage system

THE PLAN CLAIMS that taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and storing it, known as "carbon capture and storage" (CCS), will help reduce annual GHG emissions to the targeted levels in 12 years. It's a great idea, but one that has yet to work, other than in small demonstration projects. The only proven CCS process that works on the required scale is allowing trees to return to deforested land.

Doubtless stung by the Suzuki work, the Province realizes it may have drastically under-reported fugitive emissions. According to the CleanBC report, the government is now working on ways to more accurately gauge fugitive methane releases, relying on—you guessed it—actual field measurements with sniffers. Speaking in an interview, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives senior economist Marc Lee said of the volume of fugitive emissions: "We have no idea what they really are."

A large part of the CleanBC exercise appears to have involved branding. The very name, "CleanBC," with no space between *Clean* and *BC*, along with a multi-hued green and blue stylized logo at the top of every page in the CleanBC documents, suggest that it is indeed intended as a brand. Answering questions from *Focus*, an environment ministry spokeswoman said that while the reports themselves were produced in-house, "strategic brand development and initial creative development and production" cost approximately $65,000. Following a competitive bidding process, the contract was let to NOW Communications Inc, whose clients include mostly trade unions and the NDP in BC and other provinces. (During the 1990s, NOW attracted news media attention after the then-NDP government paid it $4.5 million from 1991 till March 31, 1995 for communications work. However, then-Auditor General George Morfitt found that the government appropriately managed NOW contracts, apart from "a limited number of significant exceptions.")

The December 5 news release itself indicates just how much message control went into the issuance of the strategy. Of the six-page release, a scant one-and-a-half pages were devoted to the actual plan. The last four pages contained nothing more than effusive reactions to the plan from just about every segment of society, beginning with comments from three Americans-—the governors of California, Oregon and Washington. This unusual release was doubtless pushed by the all-powerful Government Communications and Public Engagement (GCPE) unit.

Why go to so much effort to collect comments on the plan? Isn't that what news outlets would do anyway? Not any more. These days, nearly all major news outlets have little more than skeleton crews, following repeated layoffs and buyouts. Beat reporters are few and far between. But newspapers still have to fill the space between the ads, and if copy is provided, ready to cut and paste into stories, publications can retain the appearance of distributing actual content.

The obvious benefit for the government in this arrangement is that it gets to control the message *and* the reactions. Should California governor Jerry Brown, for example, have stuck in a snarky comment about the insanity of the BC government's recent push for LNG, the control freaks at the communications unit would have edited it out. My suspicion is that rather than sending pre-release drafts of the 66-page CleanBC report to the busy governor of a state with more than eight times BC's population, GCPE concocted a two-sentence comment and asked Governor Brown's communications staff if it could attribute the "quote" to him. Brown himself may not have even seen his "quote." Repeat for the other 22 CleanBC quotees.

Besides the usual environmentalists, among the 23 reverential authors were representatives of giant mining company Teck Resources Ltd and the Business Council of British Columbia, which represents around 250 of the province's largest corporations.

In her statement distributed with the news release, Teck senior vice-president Marcia Smith called CleanBC "a tremendous economic opportunity." Meanwhile, Teck is doing its bit for climate change, if in the wrong direction. As Judith Lavoie reported in the July/August 2018 *Focus*, the company is developing the $21-billion Frontier Oil Sands project near Wood Buffalo National Park in northeastern Alberta. Expected to begin operations in 2026, the reputedly largest-ever open-pit tar sands mine is expected to produce 260,000 barrels of bitumen every day. And as if to rub it in the noses of the NDP-Green government, Teck plans to be a client of the BC government-opposed Trans Mountain pipeline expansion. According to a report in the May 5, 2017 *Globe and Mail*, Teck has booked capacity on the expanded pipeline, which the federal government bought from Kinder Morgan in 2018.

In his message fronting the full CleanBC report, Premier John Horgan credits the government's own Climate Solutions and Clean Growth Advisory Council. And guess who is one of the council's two co-chairs? Teck's Marcia Smith, no less. Yet if it weren't for Teck and innumerable other similar players, Earth would not now be in what writer Monbiot calls a "death spiral," requiring not gradual changes in our way of life, but a complete and immediate upheaval of the current economic system. Fossil fuels don't belong in the new world. "At the end of the day, this is carbon, safely ensconced underground for eternity," said the CCPA's Marc Lee. Instead: "We are putting that out into the atmosphere."

The professionally produced CleanBC documents are studded with lovely colour photographs of mostly young people staring at a waterfall, wearing hardhats and looking busy, or riding bikes along a trail through a springtime meadow. Nary a burned tree, nor sky darkened by forest fire smoke, nor flooding river in sight. Not one of the smiling models in the photographs displays the slightest concern for the catastrophe that is about to hit us unless we move much faster than the CleanBC requirements. We need to switch very quickly onto something like a war footing. Increasing the proportion of zero-emission new car purchases by 2030 is a step forward, but a minuscule one: a drop in BC's annual emissions by 1.6 Mt—or six percent of BC's legislated cuts.

Happy sailors dancing on a sinking ship.

For more on CleanBC, see: https://cleanbc.gov.bc.ca/

For details on carbon capture and storage, see: https://www.carbontracker.org/ccs-important-but-not-a-get-out-of-jail-free-card/

Russ Francis is a former BC government analyst. In his spare time, he takes care of an aging Alaskan Malamute, a yearling banana slug (free range), and a contrabass racket.

Logging madness continues

BRIONY PENN

Nothing has changed in BC forestry practices under the NDP government.

If you go into the woods today you're in for no surprises. Nothing has changed since the BC Liberals left in their wake vast clearcuts, gutted rural communities, and species on the edge of extinction in our deregulated, corporate-controlled public forests. It doesn't matter who you talk to: unions, First Nations, rural politicians, enviros or insider scientists, the prognosis is that nothing has changed with the rate of mowing down what's left of our ancient forests since the NDP picked up the reigns in May 2017.

The Chief Forester, Diane Nicholls, is the same; the latest unsustainable Annual Allowable Cut (AAC) that she is setting remains the same. The empty Ministry of Forests offices and lack of anybody on the ground monitoring the forests is the same. The legislation (or lack thereof) is the same. The silent renewal of Tree Farm Licences over vast areas of public forest with no public consultation is the same. The number of raw logs leaving our shores is the same.

Even the guidance letters that Nicholls uses in her determinations of AAC haven't changed: in two recent timber allocations for Arrow and Arrowsmith regions, Nicholls refers to guidance letters from the former BC Liberal minister who appointed her—not even a touching-of-the-hat to current Forest Minister Doug Donaldson. Was it just a *faux pas* or the failure of Minister Donaldson to lead British Columbians, including his top staffer, in a new direction for the sake of our decimated forests?

According to Gary Fiege, president of the PPWC (Public and Private Workers of Canada, formerly the Pulp and Paper Workers Union), the minister seems to be paralyzed. Despite a platform to bring in the much-needed forest management reform, the NDP seem to have been unable to implement a single change. "Nothing has happened," states Fiege. His union will take their frustration public in the new year.

Certainly the calls for change haven't changed, particularly around the exporting of raw logs and the continuing "fall down effect"—i.e. the decline in timber production as old growth is depleted and the industry logs smaller and smaller second growth. The last two years have been record years for exporting raw logs: 8 million cubic metres per year, equivalent to full logging trucks lined up bumper to bumper from here to Montreal. Exporting 8 million cubic metres also means exporting jobs—six of them a day. As Fiege states, "Instead of dealing with the loss of jobs, the minister is in Asia selling our logs. We weren't even invited on the tour."

The PPWC are one of the signatories for a resolution to end the logging of Vancouver Island's ancient rainforest. Many would assume the NDP would be listening to their union base, so why has nothing happened?

One clue is that every one of the 36 existing Tree Farm Licences has recently been renewed, guaranteeing under the existing *Forest and Range Practices Act* a dedicated supply of fibre; so there is no wiggle room. The BC Liberals tied up 31 of those leases in the last nine years, even though half of them weren't coming up for renewal until 2019. The kicker is that another five TFLs were renewed by Minister Donaldson in the last 15 months (TFL 8, 41, 43, 48 and 53) with virtually no public consultation. The question is *why*?

Ancient Forest Alliance campaigner surveys downed Western red cedar

According to a ministry insider who cannot be named for fear of reprisal, a structural cause is that top staffers remain the same, especially the Chief Forester, whose job it is to determine how much timber is to be cut down. When it comes to public interest issues, whether it is the protection of ancient forests, wildlife, water, indigenous rights, carbon storage or recreational values, all ultimately depend on *reducing* the cut—but that cut remains the same. For Fort St John, the largest timber supply area in BC, Nicholls has set the AAC for the next 10 years at the same levels set by the BC Liberals a decade ago. And this is despite all the fires, the insect predations, the warnings on climate change, the smaller trees, the threats to endangered caribou and inland rainforests. It also appears blind to the recommendations in the government-commissioned June report of Mark Haddock concerning the failure of the "professional reliance" system to adequately monitor our forests.

Nicholls' career flourished in the era of professional reliance where deregulation and demise of public oversight created the conditions for advancement to those who helped their employers do well. *Focus* is still getting whistleblower reports on the failure of her leadership. A letter from one states that Nicholls hasn't even called a staff meeting to discuss the recommendations of the Haddock report, many of which she could implement. "Instead," the letter continues, "she seems to spend all of her time in meetings with the companies she knows well. Who is working for the public interest?" According to the Lobbyist Registry, 98 percent of the lobbyists registered under Forestry visiting the minister and staff were from industry. Dealing

> "THIS GOVERNMENT RISKS becoming the government of extinction for many of the species that are dependent on old-growth forests."—*Jens Wieting, Sierra Club*

with corporations like Canfor and Interfor, whose TFLs were renewed, obviously constituted a great proportion of the Minister's time. When asked about his own lobby success, PPWC's President Fiege stated that they had had limited access but no action, "so what is the point?"

These sentiments are echoed in the ENGO sector. According to Jens Wieting of the Sierra Club, after collecting 200,000 signatures from around the world asking for a moratorium on British Columbia's ancient rainforests, there was no response from the Minister, certainly no meeting with him. "It is symbolic that Minister Donaldson has made it his priority to go out to the world to sell our old growth logs, but it is the world that is calling him to save it—and he didn't have even a word to say about it." When the petition was submitted, an assistant came out and received the names, but there was no comment from the Ministry. "That lack of response," states Wieting, "was very telling."

The original hope for policy on ancient forests stems from a vague promise in the NDP's environment platform to use "the ecosystem-based management approach of the Great Bear Rainforest as a model to sustainably manage BC's old-growth." This would require revisiting licences and reforming the *Forest and Range Practices Act* which currently puts timber ahead of all other public interest values. As Wieting points out, there hasn't even been a public conversation around what the public interest is. The Union of BC Municipalities passed a resolution to end old-growth logging, and even the mayor of the resource-dependent town of Prince George is asking for reform in forest management, but their calls go unheeded. Calls from many First Nations for reform continue to go unanswered. This past November, the Nuu-chah-nulth asked the Province to do more to protect old growth, because logging it is threatening their culture with the disappearance of ancient Western red cedars that root their material, artistic and spiritual lives.

Fiege suggests that after 17 years of sitting in opposition, the NDP were "woefully unprepared on the forestry file." It defies logic when you have so many sectors calling for forestry reforms, especially with protecting something as valuable to our biggest industry, tourism, as the last bit of old growth. A big tree protection law even made it onto the BC Liberal agenda back in 2011 because of their value to tourism, though was never implemented.

Now the big trees are falling faster than ever. Wieting notes: "This government risks becoming the government of extinction for many of the species that are dependent on old-growth forests." The percentage of large-enough, intact ancient forests to support marbled murrelets, caribou, and other old-growth-dependent species is diminishing so fast that it looks like some extinctions might occur on this government's watch. Some high-profile cutting of ancient trees through BC Timber Sales has also highlighted the failure of this agency that sells 20 percent of our AAC.

Where is the Green Party on this? They have been pursuing improvement in forest management through the narrow window they have under the *Supply and Confidence Agreement* to review the professional reliance system that puts the public interest in professional hands. In November, Bill 49, the *Professional Governance Act*, was introduced to implement 2 of the 121 recommendations made under the Haddock report. However, professionals are only as good as the regulations they have to follow, so there still has to be leadership in reform of forest legislation. Even industry and professional foresters, like Christine Gelowitz of the Association of BC Forest Professionals, stress "the need for government to clearly define values, clarify desired results, set objectives and values and establish a hierarchy for objectives on the landscape. Without those tools, forest professionals are left trying to balance numerous competing and varied expectations by disparate groups with differing values and competing interests on the land."

Meanwhile, the war in the woods continues. Climber/activists like Alex Smith have been scouring imminent cut blocks, flagging and measuring the last of the huge trees in the Nahmint, Klaskish, and Walbran watersheds, as well as Edinburgh Mountain and other places. Smith and others have built witness trails to some of the big giants, like those in the proposed cutblocks of the upper Walbran, which has been the site of blockades for decades. As Smith notes: "Everyone else in the world can see the value of these ancient rainforests, why doesn't our current government?"

ACCORDING TO WIETING, 2019 is going to be a make-or-break year for rainforests and climate policy in BC. Our ancient rainforests are the biggest sequesters and storehouses of carbon on the planet, but government is barely counting their contribution or loss in the BC greenhouse gas emissions inventory. If they did, they would find the logging companies are a larger contributor to greenhouse gas emissions than the oil sector. The problem with not factoring in the role of the forest industry is that when you add up the carbon loss through logging and slash burning, the climate loses twice: once for the loss of a forest sink for future carbon sequestration, and again for the emissions released.

Many are lining up to get in front of Minister Donaldson in the new year to recommend the setting of targets related to actions like phasing out slashburning; the protection of carbon rich old-growth rainforests; and reforming forest management to achieve negative emissions in recovering second-growth forests managed for carbon and timber by careful selective forestry. After all, this was the basis for the NDP platform on ecosystem-based management. And, as with the Great Bear, there are carbon financing mechanisms to do this now, using a combination of incentive and regulation to reduce waste.

In response to *Focus*' request for input, the minister's office wrote, "Given the scope of the subject matter, we will not be able to meet your deadline. Minister Donaldson is also on a trade mission in Asia at the moment." Selling BC's logs, no doubt.

Briony Penn is currently working with Xenaksiala elder, Cecil Paul, Wa'xaid on *Following the Good River*, due out in 2019. She is also the author of (the prize-winning) *The Real Thing: The Natural History of Ian McTaggart Cowan*.

Seniors targeted with expensive high-dose flu vaccine

ALAN CASSELS

The government doesn't pay for it yet, but the pressure from Big Pharma is on.

In the fall of 2016 a new flu vaccine became available in Canada, promising to provide much better protection for senior citizens. Known as a high-dose trivalent inactivated vaccine (HD-TIIV) and sold under the brand name Fluzone, the vaccine was promoted as a weapons-grade tool in the fight against the flu among our most vulnerable population—seniors. We were told it contained four times as much antigen compared to standard-dose quadrivalent inactivated vaccine (QIV), for the three strains the vaccines share in common.

While this is not the first time I've tried to inform *Focus* readers about campaigns to shape our thinking about diseases and drugs, or questioned whether the best available evidence supports mass influenza vaccination, the high dose of propaganda floating around this flu season seems particularly noxious. The drama hinges on a key question: Would millions of dollars more—either from BC taxpayers or the pockets of seniors themselves—make any real difference to the annual burden of influenza?

The so-called "awareness-raising" (mostly by industry) around this new flu vaccine is not only exposing all of us to the scariest of statistics around the flu, but seniors' groups, doctors and pharmacists have been even more intensely targeted. "Seniors are at high-risk for the most severe consequences of flu, including hospitalization and death," we are told in ads and public service announcements, adding that "up to 91 percent of flu-related deaths occur in those 65 years of age and older."

Repeated public health appeals to get the flu shot seem to be singling out older people and their weaker immune defenses, but for me this targeting raises a contentious question: If the flu is so bad, how many people die of it every year?

The Public Health Agency of Canada, which runs the FluWatch program, says they get, on average, 23,000 lab-confirmed cases of influenza reported to them each year. Acknowledging that the "burden of influenza can vary from year to year," they estimate that in Canada there are an average of 12,200 hospitalizations related to influenza, and approximately 3,500 flu deaths every year. These are projections, based on modelling, but that 3,500 number gets repeated *ad nauseum*. But is it true? Two months ago, a CBC story reported *actual* FluWatch data that said Canada had 302 flu deaths last year.

In whose interest is it to exaggerate these numbers?

I guess it only matters when you thoughtfully consider what game is going on. As every marketer knows, you don't sell the steak, you sell the sizzle. Big Pharma is happy to have the projections and estimates sound dramatically scary, even if they are as much as ten times inflated from reality.

In Canada, a national body called the National Advisory Committee on Immunizations, or NACI, said that Canadians over 65 should be offered this high-dose flu vaccine on the basis of "good evidence of better efficacy compared to standard-dose" flu vaccines. They suggested that older people suffer from "immunosenescence"—a waning immune system as they age—and hence older people are at greater risk of severe illness from the flu. This apparent need for stronger stuff buttresses the case that an "extra strong" vaccine is needed to protect our seniors.

NACI's Canadian Immunization Guide said that Canadian provinces "may use any of the four influenza vaccines available for use in adults aged 65 years and older: standard-dose TIIV, the HD-TIIV, adjuvanted TIIV, and QIV (quadrivalent influenza vaccine)." However, the organization also recommended "at an individual level, the HD-TIIV should be offered over standard-dose TIIV to persons 65 years and older because of the expectation of higher effectiveness."

This means it's better, right?

Others aren't so sure. The BC Centres for Disease Control looked closely at the science behind the vaccine and said additional studies were needed to confirm whether the HD-TIIV vaccine's effects are consistent "across seasons and vaccine strains." They also said they didn't know if the vaccine "warrants preferential recommendation and public funding over other available options." The new high-dose vaccine costs about $80-$90 per shot, about five times as much as a standard flu shot. Saying yes to the vaccine would cost BC taxpayers millions more than we already spend. This would be money well spent if it saved more lives and kept more people out of the hospital, but…let's dig into the numbers.

The pivotal trial of HD-TIIV enrolled more than 30,000 people comparing it to standard-dose TIIV. The results? The HD-TIIV reduced the risk of influenza by 24 percent. It sounds pretty impressive, but what does that number really mean? The study, carried out in seniors who lived in their own homes, found 1.9 percent of those getting the standard-dose vaccine developed the flu, versus 1.4 percent who got the high-dose vaccine. While it's a 24 percent drop to go from 1.9 to 1.4, it's also a 0.5 percent difference (1.9 percent subtract 1.4 percent = 0.5 percent). This means that half a percent of seniors were saved from the flu. The CDC concludes that "an additional 200 such individuals would need to be immunized with the high-dose product to prevent 1 additional case of influenza." Also, one person in 4,000 vaccinated would avoid a hospitalization. The high-dose vaccine showed *no effect* on deaths.

So if you trust the study, the HD-TIIV vaccine increases grandma's chances of avoiding the flu by 1 in 200. The converse of this is that 199 of every 200 people vaccinated with the HD-TIIV will see no benefit. The researchers' conclusion and recommendation to the Ministry of Health speaks volumes: "the strength of the evidence and anticipated incremental benefit of HD-TIIV relative to standard dose TIIV is not commensurate with the additional 5-fold cost..."

As of press time, the BC Ministry of Health seems to agree. It does not cover the HD-TIIV, likely because it costs five times as much but doesn't help 199 of the 200 people who get it. My back-of-the-envelope math says that for $16,000, the high-dose flu shot will help prevent one additional flu case in seniors; it would cost $320,000 to prevent one hospitalization (that's just for the vaccine, not for administration costs). And there is no evidence the high-dose vaccine saves lives.

For drug companies in Canada, however, the big enchilada in sales is provincial coverage. If their drug or vaccine isn't covered by the provincial government, their profits will be smaller, and they will have to rely on people paying out of their own pockets or having private insurance.

Among Canada's 13 provinces and territories, only Ontario funds the HD-TIIV for all adults aged 65 and older. Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, P.E.I. and Northwest Territories cover it for seniors in care facilities. BC does neither.

THE NEW HIGH-DOSE VACCINE costs about $80-$90 per shot, about five times as much as a standard flu shot.

But the pressure is on. Over the last year I became aware of at least four different Canadian seniors' organizations who have been lobbied by the company promoting the high-dose vaccine. The company offers conference speakers, workshops and webinars to "educate" seniors about the threat of influenza and the benefits of various vaccines. The punchline: You deserve the best, so lobby your government to pay for this vaccine! (The BC Liberal Opposition introduced legislation in October to cover costs of the high-dose drug for seniors.)

These promotions have the veneer of being public-spirited and helpful, especially when the companies propose their own speakers to educate senior's groups, offering free sessions on the dangers of influenza and so on.

Putting vulnerable seniors into the cross hairs of big Pharma's direct marketing tactics doesn't please everyone. One member of a seniors' organization based in Vancouver (who asked that his name not be used) was blunt with me: "Sanofi, the third-largest drug corporation in the world, has generously provided expensive restaurant meals and delivered their sales pitch to retired teachers' groups in BC as part of promoting their new and very costly flu vaccine." He added that "BC seniors cannot easily access independent information about the efficacy of new drugs, and neither can family doctors for that matter, so some seniors are now lobbying their provincial government to cover them. Constant TV advertisements marketing these new vaccines reinforce a message of fear and the need for urgent preventative action." Also jumping on this bandwagon are a variety of national patient and seniors groups "partnering" with the vaccine makers to sponsor flu awareness campaigns.

There is evidence that the marketing to health professionals is also in full action mode, and the way this works is usually through the digestive system. The manufacturer will sponsor a dinner at a nice local restaurant and invite community pharmacists or local GPs to attend a dinner lecture. They'll either feature their own "Key Opinion Leader" or work with a local GP or pharmacist to deliver the goods with a company-provided slide deck. Don't be shocked, this is Drug Marketing 101, and a time-worn way for the company to make sure our doctors and pharmacists buy into their version of this lifesaving vaccine.

All this is perfectly legal, of course, despite the fact the doctors and pharmacists I know become somewhat red-faced when I ask them what they think of their colleagues being wined and dined with company presentations and other pharma-funded schmoozing.

What can we do about this? I'd recommend a much higher dose of skepticism among the public and our health professionals as a partial antidote. We need to be reminded that we allow this kind of sneaky marketing and flu-mongering at our peril. But here's my big worry: Maybe the growing distrust that many Canadians feel around flu propaganda will lead to a greater public reaction, causing fewer and fewer people to trust what they are being told about the value of other vaccines.

Alan Cassels is a Victoria-based drug policy researcher and author whose motto is "We need clean, clear health information as urgently as we need clean, clear water." He works for UBC's Therapeutics Initiative but the opinions represented here are his and his alone. Follow him on twitter @akecassels.

ADVERTISEMENT

Focus presents: Triangle Healing

Customer Loyalty Program—Diane's gift to you

Triangle Healing Products has launched an exclusive customer loyalty program, owner Diane Regan's gift to everyone who has ever shopped at the store. Many customers have spent $10,000 and more in the store over the years, and Diane wants to reward that loyalty.

The store maintains records of all of their customers' purchases so no membership card is needed. Purchases are cumulative, so once you have spent $3000, you will receive a 10 percent discount; once you spend $5000, your discount rises to 15 percent; and once you spend $10,000, your discount rises again, to 20 percent. All of these discounts are permanent.

Customers will be pleased to hear that Triangle will also continue to offer its quarterly $1000 shopping sprees. Every purchase of $100 qualifies you for one entry, and then every four months a draw is made. The winner is entitled to a $1000 shopping spree in the store.

Diane has always operated Triangle Healing Products as a health education store. After four decades in the business of health, Diane can teach you how to take care of yourself so that you can participate in your own health and well-being. "If you haven't met me, come in and meet me," she invites. One look at Diane, at age 76, and you will believe that she knows how to take care of herself.

For example, aging is unavoidable, but ailments like arthritis can be avoided. Simple steps such as drinking clean distilled water and moving your body regularly can not only avoid age-related ailments but can also reduce the effects of such afflictions as fibromyalgia.

Quality is a given when you shop at Triangle. They do not sell disposable appliances, and will service what they sell. Diane researches all of the items she stocks, and says, "We deal with companies that will back us up." Online shopping is available, and free shipping is offered for items over $99.

Triangle will not be at this year's January health show, but the store has an offer for you. Once you visit this year's show, come in to Triangle and have a good look around. If you see something that was at the health show that you think should be at Triangle, let the staff know. There will be a gift for you if we follow through on that suggestion.

Diane has chosen to use the money she would have paid to have a booth at the health show to give back to her customers in her newly launched Customer Loyalty Program.

Come into Triangle today. You will learn something new about your own health.

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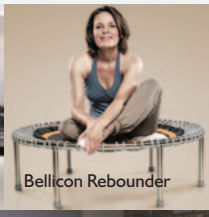
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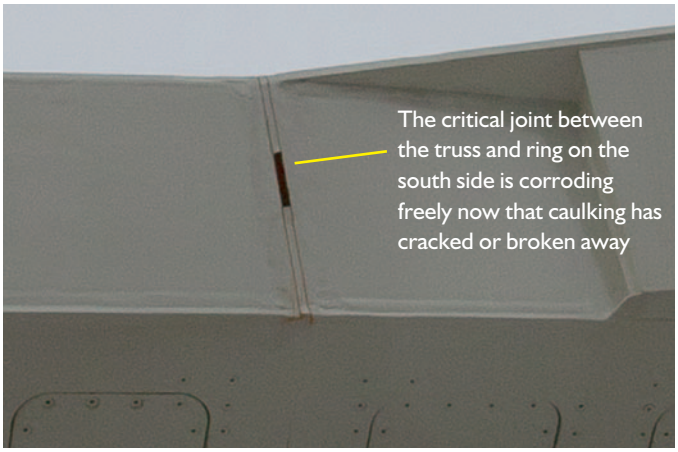
Bridge builder sues City for bad design

DAVID BROADLAND

The City has always denied the new bridge has any problems, thus limiting its ability to assert itself in legal fights over the project.

The top edge of the north truss has 7 changes in direction not in the design



Judging by the legal suits claiming damages that have been filed (but not yet served) by PCL Constructors against the City of Victoria and the engineering companies involved in designing the new Johnson Street Bridge, history is about to repeat itself.

PCL launched a similar legal maneuver against its partners on the project back in 2015, and that led to the City agreeing to "release and forever discharge" PCL, MMM Group, and Hardesty & Hanover "from all debts, claims, demands, damages, expenses and costs (including without limitation, legal costs) of any nature or kind that are in any way related to the Project and either known or which ought to be known by the [City] as of [April 23, 2016]."

PCL now claims "The design provided by the City to PCL was not prepared in accordance with the standard of professional care normally exercised by recognized professional engineers experienced in the performance of design work such as required for the design of the New Bridge, and was not accurate and complete but rather the design information contained errors, omissions and misrepresentations."

PCL's filing makes similar design-focussed claims against Hardesty & Hanover and MMM Group/WSP, the two companies that did the actual design and engineering on the bridge. PCL's contract with the City stated that the City was legally responsible to provide the design.

PCL's latest claims have forced the City back into mediation. The head of the one-person company the City contracted to provide public relations for the project, Jonathan Huggett, has characterized PCL's filings as simply placeholders to meet BC's *Limitation Act* requirement of filing civil claims within two years of a construction project's completion date. But at the same time, Huggett admits the City is in a new round of legal mediation with PCL.

My guess is that PCL is looking to obtain a similar agreement to the one it negotiated with the City in 2016. This time it will want to rid itself of any future liability for what occurred after April 2016. One of those liabilities arises from the execution of what the original construction contract between the City and PCL called "a complicated joint." This is the six-surface connection between each ring and each truss.

If you watched the bridge parts being erected, you will recall that each ring was lowered into place separately and later the two side trusses with the highway deck attached to them were added as a single piece. To join the trusses to the rings, twelve different surfaces needed to meet in almost perfect juxtaposition. The mating surfaces were then fastened with internal bolts. The long-term structural integrity of these joints is dependent on all of the parts never corroding, especially the bolts and the holes through which they pass. Yet it's obvious that oxidation at these joints is already occurring. Worse, caulking intended to keep the joints dry is already cracking away from the joints.

The bridge opened only nine months ago, but by December a section of the seal over the upper joint on the south side of the bridge had fallen out and the joint appeared to be corroding freely (see photo to left). Hardesty & Hanover's design depends heavily on the durability of epoxy grout in a number of critical areas on the structure, yet the trustworthiness of that design choice is already in question.

Kiewit Construction's exquisite competing bid design called for this to be a field-welded joint, not a bolted joint, so there are legitimate

Ricard's imagined iconic trusses had no wobbles

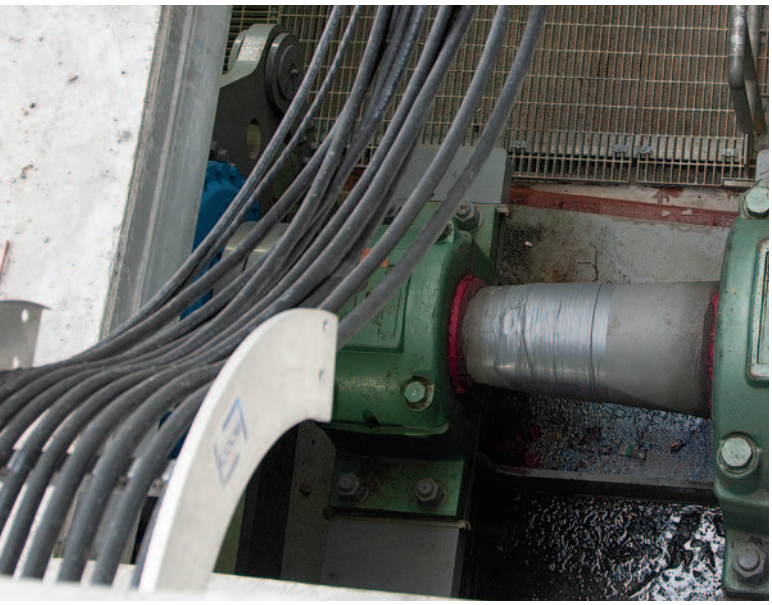
questions about Hardesty & Hanover's choice of how to execute this "complicated joint."

The City's apologists for the project will likely deny there's any problem and will argue that critical joints freely corroding is standard fare on such engineering projects—thus undermining the City's legal position vis-a-vis PCL. Recall the six-foot by six-foot bolted-on plates that were needed as a result of incomplete design information being included in shop drawings. Those weren't a problem, either, according to Huggett, just a "fabrication challenge." Huggett's public claim that the plates were standard fare for such an infrastructure project single-handedly defeated any future case the City could make in a court of law.

Such "fabrication challenges" are now evident all over the bridge. My personal Top Ten would include the top chord of the trusses. In the original conceptual design by Wilkinson Eyre's Sebastien Ricard—the dreamy image used to get a "Yes" in the 2010 referendum—the graceful sweep of the top edge of the trusses, from the top of the rings to the far western toe of the trusses, contained exactly zero abrupt changes in direction. These lines were meant to be sweeping and graceful.

In the bridge PCL built, this sweeping line has about seven changes in direction (see top photo on page 28). These range from inexplicably abrupt to "fabrication challenge" wobbles. The wobbles in the line of that top edge result in a series of bulges and dents in the sides of the trusses where there should have been a predictably straight and flat surface. Anyone with an eye for good form will perceive these deformations as serious flaws. To my eye, this aspect of the new bridge

Duct tape and leaking hydraulic oil: Sure signs of bigger problems to come



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is the best example of poor design and workmanship at play anywhere in Downtown Victoria.

This was supposed to be an "architecturally significant" structure, a "signature" bridge. What else could justify its eventual $120-million cost? Yet not a single mention of the project can be found on any of the websites of the companies involved in designing, engineering, and constructing it. None of them wants to put their corporate signature on the hodgepodge of metal confusion. But Victoria is stuck with it, the engineers claim, for the next 100 years.

There's a lot more that's already gone wrong with the structure, and I don't mean intoxicated men falling overboard. Enter the cavernous machinery room, for example, which, it was hoped, visitors would find "iconic." Check out the cracked and spalling concrete overhangs that are supposed to keep rain off the hydraulic motors. Below them, look closely and you'll see duct tape crudely applied to makeshift sheet-metal covers intended to keep rainwater away from the pinion shafts. After only nine months of service, the City has resorted to using duct tape to solve problems. Below the duct tape, note the pool of hydraulic oil that's leaking from the drive motors. $120 million bought a certain style of iconic, but it's more like Trailer Park Boys than Wilkinson Eyre. Watch for duct tape to appear over those "complicated joints."

These are just some of the reasons why PCL is now likely twisting the City's arm to "release and forever discharge" it from all responsibility it might have for everything that has already gone wrong, and everything that will go wrong in the future. City councillors will be told by their consultant that this is "normal" for a big infrastructure project and councillors will accept PCL's terms, just like they always have.

David Broadland is the publisher of *Focus*.

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Light of day

AAREN MADDEN

Ray Ward's landscape paintings celebrate the ever-changing skies and moods of the West Coast.

"September Reflections, Cowichan Valley" by Ray Ward, 20 x 20 inches, oil on board

Nanaimo-based landscape painter Ray Ward has a data storage problem. At its root is his interest in capturing the constantly shifting light, the banks of fog and mist, and myriad cloud formations that advance and retreat daily across Vancouver Island. Along with images of land and shore, "I've got a sky folder that grew into about ten subfolders for different types of clouds," he says. "I've got cumulus, I've got storm clouds, I've got backlit cumulus, I've got evening cumulus, morning sky, all different times of the day, and different varieties of clouds," he lists with a lightness in his voice that suggests it's not such a bad problem to have.

Thank goodness for digital cameras, though. It wasn't that long ago that Ward would paint in a darkened room, his easel in an umbrella of lamplight, slides projected on the wall for reference. "The quality of the slides was just so much better," he explains, until about 2009, when digital resolution was fine enough to provide the detail he required.

That's not to say Ward's landscapes are photo-realist. They are equally concerned with a mood conveyed with atmospheric perspective, the particular quality of light at a particular moment in time, resulting in an experience of landscape that is both visual and visceral. In the oil on board painting "September Reflections, Cowichan Valley," the

"Shining Through" (detail) 20 x 16 inches, oil on board

mist practically dabs at the viewer's cheek. The overcast sky comprises the majority of the picture plane, with soft clouds settling in on distant hills. The moist air and diffuse light softens the edges of the trees just so, and the slightly rippling pond is foregrounded in such a way that the viewer is placed firmly at its bank, present and involved in this specific moment. It is a typical early fall day, made special by its singling out in time.

Ward is particularly attracted to cloud formations because of their ephemeral nature: "I like the way [they] can change a landscape so fast—when a storm front moves in and it looks completely different.

Ray Ward

I like the challenge of getting the subtleties. On an overcast day, it is more challenging than on a bright sunny day: you don't have the contrast, the obvious value shifts between the lights and the darks. Everything is more in the middle. When you can get it right, it's pretty rewarding," he says.

This appreciation may stem from what sounds like an idyllic childhood spent largely outdoors. Ward was born in Comox in 1968 and grew up on his family's five-acre hobby farm in Courtenay. "We had cows and chickens, pheasants, ducks and geese, all sorts of things," he says. "It was a good way to grow up." He also enjoyed drawing as a child, and was encouraged by friends and, at age 11, winning an art contest in a local paper. After hearing that a friend's uncle had made a living thus, Ward decided to pursue a career as an illustrator. He entered the Illustration and Design program at Capilano College (now University) in North Vancouver when he was 20 years old, and upon graduation found an agent.

This was the early 1990s, when the illustration field was transitioning to digital, which held little appeal for Ward. He freelanced for about a year, continuing to pay the bills with landscaping and stonework, a job he'd had while in school.

"My end goal was always to be a fine artist one day, but I thought it would be a lot later," Ward admits. Needing to adapt his plan, he began to paint in the evenings. Days spent hefting stones and building walls were followed by nights lifting brush to canvas. He started showing work at a gallery on Granville Island in Vancouver and sold his first painting there, a seascape, in 1995.

Around this time Ward and his wife Heidi were also travelling extensively. They spent time in Australia, Malaysia and Thailand, saw

Left top: "December Shoreline" 12 x 24 inches, oil
Left bottom: "Still Waters, Cape Scott" 16 x 20 inches, oil

Komodo dragons on the island of the same name, and travelled in Europe. Another trip took them to Central America, and they made multiple trips to France and Italy. Ward was taken with the light, colour and architecture of Venetian street scenes, and those were what he projected onto his darkened walls in his earlier studio work. The scenes sold well in the galleries who began representing him, and he painted several iterations of them.

However, when he and his wife moved to Nanaimo and he began painting full-time in 2004, Ward found his interests shifting toward his immediate environs. Walking his dog around the many trails near their home and visiting the west coast of the island provided Ward with endless inspiration for his painting—and a sense of urgency to capture landscapes that seem to be constantly usurped by development.

Recently Ward's family, now including a young son, travelled to Alberta and Haida Gwaii, where he gathered more images from which to paint. Ironically, the sun was high and bright for most of his visit to Haida Gwaii, while the mountains were shrouded in low cloud in Alberta—"You could only see the bottom quarter at Lake Louise," he laughs, but he still found plenty to further stretch his computer's capacity.

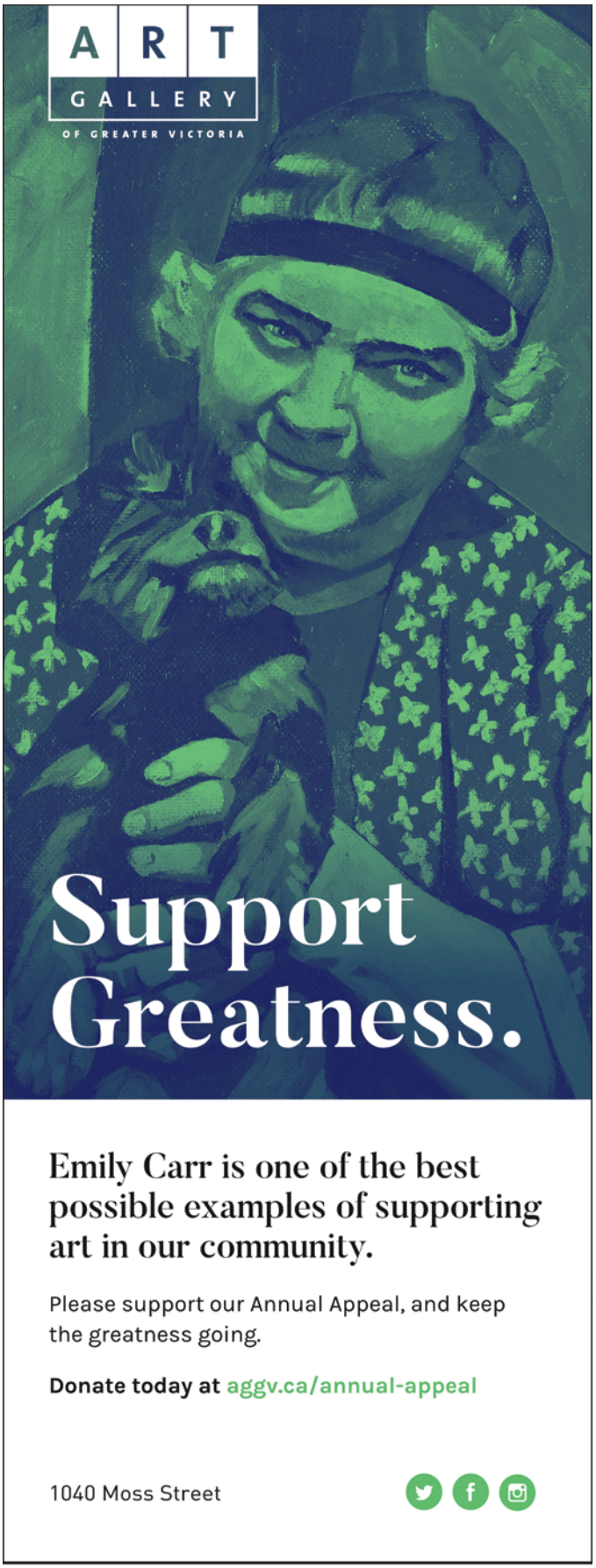
He will approach these compositions as he typically works. "I still do thumbnail sketches most of the time and work out the composition that way, trying different things, eliminating distracting elements." he says. Once satisfied, he will do a simple drawing on board or canvas. He prefers the former for its smooth surface, which best supports fine detail, and its flexibility in size and shape.

Next he applies oil paint in thin layers. Each begins with a preliminary wash in an earth tone. "I have never liked working off a white surface; I like to see a little bit of the background throughout when I am painting," he explains. "I can adjust the values, the temperature off of that." After blocking in the scene, he continues, "I just start going over layer by layer, usually three to four layers, just finishing it from the background to the foreground." Because each layer of paint takes at least a day to dry, Ward works on several canvases at once—usually around four or five, but recently up to 15, in the crowded outbuilding near his house.

Despite his productivity, he has another problem: supply and demand. "I was trying to get ready for another gallery and I would get a bunch [of paintings] finished, then one of my other galleries would want more work, so I would have to dig into those," he laughs. But really, it shows that a wider public shares his fascination with our capricious skies. This, like finding digital capacity for images of infinitely changing cloudscapes, is a good problem to have.

Ray Ward's paintings can be seen at Peninsula Gallery, 100-2506 Beacon Ave, Sidney, 250-655-1722, www.pengal.com. Find him online at www.rayward.ca.

While she tries to keep up with her growing family, Aaren Madden continues to learn and be inspired both personally and professionally, aware that she has many good problems to have.



PORTRAIT OF EMILY CARR | EDYTHE HEMBROFF-SCHLEICHER, 1906-1994 | 1917 | OIL ON CANVAS
COLLECTION OF THE AGGV | 2017.020.00

The art and life of Elizabeth Yeend Duer

KATE CINO

This Anglo-Japanese artist illustrates the fascinating blend of cultural themes at play in the 1940s in Victoria.

"Arbutus Menziesii Madrona" by Elizabeth Yeend Duer (March 1941) watercolour, silk on board

Elizabeth Yeend Duer is following her cousin Katharine Maltwood through the woods. It's a breezy March morning in 1941. The trail meanders across Katharine's hilltop property overlooking Cordova Bay. They pass by dappled groves of wildflowers and blossoming trees. Elizabeth is listening intently to her cousin, trying to pick up each word about "their project." Every few steps, Katharine whirls around and gestures in the air with her walking stick. "With your painting skills we can document every flower and tree in the

PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, IMAGE COURTESY OF THE DUER FAMILY COLLECTION

Elizabeth Yeend Duer in kimono, circa 1920s

whole area," she says. "I'm sure local shops would be happy to sell your cards, and I'll contact Hallmark about your designs."

These two mature women on a painting excursion are a study in contrasts. Katharine, 63, overflows with ideas and energy; Elizabeth, 52, moves along like a quiet stream.

Katharine reminds her cousin about an upcoming exhibition. "My two sculptures are ready for the Island Arts and Crafts show," she says. "and you could enter some originals." Katharine resumes their hunt for one of her favourite trees, an ancient madrona that towers over a steep ocean cliff. When found, Katharine runs her hands over the smooth green trunk speckled with curling red bark. "Did you know the madrona tree is sacred to the local Indians?" asks Katharine. "These trees saved them during the great flood."

Katharine snaps open her camp stool and positions herself so she can see the sparkling ocean and Mount Baker beyond. In her sketch book, she begins a series of sharp, flowing gestures with her pencil. Elizabeth settles down to observe the lower branch of the arbutus showing a spray of white flowers. She closes her eyes and takes a breath. In her mind, Elizabeth sees her beloved teacher, Atomi Gyokusho, kneeling in front of a fuchsia-coloured spray of cherry blossoms. Elizabeth recalls the exact angle of Atomi's brush, the

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"Kamass Camassia quamash; Camas" by Elizabeth Yeend Duer (April 1941), watercolour, silk on board

single delicate strokes building up the fragile blooms, bringing them to life in traditional Nihonga style.

This memory calms her and sweeps away her constant worries.

The rumblings of a world at war recede. Born in Japan to a Japanese mother and British father, Elizabeth has always known racism, the feeling of being an outsider. Now she is an outsider in Canada, far from home and family. She managed to exit Japan in 1940, using her British passport, and find refuge with her cousin in Victoria. But her siblings remain in Japan, and she fears for their safety due to their British connections. (Indeed they will soon be imprisoned in Japan.) While in Canada, she is suspect for having Japanese heritage.

When the contradictions of her life overwhelm, Elizabeth finds strength and solace in her art practice. She examines the arbutus closely, and summons up her skills. First she paints the stem, carefully placed on the 8-inch by 10-inch silk board to create a balanced vertical composition. Next she adds the green leaves, taking care to note the mottled texture, small holes and imperfections. Nature as it is. The small white blossoms, shaped like minuscule jugs, take shape at the end of the curving stem.

On outings like these, circa 1941, Duer created over 100 accurate watercolours of the local plants and trees, each documented as to the exact date it was in bloom and the plant name and species. Believed commissioned by Katharine Maltwood, 50 of these paintings are now in the Maltwood Collection. The series is presented in an important show at the Legacy Gallery called *Translations: The Art and Life of Elizabeth Yeend Duer—Gyokusho, January 12 to April 6, 2019. Translations* showcases the movement of ideas, aesthetics, politics, and people between England, Japan, and Victoria by looking at the life and work of Duer. Co-curator Carolyn Butler Palmer initiated the project as Legacy Chair, the academic responsible for bringing forward Michael Williams' vision for contemporary arts of the Pacific Northwest. "This is an unexpected story," says Butler. "We were surprised to find a person with Japanese heritage painting local wild flowers and exhibiting her work at this time in history."

Butler is referring to the forced relocation of Japanese Canadians following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941. The attack was followed by the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong on December 18, resulting in the death or capture of 2,000 Canadian soldiers. In January of 1942, the federal government designated all coastal land in BC within 100 miles of the coast as "protected," and forced adult males to leave the area. Property and possessions were seized. In March 1942, a second edict forced all people of Japanese origin to leave the protected area. Duer managed to escape internment due to her British citizenship, but at least 21,000 people were confined in cramped, unsafe housing and stripped of their human rights. Various discriminatory policies continued after the war. In 1988, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney finally offered an apology and symbolic reimbursements.

How do these gentle, meticulously-detailed watercolour paintings coincide in time and place with such chaos and hatred? A symposium on January 19, 2019 will address the issues. The event will welcome members of the Japanese community who experienced internment, as well as academics in the field. Guests will include curator Haema Sivanesen from the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and renowned ethnobotanist Dr Nancy Turner. Turner's research into culturally important plants of the WSÁNEĆ (Saanich) people was published in 2012.

Looking closely at Duer's arbutus painting, Turner tells me, "Her attention to botanical detail is remarkable. The creamy white flowers are perfectly shaped, and a new greenish twig emerges from a broken red stem." Turner confirms the arbutus tree (*Arbutus menziesii*) is sacred to the WSÁNEĆ. Arbutus is never used as firewood.

"Camas" is the signature painting of the *Translations* exhibition. There are two species of edible blue camas in our region. Duer's details clearly define this plant as the common variety (it's titled "Kamas Camassia quamash"). Camas was an important source of food and

commerce for the WSÁNEĆ people. In the painting, the flowers are slightly asymmetrical and one petal is separate and points down. "Few people would have noticed this defining feature," says Turner. Also, she notes, the structure of the flowering stems and the purple blue hues are carefully copied.

Duer entered "Skunk Cabbage" in the 1941 Island Arts and Craft Society show. This cheerful painting must have been a crowd pleaser. As our wetlands are drained, skunk cabbage has become less common. Turner notices the vivid yellow colour of the flowers, and smooth waxy texture of the opening leaves in Duer's artwork. "Even the reddish bracts below the leaves are included," says the ethnobotanist. Called "swamp lantern" by some, the plant is used by Saanich peoples as a natural waxed paper. Cooked berries can be spread to dry on the leaves.

While the public can see Duer's paintings during regular hours, Legacy Gallery also invites the public to experience *Translations* via a March event hosted by Cindy Mochizuki. (March 8, 4-8pm and March 9, 11am-3pm). The Vancouver-based artist reimagines historical events using a combination of fact and fiction, multi-media installation, and community engagement. Several members of her own family experienced internment. Mochizuki honours the traditional medium of Nihonga with an embroidery style called Bunka Shishu. Gallery visitors are invited to try the punch needle technique while listening to tape recordings of Japanese women. As well as bird and flower motifs, expect some visual entanglements to emerge that inform the group's artwork.

Our shared history holds many entanglements. *Translations* encourages us to view past events through various viewpoints and cultural lenses. This builds understanding and compassion, key ingredients for envisioning a kinder, more inclusive society.

Translations *runs from January 12 to April 6, 2019 at the Legacy Gallery, 630 Yates St, Victoria. It is open 10am-4pm Wednesdays through Saturdays. Opening with Curator Talk, February 2, 2pm. 250-721-6562, uvac.uvic.ca*

Kate Cino writes about the arts for Victoria publications and her own website, artopenings.ca. She has an Art History degree and Public Relations certificate from the University of Victoria.

MARSCHALL

Concussion • January 24-26

Life after a traumatic brain injury is never the same. Without realizing it, we are silently surrounded by many who are adapting to a different, post-concussion existence. Victoria dancer, mother, and three-time concussion survivor Stacey Horton is the creator of *Concussion*, a multimedia dance performance that aims to build community around an experience so many share, yet so few talk about. "It's an invisible condition. We forget it exists. So many people tell me that they, or someone they are close to, have suffered with this."

Stacey Horton

Horton's piece is a non-linear telling of her life inside three separate concussions. A melange of dance, spoken word, music and soundscapes created by film industry sound designer David Parfitt, *Concussion* illuminates Horton's myriad daily challenges, and evokes the confusing distortions of perception and unpredictable inner terrors she's confronted in her post-brain-trauma life. "I've created sequences of visceral sensation of being inside the concussion," she explains, "recreating my physical sense of the brain—when it's damaged, when it's healthy—and showing these differences."

Horton workshopped the piece and won the Crystal Dance Prize awarded by Dance Victoria. She applied for and received an equity grant from the CRD, which then led her to partner on the production with the Cridge Centre. "They have a brain injury department," Horton enthuses. "I wouldn't have connected with them unless I'd applied for the grant; it's been amazing to learn about the services they offer for the families and supporters of those who have been affected by traumatic brain injury."

ASL will be provided for the performances, along with a brand-new form of live, spoken audio that describes dance for the blind. "As much as possible, we are making it accessible," she says. Her intention is to make the performance "immersive" for audiences, so she has chosen the Intrepid Theatre Club downtown. "We're setting up 35 chairs in the round," she explains. "It's a tiny space, and we'll fill it with sound, lights, and projections" as well as "ping pong balls that end up bouncing around in the space, to give that impact of… being in a world that is slightly more traumatic or bombarded than an everyday peaceful living experience."

Jan 24-26 at 7pm; Jan 26 at 2pm (discussion to follow) at Intrepid Theatre Club, 1609 Blanshard St. $15 suggested donation, door only, reserve seat by emailing concussiondance@gmail.com—MK

"LIKE THE WIND" GERDA MARSCHALL, 40 X 30 INCHES, OIL ON CANVAS

Throughout January & February

WELCOMING GERDA MARSCHALL

West End Gallery

Gerda Marschall's exuberant still life paintings are anything but still. Her boundless energy and joyful view on life are evident in her paintings where bursts of colour and broad strokes take on a life of their own. Her process starts with colour. She lays out her pigments on a pallet and begins to mix them. The colours dictate whether the painting will create tension, harmony, or purposefully clash. As Marschall works, she flips the canvas in different directions to work on colour and balance and visualize new approaches. 1203 Broad St, 250-388-0009, www.westendgalleryltd.com.

GAGE GALLERY
ARTS COLLECTIVE

Orca Dreams

Ilka Bauer

Jan 8 - 26

Tracing boundaries between the Real, the Unfamiliar, and the Surreal

Opening Reception
Tuesday, January 8
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Vision/Opportunity

Anita Boyd

Jan 29 - Feb 16

Abstract paintings

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Encore

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with the artists
of the Gage

Feb 19 - Mar 9

Opening Reception:
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1 – 4 pm

Gallery Open Tuesday to Saturday, 11 am to 5 pm

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"THE DAYS" HYUN JOU-LEE, 60 X 24 INCHES, MIXED MEDIA

January & February

HYUN JOU-LEE, PAINTER

The Avenue Gallery

Hyun Jou-Lee studied at the Saidye Bronfman Centre in Montreal. She started exhibiting locally, and has since been showing work in galleries in Canada, the US, and the UK. This artist has a symbiotic relationship with her artwork. She begins by applying a thick gesso, to create relief and give dimension to the piece. Jou-Lee experiments with many mediums, using principally oil and encaustic. Her colour palette is extremely broad; ranging from the very organic to the brightest colours. 2184 Oak Bay Ave, 250-598-2184, www.theavenuegallery.com.

"TIDAL DRIFT" GRETA GUZEK, 30 X 50 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

January & February

FEATURING GRETA GUZEK

West End Gallery

Greta Guzek embraces and captures the spirit of the West Coast. Her intricate designs and vivid colours have become a distinctively joyful feature of her artwork, which has gained wide appeal throughout Canada. After completing a Fine Arts degree in South Africa, Greta moved to the Sunshine Coast of BC where she now works out of her studio in Gibsons. "I paint in a way to express my involvement with the subject…I hope to develop a visual language that conveys my sense of wonder." 1203 Broad St, 250-388-0009, www.westendgalleryltd.com.

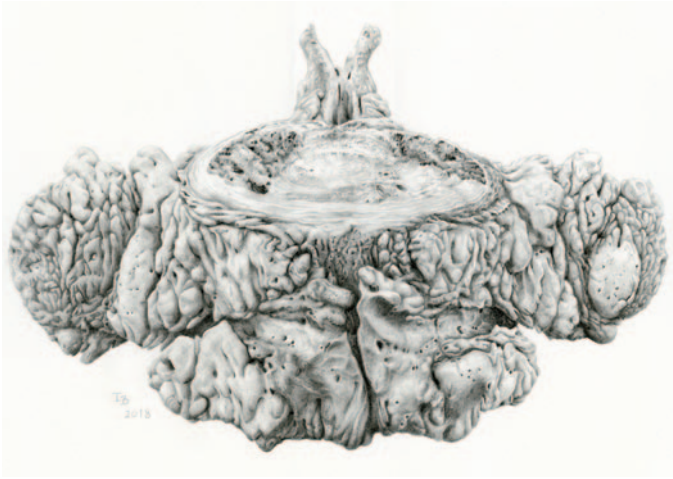
"SAILING AWAY" ILKA BAUER, GRAPHITE, INK

January 8–26

ILKA BAUER: ORCA DREAMS

Gage Gallery

Orca Dreams invites the viewer to explore the subjectivity of the boundary between the Real, the Unfamiliar, and the Surreal. Drawn in graphite, coloured pencil, and ink, the works range from fully realistic to clearly surreal, with a space in between where we each may question our own first impression. Is this thing real? Is it made up? Why do I think so? The eponymous orca does not appear in every drawing, but its presence weaves throughout the show. Reception with artist Tuesday, Jan 8, 5-7pm, 2031 Oak Bay Ave, 250-592-2760, www.gagegallery.ca.



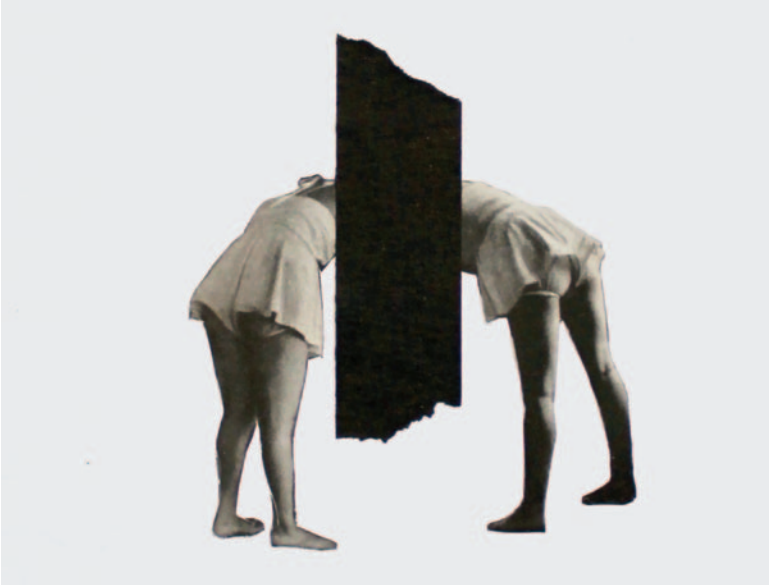
"UNTITLED" CHANTAL NEW, DRAWING

January 4–20

CHANTAL NEW: BE HONEST. BUT DON'T

Xchanges Gallery

This series of installations and drawings document the internal narrative of the female experience and the anxious thoughts that often define puberty and womanhood. Chantal New (BA in Art+Design, Trinity Western) is an emerging artist working in mixed media drawing and painting. Her minimalist drawings explore the importance of place and memory and the intersections between environmental and cultural geographies. Opening January 4, 7-9pm; otherwise Sats & Suns 11am-4pm. 6E-2333 Government St, 250-382-0442, www. xchangesgallery.org.



Pond on the Yakoun, 30x34, Oil on Canvas, c.1990

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Christine Reimer, 36 x 36 inches, acrylic on canvas

Found Beauty

Christine Reimer Paintings

February 12 - March 3

Main Gallery, Arts Centre at Cedar Hill

3220 Cedar Hill Road 250.475.7121

view paintings at christinereimer.ca

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SHAWN

15th Anniversary Pacific Baroque Festival • Feb 7-10

The catalytic moment that started a fine flourishing of Baroque music here in Victoria began in Brussels over 15 years ago. Brussels? Yes, that's where Pacific Baroque Festival founder Brian Groos used to live, and first got a gleam in his eye about the sort of exciting, early-music happenings he could create back here on Vancouver Island. "I favoured going to period performance concerts throughout Belgium and Europe, and thought it would be a nice festival to bring to Victoria." At a concert one night in Brussels, "I recognized the concertmaster, and it turned out to be [Marc] Destrubé from Victoria, performing with the Orchestra of the 18th Century. I told him my idea, and he seemed interested." Once back in Victoria, Groos was at a crossroads. "I said to myself, 'You going to do something about this idea, or spend the rest of your life wondering if you should have?'"

Marc Destrubé

Groos did it. Destrubé came on board and became the artistic director of the Pacific Baroque Festival, now producing its 15th anniversary offering. Each concert references significant moments from past years' festivals, says Groos. "We've taken elements from the character that we've created, and tried to represent them in the program." This year's five-concert lineup includes Vivaldi's *Gloria*, with Victoria Children's Choir and the Pacific Baroque Festival Ensemble; Ensemble La Modestine performing rarely-heard gems from the Düben Collection; and the PBF Ensemble and St Christopher Singers performing works by Henry Purcell.

Fifteen years ago, Groos says, "there weren't many institutions in Victoria performing this music [on period instruments]. Now there are other groups who are interested in continuing this work, over and above the festival," One such inspiration is the new partnership between the Pacific Baroque Festival, Christ Church Cathedral, and Early Music Vancouver, who are co-producing the inaugural year of a brand-new annual Pacific Baroque Series they launched this fall in Victoria. "I am thrilled the Pacific Baroque Festival is deepening its collaborations," Groos says. "Victoria is now recognized as a vibrant centre for Baroque music."

The Pacific Baroque Festival's five concerts are held at the Victoria Conservatory of Music's Alix Goolden Hall and Christ Church Cathedral. Festival tickets: pacbaroque.com/festival, 250-590-0523.—MK

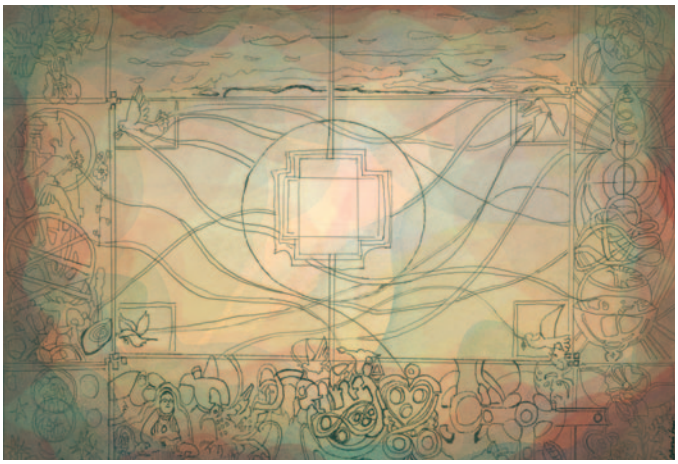
"MOONLIGHT" SHINAH LEE , 36 X 24 INCHES, OIL ON CANVAS

Throughout January & February

SHINAH LEE

The Avenue Gallery

Shinah Lee moved from South Korea to Montreal at age 13. Confronted with a different culture, different faces and different landscapes, the quiet teenager embarked on a fantastic journey of artistic exploration. She begins her work on the floor, using the happy accidents of pigments as a backdrop. Then she rotates her canvas on the wall until she is satisfied with its composition and vitality, then adds colours in fast, instinctive gestures. Not just a flower but a spontaneous emotion by which the artist shares her feelings about life. 2184 Oak Bay Ave, 250-598-2184, www.theavenuegallery.com.



"SLENDER THREADS OF CONNECTIONS" CATHERINE FRASER, 11 X 14 INCHES, INK AND WATERCOLOUR

January 18–February 22

CATHERINE FRASER: SPIRIT OF PLACE, ISLE OF IONA

The Chapel Gallery, St Matthias Church

An accomplished multi-media artist, art therapist and public speaker, Fraser works in oils, acrylic, watercolour, graphite, pastels, and mixed media. She is constantly exploring and experimenting with new artistic responses to the world around her. This exhibit focuses on her trips to Isle of Iona, off the west coast of Scotland, with both representational and abstract works. Opening and artist talk, Jan 17, 5-7pm. 600 Richmond Ave. Hours: Sats, Tues, Thurs: 10am-2pm. The artist will be in attendance on Sats. www.catherinefraserart.weebly.com, www.stmatthiasvictoria.ca/chapelgallery.

"AFTER THE STORM" BRIAN LASAGA, 14.5 X 28 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON BOARD

January & February

BRIAN LASAGA

Peninsula Gallery

Born and bred in Newfoundland, Brian Lasaga's studio is located in his hometown of St George's, Newfoundland. That province's many rugged coastlines, rivers, forests, wildlife, ponds and marshes have been the inspiration for Lasaga's work for over 30 years. He has always remained faithful to his subjects, and his imagery, painting primarily with acrylics on masonite panel, because they dry faster, and this allows him to layer quickly. 100-2506 Beacon Ave, Sidney, 250-655-1282, www.pengal.com.

"CASCADE" CHRISTINE REIMER, 36 X 36 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

February 12–March 3

CHRISTINE REIMER: FOUND BEAUTY

Main Gallery, Arts Centre at Cedar Hill

Five years ago artist/painter Christine Reimer BFA made a dramatic shift from painting landscape to exploring Abstract Expressionism. This challenging genre has facilitated new painting techniques, thus sparking a fresh approach to her subject matter and influencing the reflective quality, texture and light in her canvases. In "Found Beauty" Reimer views the natural world with a new perspective and deepened understanding of its importance in our lives. 3220 Cedar Hill Road, www.christinereimer.ca.

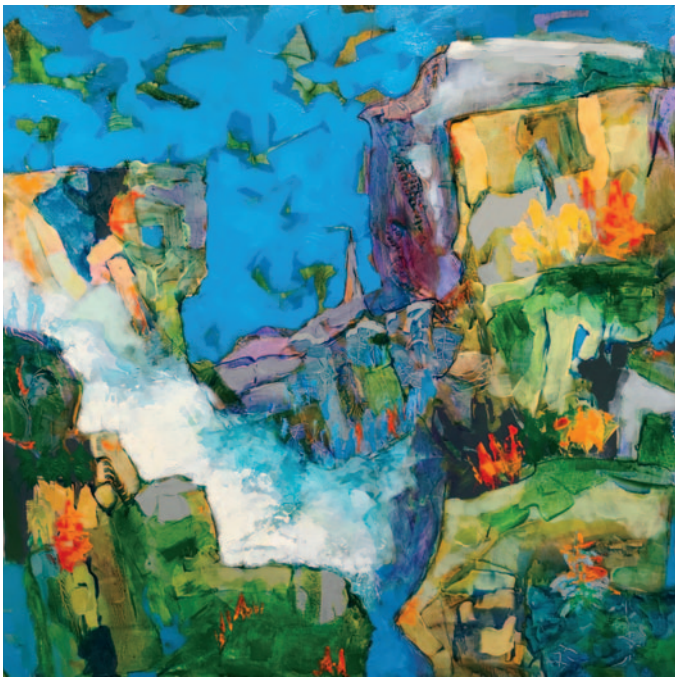
"THE GOOD TROUT PLACE, SAKINAW LAKE" ROBERT GENN, 24 X 30, OIL ON CANVAS, 1974

January 19–February 2

ROBERT GENN: A LIFETIME OF PAINTING

Madrona Gallery

Madrona hosts this major retrospective exhibition of Robert Genn's paintings from the late 1960s to the 2000s. One of Canada's most accomplished painters, Robert Genn was an internationally recognized painter and author with a career spanning 5 decades. His landscapes have become iconic images in late 20th-century Canadian art. Born in 1936 in Victoria (he died in 2014), his paintings are known for strong design with patterns of colour and form, revealing a pervasive sense of personal style. 606 View St, 250-380-4660, www.madronagallery.com.



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Robert Genn

Pacific Opera Victoria's *La Traviata* • Feb 14-24

If you don't think you could ever sit through—never mind enjoy—an opera, you might want to test your theory and go see Pacific Opera Victoria's February staging of Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata*. POV conductor Timothy Vernon says it's a good "gateway opera" because "it moves quickly, like an arrow. It doesn't flag. There's not any part where you think, 'Ugh, let's get through this bit.' It's inspired, it's moving." It's also relatable, he says, and exciting: "The [libretto] framework is society life in late 19th century Paris, so it's fun. Champagne and bubbles…who doesn't like a party with champagne?"

In this staging, among the the tuxedos, flapper ballgowns, and glass flutes emerges a tragic tale of love in the face of social cruelty in the roaring 20s. *La Traviata* (Italian for "the fallen woman") is adapted from a novel by Dumas, and has "a wonderful sense of psychology of the characters; Violetta (main protagonist, sung by soprano Lucia Cesaroni) is…a victim of incredible, hypocritical ostracism. She is willing to sacrifice the love of her life for propriety, to protect the family."

Even though it is the most performed opera in the world, it can be challenging to find soloists for the four main roles who have a particularly specific and versatile "fach," an opera term for the combination of a singer's vocal range, character and timbre. The success of any production of *La Traviata* hinges on the casting, says Vernon. "All you need are the four greatest singers in the world," he laughs.

Besides directing, Vernon was charged with the task to cast this sumptuous co-production with Manitoba Opera, Edmonton Opera, Pacific Opera Victoria, Vancouver Opera, and Opéra de Montréal. He says his real "casting coup" is the tenor he landed to sing the role of Violetta's young lover Alfredo—Canadian Colin Ainsworth. "He sings quite a lot of Baroque opera," Vernon says, and has the perfect "fach" for this plum role, even though he's never sung it before. Vernon, a *Traviata* veteran who has conducted over 300 performances of this beloved piece, says, "You get a different kind of buy-in when singers are new to the role. You can figure it out together. Freshen it up."

Surtitles, a Canadian invention, are projected above the action on stage for those of us who may not be fluent in Italian, but still want to be in on every nuance of the story. Accessibility is a theme, and Vernon invites all comers. "Nobody should feel they're going to have an estranging experience, or that you have to go and rent a tuxedo. This is an opera that anyone with any feelings at all can get right into."

La Traviata *runs February 14-24 at the Royal Theatre, 805 Broughton St. Pre-performance talk one hour before curtain. For tickets, www.rmts.bc.ca or 250-386-6121.* —*Mollie Kaye*

"LATE AFTERNOON, CAYOOSH" ROBERT GENN, 14 X 10 INCHES, OIL ON BOARD, 1972

January 19-February 2

ROBERT GENN: A LIFETIME OF PAINTING

Madrona Gallery

One of Canada's most accomplished painters, Robert Genn gained international recognition for his landscape subjects of Canada's West Coast. Extremely prolific and dedicated to his art, he painted in most parts of Canada, the US, Central America, Europe, and Asia, making comprehensive land and sea explorations on Northern Canada's Mackenzie River, Haida Gwaii, and elsewhere. Born in Victoria in 1936, he attended Victoria College, UBC and the Art Centre School in Los Angeles. He died in 2014 at age 77. 606 View St, 250-380-4660, www.madronagallery.com.

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Speakeasy: hot jazz on Broad Street

MOLLIE KAYE

Your once-sleepy Tuesday nights may never be the same.

PHOTO: MOLLIE KAYE

The Capital City Syncopators play Prohibition-era hits at Speakeasy

After you come through the old creaky door on Broad Street, climb the wide, steep staircase, and exchange your $10 for a green paper drink ticket, you gain entrance to a vibrant, candlelit "Speakeasy." A small stage with red velvet curtains frames some "hot jazz" musicians: banjo, trumpet, and sousaphone—plus a percussionist playing a washboard affixed with a plethora of Spike Jones-esque noisemakers, including a small pot lid and a rubber chicken. The musicians all wear garb that hails from the days when men changed their collars, not their shirts. The wry banjo player who leads the Capital City Syncopators introduces each Jelly Roll Morton-era number with a patter so dry it crackles. The bouncy, tight arrangements fill the room with giddy energy, and generations of smiling dancers hit the marmoleum floor. Their arms intertwine while their feet kick and fly: balboa, shag, lindy hop, jive. Candles flicker on clustered tables, and underlit faces of listeners and watchers nestle together, conversing and sipping hand-crafted cocktails.

Every Tuesday night at the Victoria Event Centre (VEC), this joyful, warm, wholesome scene plays out—like the antique silent films the organizers project on the walls. Speakeasy is the only place in town where ten bucks buys you a fabulous traditional jazz band, a fascinating drink poured by bartenders in bow-ties (they even use blowtorches to create some of the menu items), fun inspiration from gleeful dancers, and a fast trip through time to Chicago or New Orleans, circa 1923—but without any of the cigarette smoke, thank heaven.

I'm curious how it all got started, and how come more people don't know about it.

Eric Nordal, program coordinator for the VEC, says local swing dancers and musicians alerted him last year that a venue gap had opened up after Swan's Brewpub stopped hosting live music. A passionate organizer who appreciates live performance and theatre, Nordal saw an easy fit for the VEC. "Speakeasy is the first thing we started as a weekly event. It came to be out of the need of the swing jazz musicians looking for a home, bartenders looking for work, dancers who wanted to be dancing…it magically synergized, to have a cocktail event where you can enjoy a drink, and enjoy the music." I ask him why Tuesday nights. "Throughout the week, there are various dancing events scheduled, and we didn't want to step on any toes—no pun intended."

Leading the collaborative effort to create Speakeasy on the musicians' side was Victoria traditional jazz, klezmer and gypsy-swing multi-instrumentalist Avram McCagherty (he has performed with the Capital City Syncopators, Stomp Club, Yiddish Columbia State Orchestra, and Avram McCagherty Trio, among others). I sit down with McCagherty at the bustling Spiral Cafe in Vic West on a chilly December morning—he's managed to squeeze me in betwixt the preschool drop-off and his weekly gig facilitating musical stage performances for the special-needs community. His family, faith observance, teaching, and professional therapeutic work all come before performing, he tells me. Somehow, though, I've seen him breathe a whole lot of life into our local music scene over the years. I ask him how he ended up anchoring the live music aspect of VEC's Speakeasy offerings.

"The people at the Event Centre are some of the best people I've ever worked with," McCagherty enthuses. "Their main focus is justice, and doing what's right. They're great people; they saw…that [Speakeasy] could be a soft landing for some of those musicians." The VEC reached out to McCagherty to take on the role of music director for that night. It was an easy "yes" for him. "Traditional jazz is my thing," he says: "pre-bebop, pre-concert-hall jazz. Dancing jazz, drinking jazz." He says the VEC got inspired to make some welcome functional and aesthetic improvements to the space, which for many years has been home to both performance art and social activism. "They made the stage bigger, and put up the beautiful curtains," he says. I mention I've noticed that the grand bar in the space is also being renovated. "[Speakeasy] has been a catalyst for a lot of things around there," he confirms.

The VEC can now provide what McCagherty considers a perfect container

for an art form that was meant to be offered in a space that allows for free movement and socializing. "With classical [music], you have to sit in a chair," he says. "With jazz, you can dance. I think the way it's supposed to be enjoyed is with dancing, and celebrating with your friends. I don't think the best place for jazz is in the concert hall. [At Speakeasy] you can sit around the table and have a few drinks, and tell a joke to your friend on the side."

A question many will ask is whether non-dancers can still have fun and feel welcome at Speakeasy. The answer is an enthusiastic *yes*. While most who attend are the town's in-the-know dancers, both McCagherty and Nordal say they welcome all comers. Diversity, McCagherty says, is an important part of creating the traditional jazz vibe in the room.

At the Speakeasy the band is performing—"We play exactly what *we* want." Unless the dance community hires a band for one of their own events, they don't get to call the tune. "We want to play our arrangements—they're danceable, but they're also for the drinkers, too." So while Speakeasy is not intended to be an event solely for the lindy-hopping crowd, "at the same time, they love it and come out for it. I owe them a debt of gratitude…they're very supportive."

I've experienced VEC's Speakeasy from three angles now. I've been a guest performer filling the Capital City Syncopators' set break (McCagherty's band plays every other week, and he books the acts for alternate Tuesdays; he is wonderfully generous this way, offering myriad opportunities for musicians to contribute on stage). I've been a social dancer on the floor. And I've sat at a table with friends to have a couple of drinks, joyfully taking it all in. My conclusion is that if you can manage the stairs (there's no other way to get up there), prefer live music to live streaming, and crave those face-to-face, convivial social experiences of days gone by, Speakeasy is most definitely for you.

"Speakeasy," featuring bi-weekly performances by the Capital City Syncopators, every Tuesday night 8pm–1am, $10, Victoria Event Centre, 1415 Broad Street.

Mollie Kaye celebrates Victoria's creative people and passion projects. Contact her at molliek@shaw.ca if there is a performance you'd like to see featured (three months' advance notice required).

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January 19, continuing to October 27

UNFORMABLE THINGS: EMILY CARR AND SOME CANADIAN MODERNISTS

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

This exhibit features the work of Emily Carr alongside some of her notable Canadian peers, including Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Pegi Nicol MacLeod, David Milne, and Florence Helena Mcgillivray. The exhibit explores the emergence of an increasingly experimental approach to art-making in Canada, one which Carr once described as the search for "essence" or "the unformable things one wants to paint." Public Open House on Jan 19, with admission by donation. 1040 Moss Street, www.aggv.ca.

"RECONCILED POWER POLE" HJALMER WENSTOB, ART INSTALLATION (2017)

January 11–February 16

TLEHPIK HJALMER WENSTOB

Victoria Arts Council's Store Street Gallery

Interdisciplinary artist Hjalmer Wenstob is from the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations (Tofino), and of Norwegian and English ancestry. The artist states, "In my work I have been creating art that makes a balance between the dynamic relationship of traditional West Coast First Nation art, and that of contemporary art, and I am discovering a place where my art can transform, and reform." In 2017, as a community art project, he helped resurrect an Esquimalt First Nation village site in front of Victoria's Parliament Building. 1800 Store St, www.vicartscouncil.ca.

Vancouver Island Vanguard • Feb 2-Mar 2

Alcheringa enters the new year with new ownership and an exhibit recognizing some Vancouver Island-based artists whose innovative work has made a resounding impact on the contemporary art canon of the Northwest Coast, yet who are not as well known as many other artists.

Mark Loria, a local arts and culture advocate, and his wife Mary Loria, a ceramic artist and educator, have taken over the gallery from its founder and director of 30 years, Elaine Monds, who established Alcheringa as one of the top Indigenous art galleries in the world. The Lorias are committed to supporting Northwest Coast-based artists, and Monds will help in an advisory role.

For the Vancouver Island Vanguard exhibit, artists such as TEMOSEN Charles Elliott, Delmar Johnnie Seletze' and Mark Henderson will be a major focus alongside Beau Dick, Art Thompson, Susan (Sparrow) Point, Roy Henry Vickers, Art Vickers, Harris Smith and Pat Amos.

Of TEMOSEN, Professor Dr Robina Thomas writes: "Having been awarded the Order of British Columbia, and having international success, Coast Salish artist Charles Elliott's (TEMOSEN) art work is like examining the old masters. However, a quick search for Charles Elliott displays minimal results at best. The tension in his elongated forms, his storytelling within the work, and the influence he continues to hold over young Salish artists is undeniable. He created the Queen's baton used in the 1994 Commonwealth Games and a talking stick presented to Nelson Mandela." TEMOSEN will give an artist talk at the closing event, March 2, 4-6pm.

Professor Thomas also mentions Mark Henderson (1953–2016), who "created sophisticated multi-colour silkscreen prints that have a whimsical, painterly quality to them. There is always movement, and flow, landscape and motion, form line and nature. It is pictoral in a way; he took the current style and made it approachable, recognizable, and ultimately fun."

In all, over 30 works from the influencers of the burgeoning renaissance of Coast Salish contemporary art will be on display.

Opening on February 2, 4-6pm with smudging ceremony. 621 Fort Street, 250-383-8224, www.alcheringa-gallery.com.

"In the Spirit" (detail) Charles Elliot (TEMOSEN)

Ocean Networks Canada

Artist residency • Data+art+action

When Ocean Networks Canada (ONC) scientists realized the ongoing disconnect happening between the general public and their valuable research, they knew they needed to get creative. "One of our core goals is to disseminate these data to people of all stripes…we see data as a means to a greater end, which is the transformation of information into meaningful, actionable knowledge," says ONC user engagement officer Dwight Owens via email. To put some life into that goal, ONC has created a brand-new, artist-in-residence program in collaboration with UVic's Fine Arts Department.

The first ONC artist residency has been awarded to freshly-minted UVic alumno Colton Hash, whose multidisciplinary undergraduate degree combined computer science, environmental studies, and fine art. "In each of those areas, I had projects working on the intersections between those areas. This residency is formalizing that," he says. Hash, who was never interested in "art that's just about art," says his keen desire to create art infused with relevant political and social commentary made him particularly enthusiastic to partner with ONC and launch their new initiative.

Part of the body of work Hash will produce during his residency will be an "immersive installation" harnessing a broad variety of data collected by ONC, "turning a room into a representation of [an underwater] environment, using hydrophone recordings from the region, video sources of thermal vents, data concerning water temperature and acidity, and using that to drive visuals that would be projected." Dunking people under to see what's actually going on beneath the quiet surface where the Salish Sea meets the Pacific Ocean (ONC focuses a lot of research there) is Hash's aim. "It would create a space that would feel totally different; as you spent time in it and walked around in it, it would be creating an understanding of ocean life, and how all those dynamics work together."

Owens says that ONC chose Hash specifically "to find new ways to communicate about the ocean and engage audiences who may not normally be aware of our data and facility." He also sees value in exploring "ways to engage some of our scientific and data-focused staff in artistic pursuits…[those who] wish to engage in art-science cross-pollination. We're not sure what shape this may take, but we are curious to find out."

—Mollie Kaye

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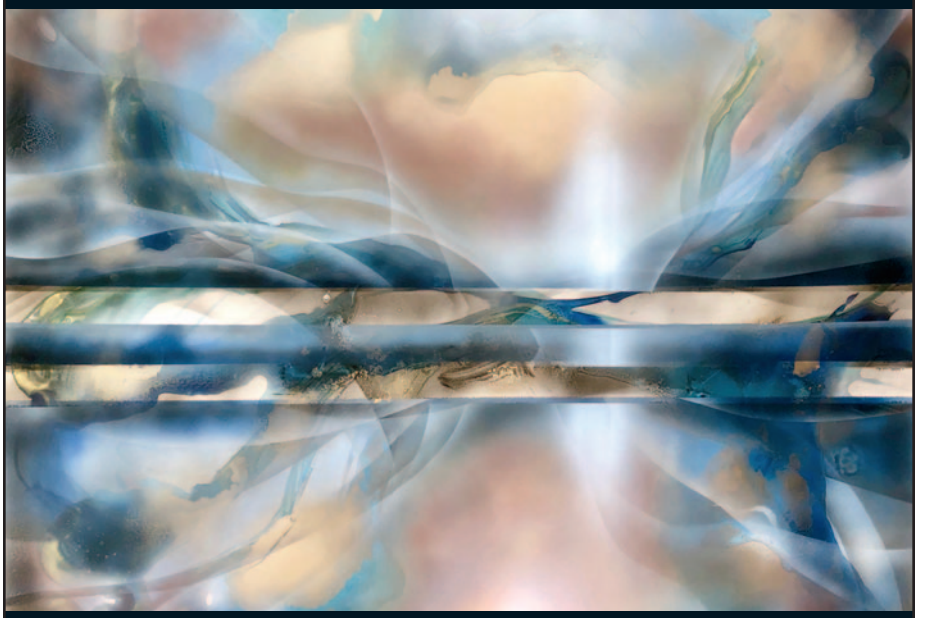

"Beribboned" by Taryn Brown, 36x36 inches, mixed media on cradles board

FEBRUARY: Taryn Brown and Joanna Drummond

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On the path of an oil pipeline

MONICA PRENDERGAST

Bears at the Belfry is a great example of the resurgence of Indigenous theatre in Canada.

The Belfry Theatre opens its fourth show of the 2018-2019 season with a production from Edmonton, *Bears* by Matthew Mackenzie (*Focus* is the media sponsor). The play promises to be a blend of both Indigenous and environmental issues in its portrayal of an Indigenous man who works for an Alberta oil company. This man, Floyd, is on the run after being accused in a workplace accident. His journey takes him along the path of an oil pipeline, pursued by both Kinder Morgan and the RCMP. As Floyd tries to reach British Columbia, he is joined by a chorus of animals and, through their intervention and his own memories, he begins to feel his own transformation underway.

The production, by Alberta Aboriginal Performing Arts and Punctuate! Theatre, has had successful runs in Edmonton, Toronto and Vancouver earlier this year. And playwright Mackenzie recently was awarded the Carol Bolt New Play Award by the Playwrights Guild of Canada. Critics and audiences have enjoyed the writing by Mackenzie that blends the mythic with the everyday, visual and musical elements provided by the chorus, the design of the show by Erin Gruber, and choreography by Monica Dottor.

But there were some questions raised, specifically by Vancouver theatre reviewer Colin Thomas, about the problem of preaching to the converted. He called the play "a decorative illustration of a preconceived position." It is true that it's very likely the well-educated Belfry audience will be sympathetic to the anti-pipeline/pro-environmental stance taken in the play. However, yet another critic in Toronto, Amanda Ghazale Aziz in *Now Magazine*, described the production as "a witty, riveting and evocative production that never loses its pace," so it may be that audiences will be somewhat divided in their reception. This is a good thing, I believe, as political theatre should prompt meaningful community conversations.

Belfry Theatre Artistic Director Michael Shamata has been very mindful in programming Indigenous plays throughout his decade at the helm. We have seen Kevin Loring's *Where the Blood Mixes*, Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters*, and *Salt Baby* by Falen Johnson. There is no doubt that Victoria audiences

PHOTO BY ALEXIS MCKEOWN

Punctuate! Theatre's production of *Bears*

have been enriched through these productions, and others, as Canada itself has wrestled with coming to better terms with First Nations.

Earlier this year, the National Arts Centre in Ottawa appointed Kevin Loring to be the first ever Artistic Director of Indigenous Theatre. In his speech, made at the appointment ceremony in March of this year, Loring said, "In the 150 years of confederation, and the 525 years of colonization that Indigenous people have endured, our languages have been brought to the edge of extinction, our dances forbidden, and our ceremonies outlawed. Our traditional songs and stories that remain have survived by going underground." His job as he sees it, is to follow the prophetic words of Louis Riel: "My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back."

There has been a remarkable resurgence of Indigenous arts in Canada in the past couple of decades or so. These artists have found renewed support from a Canada Council for the Arts that has doubled its budget commitment under the Trudeau Liberals. Indigenous arts groups and individual artists have been the recipients of increased funding, along with a special project called {Re}conciliation that has brought Indigenous and settler artists together to co-create. It is inspiring to read through the various projects funded by this initiative. I am heartened by this work, as I am by a lengthy list of plays by Indigenous writers on the website of the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance. In addition to the playwrights mentioned above, we have many other Indigenous writers whose work has enhanced our cultural landscape: Marie Clements, Tara Beagan, Cliff Cardinal, Floyd Favel, Jani Lauzon and Drew Hayden Taylor among them.

Yet there is a tension in all of this welcome Indigenous theatre, in that for the most part, these plays are being performed to white and middle class settler audiences. Loring addresses this in his talk at the NAC, saying, "Our traditions are rooted in oration, song, dance and the celebration of creation. Our stories are rooted in the land. Though we may have appropriated (and I do use that word intentionally) the methodologies of our settler contemporaries, at the core of our stories is the Indigenous perspective—the Indigenous experience which is inherently different than the settler world view of this land."

Loring acknowledges here that Indigenous artists are often working in forms and spaces established by the settlers on their lands. Perhaps there is a productive tension at play here, particularly (in my view) when audiences become "unsettled" by their encounter with Indigenous art.

My own encounter with Cliff Cardinal's one-man play *Huff* was certainly an example of this, in the play's terrible yet blackly comedic whirlwind story of physical, sexual and drug and alcohol abuses suffered by northern First Nations children and young people. It feels much harder to get up and walk away from such an intimate encounter with the reality of too many lives in Canadian First Nations communities. I had to sit in the theatre for many minutes after the show was over to compose myself, and to try to come to terms in my mind

> "MY PEOPLE WILL SLEEP for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back."—*Louis Riel*

with one of the richest nations on Earth allowing such poverty and deprivation to exist. The play made me angry, in a good way.

That said, Indigenous theatre has begun to move beyond stories of colonial and post-colonial abuse and neglect, important as they are to tell and to witness. This spring, The Belfry brought in a lovely one-woman play called *Café Daughter* by Cree writer Kenneth T. Williams. Performed by Tiffany Ayalik, it tells the story of a girl who is half-Chinese-Canadian and half-Indigenous, growing up in small-town Saskatchewan in the 1950s and '60s. The touching play is inspired by the life of Lillian Eva Quan Dyck, who became a member of the Senate.

And earlier this year, I saw Drew Hayden Taylor's play for young people, *Spirit Horse*, performed at Young People's Theatre in Toronto to a full house of students from many cultural backgrounds. This play is an interesting example of cross-cultural blending, as it is based on an Irish play exploring the lives of Roma Gypsies, who are considered outsiders in that country. Taylor rewrote the play with an Indigenous single-parent family, keeping its core narrative of two children grieving their mother's death and a magical horse that gives them hope and a reason to go on.

There is much to celebrate in the resurgence of Indigenous arts in Canada. The work of reparation and reconciliation continues, and will likely take many generations to achieve. But in the visible resurgence of Indigenous art and artists on stages across this country, with plays like *Bears*, we can all play our part. In coming together as a community, to listen, to watch and to stand with First Nations in their struggles, we can work together for a better environment, for Indigenous self-governance, social health and wellness, and ultimately for a better country of which we can all be proud.

Monica works at the University of Victoria in the Faculty of Education. Her newest publication, *Web of Performance* is available as a free ebook through the University of Victoria Library.

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Patricia Roy's *The Collectors*

STEPHEN HUME

As this historian shows, the Royal BC Museum has proved a resilient, adaptive and unusually far-sighted institution.

IMAGE A-0308524 COURTESY OF THE ROYAL BC MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

The building was ornately decorated, but crowded with specimens of the province's fauna

More than 60 years ago, while my mother shopped, I'd laze away unsupervised summer afternoons in the public galleries of the ornate east wing of British Columbia's iconic legislature buildings.

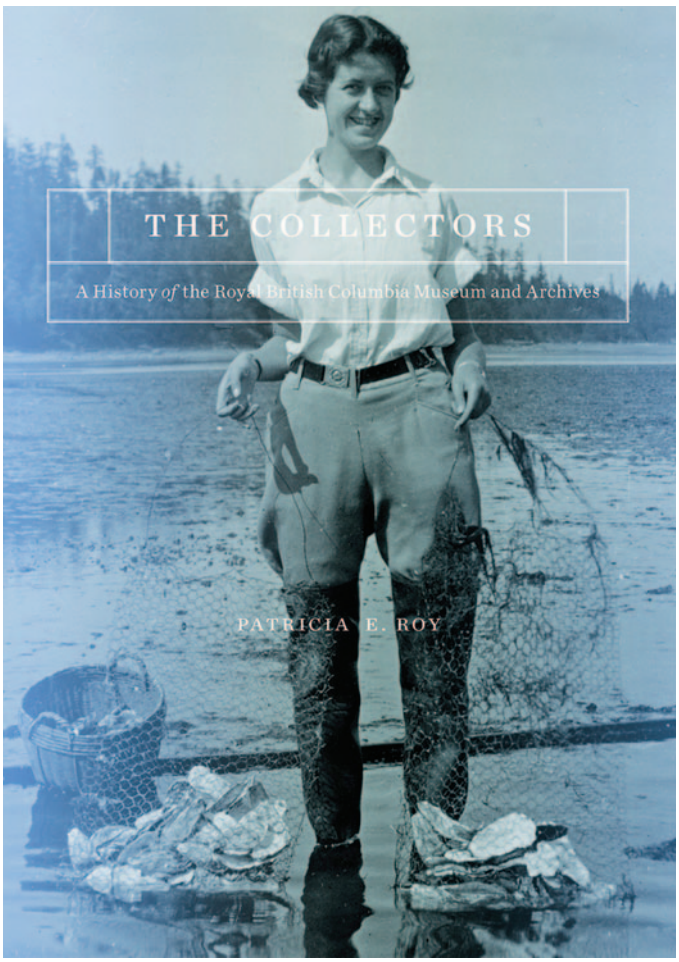
It was another world from our present provincial museum's post-modernist structure, purpose-built in 1968 for dramatic dioramas, dynamic displays and public engagement—even now being modernized for the next 50 years of our digitally-enhanced century.

The old museum remembered from childhood flaunted all the imposing trappings that romanticized colonial hubris—Romanesque arches, Greek columns, pilasters, cornices and tiled mosaics, all the sympathetic magic of imperialism, symbols of past glory invoked to inflate one's own.

Whatever its future might be, as Patricia Roy's meticulous new history of the Royal British Columbia Museum and Archives, *The Collectors*, reminded me with vivid intensity, our provincial museum indisputably began as Victorian trophy case.

IMAGE I-61549 COURTESY OF THE ROYAL BC MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

The Ethnological Department; Indigenous treasures were laid out where visitors could touch many of them



On the cover of Roy's book, former museum staffer Violet Redfern (1920s)

Where current visitors may stroll through a rather-more sedate version of Old Victoria, examine a full-sized mammoth in its Ice Age habitat, visit Captain George Vancouver's spartan cabin or sit in a long house as Vancouver did with the whaling Chief Maquinna, I recall glass cabinets stuffed with skewered butterflies. Unusual marine specimens floated in jars of formaldehyde or were mounted like fishing trophies. Predators snarled amid big game shot by adventurers for whom specimen-gathering seemed an excuse for hunting expeditions.

ROY'S ACCOUNT doesn't flinch from just demands for the repatriation of artifacts and specimens obtained under dubious circumstance. Acquisitions involved everything from duplicity to bald-faced appropriation.

And there was a hypnotically-rich collection of First Nations ceremonial regalia, totems, tools, weapons and art, the display untroubled by cultural, social or historic context.

When, as a child, I descended the time-worn stairs to the ethnographic gallery and its stunning Newcombe Collection, it was like stepping into some cool, stone-clad other-world suffused with the supernatural.

Today, the museum cornerstones Victoria's identity, commercial as well as cultural. Since 2008 it has attracted almost 6.5 million visitors. By way of comparison, that's about two million more than attended BC Lions football games. It's about 5.2 million more than visited Calgary's Glenbow Museum in a market of more than a million. More locally, it's nearly 4.8 million more than paid attendance at the Royal and McPherson theatres combined. The RBCM's modest target for 2019 is to attract 12 visitors for every citizen in the City of Victoria.

Our museum has generated almost a quarter of a billion dollars in revenue since 2008. Spending by the museum and its visitors contribute about $26 million a year to south Vancouver Island's gross domestic product.

More importantly, it's changed from colonial trophy case to leading advocate for First Nations' place in the fabric of a 21st-century British Columbia that emerges from the post-colonial braiding of many cultural traditions.

And yet the museum did begin in unapologetic colonial eccentricity. Certainly that's what is suggested by an 1889 report in the *British Colonist*. On Victoria Day that year, the museum threw open its collections and the public rushed to view "the many valuable natural curiosities, the treasures of mineralogy and the collections of well-mounted specimens of the wild animals and birds of the province," reported the newspaper.

Exhibits were heavy on the latter. Roy notes that the new head of the museum, John Fannin, was a skilled taxidermist. He had donated 12 cases of his own specimens. Visitors goggled at a "monster grizzly bear" rendered so realistic that "timid ladies trembled," a mammoth bone, a brick from the Great Wall of China, and an ancient Spanish cannon found near Port Alberni. Fannin's successor in 1904, Francis Kermode, was also a taxidermist, though he is now famous for bestowing his name on the white "Spirit Bear" with which the Great Bear Rainforest is associated.

Yet, if the museum began as a curiosity cabinet during the rush for "primitive" spoils that characterized late Victorian colonialism, Roy, professor emeritus of history at the University of Victoria, tells us that it quickly evolved a deep and abiding relationship with First Nations.

Concern for such a relationship was, in fact, evident in the impetus for the museum's establishment in 1886—a petition signed by 30 prominent citizens worried about the pillaging of First Nations art and artifacts just as the federal government banned the potlatch. Among those citizens were two defenders of Indigenous rights and culture, Dr Israel Wood Powell and Chief Justice Matthew Bailie Begbie. Begbie, a defender of aboriginal rights and a founder of what would become one of an otherwise benighted province's most important advocates of cross-cultural understanding, is now, ironically,

a thoroughly-battered target of historical revisionism, ostensibly for purposes of reconciliation.

These are difficult days for museums everywhere as they navigate post-colonial deconstruction and changing public sentiment. Political agendas of groups once ignored sometimes fuse with well-intended political correctness based in passionate ignorance of the wrongs it seeks to right.

Roy's account doesn't flinch from just demands for the repatriation of artifacts and specimens obtained under dubious circumstance. Acquisitions involved everything from duplicity to bald-faced appropriation. Museums must now re-evaluate the assumptions behind what and how they arrange, order and prioritize their displays.

But, so what? Museums and their missions have never been static. They've progressed from the curiosity cabinets of 18th-century antiquarians, to the trophy cases of colonial empires, to self-affirming displays of the dominant culture's assumptions regarding science and social stratification, to protectors of cultural heritage threatened by greed, politics and propaganda.

The Royal BC Museum's collections include the commissioned work of Mungo Martin, whose genius triggered a coast-wide resurgence of Indigenous art. Martin—born Naka'pankam (Potlatch Chief Ten Times Over) at Tsaxis on the north end of Vancouver Island—was 10 on that luminous night in 1889 when the museum threw open its doors.

Taught by his stepfather Charlie James, Martin carved his first commissioned pole while the potlatch was still outlawed. (It was illegal for 66 years.) He made it for a client in Alert Bay where the RCMP would arrest and jail 45 people for the crime of being themselves with an ancient ceremony.

Yet in 1950, one year before the potlatch ban ended, Martin was hired as resident carver at the BC Museum. He collected 400 songs and oral histories. He trained the famous Indigenous artists Henry Hunt, Tony Hunt, Bill Reid and Doug Cranmer. In 1953, he gave the first legal potlatch since 1884—at the museum where he had built his Big House.

Martin died in Victoria on August 16, 1962, having presided over the resurrection of an artistic tradition his government had tried to murder and which had subsequently been pronounced dead, even by famous anthropologist Marius Barbeau. He lay in state in a carved yellow cedar coffin in his own Big House at Thunderbird Park, part of the museum precinct. Hundreds filed past in a traditional Kwakwaka'wakw ceremony. His pallbearers included cabinet ministers. His body was carried home in honour by the Canadian warship HMCS Ottawa.

As Roy's thoughtful narrative points out, the Royal BC Museum deserves much credit for projecting work like Martin's onto the world screen. From its early collection of argillite carvings by Skidegate chief Charles Edenshaw, to outreach programs for schools based on *Son of Raven, Son of Deer* by the Tseshaht artist George Clutesi (to whom Emily Carr left her paintbrushes), the museum's profound efforts spanned a First Nations era from earliest contact to the Space Age. It even holds masks donated in gratitude by Kitty White, a woman from northern Vancouver Island who was "stolen" by people near Port Renfrew. The masks—for her and her children—were carved by her brother to mark his joy at eventually finding her.

The Legacy, a 1975 exhibition, was the first of a series of remarkable exhibitions that toured in Canada and Europe. Roy quotes Neil Sterritt, the honoured Gitxsan historian, as saying it was "probably the finest display of contemporary Indian art assembled in North America."

IMAGE I-26794 COURTESY OF THE ROYAL BC MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

Mungo Martin carving in Thunderbird Park (1953)

If the democratization of knowledge, the flattening of social class into a more inclusive and pluralistic society, and the broadening distribution of education mean challenges to conventional thought, as Roy's new history shows, the museum has proved a resilient, adaptive and unusually far-sighted institution.

Faced with challenging ethical questions of cultural appropriation, the museum pioneered repatriation policies for artifacts. In 2016, for example, it returned 17 items to the Huu-ay-aht for permanent display in the First Nation's government office at Pachena Bay. The museum negotiates custodial arrangements to preserve and protect other items held by the museum or repatriated from other museums until such time as they might be returned.

IN ALL, THE MUSEUM HAS SEVEN MILLION ITEMS in its collections—including fascinating examples and insights into the flora and fauna, the natural and social histories of the province. As well, as Roy wryly reports, the museum's own staff comprised some exotic specimens, too.

E.M. Anderson was a talented museum collector. In 1908 he applied for paid leave as his wife's serious illness required him to take her to Calgary. While on leave, however, Anderson was discovered touring the United States as drummer with a theatrical troupe.

Then there was the chap hired to fill gaps in Indigenous inventory from BC's Interior. His task was to find and buy rare art and artifacts for the museum's "Indian collection." Two museum officials happened to be visiting Vancouver Art Gallery when a call came. It was Calgary's Glenbow Museum. Could anyone there authenticate a rare copper mask being offered for sale? The Glenbow provided a photograph. The BC museum's experts could indeed verify. The mask, alas, was from their

own collection, on loan from Victoria's Christ Church Cathedral. It was being offered for sale in Calgary by the museum's own collector.

Violet Redfern was on the payroll as a 1920s stenographer but she actually worked as the museum's botanist, collecting specimens and devising imaginative displays. Finally, after ten years of asking for a pay raise that reflected her work, the Province coughed up 7.5 cents an hour. She married the museum's entomologist. They quit and went to homestead in Alberta.

And there was the directive from "Glad Hand Dick," early 20th-century Premier Richard McBride, that the museum's skilled taxidermists obtain a grizzly bear rug for the Emperor of Japan. The museum complied. Maybe that's why, at the outbreak of World War One, when powerful German cruisers menaced the South Coast, the Japanese sent even bigger battleships to defend the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The Japanese sailors on shore leave were among the museum's intrepid visitors.

Among the eccentricities, of course, were giants of BC heritage and history. Roy cites Ian McTaggart Cowan, often called the father of Canadian ecology, who laid foundations in the 1930s for the museum's transition to a genuine scientific institution. Clifford Carl, who completed the process in the 1940s, hired Wilson Duff, the anthropologist who shaped the museum into an astonishing First Nations treasure house. Duff was matched in vision by Willard Ireland, a brilliant young provincial archivist and librarian who succeeded William Kaye Lamb who left BC to become first the Dominion Archivist and then the first National Librarian of Canada.

Reflecting the province itself—BC is the most biologically, topologically and geologically diverse region in Canada—the museum addresses natural history, our diverse zoological heritage, anthropology and ethnology, palaeontology, archaeology and modern history, entomology and ichthyology, botany and herpetology.

If it opens doorways into BC's past and future, the museum also opens windows on the cultural heritage of our wider world—this spring it celebrates UNESCO's Year of Indigenous Languages with *Maya: The Great Jaguar Rises*, an exhibition raised from the immense civilizations that dominated Central America before Europeans found their way to the New World. Some of the items on display will be seen outside their country for the first time.

Roy's history meets all the benchmarks of scholarly work. It's meticulously detailed, exhaustively attributed and extensively annotated. More important, it brings a sense of humour and a lively appreciation of Victoria's historic museum—not as a collection cabinet for desiccated specimens of the past but as a throbbing, dishevelled, entirely human enterprise replete with surprises and astonishments.

Patricia Roy will be the guest speaker at the Victoria Historical Society meeting on January 24 at James Bay New Horizons, 234 Menzies Street. Her focus will be "Flora, Fauna, and Fannin: The Early Days of the Provincial Museum." Doors open at 7:15 pm. Admission is free for members, $5 for guests. www.victoriahistoricalsociety.bc.ca.

Stephen Hume has lived in many parts of BC since 1948. He spent half a century as a journalist writing about Western Canada, the Far North, BC and the Island. His byline has appeared in most major Canadian newspapers; he's written nine books of poetry, natural history, history and literary essays.

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Downtown has it all-ish

GENE MILLER

Downtown has 1000s of new units, yet it feels unwelcoming to many.

McDonald's, open 24/7 at the corner of Douglas and View Streets, is an overnight hellhole and theatre of the absurd. If you can put the prefix *dys* in front of almost any hapless adjective, or *un* as in -hinged, -housed, -healthy, -happy, it describes the street-side atmosphere around the place. Really, you should visit some Friday or Saturday around 3am. It screams "major tourist attraction."

It struck me, south-bound on Douglas after a suburban mall run (the Devil never runs out of seductions), into the increasingly compressive maw of the City centre, that Downtown overall feels…well, hard, unsmiling. I had imagined that, as all of those newly sprouted high-rises filled up with new-minted citizens, the social tone on the streets would become happier, life more public and at least quietly, appropriately joyful. It hasn't happened yet, to my senses, unless there's a vast, conspiratorial joke being played on me: "Attention, 700-block Fort Street, Doomer Miller approaching. Everybody frown and look miserable, alienated and a bit psychotic."

Maybe I picked the wrong season. The storm clouds this December morning are looming about 40 feet off the ground, and even the peacocks in Beacon Hill Park (I'm now parked within sight of the petting zoo, nursing a large, two creams, two sugars) are clumsily attempting suicide by jumping out of trees.

I initiated and organized the Downtown 2020 conference several years ago to study and attempt to plan for the rosy and singular future of this place. The confected vision, you won't be surprised to learn, was of thousands of residential newcomers, walking arm-in-arm on gorgeous boulevards, admiring the clever and provocative public art and beautiful, generous landscaping; shopping, and leaving the friendly and appreciative merchants successful and happy; they'd be sitting at tables outside their favourite konditorei, the very picture and essence of *gemütlichkeit*, animatedly discussing (in, say, a Prague-inflected English—think Viktor Laszlo in *Casablanca*) the Victoria Art Gallery's massive Klimt retrospective, the just-released new Don deLillo novel, trip-planning to Spain, and other choice pickings from that conversational buffet.

The Legato under construction in 2017

The thesis was so simple, logical, commonsense: lots of new Downtown buildings filled with lots of new Downtowners conducting their lives in Downtown's public realm, making everything safe, socially fizzy, successful—essentially, the theoretically sound (but never actually materializing) 2+2=4 of Downtown land use planning and social design (and swooning romantic idealism).

Instead, we witness a work-in-progress of isolation, alienation, fortification; a streetscape of by-and-large desultory urban dormitories, hard and unwelcoming monuments to risk management, when what we need is buoyant, arms-open architectural expressions of the ever-perfecting human project. If we decorated our birthday cakes the way we decorate our buildings, all of us would blow our brains, not the candles, out.

So, wha hoppen?

Oh, a little thing known as the near-total shift of human values, social meanings and practices, consciousness, sensibilities, behaviours. The 21st century, that's wha hoppen. Times have changed, to put it witlessly.

"But, but, this is Vienn—I mean, Victoria," you sputter, "the Land that Time Forgot!" Not a chance, sonny or honey. I mean, you must have some idea of what's going on. Two little words: *civilizational tectonics*.

Look, we steer, or try to steer, by icons, symbols, social signals, corner points (real or seeming) in our restless progress: home, family, opportunity, future, job, faith, politics, and a clutch of others. What *made* them valid doesn't necessarily sustain their validity in this time of shortening forevers. Often as not, this produces cultural dislocation leading to hollow language, words that may still have some symbolic heft, but that no longer manage the emotional traffic, no longer truly tell us who we are, or how to behave, or how to order our values or shape and manage experience. In some circles, this is called cultural relativism; in others, the end of the effing world.

If you add together all of the brand-new, recently or just-completed Downtown and shoulder-area residential projects, and those under various stages of construction, plus all of the development rumours, where property is being quietly offered for sale, or has been acquired, plans being drawn up, and where approvals will soon be given and ground broken—roughly, north to Capital Iron (whose entire property is currently for sale), south to the Empress (including that hollow yesteryear hulk of a Customs House building beside the Causeway, its memorable shell now held in place by a girder system), northeast a few blocks past Wellburn's at Cook and Pandora (also sold, I believe), east of Cook a block or two up the Fort/Yates/ Johnson/Pandora shoulder—we are talking about at least 40 projects with a guesstimated average unit count of 100, and perhaps 1.5 residents average per dwelling.

That's a likely 6,000 newcomers calling Downtown home, now and soon…and

IN THREE TO FOUR YEARS you will barely recognize Downtown, barely be able to reconcile your earlier mental picture of its quaint and pokey feel and ground-hugging scale with the quickly emerging physical reality.

Downtown physically, commercially, socially transformed. In three to four years—no time at all, in terms of Downtown's evolution—you will barely recognize Downtown, barely be able to reconcile your earlier mental picture of Downtown's quaint and pokey feel and ground-hugging scale with the quickly emerging physical reality. The memory-to-modernity balance will have shifted, making what remains of the old Downtown feel more *I-remember-when*, more museological, and less the defining qualitative centrepiece of the Victoria identity.

Downtown will be vastly more populous, but how will the streets feel? Will Downtown present a more compelling case for frequent visits by all of us out-of-Downtowners, or will it seem unrecognizable to a lot of us, a candidate for the kind of dismissal directed at most North American Downtowns (including Vancouver's): "I don't go down there unless I have to"?

Perhaps you recall a short letter, an omnibus complaint, from a Jim Gibson in the November 4, 2018 *Times Colonist* titled "Council leads the way into the abyss." Here is a worried and slightly phrumphy excerpt from Gibson's Scripture-toned note, which lacks only for a "yea" and an "unto":

"To those working in unison with Mayor Lisa Helps: Which one of you has the courage to allow the merchants on Fort Street to exhale by taking down the barriers to entry you have built? Who among you has the courage to fix the bike-lane fiasco? Who among you will allow Fort Street its rightful place as a three-lane artery? Who among you has the courage to stand up for a city you have already put on the precipice for decline by fast-tracking anti-business, anti-commuting and anti-tourist policies with the arrogant self-entitlement bias you continue to display? Will you let Victoria breathe again, or will you point fingers at those of us who want civilized progress?"

I'm particularly taken with the florid, almost Shakespearean "Who among you will allow Fort Street its rightful place as a three-lane artery?"

Alas, poor Fort Street, I knew it well. (I note Fort Street is still a three-lane artery, it's just that one of the lanes is a bike lane.) Be patient, Mr Gibson. Downtown's a work-in-progress. I fantasize some kind of social epiphany, thousands of Downtowners, arms linked—a glorious amalgam of Gilbert and Sullivan operetta and Paul Goodman-esque post-war 1950s/60s egalitarian optimism, housing the homeless, uptrodding the down-trodden, restoring human dignity, advancing social possibility. Said Goodman (author of *Growing Up Absurd* and many more): "I might seem to have a number of divergent interests—community planning, psychotherapy, education, politics—but they are all one concern: how to make it possible to grow up as a human being into a culture without losing nature. I simply refuse to acknowledge that a sensible and honorable community does not exist."

Our City could do worse at this moment than to embrace Goodman's dogged and hopeful vision (a vision that runs so counter to present social practice) and string conspicuous but tasteful banners across all of the City's key entry points: "Victoria waives the rules. Welcome to Paradise." (God forgive me.)

How to get there from here? How to break the dismal pattern of reticence and strangerhood and turn the public realm into an outdoor living room, something socially and visually operatic, a beautiful, generous, richly furnished, hopeful arrival-point from dormitory isolation and privacy to the public warmth and comfort of the human family?

It's time for a series of urban design charrettes: critical, analytical study sessions structured (and strictured) to force coitus on "extra" and "ordinary." Oh, and a vast amount of funding. I'm sorry City councillors didn't impose a development cost charge of $5,000 per new Downtown door four years ago. They, we, would now have a Downtown public realm amenity kitty approaching $20,000,000.

"Civilized progress," letter-writer Gibson requested. I don't share his anxieties about Fort Street, but civilized progress sounds just peachy.

Founder of Open Space and co-founder of *Monday Magazine*, Gene Miller is currently promoting ASH, an affordable housing concept.

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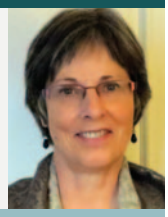

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Balancing progress and parkland

MALEEA ACKER

Julian Anderson and Cuthbert Holmes Park.

PHOTO: TONY BOUNSALL

Julian Anderson

An important facet of any sustainable city is its green spaces—providing opportunity for residents to step off a city bus and walk into wild areas to enjoy the ecosystems that make a region what it is. On Southern Vancouver Island, that includes salmon-bearing streams, Douglas-fir forests, wetlands, and habitat for a variety of bird and mammal species. Saanich's Cuthbert Holmes Park, though sandwiched between a suburban mall, a residential neighbourhood and the Island Highway, satisfies all of these needs. But throughout its lifespan it has been both helped by its stewards and troubled by development.

Julian Anderson, who directs the Friends of Cuthbert Holmes Park (FCHP), acts as main steward of the park. He made up the organization on the spot when asked to join the Gorge Waterway Initiative years ago. "Everyone else was part of a group already," he explains, smiling, so he said he was part of the Friends of Cuthbert Holmes Park, which, at the time, didn't yet exist.

Anderson's invention of the organization, which shares its reports and findings with Saanich, was fortuitous. Anderson began a Restoration of Natural Systems diploma program in 2002 through the University of Victoria. Whenever he had a course project to complete, he used Cuthbert Holmes as the site location. Now, FCHP works in collaboration with Pulling Together, a Saanich invasive species removal program, and Anderson hosts work parties to plant native species, remove invasives, and generally care for the park's ecosystems. Anderson and other volunteers have cleared large areas of the park, exposing native plants and stopping species like English ivy from smothering trees.

Cuthbert Holmes is also home to a portion of the Colquitz River, one of the region's primary Coho salmon spawning waterways. The park's paths wind through forests, over two bridges, and out to a point where the Gorge waterway meanders past residential backyards. A fish-counting fence on the Colquitz helps keep track of returning salmon each year (see *Focus*' October 2015 edition for Dorothy Chambers' salmon work). Nootka roses and fawn lilies bloom in hidden corners of the park in spring.

Anderson is no stranger to the area. He grew up beside the Victoria Canoe and Kayak Club, in one of several houses along the Gorge that have since been demolished. "In those days, we'd get kicked out of the house [in the morning], and come back for dinner," he tells me at a coffee shop in Tillicum. Roving around the neighbourhood as a boy, he learned the local animals and plants. After starting FCHP he found himself directing volunteers and often serving as nature interpreter for school and volunteer groups that visited the park.

Saanich was all too happy to see someone take a long-term interest in Cuthbert Holmes, and collaboration with the municipality is something for which he's also thankful. Saanich's invasive species management program and their openness to volunteers working in Saanich parks makes them "the envy of the entire south Island region," Anderson says.

As an example, Saanich's management of the ferociously invasive species Japanese knotweed has been relatively successful in comparison to the Cowichan Valley Regional District's. On the Cowichan River, whole areas of streamside native habitat have been supplanted in the last five years by a monotonous sea of knotweed. Knotweed decimates biodiversity and grows through concrete, so Saanich has taken a proactive stance, working to eliminate every new infestation, whether on private or public property. Luckily, none has yet been found in Cuthbert Holmes.

Anderson's primary focus these days concerns a new (but familiar) chapter for the park's borders, as the Ministry of Highways completes an interchange on the Island Highway at McKenzie Avenue. In 2016, the Ministry of Highways vetoed Saanich's decision to reject a cloverleaf design for the intersection. The ministry used 1.4 hectares of the park, including an area with mature Garry oak trees and a stand of rare Oregon ash and trembling aspen, for the cloverleaf. Some of the land was replaced with Ministry of Highways land alongside the TransCanada, but Anderson argued that infringement into the park was unjustified. Additionally, a constructed berm along the park's edge will be planted with cultivated grasses and groupings of trees. Recommendations by an ecologist to leave the berm "rough and loose" to allow for gradual growth of native species was rejected. "We're an impatient species," rues Anderson.

It's been proven that enlarging highways increases dependence on single-vehicle travel. More cars move in to fill the new space. The

> “THERE WERE CHORUSES OF FROGS. You don’t hear that anymore. That’s an incremental change.”
>
> —*Julian Anderson*

noise pollution from commuting vehicles is already extreme in Cuthbert Holmes. But “there’s no sound fencing planned next to the cloverleaf right now,” laments Anderson.

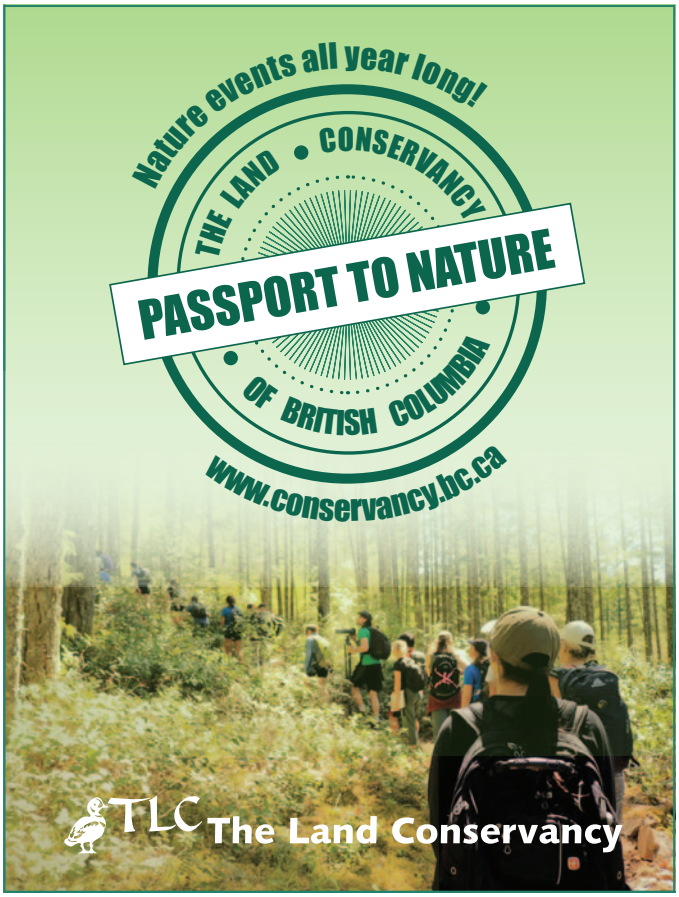
The park’s history can be more easily understood, Anderson explains, through aerial photos of the land. Perusing his series of air photos of Cuthbert Holmes park from 1928 to the present is a sobering experience. Anderson describes the changes he’s documented as we leaf through the decades. The earliest, at 1928, shows tracts of farmland stretching out from the park’s original, larger borders; there is no housing to be seen. The neighbourhoods of Burnside, Gorge and Tillicum mostly haven’t yet been built. Then the island highway bisects Saanich in 1956. Greenspace that makes up the park continually shrinks, as development chips away at its edges. A drive-in movie theatre replaces a field, then Tillicum Mall replaces the theatre. Pearkes Recreation Centre lops off a forested edge; its parking lot takes over a further swath. Then in the 1990s, the Silver City movie theatre replaces another edge. As the decades tick by, the wide swath of fields and wetlands surrounding the s-curve of the Colquitz River slowly shrinks.

Changes in the park’s boundaries have also affected its species. “I used to walk by the drive-in on my way to school,” Anderson tells me. “There were choruses of frogs” near where the Tillicum Mall parking lot now stands. “You don’t hear that anymore. That’s an incremental change.” Salmon, he points out, are resilient creatures, but “they handle change until they can’t anymore. They’ll reach a limit, too.”

One of Anderson’s primary hopes for the park is that people step forward who can eventually act as his successors. Anderson is nowhere near burnout, but he recognizes that, as an introvert, the education portion of environmental stewardship is a challenge. “If I disappear, I want this to carry on.” This desire for a succeeding generation of knowledge-keepers is a common refrain among environmental stewards in the region; most of those I have spoken with in the last three years voice concerns about what will happen to their carefully stewarded ecosystems in future decades.

Cuthbert Holmes is no exception. Two-thirds of the park belong to the Province, and is currently leased by Saanich. It’s hard to say what decisions future governments will make about an urban park beside a highway, even if it does nurture great-horned owls, nesting herons and other at-risk species. The park hosted the largest great blue heron rookery on the island until 2010. Anderson hopes they will return. “I want future generations to go into the park and see the same things I’m seeing. This is a salmon-bearing river in the middle of an urban area,” he pauses to let that amazing fact sink in.

Maleea Acker is the author of *Gardens Aflame: Garry Oak Meadows of BC’s South Coast* (New Star, 2012). She is currently completing a PhD in Human Geography, focusing on the intersections between the social sciences and poetry.



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Saanich

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Envisioning a plastic-free zone for the new year

TRUDY DUIVENVOORDEN MITIC

Victoria is tackling the bags; now let's move on to single-use plastics.

We live in the best place on Earth. Well, that might be an exaggeration but, we like to believe it and enjoy proclaiming it, especially to bedazzled visitors and newcomers. People enjoyed saying it to me many years ago, when I had barely stepped off the plane. "You've arrived in Paradise," someone—I no longer remember who—declared in that incontestable big-little way that makes you feel both grateful to be here and a fool for having frittered away so many years elsewhere.

We do live in a wonderful place, but as we limp over the threshold into what's likely to be another bedraggled year, it's worth acknowledging that there's much room for improvement. Especially now, with crucial global issues hanging in the balance and, given the urgency of a recently released report by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, an unavoidable era of enforced transition looming ever closer.

An estimated 1,000,000 plastic bottles *a minute* are purchased on the planet. 91 percent aren't recycled. (*Forbes*)

As in most other communities large and small, we continue to postpone until tomorrow what we just don't feel like facing today. We continue to uphold a stubborn disconnect between business interests and what we hold dear when we're not talking business. We keep accepting the politically-driven myth that if something is good for the environment, it must be detrimental to the economy. And we keep on swallowing the emboldened government doublespeak that the environment can be preserved one pipeline and fracking event at a time.

The environment is what we locals hold most dear, according to the Victoria Foundation's 2018 edition of *Vital Signs*. This is not surprising, given that we've been blessed with nature's most extravagant largesse. It's always the lush landscape and temperate climate that enthral the newcomer at first sight, the proximity of snow-capped mountains to wave-washed seashores, the marine life, pristine air, islands, and century-old trees gracing trees, parks and neighbourhoods. No visitor from anywhere has ever said, "I can't believe how beautiful your roadways and buildings are here."

We've taken some notable measures to protect our environment and ease the carbon footprint. Probably the most dramatic was Victoria's move last year to banish the plastic shopping bag, a decision that generated such minor pushback—except from the plastics industry—that other municipalities should have seized the opportunity to swiftly follow suit.

Banning soft plastic is just the beginning, however, and it's time to tackle another critical issue—single-use plastics. (Actually, time is running out, but let's not be derailed by that anxiety right now.)

There is a place that can offer a blueprint. Bayfield is a storybook town of 1,100 people on the eastern shore of Ontario's Lake Huron. Last year it became the first community in North America to be recognized as a plastic-free zone by the online organization Random Acts of Green. Alarmed by the glut of plastic in the Great Lakes—450,000 pieces per square kilometre, double the rate of ocean contamination—Bayfield accomplished this feat by engaging community groups to work on projects in "chewable bits," according to one key organizer. These groups focused on public education, business buy-in, political pressure, and hands-on action. They installed several water refill stations, distributed 2,500 reusable water bottles, and banned the sale of bottled water at town venues and events. Slowly and persistently they convinced most businesses and eateries to eliminate all single-use plastics and polystyrene, surely the most ubiquitous of all petroleum products.

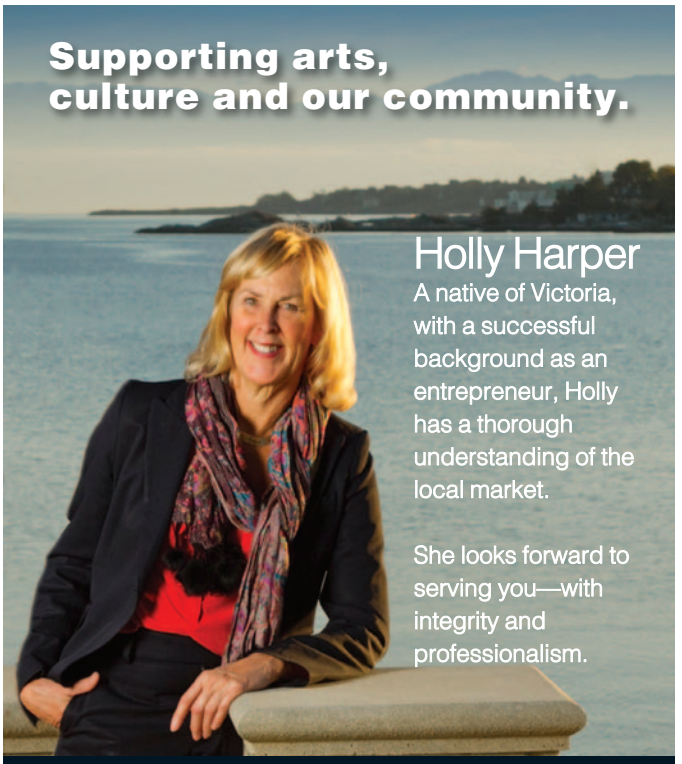
We can do it too, in chewable bits of our own design, and we seem well poised to take the plunge. Last spring the *Times Colonist* reported that the City of Victoria was already in the process of "developing a single-use materials strategy as part of a comprehensive zero-waste program." That means getting rid of drinking straws, Styrofoam cups, take-out containers and plastic cutlery.

The CRD and most municipalities are exploring similar possibilities, having developed their own climate action plans that emphasize the reduction of energy and material consumption. Saanich aims to become a 100 percent renewable energy community by 2050. Many local businesses are also working towards sustainability and zero waste. (Check out the Victoria-based Synergy Sustainability Institute and the long list of businesses to which it recently awarded Ecostar awards.)

And then there's us, the denizens of this Eden. We can get ahead of the curve—and the inevitable legislation—by starting right now to quit the disposable plastics habit. What a great New Year's resolution, to begin toting a refillable travel mug or water bottle, to begin saying no to plastic drinking straws.

Victoria *is* a great place to live. In 2019 we can make it even better.

Trudy finished writing just as the BC government began rolling out CleanBC, a bold new proclamation for tackling climate action. She thinks it might bode well for a happy new year.



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Grief, Grit, and Gratitude: A Workshop for Resilience
with **Jan Inglis**
4 Tuesdays, 10 am to 12 pm, Feb 5 – 26
$75.00 ($20 drop in Feb 5 only)
Friends Meeting House, 1831 Fern Street

Love Songs for the Earth: A Day of Singing
with **Siobhan Robinsong**
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Mary Lake Nature Sanctuary, 1772 Millstream Rd. (Do you need a ride or can you offer a ride? Please let us know.)

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