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ON THE COVER

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Math & ethics argue against Trans Mountain

Focus continues to inform me, to encourage me, and to delight me. I very much admire your Editor's letter opening the March/April edition. It's understandable that we here on the West Coast and in the western-most province should be nervous about probable tanker mishaps and the escape of dilbit into the sea and onto our coastal shores—to the point of protesting the pipeline's expansion and rerouting. But your letter takes on a related, truly national aspect: the incongruity of increasing fossil-fuel-export-related emissions from Alberta, while countrywide, reducing overall the fossil-fuel carbon released in order to meet our commitment made in the Paris Accord. And your piece does it with "math," with reliable numbers displayed graphically. Then the conclusion—from the facts, from the math—is rendered in your column's final paragraph. Many thanks.

George Kyle

Canada's federal and provincial governments have squandered billions of taxpayer funds to perpetrate the myths that ongoing fossil fuel development will be a net employment generator and revenue producer for the country. The only obstruction to achieving that economic utopia are those "anti-business," "left-wing," "drum-beating," "tree-hugging," "foreign-funded" environmentalists.

That's bovine crap, paid for with our tax dollars. The fact is, subsidizing fossil fuel expansion in genera,l and the Kinder Morgan project specifically, is as much or more about BC's and, ultimately, Canada's economy as it is about the environment.

Continuing to commit more taxpayer dollars to the billions that have been poured into this financial black hole to date would be a crime against those taxpayers who, as evidenced by recent federal and provincial budgets, are being increasingly burdened with additional taxes to fund the subsidies to these non-viable projects.

Don Gordon

Victoria's marijuana regulations

Thanks for your article. Good balance, I thought. I became acquainted with this issue because of the circumstances of Chris Zmuda, but that was just a portal to a realization of the proliferation of cannabis retailing. The City has strived to meet this challenge (with some success). However, this issue is not improving city life (it seems to me), and it's not going to go away when the Province and the Feds enter the picture.

I hope you will keep your eye on this issue in the coming months.

Dave Rodenhuis

Bridge names, continued

With reference to Steen Petersen's suggestion for a name for the new Blew Budget Bridge: two or three years ago, in a letter published in *Focus*, I suggested the name "Fortin's Folly." In my imagination, this new monstrosity spans Jackass Gulch.

Jeremy Hespeler-Boultbee

Gonzales Hill development alarms citizens

Thanks for Leslie Campbell's fantastically well-researched and well-written article. I was at Gonzales Hill Park today with my mom, brother and nephew and we spent quite a bit of time on the area sited to be developed. To allow this to happen reveals a complete lack of environmental stewardship. Anybody who spends five minutes on this property can immediately see that it is completely inappropriate to develop on it. This is rare land in the area especially because it is in an almost pristine state. For this reason alone, development should not be permitted. Some of the rocks here are millions of years old. And somehow the CRD considers that it would be appropriate to dynamite and blast these rocks out of their natural location to create a flat ground for a single-family luxury home? It is a travesty that the CRD did not purchase this small parcel and make it part of the park.

With all the rampant development and need for increased densification in the Greater Victoria area, we need to take into consideration that development and densification should be balanced with some recognition for the need for humans to have green spaces.

During our time in the park and surrounding area, we met several people who were coming to check out the spot that is going to be developed. One local resident, who has been making use of this park for decades, was extremely upset about the development plans, and she was stopping everyone who was visiting the area today to tell them about the plans for the site. All those hearing the news for the first time expressed utter shock and disbelief. Not one person thought it was a good idea. Of course these people were a biased audience in that they understood the importance of public green spaces as they were making use of one of them. I recommended to all that they read your article.

People were taking photos of the signs that have been posted with the email address to contact to protest the development. One person who lived nearby said that if she had even known the land was for sale, she would have petitioned all her friends in the neighbourhood and easily raised $1,000,000 among her Oak Bay contacts to buy the land for the park. It seems this was all done in secret, which reveals that something is amiss with the plan.

This is something definitely worth fighting for because once this piece of land is lost to private development, it is lost forever.

Wendy Welch

I thought your article on the Gonzales Hill Regional Park was excellent—what some might call a disastrous private/public sector interface. The owners/proponents bought a topographically-challenged property on spec. In order to justify their million-dollar property investment, they needed a bigger house than the zoning allowed, and requested variances. If the variances are not approved, then too bad, so sad. There is no obligation to approve the variances or bail them out. *Caveat emptor*, buyer beware. It's all about due diligence.

I'm usually pro-development, but the two remaining variances are egregious, do not pass the litmus-test, and should not be approved in order to accommodate the proposed residence.

Boards of Variance should be accountable to someone, but then the City of Victoria could refuse the request somehow?

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CRD staff could be criticized for their ho-hum non-comments regarding the development, and then not approving the requested driveway easement/land swap which would ameliorate the development somewhat. The CRD politicians have not been helpful in this situation, which brings to mind Gene Miller's column on "Amalgacide" and the distant non-accountability of our fourth and well-paid level of government.

The CRD should have bought the property. It's an obvious solution. I felt the neighbours' frustration, a combination of NIMBYism and the inability of the proponent and government to work out compromises or solutions to the problem.

Based on what I read, I hope the development does not proceed and the property owners are not in any way "kept whole" by government.

Tony Beckett

Editor's note: In late March, the City of Victoria's Board of Variance denied both requested variances by the owners of the property. It's not clear what the lot owners will do now, but neighbours are hoping to help purchase the lot for public use.

Saanich's EDPA

I am the President of SCRES, the Saanich Citizens for a Responsible EDPA (Environmental Development Permit Area). I believe the article by Briony Penn is very one-sided with significant misunderstandings and mistruths about the issue. I have been the public face of SCRES since it was created. Penn made no attempt to contact me, despite saying that she did try to find a spokesperson for SCRES. Penn implies in the article that loss of property value due to the EDPA bylaw was something that SCRES or landowners made up to try to get rid of the Saanich EDPA.

The Rollo report that the District of Saanich commissioned stated that "some recent public concerns regarding the adverse impact of the EDPA on property values are justified, with substantial impacts on some" and then goes on to specifically list the types of properties that are likely to be impacted. BC Assessment, in meeting with SCRES, indicated that most properties in their report were bought and sold with no knowledge of the EDPA's existence on the part of the buyer and real estate agents, and that sale prices likely did not reflect any potential impact of the EDPA on property value. Most landowners did not know that their property was in the EDPA because Saanich did not directly tell them. Saanich never told BC Assessment about the EDPA when Saanich passed the legislation. Real estate agents mostly had no knowledge of the EDPA. When the EDPA was disclosed in property sales, we have seen losses in the hundreds of thousands of dollars in what was a very hot market at the time.

Penn indicated in her afterward to the article that she was involved in the original Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory (SEI) which was used as the basis of the mapping for Saanich's EDPA. What she failed to point out was this mapping was never verified on the ground, as was done in many other jurisdictions. If she had, she would have found out that many of the Garry oak ecosystems, mapped in areas that have been developed for many decades, no longer exist. They consist of homeowners' lawns, gardens, homes, driveways, and areas covered by invasive species, all which no longer meet the criteria of Sensitive Ecosystems as required by the bylaw. As an example of how poor the EDPA mapping is, the photo in Penn's article shows a Garry oak ecosystem that is not actually mapped as being in the EDPA. The EDPA on this property was mapped in the back of the property which no longer had any natural vegetation remaining.

The reason Saanich has had such a pushback on the EDPA is because it is still trying to protect fully developed lots that have not had natural vegetation for 50 to 100 years. This, and what many people have called

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heavy-handed implementation. Penn talks about measurables from the bylaw and 20 cases of successful plantings of native species and removal of invasive species. What Penn failed to find out was that these were just native plant gardens that were required in exchange for a building permit, that were placed in areas that did not have any native species before. Not only is this not required by the bylaw, but this is not restoration of Garry oak ecosystems, or any natural ecosystem. These are small pockets of areas that now have common native landscaping material. Other landowners were required to place large covenants on their properties, in some cases up to sixty percent of the property, in areas that were completely covered by invasive species, with no restoration planned.

Penn missed an opportunity to put a focus on Garry oak ecosystems in Saanich Parks, which are mostly severely degraded, and overrun with invasive species. Many hard-working volunteers remove invasive shrubs; however, invasive grasses have severely degraded many Garry oak ecosystems that were wonderful wildflower meadows just a few decades ago. Saanich needs to find funding to maintain what still exists and restore the rest. This will have far more impact, and less conflict, on the remaining Garry oak ecosystems than expecting landowners who no longer have these ecosystems to leave their properties alone, in which case invasive species will dominate in perpetuity.

SCRES has always supported a well-crafted and well-implemented EDPA bylaw. SCRES has put forward recommendations for a landowner stewardship program to Saanich Council and provided significant recommendations for improving biodiversity in Saanich in a report to Council that is front and centre on our website.

I feel that Penn has provided a biased, unsupportable article on the Saanich EDPA which misleads and ignores many important facts and information.

Anita Bull

Briony Penn responds: Anita Bull raises an important point about Saanich's capacity to maintain and monitor the ecological integrity of their own parks, and the ongoing issue of invasive species on both public and private lands. However, it was not the focus of the article. Mayor Atwell and fairness of the public process/governance was the main focus. There was also no intention to verify or provide evidence for the various claims which Bull makes on behalf of SCRES. The issue was the toxicity of the debate, and the failure of a council to bring different parties together with accurate information and provide a forum for constructive dialogue. Citizens' charter rights to ask questions and get straight answers about why information wasn't made available, and why recommendations were not implemented, was the issue being discussed. There are a lot of important questions to be discussed, and the issue requires a respectful forum. Residents on both sides of the issue that I spoke to early on showed a great deal of fear of speaking to the issue, which was consistent with the Diamond Report—this is why it became an article on the toxicity of public discourse.

Should farmland be reserved for food?

In the lucid article by Judith Lavoie, Kent Mullinix, director of the Institute for Sustainable Food Systems at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, states: "We have got to get real. We can no longer allow a bunch of capitalist cowboys to run roughshod over the natural resources and the ecosystems that all our lives, livelihoods and—literally—happiness rely upon."

Capitalist private profit is the problem Dr Mullinix shows. Ten other accompanying *Focus* stories also covered private profit's various impacts and defects: The bridge, nuclear bombs (investors profit from these too), Trans Mountain, Gonzales Hill Park development, EDPA, drug over-prescription, marijuana regulations, the Holocaust (scapegoating Jews to mask Germany's capitalist crisis), "Amalgacide" and Trudy Duivenvoorden Mitic's citation of the Site C Dam.

Albert Einstein, in an essay "Why Socialism?" in the socialist *Monthly Review Magazine*'s inaugural May 1949 edition, stated: "Clarity about the aims and problems of socialism is of greatest significance in our age of transition. Since, under present circumstances, free and unhindered discussion of these problems has come under a powerful taboo, I consider the foundation of this magazine to be an important public service."

Evo Morales, Bolivia's President, speaking at the United Nations Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2008 put it this way: "If we want to save the planet Earth, to save life and humanity, we have a duty to put an end to the capitalist system. If we do not put an end to the capitalist system it's impossible to imagine that there will be equality and justice on this planet Earth. This is why I believe that it is important to put an end to the exploitation of human beings and to put an end to the pillage of natural resources; to put an end to destructive wars for raw materials and for the market; to the plundering of energy, particularly fossil fuels; excessive consumption of goods and the accumulation of waste. The capitalist system only allows us to heap up waste."

Larry Wartels

Not in our space

Monica Prendergast's piece in the latest issue prompts me to write. Ms Prendergast regrets that "fifty years of feminism" has not changed some negative aspects of male behaviour. Personally, I do not see any reason why it would.

It seems that society as a whole has not yet come to terms with the way we have viewed men over a long stretch of history. We are still subjecting little boys to conditioning aimed at suppressing elements of tenderness and vulnerability within them. Male roles have kept men set in the hardest and most dangerous jobs, including soldiering. Psychosocial inclinations have pushed men toward the darker reaches of human imagination and interaction. In story and symbols, and in actual life, men are typically the ones to be regarded with suspicion and fear.

The worst thing in all of this is the resistance by a lot of men to change. Maleness, almost certainly, evolved as a necessity for survival in much earlier stages of human development and it had to be programmed into male psyches. And it still is. Many men continue to view being a "real man" as an indispensible part of their existence.

It is necessary that we come to see that the behaviours of certain men can be linked with the reality that they are, in fact, themselves victims and casualties. This understanding does not obscure the criminality, nor the culpability surrounding their deeds. But the fact that men are operating in that part of the field serves to illustrate that it is they who are driven to playing the B side, not women.

In order to foster the degree of change that women claim to want, and which some men, including this writer, want, we need to evolve more progressive movements deeper and farther-reaching than what feminism has been. Even with that, it's probably liable to take some time before we see the kind of change where numbers of men can more easily transcend the confines of traditional maleness. Then we really might be able to honestly claim that we have gender equity.

Peter Halling

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Backyards fight climate change

I thought, in terms of neighbourhood planning, that people might like to read a recent article in the *New York Times*: "A Secret Superpower, Right in Your Backyard." It states: "Your average backyard has hidden superpowers: Its soil can absorb and store a significant amount of carbon from the air, unexpectedly making such green spaces an important asset in the battle against climate change. Backyard soils can lock in more planet-warming carbon emissions than soils found in native grasslands or urban forests like arboretums, according to Carly Ziter, a PhD candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison."

Aside from the abundant lifestyle and health advantages (gardening and recreation) of preserving generous backyards, this research shows a definite climatological benefit as well.

It has become commonplace in Fairfield to tear down one house and fill the lot with two *big* houses almost completely filling the lot and leaving scarcely enough room for a narrow strip of green in front and back.

Is this really the way we want our neighbourhoods to go? Is it good for our community values, our health, our food security and, even more importantly, helpful to the environment?

Arnold Porter

Amalgacide & governance review

One cannot think of anything much healthier that citizens asking each other if there are better ways that they might be governed when confronted with realities of their life that give them pause. Greater Victoria is now a region of some 350,000 people. Politically it comprises 13 governments. They all have to deal with issues that cross their borders. Transit does not end at these borders, neither does sewage. Growth affects everyone in the region. So does traffic congestion. The list is long and the issues often divisive and requiring intervention.

When they boil over, the Province has to provide what the region cannot: government. Thus we are not really in control of our own affairs. Edith Slack of the Munk Centre—a doyenne of local government thinking—suggests that this state of affairs is not to be endured for it is a drag on citizen efforts to enjoy better lives. To become "masters of our own house," the region needs to be in charge of its own affairs while local governments—however many—do likewise. Calls for a review of governance—local and regional—are increasing. It's time to heed them.

John Olson

Human impacts wide & deep: witness the orca

The impact of human activity on the planet has been identified and discussed at great length by *Focus*. If you look around the planet it is impossible to ignore the changes we have wrought in the past half century. Our species is only 1000 centuries old by most reckonings but our impact is wide and deeply ingrained in the world we currently occupy.

Some of us are deeply concerned by what has changed, and even more concerned by what will change in the next few centuries. Some of us are desperately insisting that many things must change very quickly before it is too late. Can we revert back to an earlier time? Can we revert to a past that did work for most of human history? I am concerned that many people do not fully appreciate the ramifications of what they propose should happen.

Let's take some simple examples that I think illustrate my concerns. The orcas in the Salish sea are dying. As *Focus*' David Broadland illustrated through available scientific research (November/December 2017), they are starving. Their food is no longer as readily available as it was a few decades ago. Their normal migratory and hunting patterns are being widely disrupted due to human activity. The waters they swim in are less friendly to their physical well-being. Yet ecologically-minded people propose that we stop farming fish and eat more wild salmon, their historic food source. In other words, they propose we compete more aggressively for the orca's food source. I think we can guess who will win that one.

Another example. Between 1830 and 1870, whales were the world's primary source of liquid hydrocarbons. The demand for it resulted in the decimation of whales worldwide. The first successful oil well in North America was drilled in Oil Springs, Ontario in 1857, and soon followed by one in Oil Creek, Pennsylvania. The subsequent oil rush and new source of liquid hydrocarbons saved the few remaining whales. We can all be thankful to the oil industry for that. Look out whales if we shut down all the oil wells.

The next time you go for a walk or ride your bike, glance down and see where 10-15 percent of the 90+ million barrels of oil currently consumed per day ends up. Concrete produces a ton of carbon dioxide for every ton of cement used. The return to cobblestone streets is our current best future road surface option.

An electric vehicle should be in everyone's garage. However, I am sure that electric planes are not going to be a travel option any time soon.

Can the world support 9 billion humans? How about 1 billion? By what process do we transition between what we have and what is sustainable? Do we revert back to the 4 horsemen to ride herd on our future? As Pogo said over 60 years ago, "We have met the enemy and they are us!"

Jim Knock

Why Bambi and friends moved to town

Many of us long-time Island residents have wondered why deer have invaded urban areas all along the east coast of Vancouver Island over the past 10 to 15 years. I put that question to both the guys at a local sporting goods store up here in the Comox Valley, which caters to local hunters, and *Focus*' Briony Penn. They had the same answer.

To quote Dr Penn: "Our coastal black-tails are very dependent in the winter on arboreal lichens which accumulate on older trees and most particularly on the old growth of south facing slopes where the sun hits the slope and the combination of sun and old growth canopy reduces snow cover. It is places like McLaughlin Ridge (near Port Alberni and recently mowed down by TimberWest) that provide critical winter habitat, especially when bad weather hits. When you lose this habitat the deer die or move to the cities to munch in garden beds in the winter. And, of course, cougars follow the deer. It is the fundamental reason we have cougar problems…"

Just another environmental disaster (like the flooding and subsequent boil water alert up here in the Comox Valley last winter) all thanks to the creation of the *Private Managed Forests Land Act* back in 2003 by a newly elected Liberal government. In essence, the bill served as one colossal giveaway to TimberWest and Island Timberlands since there's been virtually no government oversight of their operations here along the east coast of the Island since. As one old logger so aptly stated, "the fox was left in charge of the chicken house." As a result, not only has all our incredible first growth virtually disappeared but now any mature second growth (70 to 120 year old timber) is going, going…gone! All of which would have provided ideal habitat to blacktail deer and their close associates, the cougar.

Rick James

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The Wounded White Elephant

DAVID BROADLAND

We should call the new bridge what it is.

PHOTO: CITY OF VICTORIA

Victoria's new bridge opened on March 31, 2018

Victoria's new bridge—variously dubbed "The Blew Budget Bridge," "Fortin's Folly," and "The White Elephant"—opened on March 31, 2018. Notably absent from the group of officials presiding over the occasion were any of the former high-level City officials who lost their jobs as a consequence of the project's long history of miscalculation and misrepresentation. The bridge's original designer, Sebastien Ricard of Wilkinson Eyre Architects, who ended his connection with the project back in 2012, was nowhere to be seen. Nor was Joost Meyboom, the private engineer who first advised the City to fix the old bridge rather than build a new one, back in 2008, but then went on to become the City's prime consultant on the new bridge project. Meyboom's employer—formerly MMM Group, which changed its name to WSP—launched a legal suit against the City over the project earlier this year.

No wonder all these folks skipped Mayor Lisa Helps' $42,000 opening-day celebration. Back in April 2009, when City council voted to replace the existing "historically-significant" double-bascule bridge, those officials assured Victorians a new bridge would cost $41 million and take 18 months to build. Nine years later, costs have almost tripled while major elements of the project remain unestimated, unfunded and unfinished. Millions in costs directly attributable to the project have been hidden.

The project's record of underestimation and miscalculation, though, may be just a prelude to greater embarrassment to come. Certain aspects of the new bridge's design and construction are so at odds with engineers' warnings that, although the new bridge can, at this moment, open for marine traffic just like the old bridge, it's highly doubtful whether it will come anywhere near to matching the old bridge's 95-year record of reliable operation and minimal ongoing expense. While "The Blew Budget Bridge" does capture the huge miscalculation in cost, and "Fortin's Folly" makes it clear that good people made bad decisions, only "The White Elephant"—which signifies over-the-top original cost *and* unjustifiable ongoing expense—provides a fulsome enough characterization of the so-far nameless new bridge. But even that needs updating. Here's why I am leaning toward "The Wounded White Elephant."

THE MOST EYE-CATCHING FEATURE of the new bridge is its 50-foot-diameter steel rings. The counterweight lobes attached to the rings do happen to resemble an elephant's ears, but that's not the

BECAUSE OF A QUIRK IN RICARD'S DESIGN, every time the bridge opens, it has to lift and hold the span a full 2.5 storeys higher than it needed to. Indeed, people have observed that, when it is lifted, the new bridge is "so much higher" than the old bridge. Yet the new bridge provides the same navigational channel width as the old bridge. That extra height might be dramatic to observe—like a hopping car—but it's otherwise pointless and that little moment of drama has come with a lot of negative long-term consequences.

reason why this bridge should be named "The White Elephant." You won't find anything like those rings—or the gigantic machinery below them needed to support and rotate them—on any bridge anywhere else on Earth. Unfortunately, designing a bridge that required 1700 tonnes of structural steel in its moveable superstructure and hundreds of tons of machinery to support that—just to span a 41-metre-wide opening—is not the direction planet Earth needs to go.

Good, common-sense arguments were made against building Ricard's design by engineers, and it's because all the decision makers over the years ignored those arguments that the bridge cost three times what it should have and took 108 months to complete instead of 18.

Because of those officials' dismal performance, the bridge promises to be an ongoing source of expense to City of Victoria ratepayers and hence deserving of "The White Elephant" moniker. Below, I'll highlight just a fraction of what happened. To start with, though, let's recall why Ricard put those rings into his design. This is key to understanding why the project flubbed.

Just before the November 2010 referendum in which the City won elector approval to build a new bridge, Ricard explained those rings at a public presentation. He told a handful of people that the underlying design challenge, for him, was to create a moveable bridge that easily communicated to an observer how it worked. That's it. That's the entire argument for the rings. The rings were all about appearance and not about any substantive proven need particular to a crossing of Victoria's harbour.

Ricard wasn't trying to reduce seismic vulnerability or to create a bridge less likely to be hit by a barge full of gravel and survive the blow if one did. Nor was he trying to reduce life-cycle costs or use scarce public resources more efficiently. No, it was enough for Ricard that a tourist from Iowa, standing on the Laurel Point walkway, would be able to gaze across the Inner Harbour and understand how the bridge lifted, at a glance.

Perhaps there's a similar, whimsical rationale at the foundation of every white elephant construction project, and maybe Victorians are no better or worse than any other community at sniffing out ideas that don't have much merit. I don't know. But what I have learned, after following Victoria's project closely for 9 long years, is that there were real-life consequences that flowed from the project's ill-considered underpinnings.

Ricard's whimsical central motivation radiated outward through the project with force, inflating engineering and construction costs, laying waste to political and public service careers, substantially increasing carbon emissions, straining the City's coffers, and dividing the community. Ricard's imagination even put a well-established Chinese company out of business. How did all this happen? Let me sketch in some details.

Let's start with a fundamental physical fact about the bridge that resulted directly from Ricard's rings. Because of a quirk in Ricard's design, every time the bridge opens, it has to lift and hold the span a full 2.5 storeys higher than it needed to. Indeed, people have observed that, when it is lifted, the new bridge is "so much higher" than the old bridge. Yet the new bridge provides the same navigational channel width as the old bridge. That extra height might be dramatic to observe—like a hopping car—but it's otherwise pointless and that little moment of drama has come with a lot of negative long-term consequences.

For example, every part of the bridge that moves had to be stronger than it would have needed to be in a bridge that used a fixed central axle with conventional bearings located as close to the edge of the channel as possible. That extra strength was obtained by using far more steel for the bridge—in the rings and trusses—than would have been necessary in a more conventional approach. Extra steel in the trusses meant more lead and steel were needed in the counterweights to balance that extra weight. All that extra weight in the superstructure meant the machinery that supports and rotates it needed to be immense compared to the shaft, bearings and machinery needed to rotate a more conventional moveable bridge.

The higher lift of the span also meant that it would experience greater pressure during strong winds, and so that force, too, had to be offset with more steel and heavier support equipment, all costing more than a conventional approach.

All of these additional weights and costs affected the approach bridges, too. It meant that for a given budget, less money could be spent on the approach bridges. Originally, to satisfy high seismic performance requirements, they were going to be built of steel. Instead, because of the inflating cost of the lifting span, there was only enough budget to use less costly reinforced concrete. But in order to include the use of concrete approach bridges, City officials had to secretly agree, during the procurement process, to place a rider in the construction contract that specified much lower levels of seismic performance than had been recommended to the City.

The rider clearly states that its stipulations of (lower) performance take precedence over the seismic performance requirements of any of North America's highway bridge building codes. This loss of one of the fundamental objectives of the project—a legally enforceable contractual assurance of a high level of seismic performance by the bridge if Victoria is struck by a large earthquake, can be traced directly to Ricard's choice of rings in the lifting mechanism and the extent to which they inflated the cost of the project.

City officials, the ones who later lost their jobs, were well-warned by engineers about the risk of Ricard's open-ring design inflating costs.

For example, during bidding for the contract to build the bridge, participating companies were required to provide a critical review of the design MMM had developed with Ricard, and they were invited to "optimize" that design so that it could be built within the City's $66-million "affordability ceiling." The winning bid by PCL was the only proposal that utilized Ricard's open-ring concept. The only other serious bid proposal received by the City, from Kiewit Infrastructure, rejected the axleless design and predicted what would happen if the City went ahead with Ricard's design.

PHOTO: CITY OF VICTORIA

The second set of rings, trusses and bridge deck components being fabricated by ZTSS in March 2016

Specifically, Kiewit told City managers it had contacted "a number of steel and machinery fabricators, who are experienced in movable bridge design and/or construction. All expressed the opinion that there were likely more cost effective mechanical concepts for a bascule bridge" than the open-ring design used by Ricard and MMM. Kiewit advised the City that "unknowns and/or unexpected costs" of Ricard's "unconventional design" would "conflict with the City's mandate to remain near or below the indicated Affordability Ceiling…Kiewit is of the view that the [design] may represent a fundamentally high risk and expensive design approach."

The company's engineers noted that the counterweight in Ricard's design was attached to the truss rings in a way that "would load the truss ring eccentrically, which could distort the ring—a highly undesirable condition."

The bridge proposed by PCL had the same eccentric loading of the rings that concerned Kiewit, but was going to have an added complication: In order for its bid to be within the City's affordability ceiling, fabrication of the moveable part of the bridge would have to take place in China.

In hindsight, it's easy to see that the City listened to the wrong engineers, chose the wrong company to build a bridge, and built the wrong bridge. City officials were warned they were in danger of buying a White Elephant. Instead of heeding the warnings they insisted on having one as quickly as possible—and this meant hiding the critical reviews (which cost the City $150,000) from the public—and Ricard's whim rolled forward into the next phase.

AS YOU MAY RECALL, the City of Victoria awarded a construction contract to PCL in late 2012 to build the bridge under a $63.2-million "fixed-price" contract. PCL made it clear it planned to have the moveable part of the bridge fabricated in China. This, apparently, raised no red flags at City Hall.

At the time PCL won the construction contract, MMM Group were contracted to provide engineering, and it in turn subcontracted Hardesty & Hanover to provide engineering and design for the lifting span and the machinery used to raise that span. When PCL began construction in late 2013, the City of Victoria assured its ratepayers that the cost of the bridge could not rise since PCL had agreed to a "fixed-price" contract. But, by early 2014, PCL started to pepper the City with demands for more money.

Those demands began soon after fabrication of the rings and trusses had started in China in March 2014. By September of that year, work in China had been halted. In January 2015, the City's Project Director Jonathan Huggett reported that fabrication problems were so bad that "one of the rings is being replaced while the other is being repaired. The north truss steel will be replaced."

Notably absent from Huggett's reports from this era is any acknowledgment that the thing the Chinese welders were screwing up was actually very difficult to build. Neither did Huggett tell councillors that the City had been warned by Kiewit engineers that this was likely to happen if the City attempted to build Ricard's design.

Instead, Huggett persuaded the City that simply increasing quality control would

produce rings and trusses with adequate strength and structural integrity.

In spite of such hopes, fabrication problems in China continued to accumulate in the bridge components. Recently, Huggett admitted: "We rejected an entire bridge at one point."

The City's project director seemed to see the scrapping of "an entire bridge" as a good thing, a sign that people were doing their jobs properly, that quality assurance procedures were working, and that Victorians could be confident that the project wouldn't accept crap for a bridge.

But think about that: An entire bridge wasted. If we take Huggett at his word, about 1700 metric tonnes of steel were scrapped. That's the weight of structural steel for the superstructure specified in the City's contract with PCL. (The City did not respond to repeated requests for confirmation of the amount of steel that was scrapped.)

But we should add to that heavy burden all the human effort and other costs—including associated environmental damage—that went with throwing away the warm-up bridge. Who was going to pay for that waste? As it turned out, it wasn't going to be PCL.

The City had acknowledged PCL's first demand for more money—$7.9 million in early 2014—but then demurred from providing information about subsequent demands. In early 2015, about the time "an entire bridge" was rejected, the City admitted it had entered a "legal mediation process" with the companies building the bridge.

It wasn't until April 2016, at the conclusion of the mediation, that the City acknowledged that PCL, MMM and H&H had demanded $27 million in additional costs.

The details of that $27 million claim were never made public, but it is believed PCL's share was about $25 million. After out-competing two other companies for the contract and assuring the City Ricard's bridge could be built for $63 million, what circumstance could possibly have justified PCL's demand for over 40 percent more money?

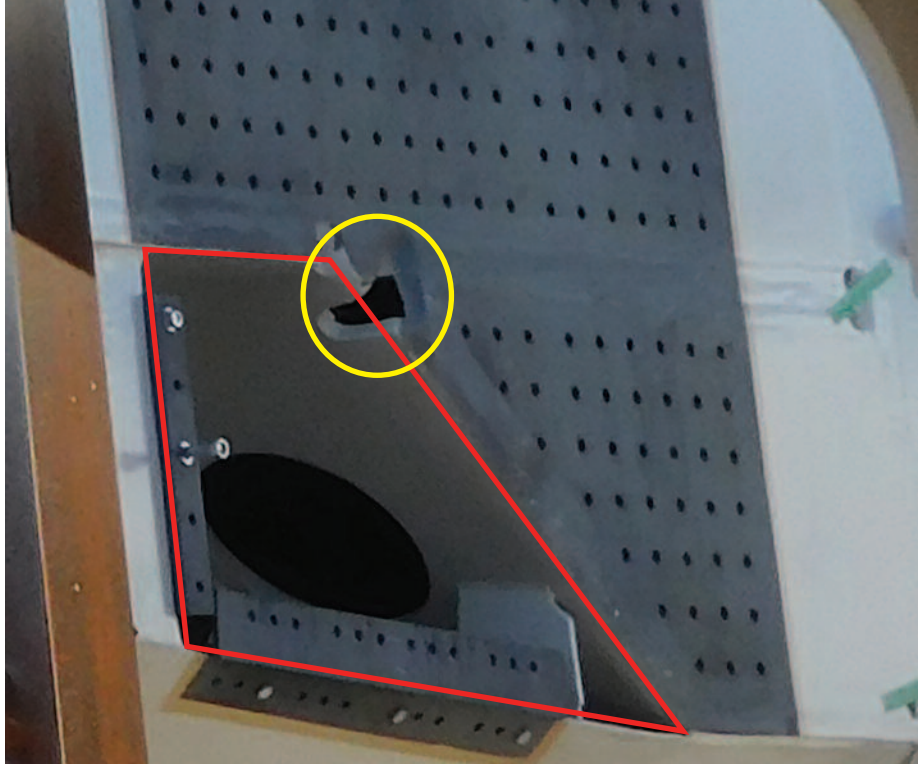
The timing of the start of PCL's demands, you may have noticed, coincided with the beginning of fabrication in China. As major components of the bridge were rejected, PCL's claims against the City increased. The company may have realized that the lifting span being (badly) fabricated in China could carry a huge risk of future legal claims by the City. By demanding more money and halting work in China, PCL may have simply been creating the conditions for dumping

all of that risk back on the City. And that's exactly what happened.

The City settled the $27 million in claims by agreeing to pay an additional $2.4 million and making changes to the terms of the contract. In a news report at the time, Mayor Helps claimed: "I think it's better news than anyone could have hoped for."

But an FOI filed by johnsonstreetbridge.org revealed the City agreed to "release and forever discharge" PCL, MMM and H&H "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]."

This was hardly "better news than anyone could have hoped for." Whatever problems have been built into the bridge by PCL, MMM and H&H are now City taxpayers' problems. One of those problems was brought to the public's attention in the last two editions of *Focus*. And this is where the "wounded" part of " Wounded White Elephant" comes into our story.



This photograph shows the repair that was made to the north ring at Point Hope Maritime's shipyard in October. The lines of small holes were drilled in China and would later allow the bolted-on plates to be attached. The opening (outlined in red) cut into the ring was made at Point Hope. The holes circled with yellow are believed to be "rat holes" cut into the rings by an unknown welder in China. These rat holes may be part of the reason why bolted-on plates were added to both rings. The City's Project Director Jonathan Huggett has acknowledged that the bridge has hundreds of such "non-conformances."

MANY OF THE RISKS PCL adroitly shifted back onto the City arose directly from the bridge's open-ring design. That such risks would have actual physical consequences became clear shortly after the rings were erected at the bridge site last December and *Focus* pointed out that they had already been repaired with metre-square bolted-on plates, apparently required because of a structural weakness in both rings.

The bolted-on plates definitely eliminated any chance of the bridge winning any awards for excellence in engineering or construction. But much worse, they may signify a more pervasive problem with the lifting span.

The City has refused to provide a full explanation for the plates, but we have since found a photograph taken during an open house at Point Hope Maritime's shipyard last October that unintentionally captured details of the repair. The repair was made in Victoria after the rings had been shipped from China. The photograph (see the close-up above), taken before the bolted-on plates were added, reveals not only the make-shift nature of the repair but also at least two holes cut into the "fracture critical" steel with a cutting torch. That damage may have created the need for the plates, at least in part.

I emailed the photograph to Martin Bache, a 40-year veteran of the heavy steel fabrication industry in Canada, most recently with Canron as a project supervisor.

About the burned-in holes that seem to have created the need for the bolted-on plates, Bache commented, "The cuts are similar to what are termed 'rat holes' in steel fabrication. These allow continuous welding of two members to take place through the member with the hole. But, I have never seen two rat holes coming together in two planes as these appear to be. A welder in China may have just taken a torch and cut out two large rat holes to make life easier for himself, but damaged the structural integrity in the process. But that would not seem to require such large bolted-on plates to correct, so I really don't know what the real story is."

Around the time the photograph was taken at Point Hope Shipyard, someone had removed a trapezoidal-shaped section from the ring and had added some light steel supports for two edges of the bolted-on plates. Of the repair that was done in Victoria, Bache observed, "Not only this bizarre rat hole but also the other pieces of steel in the photo appear to be butchered to an astounding extent. No competent steel fabricator works this way. So, what the hell is going on here?"

The steel members of the bridge that were cut into by both the Chinese welder and the workers at Point Hope are considered "fracture critical." That designation, according to the US Federal Highway Administration, applies to "any steel member in tension, or with a tension element, whose failure would probably cause a portion of or the entire bridge to collapse."

Given the apparent low quality of the repair evident in the photograph, Bache is concerned the repair has not been executed properly. "Any modifications or repairs done to fracture critical bridge components must be performed to detailed procedures approved by the Engineer of Record (EOR) and must be inspected by the EOR or his agent to confirm 100 percent compliance with the procedures. It seems inconceivable that Hardesty & Hanover are accepting all of this butchery," Bache wrote.

Butchery. Wounded. Get it?

Bache added, "With all due respect to shipyards, they are not generally expected to work to the same standards of quality and accuracy as bridge fabricators. I would have needed a lot of evidence to persuade me that a shipyard could handle modifications to a fracture critical bridge. Which party approved Point Hope as capable of doing this?"

We can't provide the answers to any of Bache's concerns. The City has dismissed

any such concerns about the repair, explaining only that it was the result of a "fabrication challenge." This is just one of over 150 similar "non-conformities" recorded by the project, according to Huggett. The City's idea of providing the public with information about the issue has been, in effect: "Why worry us about that one problem? The bridge contains hundreds of them."

The City continues to refuse to release records related to this one repair that were requested by *Focus* back in mid-December through BC's access to information legislation. Until the City provides the basic communications about the issue between the City and the engineers who were responsible for resolving the issue, we will keep insisting on seeing those records.

Martin Bache's final comment was this: "What an absolute disaster that this bridge was not made in BC."

This raises an interesting point. PCL based its 2012 bid on a quote from a Chinese fabricator and that allowed it to sneak under the City's affordability ceiling. That miracle required everyone involved to pretend that a 4 percent contingency would cover any errors in cost estimation and that Chinese labour really was "lower-cost." If a few people had been smarter, Ricard's rings would never have been built. Instead, Victoria got a disaster. Ironically, ZTSS did even worse.

That company suffered significant financial losses during the time it was building Victoria's bridge. (It was a publicly-traded company, so its financial performance is a matter of public record.) The cost of having to build the bridge twice, along with bad international publicity about "cracked welds," no doubt harmed ZTSS's ability to get new work. By November 2016, trading of the company's shares had been halted.

In August 2017, as Ricard's wounded rings were finally arriving in Victoria and being readied for repairs at Point Hope, ZTSS announced it planned to sell the operation that had fabricated Victoria's bridge. By January 2018 the company had undergone a corporate name change and was transformed into Beijing-Kaiwen Education Technology Co., Ltd.

With a such a history, it's unlikely that anyone would want their name on Victoria's new bridge. What it deserves is a nickname that truthfully reflects its troubled 9-year-long birth. I respectfully propose "The Wounded White Elephant."

David Broadland is the publisher of *Focus*.

Focus presents: Dr. Fei Yang DTCM

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Dr. Fei Yang draws loyal patients from as far as Vancouver and Duncan to her beautiful office in her waterfront home in Sooke. While she listens carefully to her patients' symptoms, she seeks the deeper nature of the illness or pain. "The pulse and tongue tell me a deeper story," explains Dr. Yang. "They tell me about the mental state, energy level, where the spirit sits. Patients finally realize someone understands them—what their body and soul needs, the weight they are carrying. It fascinates both of us and sets them on a journey that relieves symptoms but also heals them at a deeper level."

As a sixth-generation Doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine (her mother, at age 81, still practices in China), Dr. Yang is trained in herbs, nutrition and acupuncture. (She is also trained in Western medicine, though no longer practices it.)

Tracking diet is something all patients are asked to do. Often certain foods are serving a purpose—comforting a psychic wound—other than supplying nutrition. Bringing awareness to this helps patients clear the tension and make better choices.

Sometimes a simple adjustment makes all the difference. One patient told Dr. Yang that she was eating lots of vegetables and other healthy food but unable to lose weight. When Dr. Yang investigated further, it turned out the patient had had only one hot meal in two weeks—all her food was cold. This, explains Dr. Yang, slowed her metabolism—much of her food was stuck in her stomach. She needed to eat more warm, cooked food to boost her metabolism to lose weight. "If patients cooperate with me on food," says Dr. Yang, "It can save a lot of time and money."

Kerri Anne Williams originally went to Dr. Yang to get off antibiotics; after 3 months of herbs all her symptoms went away, and years later they've still not come back. Then she tried acupuncture for her sciatica. "I was very pleased that it only took two acupuncture treatments and three sets of herbs to be pain-free, and walking without a limp. "I feel very fortunate to have met such an exceptional healer," says Kerri Anne. Others have successfully dealt with fibromyalgia, depression, opiate addiction, chronic pain, autoimmune diseases, hormonal imbalances, and diabetes. Read the encouraging testimonials on Dr. Yang's website.

During the spring season, Dr. Yang helps many clients do an internal cleanse. This boosts your energy and mental clarity—which helps patients deal with other aspects of their lives. "There's lots of energy shifting in Spring," says Dr. Yang.

A spring cleanse program starts with a full assessment and a customized herb formula. Every two weeks you meet with Dr. Yang so she can assess your progress. "The body guides me to what to address in the next two weeks. It might be more cleansing but with added nourishment. However, if an infection is present, we need to address that first."

Dr. Fei Yang DTCM

She explains everything as she goes, including what symptoms of the cleanse to watch for—sometimes you will feel worse for a bit (with flu or a sore throat, for instance) as toxins are broken down and released—and what to do about it.

Her herbal formularies are based on thousands of years of experience (and all approved in Canada). During the cleanse, her aim is to "get everything working properly—your metabolism speeds up, you have no more constipation and water retention. People notice changes very quickly," says Dr. Yang.

Always without judgement, Dr. Yang helps us view each of our symptoms as a gift we can learn from. "Then you can say I don't need that symptom anymore; it has helped me towards wisdom."

Dr. Fei Yang DTCM
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Oak Bay neighbourhood wrestles with a 98-unit housing proposal

LESLIE CAMPBELL

Oak Bay United Church's plan to build affordable housing raises questions about proper consultation and density.

The project's rendering of proposed affordable housing at Granite and Mitchell Streets in Oak Bay. Oak Bay United Church is on far right.

One day, *Focus* may tell you about a housing proposal that everyone in the neighbourhood is happy with, where the public process surrounding it is hailed as transparent, inclusive, effective and painless for all involved. But that day isn't here yet.

When it was announced last summer that Oak Bay United Church wanted to build some affordable housing on its property at Granite Street and Mitchell—just one block over from Oak Bay Village—it sounded refreshingly bold and in tune with the times. Affordable housing is the region's number-one need.

Soon afterwards "Stop Overdevelopment by Oak Bay United Church" signs popped up like mushrooms on neighbourhood lawns. A "concerned citizens" website was created, and media reports citing divisions and alarm were heard.

Some early concepts for the development indicated up to five-storey buildings and 160 units could be proposed.

For a 1.2-acre lot in a leafy, mostly single-family neighbourhood, it did seem perhaps too bold.

Now, church representatives claim they have listened, and in their recent plans—unveiled at open houses at the end of April—have tried to meet neighbours' concerns as much as possible.

We shall see how that works out.

Reverend Michelle Slater

IN HER OFFICE in a 1920s-era duplex behind the church, Oak Bay United Church Minister Michelle Slater told me the idea of developing the property stems back to 1994 when the heritage church was "condemned" as unsafe, and the congregation had to conduct services elsewhere. It wasn't clear that the church, built in 1914, could be saved, so everything was up for consideration, including selling off the whole property. Eventually, it was decided that restoration was possible, and the congregation worked hard for years to raise $1.5 million. In 2010, 16 years after its closure, the church reopened.

Once back in their church, congregants had little appetite for further change any time soon. But, said Slater, "it was always accepted that that was just the first step to renewal."

There are five structures on the 56,000-square-foot property. The church occupies 9000 square feet. There is also a large storage shed; an office building (often called the "duplex"); the cinder block, seismically-challenged Gardiner Hall (with a gym); and Threshold House, which is rented to Threshold Housing Society, and has nine studio apartments for vulnerable youth. With the exception of the church, the latest plans call for demolition of all these structures.

Slater said that if the 200-strong congregation was dwindling, they would look at amalgamating with another church and selling off the property. But it's actually growing, though that includes those who use the church's many services.

"We're becoming increasingly aware, particularly through our ministry to children and families, of the real crisis with diverse and affordable housing," said Slater, mentioning seniors who attend weekly coffee meetings and young parents who come to church activities.

Sometimes congregants can't afford a prescription they need, so the church steps in. It has also provided food vouchers, or even a funeral for those in need.

In all, she estimates that Oak Bay United provides about $2.5 million annually in community services (calculated by a formula arrived at through research by the Halo Project at McMaster University). Some of it, she noted, comes in the form of saving the community money—for instance when members notice another congregant is unwell, and ensure they receive help before needing an expensive hospital bed.

At this point, Slater stopped herself, noting wryly that it sounded as if she's trying to justify the church's very existence—perhaps in reaction to the heated atmosphere in the neighbourhood of late. The social services she alluded to have added an extra layer of complexity

> "WE FEEL EXCLUDED, manipulated and are being painted as against change or affordable housing."
>
> *—Curtis Hobson, nearby neighbour*

to the debate. Do such services mean the church deserves more right to develop as it pleases, despite neighbours' concerns?

Continuing the historical overview, Slater told me that a few years ago, the board asked a couple of members to look into options for developing the 56,000-square-foot property, in keeping with the mission and purpose of Oak Bay United Church. That led to them devoting $20,000 to a feasibility study led by Chris Corps, a land economist, which in turn led, in March 2017, to the church board giving unanimous support to applying for a $500,000 loan from BC Housing to do a thorough proposal involving "diverse, inclusionary and affordable housing," said Slater.

"We could make a lot more money if we just put up some luxury condos. But that's not what this community needs," said Slater. "And making the most money is not the most important thing to us."

The church got the BC Housing loan, and by last August, its board members had started knocking on doors to inform immediate neighbours that the church was thinking of developing its property. Some became alarmed, Slater said, and asked for a meeting. About 60 people came. They wanted to know the plans, but, said Slater, "We're not a developer; we wanted input first."

In November, four sessions with "near neighbours" were held. "We asked what would you be most concerned about?'" said Slater. Feedback was all over the map, she said. "We got everything from 'nothing' to 'six stories.' [On style], we got 'traditional' to 'contemporary.' We gave all the input to the architect. In mid-December we presented four scenarios for siting and massing to test people's responses." (The scenarios involved three-, four- and five-storey buildings; many neighbours were aghast there were no smaller options.)

The biggest concerns were around height, density and traffic. "We've worked hard to mitigate or solve the concerns people have—which are for the most part legitimate," said Slater. However, she argued, Granite Street, running parallel to Oak Bay Avenue, is viewed by the municipality as a transition street, from the busy Oak Bay commercial zone to residential. "It is not solely a single-family-home neighbourhood," said Slater, pointing to the boxy, 3.5-storey Granite House condos across the street towards the Village. "Our project will be much more attentive to the character of the neighbourhood than Granite House."

Reverend Slater is diplomatic when speaking of the resistance to the development: "I am not surprised at the depth of feeling, because everyone values their neighbourhood and wants to preserve what's best about it. I was distressed by some of the personal comments about our consultants," along with the level of distrust. "We feel we're really trying to do something good," she said. "This is a good way for Oak Bay to contribute to the region and show leadership." She seems bewildered and dismayed that some people do not trust the church.

AN INDICATION OF THAT DISTRUST, and perhaps another brick in the wall between the church and its neighbours, occurred at a meeting of Oak Bay's Committee of the Whole on January 15. The last item on the agenda was a request from the church that council approve a process to expedite the church's development application,

Oak Bay United Church

once submitted, as a pilot project for affordable housing projects. It brought citizens out in force; they filled all the seats and the hallway. Numerous letters of concern had been sent in.

Kim Fowler, the planner on the church's team, explained that they are working on "a minimum, break even" budget, and delays would be costly. She pointed to other municipalities that have adopted streamlined processes or a "concierge"-type service with staff dedicated to ushering non-profit proposals through various hurdles at City Hall. (Fowler played a similar role at the City of Victoria when she worked as the project manager for the Dockside Green redevelopment project).

Councillor Tara Ney, noting the evident community interest, voiced a concern that "the amount of time for making decisions, the amount of time for consulting thoroughly with the community—that those parts of the process are not compromised." Fowler assured her that that would not happen.

When Councillor Hazel Braithwaite warned that "it takes a long time to get something correct," there was applause from the gallery. Braithwaite also suggested that shepherding the application through City Hall was Fowler's job—and that it would have been "friendly" if the church had notified citizens of its request for expedited service.

When Councillor Tom Croft asked, "Where is the extra cost of delay when the church owns the land?" Fowler alluded to an existing mortgage (it is about $300,000), and the escalation of construction costs. At 6 percent, she said, that translates to $170,000 in carrying costs per month.

Other councillors noted that with "complicated applications like this," the best way to expedite it is to have a good application, and to not short-circuit public engagement. Councillor Eric Zhelka advised studying the case of Oak Bay Lodge—which came to council two times with proposals that were both rejected. The lesson being: "Find a design with everyone here [meaning the audience] before you come to council, that everyone can support."

The Committee decided not to even vote on Fowler's request.

Later, Ney told *Focus* the request for an expedited process was "not an example of good timing."

ON A SATURDAY MORNING IN APRIL, I met with five members of "the resistance" at Sue MacRae's house, right next door to the church property.

They expressed many concerns: about Oak Bay's infrastructure not being adequate to handle another 100-plus residents on the one-acre site; about the unfairness of the church having $500,000 to put towards developing their plan and doing PR, while their group relies on volunteer time and digs into their own pockets for signs and flyers; and about the size and scale of the proposals they've seen and how it will impact their beloved streetscape, characterized by lots of trees and 100-year-old single-family homes.

But they were most perturbed by the public consultation process, and the distrust they feel it has fostered.

Both Reverend Slater and the church's development team co-chair Cheryl Thomas have told me that what they were actually trying to do in consultation sessions in the fall was get neighbours' input before designing anything. But it seems to have backfired, as these neighbours believed that there was a plan, but it was being kept secret. They pointed to the church's application for a BC Housing loan, which they obtained through a Freedom of Information request. Though 90 percent redacted, it shows that as early as March 2017, the church was outlining options to BC Housing and Oak Bay municipal staff—whereas the neighbours only got notified in August that the church was considering development. Cheryl Thomas assured me that only financial models went to BC Housing, not actual designs, yet it seems clear those would have required some assumptions about size in order to project costs and revenues.

Diana Butler, a former mayor of Oak Bay who lives on Granite Street, suggested the fall consultations were mostly for show, and as evidence, pointed to the short time lapse between the November "consult sessions" and the "reveal sessions" in December, at which the scenarios involving 101- to 160-unit buildings were presented. The development team's unwillingness to entertain a project with a much smaller profile fuelled suspicions around the church's motivations, as well as its strategy.

Wayne Todd and Diana Butler

At our meeting, neighbour Wayne Randall said he believes it's now the church's strategy to focus solely on the wider community and ignore the neighbours. Butler concurs. She has written extensively on the Concerned Citizens' website (ccn-oakbay.com), at one point writing: "We have spent hours and hours working with the development team to design a better consultation process. We placed our trust in the development team truly wanting to engage the neighbourhood in a meaningful discussion. We are very disappointed that they have so abruptly abandoned this route, in preference to taking their project to the wider community where they hope to get more support."

The development team contracted Gene Miller to help with consultations with this group of neighbours, who say he sincerely tried to help. They told me he met with them separately a couple of times, to try to work out a better process. But, they said, "he failed." (Disclosure: Gene Miller writes for *Focus*. I did not know he was involved until recently, and have not had any communication with him about the project.)

Curtis Hobson, a special education teacher who lives directly across from the church, told me, "We feel excluded, manipulated, and are being painted as against change or affordable housing." Hobson and other neighbours I spoke with said they are in favour of affordable housing on this site, but not at the scale the church has in mind.

At the meeting, these residents provided me with an outline of what they would accept: A maximum three storeys, with massing along Granite Street, with some variation in height, and a more traditional design in keeping with the neighbourhood. Ideally, they'd like the buildings broken up or clustered so that pedestrians can move through the site. They want to keep Threshold House, but if it must go, they want alternative housing to be provided on the site for the nine vulnerable youth (age 16-22) now housed in its studio apartments. This heritage-style building, they argued, is only 25 years old, fits into the neighbourhood well and serves a valuable purpose.

The main stumbling blocks towards agreement, however, will be the massing and the number of units: the neighbours' wishlist calls for 25-40 suites, whereas the latest church plans (not unveiled when I interviewed them) call for 98.

Curtis Hobson and Sue MacRae

AT A MEETING WITH the Development Team co-chair Cheryl Thomas and architect Rod Windjack, I was shown rough drafts of the plans that will be unveiled at the late-April open houses. Thomas lived in Oak Bay when her kids were growing up, and got involved in the church in 2012—mostly to sing in the choir. She ended up on the board and came to realize "we've got to make this place sustainable." As a congregation, she said, "we wanted to live our values and provide something that was truly needed. Obviously affordable housing is desperately needed."

Windjack, an architect who was involved with the design for the new Oak Bay High School, had his work cut out for him, trying to accommodate the needs of both church and neighbours. Besides the concern over size, he said, one thing that came through loud and clear from neighbours was that the development shouldn't result in additional parking on nearby streets. This, he noted, created a burden on the church financially, because underground parking is so costly.

After numerous iterations, Windjack eventually came up with a 3.5-storey (four floors), L-shaped building with 98 units (predominantly one-bedrooms) and tilted it, so it's not monolithic from the street. "We've tried to deal with how the building responds to neighbours, through how it sits on the site and by playing with the massing of the building—using articulation in front, further extended by our use of materials," Windjack said. Materials include some brick, echoing the church. The main building has a gently-sloped roof with dormer elements that are common in the neighbour-

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hood. At 51 feet high, it is slightly higher than the ridge line of the church.

In the location where the church office now stands on Mitchell, the project is proposing a three-storey "brownstone" building with four market-priced leasehold units.

Parking—for 116 vehicles—would all be underground. Virtually the whole site would need to be blasted (through granite) to create a two-storey parkade, costing about $5 million of the $26-million total price tag. About half would be for church-goers and the other half for project residents. While they cannot prohibit a resident from having a vehicle, they can tell prospective renters that units do not include parking. Residents would have good bike storage and likely a car-share vehicle, perhaps even bus passes, noted Thomas.

Everyone with the church and the neighbourhood was in agreement that a green strip, with majestic Garry oaks, that runs along the back of the property, had to stay.

Units would be small, even by present standards: one-bedrooms approximately 420-455 square feet, two bedrooms 650-700 square feet, and three bedrooms 850-900. "That's what makes them affordable," said Thomas. (Brownstone units are larger.)

Rents for the affordable units would be set by BC Housing and CMHC, and rent increases would be tied to the cost of living (not the market). A one-bedroom unit would cost about $1000 per month.

Thomas stressed that the development team has tried to accommodate all that they heard from neighbours, but the financial realities are limiting. In their attempt to keep the height to 3.5 storeys, only 50 units will be officially "affordable," though 44 others are characterized as "market affordable."

The feedback at the Open Houses planned for late April might help them "further refine what we've got, but we don't see major changes," said Windjack.

CURTIS HOBSON DIRECTED ME TO an interesting 2014 article in the United Church's *Observer* magazine, called "The Perils of Redevelopment." In discussing the trends for many churches—declining congregations, rising costs, and the sale or redevelopment of their properties—it warns, "Even a plan conceived with the best of intentions can go horribly wrong."

The article stresses the importance of constructive community outreach, without which, it warns, years can be spent fighting with neighbours and municipal governments.

Neighbour Wayne Todd researched every development mentioned in the article and found virtually all of them had been sold or failed, with congregations forced to rent other facilities. But he also inadvertently stumbled on one church project, not mentioned in the *Observer* article, that worked out well; in fact it may become Canada's first net-zero-energy multi-family building.

Andrew Gregory chaired the planning committee of the North Glenora Community League during the time (2013-2015) the Westmount Presbyterian Church in that Edmonton community sought rezoning for its property in order to put up affordable housing. In a report on it, he stated: "It took dozens of meetings and hundreds of hours of focused effort on both sides to get to 'YIMBY.'"

He mentions the wisdom of arriving at "a mutually understood definition for community engagement." He writes: "It seems that the Achilles heel of most re-development plans in the city is that too many decisions are made too early without involving the community… committing the developer to a plan before engagement has taken place and derailing authentic dialogue before it can happen."

Certainly in the Oak Bay case, it does not appear that the church went to neighbours with a blank slate. It had priorities and financial realities that led it early on to think big.

One major difference between the Edmonton church and the Oak Bay church is that in Edmonton, the North Glenora Community League's planning committee (all volunteers)—took the reigns to negotiate a community engagement process. Then it took minutes of every meeting which were posted, hosted periodic town halls, and conducted surveys on specific aspects. In Oak Bay, there's been no similar body providing such leadership. (The Oak Bay Community Association did host a community forum on housing affordability that both sides appreciated.)

Another difference: the Edmonton church seemed willing to take its time—two years in total from announcement to passing at Edmonton City Hall—whereas Oak Bay United Church representatives seem in a hurry, and seem to believe they've already done much of the community consultation necessary—not the hundreds of hours allowed for in the Edmonton case. By the way, it too started out on shaky ground, but in the end, at the final Edmonton City Hall public hearing, two residents spoke in favour of the development, none opposed, and it passed unanimously.

Another noteworthy difference: the Edmonton church's proposal was for a 16-unit townhouse development for families.

EVERYONE I SPOKE TO for this article seems to care deeply about their community and be in favour of some affordable housing on the church property. No neighbours expressed concerns about property values. Even the vociferous ad-hoc group I spoke with would accept a three-story building.

Yet even if the church wins wide community support for its project, it may be embarking on a perilous journey. Its financial straits have been alluded to time and time again, in church minutes, at consultations, at council meetings, and during interviews.

The church has a $300,000 mortgage now. To create a development on its property, it has borrowed $500,000 from BC Housing (which needs to be repaid, regardless of the outcome). If it gets rezoning approved, it will be borrowing tens of millions more from BC Housing to finance it. Yes, it will get rental income to pay down its debts, but it will also be sacrificing significant space for its activities, along with $100,000 in annual revenues from its thrift store, and $54,000 in annual rent from Threshold Housing Society. These revenues currently get fully spent on church operations and maintenance. Right now, the sanctuary needs an estimated $300,000 in repairs. When Threshold leaves, the church will also have to refund the balance of a loan the housing society provided for renovations—about $40,000 now.

But the church is committed to the project. And as of last August, it's doubtful the congregation could back out if it wanted to. The church board transferred all decision-making to its project development team. In church board minutes, it's noted that the team, composed of four church representatives as well as some external advisors and consultants, has "commission status," meaning they have "complete authority" until their mandate expires at end of the rezoning process. "The governing body or executive [of the church] may not debate the commission's decision and come to a different decision."

Reverend Slater told me she hopes their proposal goes before council in May, and that it's approved in advance of the municipal election in October. Given the usual pace of the development process, this seems wildly optimistic.

Interestingly, the church is already permitted, under its "institutional" zoning, to build three floors of multi-family housing on the church

property. But the proposed density will make it necessary to apply for rezoning. For instance, the minimum square footage for a one-bedroom apartment has to be 603 sq ft, not the 420 the church is planning. The project would also take up a far greater portion of the land than its institutional zoning allows.

Will a majority of councillors be willing to "spot zone" the development as proposed? Will they give weight to the church's provision of services and financial need? In light of citizens' complaints, will they send it back to the drawing board?

When I asked Councillor Ney about this, she reiterated the message of the January meeting, that the way to ensure success is to have a robust consultative process, developing rapport with the community and coming up with something that is amenable to all. "For whatever reason," she said, "the consultation with this proposal went off the rails," resulting in people being scared and nervous—especially about the massing. Historically, Ney said, Oak Bay was not planned with adequate transition zones between areas of multi-unit buildings and single-family homes. Ney noted that council often has to "soften the edges" of developments so they are not pushed hard against neighbours.

But there appears little room for compromise on the part of the church. Thomas said, "Our reality is we've made it as small as we realistically can. We are now [in the late April open houses] putting all our cards on the table. This is the best we can do."

So what is the church's fall-back position if rezoning is refused? Thomas said they would probably have to subdivide, selling off the Threshold building to get enough money to do the needed repairs of other buildings. "There would be no housing. And it puts the church in a precarious long-term position," she said.

It is admirable that Oak Bay United has stepped up to create some desperately needed affordable housing. Reverend Slater might be overly optimistic, but she's correct in her assessment that the project proposal is "an opportunity for the community to wrestle with the 'over-development' issue, and how a community has that conversation."

Leslie Campbell attended the first open house on April 25. She overheard one gentleman saying, "Well, at least it's going in the right direction."

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Did you know that one in three people experience urinary incontinence? For many of those affected, it means they limit their activities for fear of being caught without a nearby bathroom. At best, they have to spend too much time in "that aisle" of drugstores, awkwardly looking at the myriad of incontinence supplies.

Fortunately, there is a way to avoid that aisle—through specific exercises designed to train the deep core muscles of the pelvic floor. Studies show that pelvic floor strength training decreases symptoms of incontinence in 83 percent of women.

And doubly fortunate, Victorians can rely on Leslie Hopkins of Confident Core Fitness to help them regain and maintain their pelvic health.

Leslie notes, "We develop pelvic health issues, such as incontinence and prolapse (a condition where organs fall or slip out of place), as a result of pregnancy and childbirth, poor posture, chronic constipation, chronic coughing and sitting for prolonged periods." While aging can be a factor, Leslie says, "We should never assume these issues are simply due to aging."

She is dismayed by the burgeoning incontinence industry, with its plethora of products promoted by celebrities. "If we just exercise properly, we don't need any of them," she says. She also laments that physicians often steer women with prolapses towards surgery. (Pelvic organ prolapse affects 40 percent of women over the age of 45.)

"Really, we can do so much to avoid pads and surgery and become continent," says Leslie. "No matter what your age, you can make a difference if you do the exercises." The pelvic floor is a muscular system, and just like any other muscular system in the body, it can be trained.

Leslie has long been involved in the fitness industry, but when she discovered Stott Pilates™, a scientifically-based exercise system, about 18 years ago, she knew she had found her calling.

Leslie's training didn't stop there. Her own struggles with incontinence and prolapse made her realize that the pelvic muscles are central to our health, rather tricky to exercise, and deserved special attention. Over the past decade, she has taken advanced training in a number of exercise modalities related to pelvic health, including Pfilates™, which was developed by a urogynecologist to help women prevent and recover from pelvic surgery. From another physician's work, she learned about the Hypopressive Technique™, which uses a unique breathing pattern and a series of postures to create more tone without increasing intra-abdominal pressure (when we cough, laugh, sneeze, brace, or lift, we increase intra-abdominal pressure, and this is when those little leaks occur). Leslie continues to educate and participate in training from leaders in the field of pelvic health, and is now an affiliate member of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association.

The ideal way to start your journey to pelvic health is with a personal one-on-one session in Leslie's lovely Fernwood studio. This will allow her to assess your core fitness and figure out a strategy that will work best for you. She has developed a number of programs designed to suit both women requiring a more personal touch and those DIYs who may enjoy her innovative online program "Laugh Without Leaking." This video program makes it easy to resolve issues such as incontinence and prolapse comfortably in your own home.

With June 18-24 being World Continence Week, it's a good time to think about how to tackle it in your own life. Check out the Confident Core Fitness website, where you'll find health tips, a pelvic floor exercise sheet, along with testimonials and videos.

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Two sorts of truth

ROSS CROCKFORD

The debate over density at 1201 Fort is sure to be repeated.

Victorians crowded into City Hall on April 12. They stood in hallways, craning to hear the speakers in the council chambers, or downstairs, watching a live stream of the meeting on a TV in the foyer. The agenda package was 2,311 pages long—nearly 2,000 about a proposed development for 1201 Fort Street, the site of the former Church of Truth.

"This has been an emotional journey for everyone," said Mike Miller, president of Abstract Developments. In the two years since he'd bought the two-acre property, he told the council, he'd held 20 meetings with the neighbours and revised the project six times. One six-storey condo building faced Fort Street, but he'd reduced another to four storeys, and scaled down the size and number of townhouses facing Pentrelew Place at the back, cutting the total units from 94 to 83.

"I've truly given all that I know to this application," Miller concluded. "I do understand this can be a trying process. However, the passionate dialogue has been invaluable, and I feel has resulted in a better project."

Then dozens of citizens came up to speak. A large majority supported Miller's project—a procession of architects, planners, contractors, realtors, and residents of other Abstract buildings, talking of the urgent need for more housing, and the quality of Abstract's work—a sampling of the many allies Miller has made since he renovated his first house in Burnside 20 years ago.

But the speakers' list was also peppered with those who lived next to 1201 Fort, and had written many of the letters filling the agenda package. They said they weren't opposed to development, but saw no benefit from this project, which they said would generate noise, traffic, parking conflicts, and require cutting down protected Garry oaks and sequoias.

The main thrust of their complaint, however, was that the project violated the City's own planning documents. According to the Official Community Plan (OCP), nearly three-quarters of the site is considered "traditional residential," and zoned R1-B, "single family dwelling." Abstract wanted a new site-specific zone, adding to some 650 already in Victoria's bylaws, putting the four-storey building on land meant for houses. As Jamie Hammond, representing the Rockland Neighbourhood Association, told councillors, "If this is approved here, the question becomes for residents across the city: Where else is this acceptable?"

That question is increasingly being asked by Victorians. While some of us are excited by the energy in town, others wonder if our communities are being sacrificed to simply make developers rich and expand our municipal government. Over the past five years, new construction has enlarged the City of Victoria's annual property-tax revenue by at least $5.4 million. That's allowed the City to keep a lid (somewhat) on tax increases, but raised suspicion that the City is tempted to amend the OCP and its zoning bylaws at the first whiff of new money.

The OCP, drafted in 2011, envisions 20,000 more people living in the City by 2041. But the 285-page document contains contradictions. On page 25, it says "sufficient zoned capacity" already exists to meet that demand; on page 32, it warns that existing zoning won't be enough, "running the risk that housing will become increasingly more expensive as available capacity is depleted." The document envisions

Artist rendering of Abstract's proposed development at 1201 Fort

50 percent of new density occurring Downtown, 40 percent in "urban villages" (mainly around Mayfair and Hillside malls), and 10 percent across the rest of the City. It also envisions greater density along arterial roads. That might lead one to expect towers along Douglas Street, or Shelbourne, serviced by rapid transit, but that hasn't happened. Instead, the push is to build luxury condos on streets bordering established residential districts.

That pressure is splitting neighbourhoods. The Fairfield-Gonzales Community Association has been attacked by some members for failing to criticize controversial developments, such as the five-storey condo block underway at Oliphant in the Cook Street Village. (Board members say such "political" activity would jeopardize the association's charitable status, which it needs for its child-care programs.) Community associations are supposed to facilitate meetings between developers and residents, but those meetings have become so fractious that, last month, the Fairfield-Gonzales board voted to explore changing or withdrawing its involvement in the City's development process. Some Gonzales residents have also formed their own association (gonzalesna.ca) so they can voice opposition to the City's proposed new neighbourhood plan, which would permit row housing throughout their district, and multi-storey apartments along Fairfield Road.

IF THERE'S ONE THING EVERYONE CAN AGREE ON, it's that housing in Victoria is rapidly becoming unaffordable to all but a few. The solution, say developers, is obvious: build more supply to bring prices down.

And it's not just developers. In Vancouver, Toronto, Seattle, and other expensive cities, a YIMBY (Yes, In My Back Yard) movement is gathering force. Mostly comprised of people in their 30s, they're

> "IF THIS IS APPROVED HERE, the question becomes for residents across the city: Where else is this acceptable?" —*Jamie Hammond, Rockland Neighbourhood Association*

demanding that cities dump decades-old zoning laws to allow more apartments, everywhere. In their view, it's hypocritical for owners of single-family homes to preach environmentalism and then oppose density, forcing new housing to sprawl ever farther from Downtown.

The closest thing to a YIMBY group here (so far) is Cities For Everyone, a community organization led by alternative-transportation consultant Todd Litman. He publicly defends the 1201 Fort project—right on a transit and bicycle corridor—as exactly the kind of new density envisioned in the OCP.

"Infill development often does require cutting down trees and paving over lawns, and may increase vehicle trips on a street," he wrote in an April 9 letter to Council, "but these local impacts are generally offset many times over by reductions in regional land consumption and vehicle traffic that would occur if those households instead located in conventional automobile-dependent urban fringe housing."

It's debatable if 1201 Fort will be for "Everyone": its one-bedroom units start around $400,000. "Although the units in this project will not initially be affordable to low- and moderate-income households," Litman also wrote, "they will contribute to the City's overall affordability through what urban economists call 'filtering,' which means that increasing higher-priced housing supply allows some households to move out of lower-priced units, and because [construction] depreciates in value over time, so mid-priced housing becomes future affordable supply."

But not all academics agree that increasing supply will improve affordability. John Rose, an instructor in the department of geography and the environment at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, recently published a paper entitled "The Housing Supply Myth." Using census data, he calculated that over the past 15 years, Victoria added 27,116 households to its population—but built 30,574 dwelling units.

"We would think that if a market got less affordable, maybe that meant supply was getting tighter and tighter. But that's baloney," Rose told the *Globe and Mail*. "Here we've had more than enough supply and yet the housing costs have gone crazy." He said the drivers of unaffordability are mainly on the demand side, such as the "pointless" construction of luxury units, largely created for part-time residents and speculators.

Others argue that if the urgent problem is affordability, we can't simply boost the supply of expensive condos and then wait (perhaps decades) for their prices to "filter" down to what renters can afford. Provinces and cities are trying to accelerate this via taxes on speculators and out-of-province owners, and greater regulation of short-term rentals. But some say we could also build more affordable housing by demanding greater Community Amenity Contributions (CACs) from projects—something the City has been slow to grasp.

"In stark contrast to other BC municipalities, Victoria has launched itself into a densification plan that will never achieve its rationale of general or specific housing affordability," wrote Doug Curran recently on *Mile Zero Mirror*, a local renter-advocacy blog. Curran, who worked as a community organizer in the District of North Vancouver before moving here in 2015, says his former municipality has collected $11 million in CACs from the construction of 777 residential units since 2013, charging about $22 per square foot, and using the funds to build a community centre. If the same metrics were applied to the 4,778 units in the pipeline here, Curran says, Victoria could've raised $40 million for affordable housing.

Victoria's current density-bonus policy was only enacted in 2016, and charges $12 per square foot for developments Downtown. City planners argue that's because real estate is cheaper here than in North Vancouver. But they do admit there are "limitations" to the current policy. If a development doesn't trigger a rezoning, it isn't subject to the charges; consequently, several new condo towers Downtown haven't paid anything towards affordable housing. And if an independent economic analysis says a rezoning won't produce a significant "lift" in the value of the land—as was the case for 1201 Fort—it's not required to provide any affordable units. (Abstract has pledged to build 10 affordable rental units in a newly proposed nine-storey building at 1010 Fort instead—a gesture of goodwill that also improves the likelihood of council approving both buildings.)

An improved policy is working its way through City Hall. On March 8, councillors requested an analysis of ways to further increase affordable housing built by developers—including "pre-zoning" areas feasible for affordable units, to speed up project approvals. But in the meantime, the October 20 civic election creeps closer, and Victoria's politicians are increasingly aware that they will have to justify the current density boom to longtime residents who are likely to vote.

"I don't necessarily think that council or the City or the community has necessarily done the best job of managing and stewarding change in a way that everyone sees the benefits or that's sustainable," mayor Lisa Helps admitted to the *Times Colonist* in February—right after councillors voted down a 44-unit rental apartment block proposed for a residential section of Burdett Avenue, and opposed by 150 petition-signing neighbours. "That's something that I'm grappling with right now as I kind of prepare for the [election] campaign. There's a lot of change going on. How do we make sure that as change is happening, everyone is heard and everyone benefits?"

Partway through the April 12 hearing, I stepped outside. Lots of people were out strolling, enjoying the evening, and I walked over to The Drake, a newish microbrew pub on Pandora. The place was packed, almost all people under 40. I sat beside three young professionals who'd all moved to Victoria in the past two years. They were from Edmonton, Toronto, and Albuquerque, working here for government, in finance, and in tech. They said they loved Victoria and wanted to stay, but it was nearly impossible to find a place to live.

I forgot to ask if they planned to vote in October. I must be getting old.

The public hearing for 1201 Fort was adjourned to April 26, after Focus *went to press. To find out the Council's decision, look for this story at focusonvictoria.ca.*

Ross Crockford is a former trial lawyer, and has received a National Magazine Award for his journalism.

Dear Justin and Rachel…

BRIONY PENN

Charged with criminal contempt of court while protesting Trans Mountain, the author writes to these leaders about leadership.

Alberta Premier Rachel Notley and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

You might want to review the recent case of a Massachusetts judge who recently found that protesters were "not responsible by reason of necessity" for stopping the building of a pipeline "because the action was taken to avoid serious climate damage."

I, as one of the 200+, and growing, arrestees, was also acting out of necessity when I stood in front of the Kinder Morgan gates on Tsleil-Waututh territory. We arrestees, like other protestors from Massachusetts to Standing Rock, and Kitimat to Kalamazoo, are acting in the national—no, actually—the *global* interest. We are trying to prevent the crime of the millennium—stopping what BC energy economist Mark Jaccard calls, "the single biggest reason we will not meet our climate targets." Targets that are essential to realize for our well-being on this planet.

I seem to remember that you were going to listen to people like Jaccard who provide evidence-based arguments. Jaccard, along with US climate scientist Professor James Hansen, knows what he is talking about. That is why he and Hansen were called up as expert witnesses to testify in front of the British House of Commons. Here is what they told those MPs: "If you are trying to hit that 2°C limit, you don't dramatically develop resources like Canada's oil sands, tar sands, or the heavy oil in Venezuela or in several other jurisdictions."

The reason I bring this up is that over in the UK, quite a few people have been listening to their testimony, including Mark Carney, now the head of the Bank of England. I think he has learned a few more things about international banking since he left the Bank of Canada. He and former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg have formed a task force on risk from climate change, that your minister, Catherine McKenna, attended. I'm sure that she heard them tell the world that Canadian banks are too heavily invested in the fossil-fuel sector, and that doing so undermines "the country's leadership on climate."

One of their imperatives is for companies to disclose risks to their business from climate change as the world transitions to a lower-carbon economy. Kinder Morgan didn't pass the test of full disclosure. According to a lot of credible energy economists, whether Jaccard, Robyn Allen (ex-CEO of ICBC), Carney or those with the Minnesota Department of Commerce who were reviewing the market analysis of Kinder Morgan for another one of their projects, the company has not accurately modelled the demand for global crude and its overseas price. Even Jeff Rubin, former chief economist at CIBC, was quoted in the *Financial Post* saying that the claim that the additional pipeline capacity to BC will "unlock higher prices is not corroborated by either past or current market conditions."

But whenever I listen to you, all you cite is Kinder Morgan's figures for revenue and jobs, and none of these risks. So who is acting in the national interest? Who is following science?

I am pretty careful about sources in energy reporting, because the reporting is generally appalling, even to the industry itself. *EnergiNews* states, "Is there a branch of journalism these days more politicized than energy reporting and opinion?" What we do get from you is political *opinion*. I've heard you make comments like, "Most First Nations along the route are strongly in support." When I trace your sources I end up at one of energy columnist Claudia Cattaneo's *Financial Post* pieces. Even the oil patch doesn't trust Cattaneo. *EnergiNews* says "reading her is as cringe-inducing as fingernails on a chalkboard." *American Energy News* dubs her "everyone's favourite oil and gas shill." It's disturbing to hear you chanting from the same song book as her.

Speaking of the media, even the CBC failed to accurately report a protest of 10,000 people until pressured to, and instead gave more coverage to a tiny pro-pipeline industry-sponsored rally. Only the two members of Parliament—from amongst the hundreds of arrestees—have ever been interviewed.

Perhaps noticing that, Kinder Morgan got choosy about who they arrested on April 7. Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, head of the BC Union of Indian Chiefs, was viewed as more of a liability as an arrestee than standing in front of their gate, so he was not arrested. He would condemn you for "brazenly and arrogantly ignor[ing] First Nations rights." He would state, "Now is the time to stand beside Indigenous people in support of our timeless struggle to defend Mother Earth. This is about water versus oil and life versus death, and ultimately, survival versus extinction."

There are 14 court cases currently being brought by First Nations, municipal governments, and the provincial government. This includes evidence going back to 2007 when a Kinder Morgan leak occurred in Burnaby. That was the same year the company first voiced their ambition to ramp up bitumen exports out of Burnaby, when the rejection of the Northern Gateway appeared likely.

WHENEVER I LISTEN TO YOU, all you cite are Kinder Morgan's figures for revenue and jobs, and none of these risks. So who is acting in the national interest?

Much was learned by legal teams during the judicial review of the Northern Gateway project. Now there are opinions and precedents with seasoned lawyers honing complex legal arguments that will delve into: aboriginal rights both under treaty and outside of treaty; cases about jurisdictional matters between federal, provincial and municipal governments; validity of economic cases put forward by the company; liabilities once the bitumen leaves the pipes and gets into tankers; evaluations of claims of "world-class" clean up standards; incursions on federal legislation like the *Species at Risk Act*; the behaviour of bitumen; the inability of meeting federal emission targets with this kind of investment; the relationship with Washington state; and on and on.

There is much of value to report on, but again the media fails. In a CBC analysis by Calgary business reporter Tony Seskus, he mentions five things to know about the Trans Mountain pipeline battle: not one of them is the court challenges or what they are about.

Bob Chamberlin, vice-president of the Union of Indian Chiefs, who represents more than half of the 198 First Nations in the province, responds with the kind of analysis that *American Energy News* might appreciate. "[First Nations] have the authority to make decisions and this is a complex discussion. It is not where the [federal government] can pick favourites, divide and conquer as they always have."

Who are the "favourites" that the oil industry holds up in its media? The *Financial Post* loves citing BC Liberal politician Ellis Ross of the Haisla Nation. This is not the kind of non-partisan opinion that is going to instill confidence in investors.

Within the complexity that Chamberlin refers to are three forms of governance which produce different "leaders": traditional governance models under hereditary systems which vary with every community; the elected chief and council that liaise with colonial governments as defined under the *Indian Act*; and combinations of the two. For example, the Heiltsuk Tribal Council official governing body includes both the *Hemas* (hereditary Chiefs) and the Heiltsuk Tribal Council (elected leaders). Back in Enbridge days, an editorial team from

Briony Penn being arrested

the CBC erred in not doing their homework about alleged negotiator Elmer Derrick, his ability to represent the Gitxsan Nation, and his connections with industry, before leading with his story supporting Enbridge. On Haida Gwaii where a similar model exists, traditional governance systems dealt with the pressures of oil industry bribery by having two hereditary chiefs stripped of their names for signing a letter in support of Enbridge as if they represented the Haida at large, who opposed the project. A business or energy reporter, especially with no experience in these communities, is unlikely to understand or communicate the significance of these kinds of events to their readership, and the implications for rights and title.

That is why there is such a focus on the courts, where evidence is painstakingly provided as to the legitimacy of leadership and the proof of free, prior and informed consent. It is a slow, complicated business. The Tsilhquot'in case took 26 years. But the courts can be trusted more than the press who lead daily with opinion—or the politicians.

Canada operates under the rule of law. So it is disturbing to many of us to hear you, Mr Trudeau, saying "this pipeline will be built" when the courts have not decided key questions about it. Elizabeth May, during coverage of her arrest, said, "There are constitutionally enshrined rights of Indigenous peoples in this country. They are embedded in the constitution. No legislation can say that federal jurisdiction over interprovincial pipelines is paramount to the extent that it dissolves the rights of Indigenous peoples."

If you are about to invest two billion of our dollars in this industry, besides needing clarity on First Nations rights and leadership, you will also need understanding about what the "mutual benefit agreements" with some First Nations mean. Some are Letters of Understanding, some provide funding to do research on impacts in order to come to a decision, some are Term Sheets (a nonbinding template for a legal agreement). Most are agreements that *if* the project proceeds, then the community would wish to secure economic benefits. *They do not mean that the project is supported.*

The "divide and conquer" that Chief Chamberlin refers to are the divisive electoral tactics, misrepresentation, fraud, and use of debt and bribery on the smallest, most vulnerable nations. If you're serious about truth and reconciliation, you better take a deep hard look at divide-and-conquer colonialism. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to be on your radar. Instead we get more spin and charges that environmental protesters are "eco-colonialists" and that there's a rift between them and First Nations. When I was on the unceded territory at the invitation of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation at the gates of Kinder Morgan, I was there with professors, oil engineers, teachers, lawyers, doctors, journalists, biologists, farmers, elders, technologists, artists and regular citizens of British Columbia, all standing *behind* First Nation matriarchs. There was no rift. We were standing in support of the real leadership in this country.

Trials for protesters arrested in recent weeks will begin in June and continue through October. Those who plead guilty, with some exceptions, will be liable for a $500 fine, or if unable to pay, 25 hours of community service. This does not apply to the two federal MPS arrested: Elizabeth May and Kennedy Stewart will be in court with special prosecutors on April 30.

Briony Penn is currently working with Xenaksiala elder, Cecil Paul, Wa'xaid on *Following the Good River, Stories from the Magic Canoe of Cecil Paul* (Rocky Mountain Books) due out in 2019.

Spinning the wonder drugs

ALAN CASSELS

Why hope, hype and headlines should never substitute for clean, clear analysis.

So-called "rare diseases" are those that affect less than one in 2000 Canadians (.05 percent), and for which companies often sell drugs priced at hundreds of thousands of dollars per patient per year. Parsing the pharmaceutical forecasting literature, I've come to understand that the drug market for rare diseases is huge, growing, and seems to be the main area where the industry is putting much of its current research efforts. Why? For the same reason famous bank robber Willie Sutton kept robbing banks: "Because that's where the money is."

Money, and lots of it, seems to be at the heart of a narrative that repeats with alarming frequency: along comes a new and expensive drug—characterized in the press as "lifesaving" and essential, yet priced into the stratosphere. It could mean a slight increase in a patient's quality of life, yet priced at $250,000 per patient per year, how much "quality" are we really buying?

Here in Victoria over the last year, headlines have been filled with heart-wrenching stories featuring drugs like Orkambi for cystic fibrosis, and Ilaris, which treats a rare disease called systemic juvenile idiopathic arthritis (SJIA). Then there was Soliris, which treats atypical hemolytic-uremic syndrome (aHUS), an extremely rare disease. It is among the priciest drugs we've ever seen, costing around $700,000 per patient per year. It's no wonder governments everywhere in the world are reluctant to pay for these medications, and that the stories of patients being denied access make headlines.

Each time a new "breakthrough" drug is either so expensive, so experimental (where there's little data on the drug's efficacy and safety)—or both—that the provincial drug plans won't cover it, there is public outcry. Sometimes the Ministry of Health gives in, and sometimes it doesn't—leaving one with the distinct impression that political pressure might play a larger role than science when determining whether a new, expensive drug becomes a covered benefit. Would any of us call this an optimal system?

The narrative never seems to change—only the drug names. While some journalists love to advocate for a good cause, what if the cause they are jumping aboard is one where they only know half the story? Maybe instead of providing lifesaving treatment, the new drug actually leads to more people suffering and dying, due to some unknown toxicity. Could that happen? It happens all the time.

The Michener Award is considered one of the most prized honours in journalism, recognizing "meritorious public interest journalism in Canada." A Michener is like an Olympic Gold Medal for reporters, recognizing the best of the best in what is the highest calling in journalism: the public interest. In 2006, I wrote a letter to the Michener Awards committee complaining about the 2005 winner. I felt that the *Globe and Mail* writer who won the award did so with a series of articles about a new and expensive breast cancer drug, Herceptin, that was so biased and misleading, it most certainly caused great harm to the psyches of women with breast cancer, as well as wasting huge amounts of money in funding from public drug plans. I felt the articles undermined the independent scientists who were suggesting caution. The committee ignored me.

I based my letter to them on work I and my colleagues did, documenting the reporting of trastuzumab (brand name: Herceptin), a treatment for adjuvant breast cancer, for over a year. Here's an excerpt of what I wrote: "From our perspective, 2005 was a long summer of frustration as Herceptin generated breathless front page coverage based on a poor explanation of the drug's absolute benefits, and an improper assessment of risks and uncertainties related to this treatment. We found that the *Globe's* news reports of Herceptin routinely broke simple principles of proper pharmaceutical reporting, creating excitement and demand for what are unproven treatments. This has the effect of driving provincial health departments into rapid, yet potentially harmful funding decisions which can have serious adverse effects on patients and the health system; not what you'd call 'public interest' journalism."

Herceptin, used after chemotherapy treatment, was advertised, promoted and lobbied for on the basis of a "50-percent reduction in tumour recurrence for all clinical-trial participants." The drug was tested in a special population of those with breast cancer: the 30 percent of them who have the HER2 gene, which can affect growth of breast tumours. The women in the trials had been treated for breast cancer, and the drug was prescribed to avoid a recurrent tumour. But that figure of 50 percent is misleading; the *Globe* (as well as other media outlets) were reporting the *relative* numbers from the clinical trials. In one of the key randomized trials of the drug, about 10 percent of the women given the placebo developed a new breast tumour over 3 years. Of those who took Herceptin, only 5 percent developed a recurrent breast cancer in that time. Using relative math logic, if you go from a 10-percent risk (placebo patients) down to 5 percent (Herceptin patients), that's a 50 percent reduction. "Cuts cancer risk in half!" proclaim the headlines.

But whoa! In *absolute* terms, the drug really only contributes to a *five-percent reduction,* because 10 minus 5 leaves 5. In other words, the difference in benefit of the drug over the placebo is only 5 out of 100—only one in 20 taking this drug will benefit. Based on those data, doctors would have to give Herceptin to 20 women with this certain type of gene—after being treated for breast cancer—for 3 years, to prevent *one* recurrent breast tumour.

In the Herceptin stories we examined, another thing was obvious: the harms of the drug were consistently downplayed, or simply not mentioned. We knew (closely parsing the clinical trials) that Herceptin increased risks of congestive heart failure, infection, and vascular disorders. In this case, 3.5 percent more women taking the drug experienced these effects than those who took the placebo. And here's the kicker: there was *no overall improvement in survival* in the Herceptin group.

POLITICAL PRESSURE might play a larger role than science when determining whether a new, expensive drug becomes a covered benefit.

Basically, after a summer of hyped headlines, lobbying, and beating up the Ontario government for not covering Herceptin, it turned out the drug was *not* a lifesaver. Why was the Ontario government reluctant to pay for it? Maybe because it cost somewhere between $30,000 to $45,000 per patient per year (now about double that), and would "break the bank" of the Ontario drug plan.

The citation for the *Globe's* 2005 Michener Award for meritorious public service journalism reads: "One series about the breakthrough breast cancer drug Herceptin prompted provincial government to fast-track the drug approval process and expand use of the drug. It had been restricted to women who were dying of breast cancer."

Let's be clear: all the media activity, all the personal heart-wrenching narratives of individuals begging for a drug that they claimed was helping them wage their personal war on cancer, was genuine and heart-felt. But it was also based on a big misunderstanding of the facts. The company made millions on the basis of that one drug, and the media campaign was so powerful, and so overwhelming, even women who didn't have the HER2 gene started pestering their doctors for prescriptions for Herceptin. (It's now on BC's list of approved drugs for treating breast cancer.)

It is possible that certain people may be helped by new and expensive drugs. It is also possible they may be harmed, or die taking the new treatment—at the expense of millions of dollars wasted. Original drug trial reports contain both spin and bias, and it seems most reporters aren't asking enough tough questions. Tragically, many vulnerable patients get an unnaturally rosy picture of a new medication through these media reports and end up feeling desperate—that without this wonder-drug, they will surely die.

A few years after the Herceptin debacle, I saw a major Canadian study which emerged with this headline: "What we know of breast cancer drugs may be spin & bias." This examination found that of 164 major cancer drug trials, a third were biased in how they reported the benefits of the treatment, and two-thirds spun the reporting of the toxic effects, downplaying or ignoring them. In other words, what we discovered around the Herceptin story is not an outlier. Spin and bias are all part of the packaging around a new drug.

Noteworthy villains in any media/drug saga include the academic researchers who produce slanted reports—sometimes quite unreliable—of the drugs they study; and the "advocacy" journalists who allow themselves to be unwittingly employed as part of the drug company's PR strategy. The collateral damage is clear—just ask the terrified patients who get caught up in the corporate profit machine.

Here's the lesson I learned many years ago, which we must keep relearning: we need clean, clear, health journalism as urgently as we need clean, clear water. Our lives depend on it.

Alan Cassels is taking a break from pharmaco-journalism for the time being. He continues to work as a reviewer with healthnewsreview.org which analyzes and evaluates health reporting, and now works at UBC.

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Myths about distilled water persist. Dr. Brian Clement, of Hippocrates Health, says, "Distilled water is pure water. A lot of people have been misled into believing that it robs minerals out of the body. Well, in my life, I've been drinking distilled water for 35 years. University of California, several years ago, told me I had the bone density of a 22-year-old. So if in fact distilled water robbed the body of minerals, I would probably be crippled by now" (from the video, "Why Choose Distilled Water?").

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The LNG pipe dream, part 2

JUDITH LAVOIE

Will methane asphyxiate Green support for the minority NDP government?

There is an *Alice In Wonderland* quality surrounding BC's prickly debate over liquefied natural gas (LNG) development. The story starts with a fantasy, characters shift roles, and the outcome is based on unknowns. However, decisions made on the future of the LNG industry are likely to profoundly affect the province.

The former Liberal government's rose-coloured vision of a prosperous LNG-fuelled future, with 20 terminals and 10,000 jobs, faltered and died as the reality of LNG economics, with low prices and oversupply, sent investors running for the hills.

MLA Andrew Weaver

Premier John Horgan

It was a rout applauded by the NDP, who had doggedly criticized the Liberals' generous giveaways to the industry, and by the BC Greens, who warned that one major LNG terminal and the associated increase in fracking would send the province's greenhouse gas emissions soaring to levels that would require all other sectors of the economy to cut emissions by 95 percent by 2050.

But, wait.

Fast-forward to March, when Premier John Horgan announced financial incentives for LNG investors, including temporary relief from provincial sales taxes and rebates for carbon tax increases if the facility meets "best-in-the-world" standards.

In the words of Lewis Carroll in *Alice in Wonderland*, "curiouser and curiouser."

Under the New Democrats, LNG projects that meet the standards will pay a carbon tax of $30 per tonne in 2021, instead of $50 per tonne. And, instead of plants paying a higher rate for electricity, as was set under the Liberal legislation, LNG producers will pay the standard industrial rate.

The concessions are aimed at persuading the multi-national consortium LNG Canada to proceed with a planned $40-billion project, with a natural gas export terminal in Kitimat linked to massive natural gas reserves in northeast BC by a 670-kilometre pipeline.

The incentives offer a framework for the industry and are substantially different from the package offered by the Liberals, Horgan insisted at a news conference. "What I believe is different from the approach of the previous government and the approach we are taking is that, if there is a benefit to British Columbians, we want to make it transparent and obvious to everyone and we are not going to sign a blank cheque for LNG Canada or any other proponent that may come forward," he said.

Concessions would not click in until a company makes a final investment decision, said Horgan. "The previous Liberal government brought forward a whole host of legislation that locked the Province in without ever getting a final investment decision to take place," he said.

It will not be an easy decision, the premier admitted. "Potential opportunity is extraordinary. Potential risks are significant," said Horgan, who is also acutely aware of the political risks to his government, which is supported by the three-member Green Party caucus.

The exemptions will cost about $6 billion over 40 years, but government is hoping the LNG Canada project will generate $22 billion over 40 years from natural gas royalties and income tax, plus 10,000 construction jobs and 950 permanent jobs once construction is completed.

The prospect of encouraging an LNG export industry sent BC Green leader Andrew Weaver, a climate scientist, into tirades as he threatened to bring down the government, claiming the NDP had sweetened the pot beyond the industry's wildest dreams.

"We will not support legislative changes that literally continue a generational sell-off of a resource to offshore interests," Weaver said. LNG Canada would blow the Province's climate targets right out of the water, he said, noting, "You cannot add ten megatonnes of emissions and somehow think we are going to reduce by 80 percent by 2050. There is simply no possible path to do that. It's impossible."

Calculations of carbon dioxide emissions from the LNG Canada plant range from government estimates of four megatonnes annually to Pembina Institute's estimate of 8.6 megatonnes annually in 2030, if all phases of the project are built out, and 9.6 megatonnes in 2050.

The core of the controversy is that although Horgan says any LNG development must fit within the Province's climate targets, Weaver believes that is impossible.

But Weaver stopped short of immediately withdrawing support for the NDP, saying he will wait and see what the climate action plan sets out. "We are giving them a chance to develop that plan and show us they can do it," Weaver said. "If we don't see a climate plan that meets the targets, our support for the NDP will vapourize."

Environmental groups were also taken aback by Horgan's announcement, even though the NDP election platform had made it clear that LNG development would be considered, provided it offered a fair return for the resource, guaranteed jobs for British Columbians, included partnerships with First Nations that helped lead to true reconciliation, and met the Province's climate commitments.

Jens Wieting, Sierra Club BC forest and climate campaigner, said the concessions are a form of climate change denial that would spell disaster. "By sweetening the pot for fracked gas export, the government is laying out a red carpet for investors to help destroy our climate," he said.

Similar messages came from the David Suzuki Foundation, which criticized the government for ignoring the industry's carbon footprint and pointed out that underreported fugitive methane emissions produced by fracking are among Canada's most serious greenhouse gas problems.

> "YOU CANNOT ADD TEN MEGATONNES of emissions and somehow think we are going to reduce by 80 percent by 2050. There is simply no possible path to do that. It's impossible."—*Andrew Weaver*

Fracking involves pumping large amounts of mud, water and chemicals into the ground, creating enough pressure to crack open rocks and release the natural gas. The gas is turned into a liquid by cooling it to -160 degrees C.

Now, all sides are looking warily towards the next steps.

The deciding factors will be the shape of the government's climate action plan and final investment decisions later this year by LNG Canada and the much smaller, $1.4-billion Woodfibre LNG project in Squamish.

Those investment decisions will be influenced by a federal government ruling on whether to exempt large LNG modules from a 45.8 percent anti-dumping duty, placed last year on fabricated steel products from China and South Korea. LNG Canada is planning to import modules from China.

Much will also depend on market conditions, but, after years of over-supply and slumping prices for natural gas, analysts are cautiously optimistic. Dulles Wang, Wood Mackenzie analyst, speaking at a webinar in April, said the oversupply situation is unlikely to continue and the global market could be looking for a new supply as early as 2022. "The challenge, though, is that there are just a lot of projects out there targeting the window of opportunity…So there's a sense of urgency for the Canadian projects if they want to be into that time-frame," he said.

But, with no final investment decisions, no climate action plan, and no legislation setting out Provincial concessions to the industry, there are few definitive answers.

"Right now we are in the hypothetical stage," said Weaver.

Legislation is likely to be introduced this fall, and one of many unanswered questions is—even if the Greens withdraw support—where the votes would fall. Some New Democrats remain upset with the LNG plan, and some Liberals could vote in favour of what is seen as a business-friendly move.

Sonia Furstenau, Green Party MLA for Cowichan Valley, said the Greens have been hearing from disaffected New Democrats. "We have seen quite a significant number reach out to us about that disappointment. Lots of emails and phone calls and contacts. I think [the NDP] have to think very hard about what they want their legacy to be and who they are representing. I would expect that, within their own caucus, there is division and disappointment over this," Furstenau said.

Weaver has come in for criticism for not immediately withdrawing his support for the NDP, but Furstenau said most Green party members want to see a thoughtful and measured response, and the three Green MLAs are aware of their responsibility to work for all British Columbians.

One certainty is that, for the Greens, any vote will be rooted firmly in the contents of the climate action plan. "It comes down to a responsibility to future generations," said Furstenau.

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

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Victoria needs…who?

ROSS CROCKFORD

Slates are readying candidates for council jobs that few may actually want.

PHOTO: ROSS CROCKFORD

A City of Victoria council meeting in progress

Rob Reid is not running. He still *runs*, of course. Reid operates three athletic footware stores Downtown, he's the race director for the annual Victoria marathon, and he jogs about 20 kilometres a week. But he's not running for City of Victoria's council in this autumn's municipal elections—and his reasons for not doing so should make residents question what's happening to our municipal governance.

"It was something I wanted to step into," Reid said over coffee recently. "But not with this process." Many council meetings have become acrimonious, late-night town halls, where residents argue, block by block, over every proposed development. That's deterring him, and other businesspeople, from wanting to sit at the council table. "We want to build things, grow things, and we're task and goal-oriented," he said. "Many of us have realized it's better to direct your energy to things that touch your heart."

In many ways, Reid would make an ideal candidate: a Downtown business owner with a long record of work for local charities, and name recognition. (He ran for mayor in 2008, losing to Dean Fortin by 601 votes.) For most of Victoria's history, council was mainly composed of people like him. But it seems they aren't running this year.

John Wilson, president of Wilson's Transportation, told *Saanich News* in January that he isn't running in Victoria or Saanich, despite his interest in local affairs, because he needs to focus on his company. Bruce Gillespie, a Fort Street restaurant owner and management consultant, told CFAX last month that he won't be running, despite his public criticism of the City's bike-lane scheme, because, he said, "life is too short for politics."

Five months from the October 20 election, we've heard more from those who don't want to sit on council than those who do. Perhaps the problem is the job itself.

Certainly its time demands have increased. Twenty-five years ago, according to archived minutes, the average City of Victoria council meeting was 2.7 hours long; last year, its 23 evening meetings averaged nearly 5 hours. (Compare that to Langford, where council meetings are usually under an hour.) Then there's the "Committee of the Whole," where councillors discuss reports from City staff; it convened 46 times last year, its daytime meetings often swallowing entire Thursdays. (Most other municipalities hold committee meetings after 5 pm.) There's prep time, reading hundreds of pages of documents. Councillors also sit on other boards, from the harbour authority to the Downtown Victoria Business Association, attend neighbourhood association meetings, and represent the City at events—all for around $41,000 per year. As first-term councillor Jeremy Loveday ruefully noted at a January 4 meeting (6.5 hours long, mostly spent reallocating slivers of new property-tax revenue), serving on council is a "60-hour-a-week, part-time job."

Those salaries won't change, because a majority of councillors at the same meeting rejected appointing a committee to review their pay. But the impacts of that decision are

MANY COUNCIL MEETINGS HAVE BECOME ACRIMONIOUS, late-night town halls, where residents argue, block by block, over every proposed development.

more than financial. Nobody building a professional career, supporting a family, or leading a business is likely to want to sit on council. That favours the self-employed, and incumbents—all likely to run again this year—who have already figured out how to handle the job and its meagre income. (Geoff Young, an economist, and Margaret Lucas, who manages the Hotel Rialto, are the only Victoria councillors with "regular" jobs.) And that, arguably, engenders the culture at City Hall today, in which councillors micromanage the details of every project and bylaw, instead of simply providing direction to staff, and demanding answers if those directions aren't followed.

Increasing salaries may not be enough, however. "More money is not the answer. That will just make it a career politician's job," says Shellie Gudgeon, who served one term and decided not to run again in 2014. The bigger challenge, she says, is learning how to navigate the numerous groups and factions in a city that eats and breathes politics. Every new councillor needs a team of supporters, a "kitchen-table cabinet," to help them after they're elected, she says: "You can't wade through every single issue yourself."

The challenges are multiplying, too. Social media, for example, once seemed an easy way to connect with voters; instead, it has increasingly become a "toxic echo chamber," as Mayor Lisa Helps branded Facebook, before publicly closing her account in March. The *Globe and Mail* reported recently that 11 of 21 mayors in the Lower Mainland have said they are not running again this October, due to "the rise of vitriolic social-media attacks on people in public life, the intense fights and workload resulting from the blistering pace of growth and development, the housing crisis, and the switch to four-year terms from three." (Some municipalities are advocating a return to three-year terms.)

As the *Globe* also noted, a concern of the departing mayors is that as cities become more complex, it's likely populist candidates will emerge—proposing simple solutions, and motivated more by politics than public service. And that may be happening in Victoria, judging by the organizations readying candidates for October.

One association that's already announced itself is newcouncil.ca, led by Stephen

The current City of Victoria councillors

Hammond, the lawyer who founded Mad As Hell, the neighbourhood group opposed to the tent city that arose on Victoria's courthouse lawn in 2016. As Hammond told CFAX recently, newcouncil aims to "overthrow" the current lineup, and replace them "with reasonable people who don't deal with ideology."

"A lot of people aren't happy with the present council," says Hammond. Around 250 people are on his email list, and via surveys, he's distilled what they want into a set of objectives, including "a focus on Victoria's core services," "fiscal responsibility," "fair and even enforcement of laws," and planning that assumes cars "are still a fundamental form of transportation"—all concerns he says the council has largely abandoned.

Hammond's group recently formed an alliance with "Club 89," a group of Downtown businesspeople led by Mark Mawhinney, who ran Ida Chong's mayoralty campaign in 2014. (Helps defeated Dean Fortin by 89 votes; Chong finished a distant third.) Mawhinney says they've got at least eight potential council candidates—neither he nor Hammond are running—several with "bona fide community involvement, and small-business chops." Their discussions have included BC Liberal staffer Andrew Reeve, and former diplomat Hilary Groos, both of whom ran for council in 2014 alongside Chong, but no one has emerged yet as a mayoral candidate.

Facing off against them will be Together Victoria, a youthful, NDPish electors' organization. According to its materials, Together Victoria formed because progressive candidates didn't run an identifiable slate in 2014, "preventing the opportunity for strong progressive turnout to be translated into a strong majority at the council table." Its objectives, developed in five workshops with more than 100 participants, are to "create a city that is affordable and inclusive," "prioritize infrastructure that impacts social and environmental justice," and "foster greater democratic engagement"—although it also says its members may be suspended if they are "not able to acknowledge and address their own oppressive behaviour." (*Focus* contacted Together Victoria's principals, but they declined to be interviewed until they officially launch in mid-May.)

Together Victoria apparently aims to field three new candidates, in the hope of knocking off business-oriented incumbents Geoff Young, Margaret Lucas, and Chris Coleman, who got the last three council spots in 2014. Rumoured nominees include Laurel Collins, a PhD candidate in sociology and leadership studies at UVic, and Sharmarke Dubow, a refugee worker for the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria.

Who is actually running will soon become apparent. But the responsibilites they face, if elected, are already clear. They will steer a corporation with a $224-million operating budget and more than 1,000 employees. In the coming term, they will oversee construction of a new fire hall, possibly a new swimming pool, repairs to the Bay Street Bridge and century-old underground pipes, and the ongoing development of neighbourhoods, parks, and hundreds of buildings.

Victoria needs articulate people with common sense, experience handling employees and questioning consultants, practical ideas about how to improve the City, and the determination—and the time—to see them realized. Those qualities are not as common as one would hope.

Ross Crockford is not running for Council, as he abhors long meetings in any room without a well-stocked bar.

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Guthrie Gloag sculpts the wild

MOLLIE KAYE

A BC biologist and artist wants his work to draw attention to what is here…and what is missing.

"Coastal Wolf" by Guthrie Gloag

Sometimes absence can give us a clearer vision of the truth than what is present. Scientists extrapolate from what is missing as much as from what is there; artists create impressions of life that supersede reality by choosing to omit certain details. Sculptor Guthrie Gloag is both an artist and a scientist, and in 10 full-scale wildlife pieces he's offering at his second solo show at Madrona Gallery, he uses descriptive and narrative aspects of absence to create his imagery and telegraph his message.

If we encounter an animal in the wild, we don't need to see every individual hair or claw to fully experience its energy and character; when we see an array of driftwood shapes on a beach, we know that it's wood without seeing the entire tree it came from.

To create his sculptures, Gloag carefully selects beach-sanded fragments of cedar and fir, which are inventoried and assembled in a months-long, improvisational process. Using decking screws and drills to affix the unaltered wood fragments to each other, his works gradually come to life as solutions to his self-created, organic visions, resembling three-dimensional "puzzles." There is no set plan or armature, only layers upon layers of evocative shapes that begin to describe an animal's presence. His sculptures are a dance of abundant detail and lack of information, forcing the viewer's brain to create the impression of surfaces, details, and aliveness.

"I have learned as I've built my process that sometimes the absence of a piece of wood is beneficial; to create negative spaces is just as important," says Gloag. "The hollow is there, and the shadow creates an animal's eye for the viewer." The realistic size of his work is also an integral part of the experience. "I try to stay true to scale; I find that it creates a presence…for the viewer. There may be some exaggerations, like extending legs to enhance a sense of movement, but I try to stick to scale." The relative size of each animal, as compared to a human viewer, is a visceral experience for Gloag, who depicts only subjects he has observed directly, sometimes during his field work as a biologist.

The allegiance to realistic scale means that when he depicts a subject like a grizzly bear (and yes, he's been near enough to one in the wild to say it made him "feel small"), there are certain logistical issues, like door widths, transportation vessels, and sheer weight—Gloag is up for all of it. "It's a challenge I love…the process of

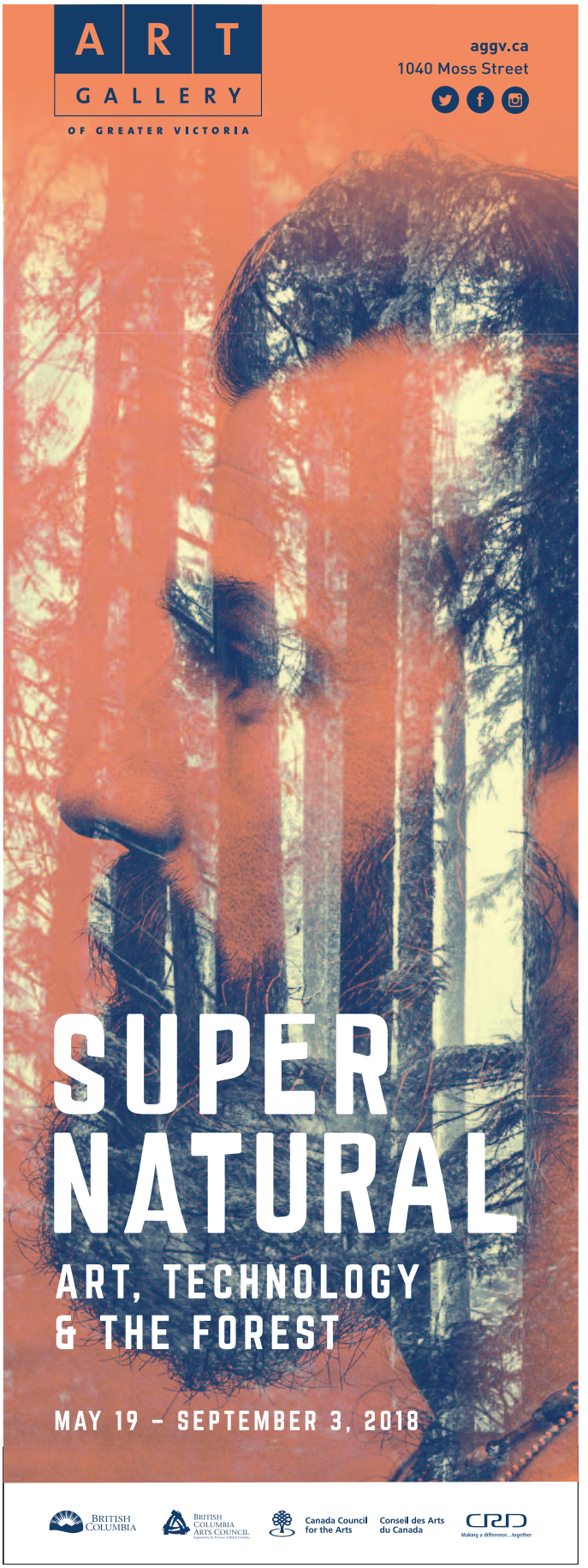
GLOAG STARTED OUT SCULPTING with only a passion to please himself, and a self-assigned mission to comment on both the majesty and fragility of wild creatures. He left his sculptures right where he made them, letting others anonymously encounter them on the beaches or hiking trails.

PHOTO: TOBYN ROSS

Guthrie Gloag

conceiving something in my mind and then setting forth to make it in three dimensions, I find immense joy in it." He learned the hard way with his first Grizzly piece, which couldn't be removed from his Vancouver apartment without being disassembled. Now on Bowen Island, Gloag and his young family live in a home that includes a 600-square-foot studio he uses for sculpting; he's enjoying that it has double French doors.

The largest sculpture Gloag created isn't in a gallery, or part of someone's private collection; it's in the woods, "somewhere in BC," far off the beaten track, where the artist intends for people to come across it incidentally. The 14-foot-tall mastodon is, for Gloag, a message about extinction and preservation, and a labour of love. He completed it "under cover of winter" a year and a half ago, the seasonal rains ensuring he would be largely undetected as he backpacked 100-pound loads of thousands of driftwood pieces to the site, assembling a massive, one-ton sculpture that has gotten coverage on CBC and become a destination site for the adventurous. I ask whether the sculpture has been disturbed by those who manage to find it. "It has been a test of humanity, and so far, humanity has passed," Gloag



Left: "Black Bear" by Guthrie Gloag

reports. "People have been very protective of it. They love the sentiment of it; it's a message of conservation. People are interacting with it, and leaving it as it is."

As a child growing up in North Vancouver's Deep Cove, Gloag says the ethic of conservation got woven deep. "I was always in nature, in the wilderness, identifying birds with my mom, going out in the boat with my dad. The intrinsic importance of nature was instilled in me from a young age." While he didn't identify himself as an artist, "Art has always been a necessity; to build, to create." The young Gloag made fantasy figures out of clay and built forts in the woods. As a UVic student earning his degree in biology and environmental studies, he was "looking for a creative outlet. I tried stone sculpture, but was not very good at it. I tried painting as well." During a vacation with his wife on Galiano Island in 2011, he assembled a life-sized driftwood sculpture of a deer on the beach, and "it kind of clicked. Sometimes people say, 'I'm not good at art,' but you just need to find your medium."

Gloag started out sculpting with only a passion to please himself, and a self-assigned mission to comment on both the majesty and fragility of wild creatures. He left his sculptures right where he made them, letting others anonymously encounter them on the beaches or hiking trails. He started to notice, though, that his efforts were getting "collected," and when Madrona Gallery owner Michael Warren ended up at Gloag's home for a casual dinner party, conversation immediately turned to finding him a wider audience and developing his career as a professional sculptor.

"He wasn't even at a point where he was considering there would be a market for his work," Warren says of the fortuitous meeting. "As soon as I saw it, I was blown away, as far as the impact of it and how it's constructed. For me, it immediately connected all the dots of this place—the material that he's using is of this land; the subject matter he's creating are all animals he has experience with in his biology and conservation work; and the aesthetic, his own personal style, connects with the roughness and the feel of this place so well."

Gloag's work has indeed found a wider audience, and his pieces are now part of collections all over the globe. Response has been so positive that many are waiting their turn to have "right of first refusal" on his sculptures as he completes them. The ten pieces in the Madrona Gallery show will no doubt be snapped up, but it's worth taking some time to be in the presence of these "animals," created by an artist who is reverently conjuring the majesty of a particular animal's presence—while starkly commenting on the increasing absence of wild things in our region.

"Instinct," works by sculptor Guthrie Gloag, June 2-16, opening reception 1pm–4pm Saturday, June 2, Madrona Gallery, 606 View St. More info at madronagallery.com or 250-380-4660.

Mollie Kaye is a visual artist who grew up with a biochemist mom and a biophysicist dad. She appreciates the creative and scientific sensibilities that Gloag brings to his work.

THE AVENUE GALLERY

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2184 OAK BAY AVENUE VICTORIA
www.theavenuegallery.com 250-598-2184

"GLOW" DANA IRVING, 36 X 36 INCHES, OIL ON CANVAS

Throughout May/June

DANA IRVING

West End Gallery

At once whimsical and serene, Dana Irving's paintings create a sense of wonder and quiet in the viewer, inviting them to guess at the stories that unfold in her unique landscapes. Her work has been compared to both Emily Carr and Dr. Seuss, and both hold true in her incredibly creative approach to painting the Canadian landscape.

Dana Irving was born in Prince George, BC in 1959. She studied at Douglas College, Victoria College of Art, Vancouver Academy of Art, Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, and Kwantlen College. Influenced by the painters of the 1930s and '40s as well as Canada's own Group of Seven, Dana has travelled extensively across British Columbia and Alberta, as well as forays into Ontario and Quebec, finding endless inspiration in the Canadian landscape. Seduced by the drama of the ever-changing natural beauty around her, her paintings focus on movement and light with a touch of whimsy.

Irving's work can be found in such diverse settings as the Dorval Airport, Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory, General Motors Place, Stanley Lodge Palace Casino, Melville Grant Inn Gateway Casino, Ridgeway Annex Empress Hotel, North American Tea & Coffee Inc, Hyatt Hote, La Rua Restaurant, and the Burrard Building.

"There is such a joy, for an artist, to connect with your audience," she says. "For me, as a painter, to interpret the inspiring beauty of the Canadian landscape and present it in my own unique language is enjoyable in itself, but to connect with the viewer in that same language is a thrill beyond measure. What a privilege it is." 1203 Broad St, 250-388-0009, www.westendgalleryltd.com.

VI School of Art fights for its home • May 4

ARTS ORGANIZATIONS live precariously, often in need of funds. But now, with the city growing and real estate going crazy, it's even harder.

Just ask Wendy Welch, executive director of Vancouver Island School of Art (VISA). She is planning her fall semester without knowing whether the school will remain in its current venue. Since 2004, VISA has been renting the 1921 heritage school in Quadra Village from the Greater Victoria School District.

Last year the School Board upped VISA's rent by 40 percent (to over $4000/month), and also hinted that they might need the building in a year or so. At the beginning of 2018, though, it appeared from discussions that VISA's 200 students would be able to enjoy its five classrooms and their great natural lighting for another 18 months—with perhaps some space shared with the School District.

On April 2, however, Welch was told VISA had to leave by the end of this summer. The School District intends to do extensive renovations and, by fall 2019, house one of their own programs there.

The School District's Mark Walsh told *Focus* that fresh numbers indicate that an estimated 2000 new school spaces will be needed over the next 10 years.

Right now, spaces that seem on offer (and affordable) to VISA are much smaller and primarily on the outskirts of the city, said Welch.

VISA offers a wide selection of courses and workshops, an artist residency program, and hosts the Slide Room Gallery where student works are exhibited. In honour of its 10th birthday several years ago, it painted the exterior of its beloved home with a design inspired by the Razzle Dazzle ships from the early 20th century when the school was built.

Welch just recently went public with the "renoviction" news. Since then, she said, there's been an outpouring of support from her students and the wider community. Because of it, she said, "I have decided to fight the School District and try and get a five-year lease. I have come to the realization that they have several buildings that are newer, larger and in better shape than VISA (they just need seismic upgrading). It doesn't make sense to evict a thriving arts organization in the heart of an urban centre when there are other alternatives."

She is asking people to write to the district's MLA Rob Fleming, who is also BC's Minister of Education, and Victoria City Hall.

Welch said she has some great options long-term, including possible space in the new Crystal Pool building, with perhaps another branch at the planned Juan de Fuca Performing Arts Centre. "I am interested in both propositions (we could have two branches). However these are long-term plans not to be finished until around 2021. We need the School District to let us continue in the Quadra building until we can move to a more permanent place. It feels the right move to fight rather than to surrender, because the arts always get swept away to the background."

On May 4, 7-10pm, Vancouver Island School of Art is hosting the "Art for You" fundraiser. $75 ticket includes an original piece of art by a local artist, complimentary drink, appetizers, desserts, music and dancing. Tickets: vancouverislandschoolart.com, or by phone 250-380-3500, or in person, 2549 Quadra St.

PORTRAITS

"Agnes" 16 x 20 inches

nancyruhlart.com
250-514-1524

Quadra Island Studio tour

16th annual kick-off weekend
June 2nd & 3rd, 2018
Saturday 10-5, Sunday 10-4

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After June 3rd many studios remain open. Pick up a free year-round brochure on the ferry, at info centres or Quadra resorts.

Quadra Island - Discover the Arts!
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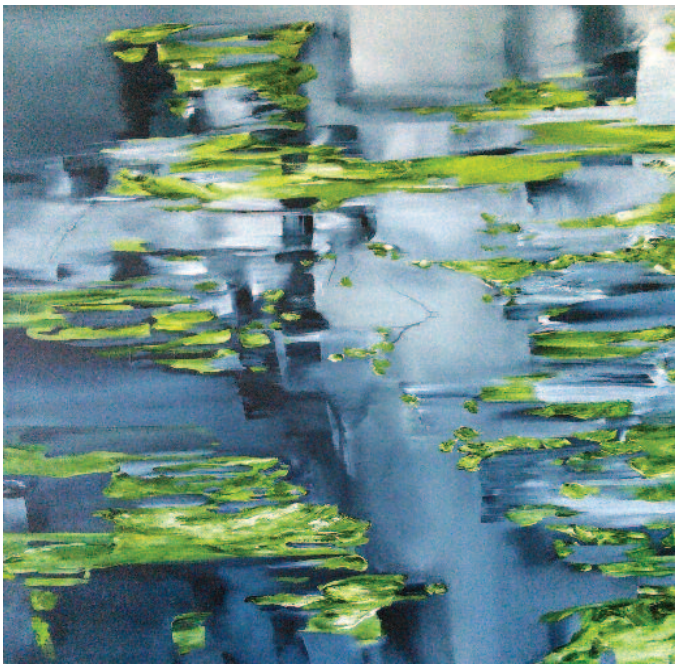

" CONTEMPLATION " NIINA CHEBRY, 42 X 42 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

Throughout May/June

INTRODUCING NIINA CHEBRY

The Avenue Gallery

Wandering comfortably between worlds of the abstract and narrative, Niina Chebry selects and dissects her subject matter to keep the viewer engaged and questioning. There is no one technique she clings to, but the essence of her approach–juicy layers of texture and translucent colour–lends a sense of mystery to her work. Now living in Vancouver, coastal flora and fauna seep into her compositions. As a founding member of Parker Art Salon, Niina is part of a vibrant arts community in East Vancouver. 2184 Oak Bay Ave, 250-598-2184, www.theavenuegallery.com.

SCULPTURE BY LEE GASS, HONEYCOMB CALCITE

June 2-3

QUADRA ISLAND STUDIO TOUR

Artist Studios

Every year for the past 16 years, artists on Quadra Island have opened up their studios to the public on the first weekend in June. There is a huge range of work to take in. Gary Colter makes incredibly intricate jewelry from recycled watches and fossils. Gordon James will wow you with both his gorgeous prints, and the amazing pottery he makes with his wife Martha. Maureen Maryka paints vibrant images of the West Coast. Tracy Myerson's fused glass pieces will captivate you. Terry Phillips' quilts are spectacular works of art. See more at www.quadraislandarts.com.

"CARNIVAL" HAREN VAKIL, 21 X 29 INCHES, MIXED MEDIA GOUACHE, INK AND ACRYLIC

May 29–June 30

THREE WAYS TO SEE / PAPER PAINT PENCIL PEN

Gage Gallery

Three Ways to See (May 29-June 16) features artists Anita Boyd, Haren Vakil and Jane Michiel. Opening reception is June 2, 5-8pm. Paper Paint Pencil Pen (June 19-30) includes works by Ilka Bauer, Margo Cooper, Haren Vakil, Heather Midori Yamada. Opening reception is June 22, 5-7:30pm. Haren Vakil's art, featured in both shows, is rooted in the surreal and the fantastic and influenced by his background in architecture, an interest in music (especially jazz), and his experience of various cultures, east and west. 2031 Oak Bay Avenue, 250-592-2760. www.gagegallery.ca.

"SUNDRENCHED II" BEV ROBERTSON, OIL ON CANVAS

Continuing to May 27

SKY IN BLOOM SPRING GROUP SHOW

The Gallery at Mattick's Farm

Artists exhibiting are Jennifer McIntyre, Kylee Turunen, Natasha Tanner Miller, Lisa Hebden, Taryn Brown, Sandra Froher, Alanna Sparanese, Maureen Ness, Brenda Walker, Stephanie Prest, Kelly Mitchelmore, Bev Robertson, Allison Brodie, April Ponsford. Shown here is work by Bev Robertson, who says, "I love finding the light in the painting that makes it come alive. My goal is to evoke a special memory or feeling, from the viewer, so they feel they have seen that before." Reception with artists May 12, 1-4pm. 5325 Cordova Bay Rd, 250-658-8333, www.thegalleryatmatticksfarm.com.

EXHIBITION

APRIL 11 —— JULY 7, 2018

THE TIME OF THINGS

The Continuum of Indigenous Customary Practice into Contemporary Art

Curated by France Trépanier

Daphne Boyer
Maureen Gruben
Susan Pavel
Skeena Reece
Marika Echachis Swan

630 Yates St. 250.721.6562 legacy.uvic.ca

University of Victoria
Legacy Art Galleries

Dennis Magnusson

"Purple Blue Iris"

acrylic, 24 x 30 inches

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May 5-20
Alison Bigg
"I Wonder"
Opening reception:
Friday, May 4, 7 - 9pm

June 2-17
Nicholas Vandergugten
"Working While Working"
Opening reception:
Friday, June 1, 7 - 9pm

Xchanges Gallery
2333 Government Street
250.382.0442
www.xchangesgallery.org
Open Saturdays & Sundays, 12-4

Xchanges Gallery gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the CRD

OCEANS EDGE
©MHobson 2017

Kirsten Brand • May 8-26

WHEN I SPEAK TO LIFELONG VICTORIA PAINTER and resident Kirsten Brand about her upcoming retrospective show at Gage Gallery, we end up laughing about how there may be some truth to the declaration "you are what you paint." The story of her evolution as an artist, and a person, is echoed in her subject matter.

Brand, who received the bulk of her instruction as a painter at the then-recently-founded Victoria College of Art (VCA) in the late 70s and early 80s, recalls an atmosphere where male instructors with "pretty powerful personalities" shaped and pruned the growth of the students' expression and style. Painter Joseph Kyle, one of the VCA's founders (and also the school's principal in those days) insisted on flat, geometric abstracts, and Brand's earliest works in the retrospective show how well she obeyed.

After graduating in 1981, Brand cast off the constraints of her college days and "blossomed" into work that was more impressionistic and representational. Flora has been her preferred subject, but not just any flora: plants that thrive in the harsh deprivation of the desert. One can imagine the young Brand, her authentic, artistic life force and full potential invisible, like the desert flowers that seem nonexistent until the tiniest bit of rain falls on them.

The brilliance that exploded when Brand was nourished by freedom echoes the desert blooms she's painted—plants that erupt in an abundant riot of yellow and magenta across the dusty expanses. After retiring from nursing in 2004, Brand and her husband travelled in an RV for 12 years, and she "fell in love with the desert; most of my paintings from 2004 until recently have had to do with the California, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona deserts. I'm at a transition point now, and coming back to doing more locally-focused work," she says.

One of the most recent pieces in this retrospective show features a macro view of pink cherry-tree blossoms, a subject she has been meaning to address for many years. "It's a very feminine painting," she says, and is intrigued by what this might mean in terms of her evolution as an artist and a woman. "There's quite a parallel there. Flowers are quite a feminine thing. I thought, 'How do I paint those cherry blossoms in a way that I react to them? The only way I could think of was to do a real close-up of a little bunch of the blossoms… I still don't know what to call them."

Perhaps a fitting title could be "I'll paint whatever I like, thank you very much."

Kirsten Brand's "Explorations: Past, Present & Future" runs May 8-26, Gage Gallery, 2031 Oak Bay Avenue. Reception May 12, 1-4pm. www.gagegallery.weebly.com, 250-592-2760. *—Mollie Kaye*

"HERRING SEASON" MARK HOBSON, 40 X 30 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

Throughout May/June

MARK HOBSON

Peninsula Gallery

Mark Hobson lives in Tofino, where he has painted professionally for over 30 years. Best known for his passionate portrayals of the wildlife and landscapes of the Canadian Pacific coast, the careful use of light is always present, enhancing subtle drama in his work. Professionally trained as a biologist, he taught high school science for nine years before devoting his career full time to painting. Hobson has won awards in the US, Canada and Europe, and has donated paintings to efforts to preserve natural environments.100-2506 Beacon Ave, Sidney, 250-655-1282, www.pengal.com.

GAGE GALLERY
ARTS COLLECTIVE

Explorations: Past, Present & Future

Kirsten Brand
www.studio222.ca

May 8 - 26

Join the artist
for a reception
May 12, 1-4 pm

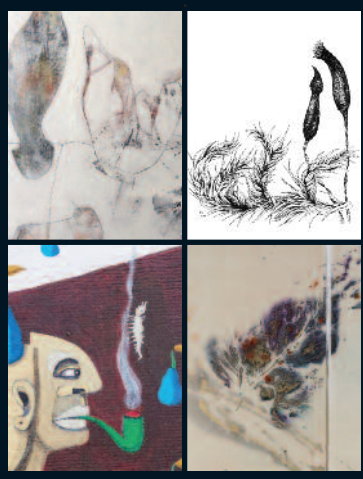
Three Ways to See

Anita Boyd
Jane Michiel
Haren Vakil

May 29 - June 16

Opening:
June 2, 5-8 pm

Paper • Paint • Pencil • Pen



Ilka Bauer
Margo Cooper
Haren Vakil
Heather Midori Yamada

June 19 - 30

Opening:
June 22, 5-7:30 pm

2031 Oak Bay Ave • 250 592 2760 • gagegallery.ca

"EBB AND FLOW" GRETA GUZEK, 50 X 50 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

May 19–31

GRETA GUZEK: CLARITY

West End Gallery

Acclaimed artist Greta Guzek presents her tenth anniversary exhibition, entitled "Clarity." Known for her bright and playful depictions of the region, her paintings capture the spirit of coastal life. Imbuing each piece with a sense of wonder and charm, she brings the viewer with her on a joyful journey around windswept shores, charming seaside cabins, and through groves of arbutus trees. Opening reception Saturday, May 19, with artist in attendance from 1-4pm. 1203 Broad St, 250-388-0009, www.westendgalleryltd.com.

"WORKING WHILE WORKING" NICHOLAS VANDERGUGTEN, DIGITAL PROJECTION

June 2-17

NICHOLAS VANDERGUGTEN: WORKING WHILE WORKING

Xchanges Gallery

In this multimedia installation, a filmed performance of on-the-clock labour by artist Nicholas Vandergugten is paired respectively with music by local folk artist Cosy Father, and autobiographical monologue by German Ocampo Salazar. Evoking the transformative potential of both physical and emotional work, this installation celebrates the dramatic retelling of internal personal struggles. Gallery hours during exhibition, 12-4pm Sat & Sun. Opening June 1, 7-9pm. 2333 Government St, Suite 6E, 250-382-0442, www.xchangesgallery.org.

"DOZING SEA LION" CRAIG BENSON, 15 X 7 INCHES

Throughout May/June

CRAIG BENSON

Peninsula Gallery

Craig Benson was born on Little Mountain in Vancouver, and carving became a hobby while he pursued an education in environmental studies. His post-graduate career in wildlife management and habitat protection kept him in close contact with his artistic subjects, and took him to many wild areas of North America. A full-time carver for over two decades, he now lives on Piers Island, north of Victoria, and his work celebrates and honours the creatures with which we share this planet.100-2506 Beacon Ave, Sidney, 250-655-1282, www.pengal.com.

"TOUCH ME" SKEENA REECE, VIDEO STILL

June 7

THE TIME OF THINGS

Legacy Gallery

On Thursday, June 7 at 7pm, Tsimshian/Gitksan and Cree artist Skeena Reece will present the world premiere of her performance "Conceptual Carving" at Legacy Art Gallery as part of the ongoing exhibition "The Time of Things." Based on Vancouver Island, Reece has become well known for her multidisciplinary work, including performance, spoken word, singing, video, and "sacred clowning" that she has presented across Canada over the last decade. More info: www.legacy.uvic.ca 250-721-6562. Exhibit at 630 Yates St until July 7.

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MADRONA GALLERY

"A Bruckner Symphonie 1" by Ernestine Tahedl, 48 x 49 inches, acrylic on canvas

Ernestine Tahedl

May 19 - June 1

606 View Street • www.madronagallery.com • 250.380.4660

ARTISHOW

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July: Maureen Ness

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Hotel Grand Pacific
July: Roger Jackson

*Program runs May - October

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2018 Exhibition of Ceramic Art

COASTAL VESSELS:

Romancing the Sea

OPENING GALA
Friday May 25, 6-9 pm

EXHIBITION CONTINUES
Sat - Sun May 26-27, 10 am - 5 pm

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'I Am Creation'

Performing Arts Festivals • May & June

BACK IN 1930s VICTORIA, nearly everyone had a "talent," and a full 10 percent of the population entered as contestants in some aspect of what is now called the Greater Victoria Performing Arts Festival (GVPAF). Adjudicators were imported from Eastern Canada and Great Britain; the newspaper published extensive coverage of competitions and awards.

Even though there's still a large number of passionate participants, they represent a much smaller percentage of the population. "There's been a cultural shift," says Fuchsia Shier, who helps administrate the festival. "There used to be extracurriculars that everybody did in school—speech arts, reciting poetry; everybody did piano lessons. Part of it was we didn't have TV, we didn't have the internet. That was the entertainment of the time: live performance."

To keep live performance relevant and alive, the annual, month-long GVPAF holds all-ages competitions and classes in music, dance, and speech arts. Winners between the ages of 10 and 28 are chosen to go on to the provincial level; from there, they may qualify for the national level. This year, there's an opportunity to see the best young talent from throughout BC, since Victoria is hosting the provincials for the first time in over a decade.

Some of the more intriguing spectacles on offer are the dance events: traditional forms, such as classical ballet, modern, and tap are on stage—but also ethnic, jazz, and hip-hop. The ethnic dance highlights show will be May 6, and it's a split ticket; half of the performance will feature folks fiddling in all sorts of different musical idioms, and the other half will spotlight performers in costumes doing traditional ethnic dances from all over the world, including Mexico, the Philippines, Ukraine, Ireland, and Scotland. "We want this festival to represent the performing arts we've got going on here today," explains Shier.

Most of the dance performances will take place at UVic, including, on June 1, the provincial dance highlights show.

For a complete listing of all GVPAF concerts, shows and venues, and a link to the provincial-level events, see gvpaf.org. Tickets will be sold at the door.—Mollie Kaye

"I AM CREATION" MARIKA ECHACHIS SWAN, CARVED WOODBLOCK PRINT

Throughout May/June

THE TIME OF THINGS

Legacy Gallery

"The Time of Things" is an exhibition which proposes to challenge the binary of traditional and contemporary art. It considers the continuum of Indigenous customary practices into contemporary Indigenous art through the work of five women artists: Daphne Boyer, Maureen Gruben, Susan Pavel, Skeena Reece, and Marika Echachis Swan. Curator Talk with France Trépanier, May 26, 2pm. Performance by Tsimshian/Gitksan and Cree artist Skeena Reece, June 7 at 7pm. Gallery hours Wed to Sat 10-4. More info: www.legacy.uvic.ca, 250-721-6562. Exhibit at 630 Yates St until July 7.

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Ska & Reggae Festival • June 20–24

WITH BANDS FROM NINE DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, organizer Dane Roberts says Victoria's 19th annual Ska & Reggae Festival is "something to celebrate." Listening to youtube videos featuring some of the festival's headliners, I'm bopping in my office chair, and it's impossible not to feel uplifted by the infectiously happy rhythms of this genre of music.

Roberts says besides ticketed shows, there will be free workshops for all ages, a visual arts show, and this year, an additional free concert at the main stage (Ship Point, Inner Harbour). Roberts adds that ska and reggae are the mainstays, but there will also be funk, soul, hip hop, punk, "and lots of extractions from Latin American music."

If you're not familiar with ska by name, think of the British "mod" youth movement of the early 1960s—interracial ska bands featured heavily there—but it originated in late 1950s Jamaica, and features elements of Caribbean mento and calypso, with American jazz and rhythm & blues thrown in. It's characterized by a walking bass line and it always hits the off-beat hard. It was the precursor to Jamaican music genres rocksteady and reggae, and in 1964, before Bob Marley had dreadlocks, he was a crop-topped vocalist in a ska band.

Mexico's biggest ska band, Panteón Rococó, is part of the Festival's international kickoff show on June 20. Victorians can see them, Back Eddy and the Procrastinators, and others, for free in the Inner Harbour. Roberts says that in Seattle or Vancouver, where these bands will tour after the Festival, each would command at least a $40 ticket price.

Most people will recognize American band The Mighty Mighty Boss Tones' biggest hit, "The Impression That I Get," and they're sure to play it at their mainstage show on June 23. The Western Standard Time Ska Orchestra, based in Los Angeles, is a 17-piece, ultra-hip lounge-style ensemble, chock full of talent, also on that same bill.

In addition to nearly a dozen music shows, the Festival will also offer a film component at the Vic Theatre as part of its workshop series. On June 23, from 12-3pm, *The Legends of Ska*, a 2015 documentary about the creators of the genre, will be screened, and filmmaker Brad Klein is flying in to be available for a Q&A after the show.

"We want to expose the music to as many people as possible and have the Harbour full," says Roberts. "When people go to the festival, they will find that it's kid friendly, family-oriented, and fully-licensed. With free music! How can you complain?"

Tickets and passes at Lyle's Place, Tourism Information Centre, Vinyl Envy, Jupiter Records and www.victoriaskafest.ca—MK

"WAITING" YARED NIGUSSU, 36 X 48 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

May 3–13

COASTAL MOODS

The Avenue Gallery

New works by artists Bi Yuan Cheng, Mary-Jean Butler, Susie Cipolla, Rob Elphinstone, Maria Josenhans, Brent Lynch, Yared Nigussu, Ron Parker and Blu Smith. Shown here is *Waiting* by Yared Nigussu who graduated from the Addis Ababa University of Fine Arts and Design, winning a scholarship to study in France. After moving to Canada, Yared was inspired by the energy, light and urban perspective of his new home of Vancouver. Known for his painterly urban landscapes, he has won numerous prizes. 2184 Oak Bay Ave, 250-598-2184, www.theavenuegallery.com.

May & June Events

PROGRAMS IN EARTH LITERACIES

A Brief History of Ken Wilber: A Friendly Exploration of his Integral Philosophy
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MOLLIE KAYE

Local artists' studios rarely seen by the public offer a glimpse into a disappearing world.

PHOTO: TONY BOUNSALL

Denise Nicholls and GJ Pearson

It may not occur to the tourists and locals walking among Chinatown's storefronts, but there's a whole community of people living above the grocery stores, furniture shops, and restaurants. Many have called this quirky neighbourhood home for decades; a disproportionate number of them are artists. What originally drew them was cheap rent and a charming, decayed-around-the-edges aesthetic; what's held them is the sense of solidarity and survival as rapid gentrification prices them out.

On a rainy April afternoon, I visit the 700-square-foot, brick-walled studio space shared by husband-and-wife artists Denise Nicholls and GJ Pearson. Their tiny home floats above the Herald Street shops like a lucid dream someone had about a Tim Burton movie starring Alexander Calder. "It's the opposite of minimalist," quips Nicholls, a graphic designer who creates jewellery and paintings under the name Firehorse Designs. A floor-to-ceiling collection of their friends' art on the walls is lit by two enormous windows. Pearson's intricate wire, fabric, and found-object sculptures—some with motors—which he refers to as "toys," perch atop most surfaces, float suspended from the ceiling, or are mounted to the walls and shelving that hold books, tools, and boxes of materials.

"This space is what I've always wanted to live in," says Pearson, as we drink home-brewed kombucha and cozy up with the studio's two cats on an intimate grouping of upholstered furniture. The historic building, originally used as meat lockers, feels secure to him as a rental; it was re-done in the late '90s. "We're not in any danger of being renovicted, because it's new-ish," he says. Before choosing the space "on a whim," the couple lived on the family farm in Central Saanich; Pearson had a separate studio—a

barn—that was twice the size of their current home. He doesn't miss anything about it. "I'm much happier in this space. I love being next door to Opus [art supplies], we're across the street from great coffee shops, we have a community of artists, and I don't have to have a car anymore."

I ask Nicholls what visitors' general reaction is when they see the place. "They don't know where to look first," she says. "It's a series of vignettes; there's probably 100 places you could look and see something." As Pearson works on what resembles a small Viking ship at his desk, I try to take it all in, and fantasize about the artist's life I might have had. "We live like children," Pearson admits. Nicholls concurs. "I'd always wanted to live in Chinatown since I was a little kid. I love living surrounded by the things that we make, and the things we've collected from other artists."

The couple considers themselves fortunate to have gotten into the rental market when they did, but Nicholls says, "We're trapped here. I mean it's great, because I love the space," but she does find the size limitations restrictive at times. She says they could never afford a larger unit at today's rates. "More and more gentrification is starting to happen in the neighbourhood; it's kind of like a switch went off, as soon as the Union Building went up, and now all the buildings are falling to developers."

The units that are currently being developed are truly tiny, Pearson says. "If this place had been renovated now instead of 20 years ago, it would be half the size," he says. "Basically, you'd have one window, and that would be it. The new standard is 250-400 square feet, just enough room for your laptop and a fold-down bed." "Or," says Nicholls quietly, "to run an airbnb." A few minutes later, she slips away to do just that—to supplement their income and remain, for now, in the hidden, eroding artists' colony of Chinatown.

To see more of Pearson's drawings and kinetic sculptures, see gjpearson.com; Nicholls' work can be purchased at firehorsedesigns.bigcartel.com.

Mollie Kaye is *Focus*' arts editor.

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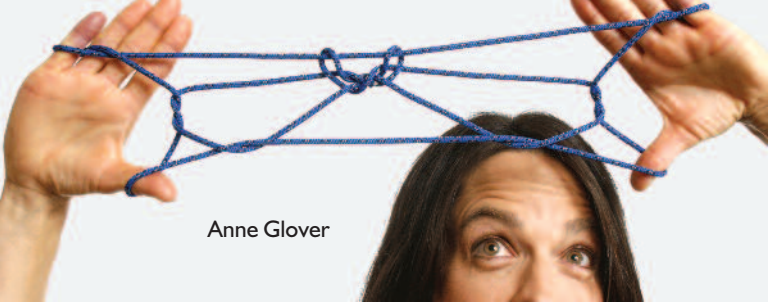

Anne Glover

Ensemble Laude • June 23

INTERNATIONALLY-ACCLAIMED STORYTELLER Anne Glover is *stringing* with a choir—roping them as well. The seasoned performer and educator has been an integral part of creating a newly-commissioned choral and spoken-word piece, "The Tale of Mahjabin," for Ensemble Laude's spring concert, entitled "Seekers and Seers." Glover, enjoying a brief pause from her whirlwind global touring schedule, agrees to sit down with me at a Fairfield café, a loop of blue nylon cord in her hands.

A few minutes into our conversation about her collaboration with Canadian composer Victor Zupanc, the elfin Glover has the string knotted intricately around her delicate fingers, explaining how a 50-foot piece of rope will be wound around some choir-member "prisoners" of a tyrannical king. With one small tug, the entire construction smoothly melts away, just as the story's protagonist will gently pull the end of the rope to magically "free" the singers from their constraints.

Looking across the table, I'm riveted by this nifty trick. Glover says working with string figures has been an integral part of her storytelling performances and work as a language educator. Even in front of large audiences, the string holds everyone rapt. "One of the things the choir wanted to do was expand its scope…there's the hope this will draw in more family, and younger people as well. That isn't to say it's a children's story; it's universal, for all ages."

Glover, who tours as a solo artist throughout the world, was yearning for a collaboration and a chance to perform in her home city. Elizabeth MacIsaac, artistic director of Ensemble Laude, approached Glover with the request to co-create a choral piece, adding new dimensions of narrative, visual interest, and audience engagement. Glover drew from her wealth of knowledge of stories from many cultures, and came up with the plot featuring a female Sufi heroine and a misguided male ruler. She's riffing on some traditional Persian stories, but modernizing them to make it relevant to a 21st century audience.

The collaborative process with Zupanc, Glover says, was "delightful; he accepted input so easily, it was lots of fun." The music has some Persian flavour to it, but also incorporates familiar melodies, to help tell the story. The singing at times is accompanied by an oud, a traditional Arabic instrument. Overall, Glover says, the score is "playful, outside the box…which is what I've done with the story as well."

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Cuarteto Chroma

MOLLIE KAYE

Four musicians are Canada's—and Mexico's—first graduate-level string quartet.

Left to right: Carlos Quijano, Ilya Gotchev, Manuel Cruz, Felix Alanis

In the bowels of the building that houses UVic's music department, I traverse corridors where scores of students rehearse in tiny, individual practice rooms. A muted cacophony of discordant trumpet, piano, and flute is punctuated by a soprano trilling through a Handel aria. They're all making music—in different keys—within a few feet of each other, but they're not playing together. Each privately hones their own skills, achieving individual excellence on their chosen instrument, hoping to earn a degree in performance.

I'm here to meet two violinists, a cellist, and a violist—all from Mexico—currently enrolled in the University's graduate music program. They're practicing together, in one room, as a group. Instead of working toward individual degrees as soloists, they are earning their masters in performance as a string quartet. When Cuarteto Chroma (Chroma Quartet) began their studies here last fall with UVic's resident string quartet, The Lafayette, it was the first time in Canadian history that a group of players entered a graduate music program to earn a collaborative performance degree.

I find the four men of Chroma playing together in a quartet-sized room, instruments in hand, going over new repertoire. Each of them has uprooted his personal and professional life in Mexico to come to UVic and earn this degree as an ensemble. They've now successfully completed their first year, will head back to Mexico for the summer, and return for their final year of study in the fall. Already, they have had a vital and positive impact on the school community and the local music scene, playing at Hermann's with the Ryan Oliver jazz quartet performing chamber music concerts in unexpected places.

Their graduate journey is requiring equal parts sacrifice, hard work, shared vision, and conflict resolution skills. "I got married in 2015, and the quartet started in 2015," says Chroma cellist Manuel Cruz. "So, I got married twice." The group chuckles. "Being in a string quartet is like being married— except instead of having sex, we have music," quips violist Felix Alanis, and an uproar of hearty laughter fills the room. Someone mutters that music can be better than sex, and there's more laughter. Clearly these guys have excellent rapport, but it's not all fun and harmony in every moment, Alanis admits. "You travel together, you eat together, you rehearse together—you fight together. It's hard, because even though you want to play music with these other people, it doesn't mean that we really think the same. All the kinds of fights you can have about little things—or big things—always happen." Just like any marriage, I say. "But with three people," quips violinist Carlos Quijano. More laughter.

Music history is littered with the corpses of bands, projects, and quartets that fizzle out, amicably part ways, or violently implode. "What happens to our quartet happens to every quartet," Alanis says. "We are friends, but it's always tricky to keep that friendship after the rehearsal." Surfing the tides of conflict, the group agrees, is perhaps more important even than musicianship, and they couldn't have asked for better advisors and mentors than the Lafayette string quartet, who have weathered it all—and are still playing together after 31 years. Alanis says Chroma members are awed by, and grateful for, the four women advisors' wisdom, perspective and counsel. "It really helps us when we can ask them, 'What do you do? How do you manage that?'"

Ann Elliott-Goldschmid, Lafayette violinist, thinks Chroma has all of what it takes to become a world-class string quartet; that's why the group was accepted into the program. As solo string players, she says, "They are really, really good." As a quartet, they have "a real 'sympatico' quality about them…they're really remarkable—wonderful, generous people, extremely empathetic. They listen really carefully, are respectful to each other and everyone around them, and they have embodied a beautiful way of communicating with each other." What a quartet needs in order to truly gel and achieve the highest level of excellence, she says, is time together, "to hone their skills, to learn each other's strengths and idiosyncrasies, to read all of that nonverbal communication that goes on in a string quartet."

"They have really given up a lot to come here," she continues. "Two of them are fathers; the amount of dedication that they have to each other, to go through what they've gone through to make this a priority in their lives…I've learned enormous amounts from working with them, in terms of the discipline they have. I'm humbled by them." These particular men are "the archetype of who we want for the program. They're each individually strong; they are wonderful role

> "BEING IN A STRING QUARTET is like being married—except instead of having sex, we have music."
>
> —*Felix Alanis*

models for the other graduate students and undergraduates; they work hard…I can't say enough about how great that has been for everybody at the school."

Chroma plays a couple of short pieces for me: an intense, dark movement from a Schubert quartet, and a lush, heart-rending arrangement of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." The small, carpeted room gives nothing back acoustically, yet their renditions sparkle and snap with complex, technical beauty—and a whole lot of soul. I say I've never heard a string quartet play a show tune. Alanis says they are always eager to experiment and explore. "We try to be as open as possible," he says. Violinist Quijano adds, "In Mexico, people like classical music, but they haven't had a lot of contact with quartets," and by offering many different genres, including Latin American and familiar melodies, more listeners can connect with their music.

The sense of inclusion goes both ways, and all the musicians of Chroma report that Victorians have been welcoming and enthusiastic. Violinist Ilya Gotchev, who was born in Bulgaria, then studied and worked in Mexico—and also Brussels—finds British Columbia delightful, but the high cost of living is a challenge. "Fortunately," he says, "we have a scholarship through the University. It helps." Elliott-Goldschmid says the greater community reaps many benefits from having Chroma in town, but unfortunately, their scholarship is not as generous as she would like. "We need donors…and more funding for our music students; UVic is not a wealthy school."

She says Chroma's long-term professional sustainability hinges on their versatility as performers. "They are fabulous, because they can do it all—they can play late Beethoven, Brahms, tango—and pull it off. They really are the 'real thing.' We're trying to attract those kinds of students, who have the talent and open-mindedness to do it all." She says she regrets that as a young player she didn't have that same kind of broad spectrum of repertoire. "I feel like [The Lafayette string quartet has] learned so much from them."

As Chroma shape-shifts into an *orquestra tipica* and plays an Astor Piazzolla tango for me, I can hear all of their individual passion, technical prowess, and expert give-and-take. I can just see the dancers punctuating the musical phrases with precise feet and romantic flourish. After the penultimate bar, the shared effort, rhythmic pulse, and pleading voices of the strings is released. Four smiles of satisfaction now greet each other over four bows poised in unison as the last chord fades.

Cuarteto Chroma will perform in a free public recital on September 28 at 8pm in the Philip T. Young Hall at University of Victoria. They're also looking for some music-loving Victoria homeowners who would like to host chamber music performances. To contact them, and for a list of their upcoming performances, see cuartetochroma.com.

Mollie Kaye spent some time in solo practice rooms as an undergraduate soprano, but is happiest, like the members of Chroma, performing in a group. She sings with The Millies, a vocal trio.

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UNO and OUT

MONICA PRENDERGAST

Intrepid Theatre's May and June theatre festivals liven up the local landscape.

May and June are typically quiet months for theatre companies that produce a season from fall through early spring, but for Intrepid Theatre, the spring months are filled with activity. Intrepid presents their UNO Fest (solo performances) May 9-19, followed by their OUTstages Festival ("a decidedly queer theatre festival") June 19-24. Theatre-goers can catch over twenty performances from local and national companies, plus an international show from Ireland.

I am always happy to see what these curated festivals have to offer. Similarly to the Belfry's Spark Festival in March, these touring productions offer me the opportunity to stay in town, yet attend theatre from other places. We have a rich theatre community in Victoria, and it is inspiring and enlivening for local theatre artists and audiences to see work from elsewhere.

I do not have the space here to go through all 20-plus performances that will be onstage in May and June, so here are some "critic's picks"—these are shows I look forward to seeing, along with some thoughts on what they suggest about trends and topics in Canadian theatre and beyond.

One of the first things I notice when looking over the UNO Fest program is that the majority of shows are performed by women. This is something to celebrate in a theatre culture that is struggling with gender-equity issues. Perhaps it is easier for a younger woman theatre artist to get her foot in the door by writing and/or performing a solo play? Certainly a number of these shows have been seen at various fringe and other kinds of theatre festivals, and have garnered positive reviews along the way. (Note: All quotes below are from the Intrepid Theatre website.)

What kinds of topics or themes are these women bringing to the stage? On the more playful side, *Dream Another Day,* from Toronto's Meagan O'Shea, considers the possibilities of a female James Bond through a "signature mash-up of dance, theatre, storytelling and visual spectacle." Edmonton's Ainsley Hillyard performs alongside Jezebel, her English bulldog, in *Jezebel, at the Still Point* as the dog and her human owner "explore the universe trying to unravel the mysteries behind time travel." And what is described as a "darkly funny" show, *Extremophiles* features Calgary's Georgina Beaty performing her play, which envisions a near-future world in which pregnancy rarely occurs. Finally, Ireland's Margaret McAuliffe performs *The Humours of Bandon,* her look at the fascinating culture surrounding Irish dance competition.

Margaret McAuliffe Grace Thompson Darla Contois

More serious solo plays performed by women this year include Toronto's Grace Thompson in *My Nightmares Wear White,* an autobiographical piece about surviving a long illness. *Our Fathers, Sons and Little Brothers* comes from Makambe Simamba, a Zambian theatre artist now living in Calgary. The play presents the final moments and imagined afterlife of Trayvon Martin, the 17-year-old African-American young man gunned down by George Zimmerman in Florida in 2012. It will be powerful to see a female African-Canadian artist addressing topics related to the ongoing killings of African-American young men in the United States. Vancouver playwright Kuan Foo's *SELF-ish,* performed by Diana Bang, looks at the after-effects of a tragic event on a Korean-Canadian woman.

Another theme that spans both festivals is the inclusion of a significant number of Indigenous plays and performers. This is another more-than-welcome trend as we witness a rise of Indigenous theatre across the country in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation report. *The Only Good Indian,* from Toronto's Pandemic Theatre, is described as "part lecture, part meditation, and part threat; each night a different performer straps themselves into an extreme situation, and takes a raw look at where our similarities begin and where they end, forcing both the performer and the audience to ask themselves: What would I die for?" *White Man's Indian* is written and performed by Cree artist Darla Contois from Manitoba. She takes her character Eva on a journey through a White man's high school with a mix of humour and poetry. And UNO's guest Indigenous curator, Yolanda Bonnell, performs her play *Bug* about "the women in an Indigenous family navigating addiction and inter-generational trauma."

Another theme in the UNO Fest are two shows using technology to create connections between people. We know how alienating technology can be, that our interconnectedness online is creating a social lack in people's lives. But these two pieces take a look at the possibility of a genuine human encounter via telephone, cell phone and text messaging. In *Landline,* participants are sent on a guided audio walk and invited to text another real-time participant in Halifax while "prompted to share stories, memories, and secrets as the urban landscape transforms into a back drop for the relationship forming between two strangers." Created by Halifax's Secret Theatre, and creators Dustin Harvey and Adrienne Wong, I really like the company's mandate: "We create meaningful moments that offer new ways of being together while shedding crooked light on how it is we've grown apart."

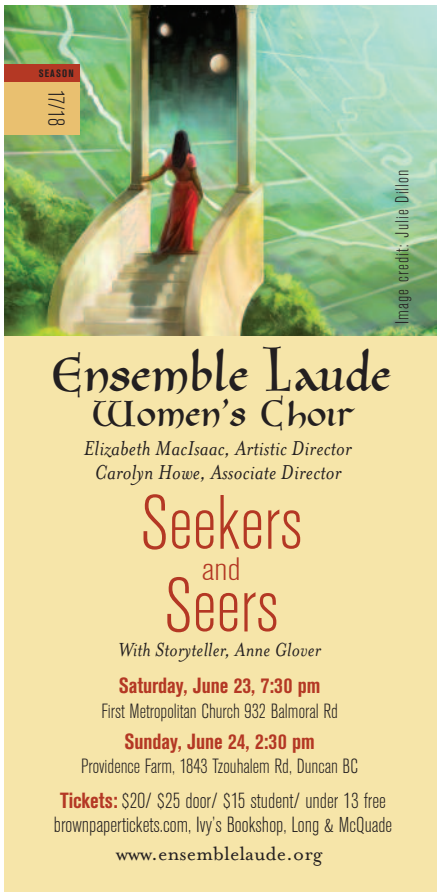
IT IS INSPIRING and enlivening for local theatre artists and audiences to see work from elsewhere.

Boca del Lupo Theatre in Vancouver is bringing their Red Phone project here as part of UNO Fest. Participants are invited to speak to a stranger on a second phone while responding to conversational prompts written by prominent Canadian playwrights and writers. Again the focus is on how technology both connects and creates disconnection. Mindful performances such as these offer deeper reflection on the impact, for better and for worse, of technology on our lives.

OUTstages in June focuses on plays and musical performances with LGBTQ2 topics and themes. Some plays are solo, including Vancouver's Zee Zee Theatre's *My Funny Valentine* and local Two-Spirit Métis artist Eddi Wilson's *Animal Medicine.* The former play looks at the real-life 2008 homophobic murder of 15-year-old Lawrence King, and the latter "uses music, monologue and movement to dissect what they (Wilson) have learned from a life spent staring in the microscope." *Pearle Harbour's Chautauqua,* from Toronto's Justin Miller (in his drag alter-ego Pearle Harbour), comes here with a raft of four-star reviews and promises "an immersive extravaganza: part drag, part tragicomedy, part old-time tent revival."

Finally, I'm pleased to see a couple of children's shows included in UNO Fest. Montreal's Puzzle Theatre brings us *Omelette,* a comic physical theatre piece performed by Csaba Raduly, a Hungarian-Canadian theatre artist. And Vancouver's Candice Roberts performs her play *Ideas Bobert!* that takes us into the world of Bobert, "a shy and curious fellow with a bird that lives in his chest." Taking children to the theatre is one of the most effective ways to build future theatre audiences, so grab a child and go to these shows. Or grab a partner or friend to see one of the many worthwhile productions that Intrepid Theatre is bringing our way this spring.

Monica is planning to take one or both of her adult children to see an UNO Fest or OUTstages show this year. See intrepidtheatre.com/shows/ for information about the shows she has discussed and more.



"Contemplating God's Conundrum" by Eloise Dumas, 36 x 48 inches, oil on canvas

Sarah Cox: Breaching the Peace

AMY REISWIG

Mythic dam battle at Site C is a showdown between "progress" and those who would preserve the valley.

Four-year-old Caleb helped pull late September corn stalks at Ken and Arlene Boon's farm, uncovering the pumpkins he'd eventually choose among for Halloween. There on a bank of the Peace River, this boy with blue glasses and dirty hands is the fifth generation to harvest in this garden, likely unaware that he may be the last, as the new highway for Site C will run through this part of his grandparents' expropriated land. Nearby at Tluuge sus (Bear Flat), First Nations families have gathered for thousands of years—long before the Boons arrived. Cultural camps allow the sharing of ancestral knowledge and help maintain a spiritual connection to the land…for now. Site C construction will claim it, too. Farther out, downstream in the river itself, is what locals call Eagle Island. Named for its nests, every tree there has already been cut down.

Sarah Cox

These aren't scenes you'll find in government reports, industry-commissioned studies, or mainstream media accounts about the now-greenlit hydro megaproject taking shape in northeastern BC. Rather, they are some of the intimate stories told in award-winning journalist Sarah Cox's new book *Breaching the Peace: The Site C Dam and a Valley's Stand Against Big Hydro* (UBC Press, May 2018). Through in-person visits, detailed interviews, and dogged research, Cox takes us to meet the place, its people, and its rare and little-studied ecosystems—all in peril. She reminds us that for local First Nations, farmers, and hundreds of species, the Peace River Valley is not a hydro opportunity; it's home.

Billed as climate-friendly clean energy to meet future demand, the Site C dam was first proposed in the 1950s and has been a topic of hot debate, and resistance, for decades. Designed to produce 1100 megawatts on some of the province's best agricultural land, Site C would affect 34 farms, the traditional territories of the Treaty 8 First Nations, 450 known archaeological sites, 900 areas of "paleontological sensitivity," and more than 100 species at risk by flooding 128 kilometres of the Peace River Valley and its tributary valleys. As Cox encourages us to imagine, that's the area between Victoria and Nanaimo under up to 15 storeys of water. The zone widens when you include the stability impact line and the wave impact line (where reservoir waves caused by landslides would reach). Oh, and there's the new highway. It's all going to cost us $10.7 billion, as of the January 2018 estimate.

That's a lot of numbers, and I often lament that "number" contains the word "numb." While Cox, with a saint's patience, sifts through the tens of thousands of pages of environmental impact assessments to tell us, for instance, that "fourteen at-risk butterfly species will also be impacted by the project, including the Old World swallowtail and Aphrodite fritillary," she clearly knows from her own experience that it takes more than data to help people understand what's at stake and what's been happening in the now bittersweetly named Peace.

Like most British Columbians, Cox had never been to the Peace region. That changed in 2013 while working for Sierra Club BC. Being there, her expectations of "just another pretty BC valley" were blown open, and she describes what she instead encountered: "something of a biological curiosity…a northern Garden of Eden." After that personal contact, her ideas about conservation shifted, looking at nature to include "the preservation of other values as well: traditional way of life, human history, the smaller green spaces that connect protected areas for wildlife, how everything fits together." From that, the spark was lit. "I remember the end of a conversation with a friend from the Peace," she tells me, tucked into a quiet upstairs nook at Nourish Cafe. "I said, 'I wish there was something else I could do.' I literally woke up the next morning with the idea for the book."

Personal contact is truly at the heart of *Breaching the Peace.* We hear the voices of expropriated landowners, of First Nations Chiefs and activists, even of birds like the endangered yellow rail, or the slow drip from the delicate geology of tufa seeps. Cox's hands-on approach produces an ever-surprising series of "who knew?" moments: in the Peace you can grow everything from artichokes to watermelon; you can find 11,000-year-old taiga vole bones on the same land as prickly pear cactus growing farther north than Moscow; BC doesn't have stand-alone legislation to protect endangered species; and methylmercury from flooded forest and agricultural land means Chief Roland Willson of West Moberly First Nations must already lament, "Nowadays what I get to do is to teach my son how to throw contaminated fish back into the river."

"I was surprised all the way along," Cox tells me, "by the extent of the damage—the damage to First Nations communities and rights and title, the damage to the environment, the damage to farmland." And she's not easy to shock. With an MA in political science, a freelance journalism career (earning a Vancouver Press Club Award, a BC Journalism Award, and two Western Magazine Awards), and a background with science-based conservation organizations, Cox has more recently been the legislative reporter for DeSmog Canada, focusing on energy and environmental issues. Site C wraps all of Cox's interests into one big, unruly ball which she deftly untangles.

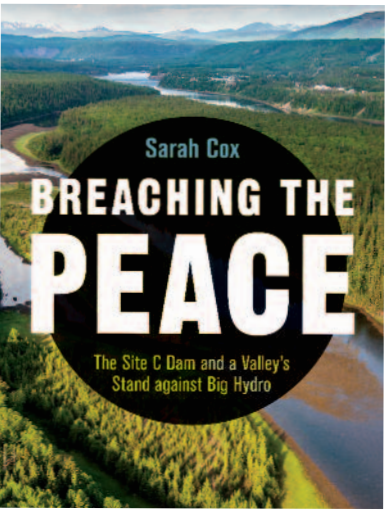
But Cox doesn't just gather and chronicle information. The beauty of her book is that it allows us to stand in closer, deeper relation to this threatened place and its determined people. And we should. Its loss is rationalized as being for our collective gain, so there's a responsibility to know what is being sacrificed for our supposed good. You can't fight for—or mourn—what you didn't even know existed.

The public also can't stand up against an invisible process; that's the other side of her story. Cox wanted people to see exactly what expropriation in BC looks like, and how BC Hydro quietly bought

> "I WAS SURPRISED all the way along by the extent of the damage—the damage to First Nations communities and rights and title, the damage to the environment, the damage to farmland." —*Sarah Cox*

up land in the Peace, spending millions, all through the '70s, '80s, '90s, and early 2000s until the BC Liberals made good on their intention to push Site C past the point of no return, despite previous rejections. She wants people to see the tactics employed—not by a foreign-owned corporation, but by their own Crown corporation —in an intimidating BC Hydro civil suit against First Nations protesters in order to discourage potential future involvement (a suit, Cox notes, that's still open). Quite simply, she says: "The story of what's going on up there needs to get out."

So while BC Hydro and the Canadian Hydropower Association wouldn't speak to her, she ducked underneath and behind official lines to gather evidence through one-on-one talks, digging through stashes of letters and clippings, conferring with scientists, making FOI requests, excavating unsorted museum archives, hiking out on the land, visiting an international hydro conference, and meeting with alternative energy producers.



She also considers the global context of hydro megaprojects dating back to the 1920s and through to cautionary contemporary examples of Muskrat Falls, Newfoundland, and the Keeyask Dam in Manitoba. Big dams once stood as symbols of progress, independence, and ingenuity, but later represented corruption and arrogance, as environmental and human costs became too great to defend… until now. She writes: "One project that was dusted off and polished with a climate-friendly cloth was Site C. It joined big hydro dams around the world…as a phoenix rising from the ashes." The climate has changed indeed.

While Cox's prose is controlled, deliberate, shot through with wonder, deep respect, and empathy, she injects a sense of the mythic, conveying the enormity of the larger principles at play—and also at risk. Despite NDP Premier John Horgan's giving the go-ahead in December, Cox doesn't believe the fight is quite over. With two First Nations court cases and major geotechnical issues (she says they still haven't found bedrock), she believes Site C's fire may still go out. "The public turning against the project could also stop it," she says. "I think most people still don't know." With *Breaching the Peace,* we'll all know a lot more.

Writer and editor Amy Reiswig continues to believe that our greatest natural resource is one another—to listen, ask questions, find solutions, and stand in support.

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Tick, tick, tick…

GENE MILLER

Victoria may be stuck in time, but that could be what guarantees its survival.

The email subject line appeared to read: "Genius Way to Be a Mistress," but when I squinted for another look, it read "Genius Way to *Buy* a *Mattress.*" It took only that heartbeat between glimpses to spin a dozen fantasies about the Degenerate-In-Chief in the White House.

Look at that! I planned to write with a springtime flutter in my heart, but two sentences in and it's cocktails on the lip of the volcano.

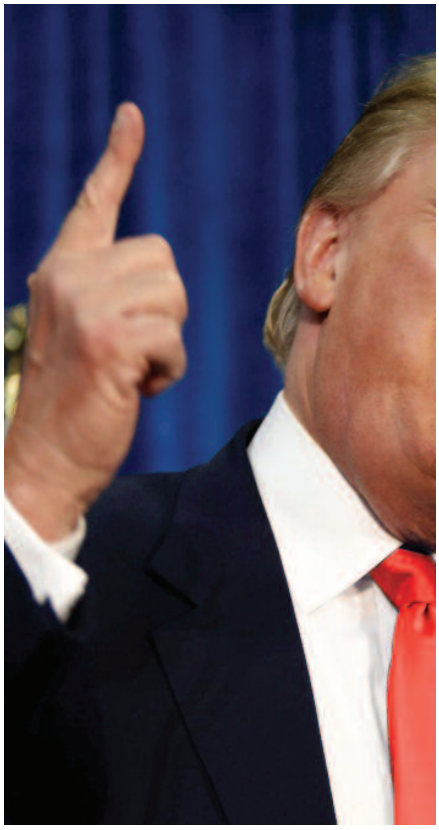
Oh well, stick with what you know.

2018 isn't 2017-just-rolls-on; it's 2017-gets-worse. In case you hadn't noticed, politically, existentially, we are staring out at stormy waters—no, not Stormy what's-her-name, the First Hooker. My old man, a turn-of-the-20th century son of two eastern European émigrés, physically unscathed by the Great Depression and two world wars (he fought in the second), but hardly an emotional survivor, meekly and ritually muttered during his Florida retirement dotage, "It's not all smooth sailing." And he was referencing his era, a short, lifetime increment, and not, say, the Permian-Triassic Mass Extinction Event when, for nine million years, you couldn't get fresh, lean pelycosaur for money or prayer. My dad meant: don't make plans that assume or require constancy, because the laws of contingency, like an amusement park herky-jerk, are sure to whip you sideways.

And it was never more true than right now. If you anticipate that the current and coming times will be same-old, same-old, you are in for a string of un-gentle shocks.

Ivan Krastev, chairman of the Center for Liberal Studies and a permanent fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna, penned a recent opinion piece claiming that the era of liberal democracy, with legislated regular leadership elections and term limits, is over. It's his view that an "emperor's moment" is the new and spreading political fashion.

I'm halfway through *How Democracies Die,* Steven Levitsky's and Daniel Ziblatt's ominous and cautionary dissection of the political and social forces that in the past have produced, and now appear set to re-produce, a global rise in autocratic leaders, presidents-for-life and military-supported dictatorships. Their book is one of a flurry of current titles exploring this theme. Of course, it could never happen in our country, notwithstanding Trudeau's declining popularity or risks to the small-L liberal agenda, because we're…well… we're Canada, and we don't roll that way. No, sir. Never. Couldn't happen here.



Oops

If there were ever a moment to liberate our sensibilities from manic and unrealistic faith in the never-ending improvability of everything, this is it. We need to install mental jitter software appropriate to very uneasy times, which might at least allow our feet to touch the ground and provoke a realistic public consensus about the state of things.

In the movies, trouble comes with uh-oh music. The skies darken, putting the world in shadow. However, off-screen, also known as "reality," trouble materializes with few cues and no music, or few cues that people are able to spot and willing to heed. I remind you, just to strike a rare sombre note, that civilizations and cultures before our own have finished and vanished—likely just after their poets celebrated in song their achievements, longevity and indestructibility.

Germany (Ribbentrop) and Russia (Molotov) signed a non-aggression pact on August 23, 1939. Three days later, the Second World War began. In his biography of pianist Vladimir Horowitz, author Harold Schonberg comments: "The 'experts' told Horowitz there would never be a war. Inconceivable! But Horowitz, recognizing the threat from Germany, knew war was coming and, he recounts, 'so did Rachmaninoff when I had dinner with him in Paris.'"

Remember, there are "experts" and there are folks who sense which way the wind is blowing.

In 2018, American social critic James Kunstler writes: "There are certainly waves and cycles in history, and one of them involves a society's capacity for self-understanding. Sometimes, a culture is too flimsy or exhausted or sick to achieve even low levels of self-awareness. We are at a low point in the cycle, sunk in grievance fantasies and narcissism. The end result is we don't know what we're doing or why we're doing it."

Succinctly, Charles Blow in the *New York Times* puts the current moment this way: "I see a man growing increasingly irascible as his sense of desperation surges. The world is closing in on Trump and he is in an existential fight for his own survival. This is precisely what makes him so dangerous: Trump will harness [presidential power] and deploy it all as guard and guarantee against his own demise."

There are times to coast and times to pedal. Right now? I'd suggest we pedal like mad.

I can't help it; I just ooze all this worry. I'm an apocalyptarian to the core. No, Gramps, not an apocryphal librarian. Change your battery.

You ask: why now, why are times so suddenly clangorous, so fraught and worrying?

Well, one theory of events is the un-nuanced but deceptively profound "Shit happens." This points to the arbitrary and random aspects, the why/ because, of existence: things that will fail to achieve their intended outcomes, or will have unintended consequences. We have a word to cover these situations or, at least, their aftermath: "Oops."

IF I HAD TO DEFINE VICTORIA'S PURPOSE in these increasingly jumpy times, I would say our task is to maintain an identity based on cultural and social continuity and a practiced and functioning mutuality, even if the Olde England thing has waned.

A second un-credentialed idea is that we are governed by an evolutionary script and, increasingly liberated from the obligations of mutuality (which itself has become abstracted beyond clarity or recognition) and made nearly godlike by our worldly competence, we are becoming culturally over-individuated—solitudes supported by technology—which puts us utterly at odds with our biological nature. Such distortions are vastly de-stabilizing and dislocating, put all of us in a state of collective anxiety and anger, force danger on the entire human project and, unsurprisingly, release boundless growth opportunities for autocrats, demagogues and assorted strongmen.

Third in this quartet of explanations: Carlos Perez, in a long essay on the Intuition Machine website, cites Scott Alexander's "Meditations on Moloch," which discusses the inevitable failure of collective coordination. Alexander argues, "groups that survive will be the kinds that are most selfish (that is, ruthless, opportunistic and self-advancing). Groups that have a strategy aligned with the common good are likely to go extinct." He writes that the optimal solution is simple enough to understand intellectually, yet impossible to implement. Civilization cannot escape this problem and it is the root cause of repeated, cyclical social tension.

Last is this idea: we systemically underprice social risk.

As world conditions deteriorate and become more parlous, I'm increasingly inclined to think of Victoria as a "lifeboat"—a community that somehow maintains its cultural coherence during rough and threatening times, not because the place is too small to matter, but because it practices the dual skills (and they are skills) of continuity and mutuality. We joke about "a little bit of Olde England," but, to give credit, how binding and stabilizing a civic narrative that has been! In spite of the one-liners about The Present arriving in Victoria ten years late, this place, as I've suggested in previous writing, has a "genius for inertia."

If I had to define Victoria's purpose in these increasingly jumpy times, I would say our task is to maintain an identity based on cultural and social continuity and a practiced and functioning mutuality, even if the Olde England thing has waned. We should remind ourselves that communities aren't communities merely because they have place names or share a postal code or some other accidental adjacency, but because they actively practice a range of community functions and maintain commonwealth—that is, do things together.

Yes, I know: easy to propose, but a challenge to undertake. Still, the social stakes are enormous, as David Brooks lays out in a mid-February *New York Times* column:

"There's been an utter transformation in the mind-set within which people hold their beliefs. Back in the 1990s, there was an unconscious abundance mind-set. Democratic capitalism provides the bounty. Prejudice gradually fades away. Growth and dynamism are our friends. The abundance mind-set is confident in the future, welcoming toward others. It sees win-win situations everywhere.

"Today, after the financial crisis, the shrinking of the middle class, the partisan warfare, a scarcity mind-set is dominant: Resources are limited. The world is dangerous. Group conflict is inevitable. It's us versus them. The ends justify the means.

"All of this would be survivable if the mentality was going away in a few years. But it is not going away. The underlying conditions of scarcity are only going to get worse. Moreover, the warrior mentality builds on itself. This is a generational challenge. Some other warrior will succeed Trump."

Imagine you and me, reader and writer, sitting, like Horowitz and Rachmaninoff, in a Victoria café, sipping our shade-grown, ethically sourced lattes and discussing prospects in 2018. What modest local initiatives, what social strategies and policies might we propose to ensure (short of a guarantee) that our boat floats through this nervous chapter and into a better beyond?

Think: community.

Now, where did I put that springtime flutter?

Gene Miller is the founder of Open Space and co-founder of *Monday Magazine*.

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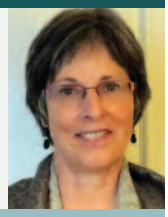

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Stewarding the oak meadows

MALEEA ACKER

Colleen O'Brien is restoring Playfair Park's Garry oak meadows—allowing the rest of us a walk back in time.

Colleen O'Brien and I sit on a bench tucked into a gap in the split-rail fence that surrounds the two-acre Garry oak meadow expanse in Playfair Park. It's windy, but when the sun shows, it's deliciously warm. Around us, the ground is thick with the new green leaves of common camas, great camas, Pacific sanicle, fawn lily and other rarer species she demurs mentioning. It's beautiful, and by the time this article comes to print, that sea of green will be a sea of blue camas flowers—so blue that Sir James Douglas, back in 1849, mistook it for a lake. But it's what is missing in this landscape, which O'Brien has tended since 2010, that makes it so rare.

Using a variety of methods—some orthodox, some her own creation—O'Brien has made it hard to find a single introduced species in Playfair's meadow. No orchard grass, no stubborn blades of couch grass, no creeping buttercup, no broom and no ivy. Hardly even any chickweed. Under the blades of native bulbs there is a thin skim of moss, but otherwise, the unblemished blue-green of camas leaves bent by wind presents a scene impossible to see anywhere else on Vancouver Island.

PHOTO: TONY BOUNSALL

Colleen O'Brien

"Am I doing restoration or rescue?" O'Brien muses. She sees the habitat she is creating in collaboration with Saanich Parks as the first step in a kind of decolonization of the land—getting rid of the invasives and "seeing what is there." O'Brien, a resident of Victoria since 1976, grew up in Metchosin, where as a child she cultivated satin flowers from seed and planted them out, caring for them "like they were my children." Her 7000-plus hours of volunteer work in Playfair (since 2010) is mostly solitary, broken by spells of unofficial public education, when she tells people about the species they can find here, or asks them to keep their dogs from running through fenced areas.

O'Brien is not a trained scientist, but has learned from some of the region's best, including Hans Roemer, who did the first categorization of Garry oak ecosystems in the 1970s, and James and Kristen Miskelly. She also regularly researches using the Garry Oak Ecysostems Recovery Team's website (www.goert.ca) and E-Flora BC. In 2003, after years of serving on various arts and environmental boards, she was asked by Saanich to be the lead steward for Playfair Park. Her restorations were unofficial at first, and gradually gained ground as she learned more.

Intact, deep-soil Garry oak meadows are extremely rare in the CRD. Less than one percent remains of the original coverage. At Playfair Park, the sandy, loamy soil crumbles at a touch. It's completely unlike the clay I wrestle with in my backyard, or the thin soil of Mount Tolmie. This deep topsoil supported a wide variety of native species, but it was also highly coveted when colonists arrived to the island. Most deep-soil sites are now lawns around houses in Saanich, Oak Bay and Victoria, or farming fields and large developments in Langford, Colwood and Metchosin. Those sites left are often highly degraded, O'Brien tells me, mostly because of human impacts from straying off trails and soil compaction.

O'Brien's work takes a different form than the restoration done in the Cowichan Garry oak preserve, where caretaker Irvin Banman has gradually convinced Cowichan officials to use fire to control introduced species. That's not an option in an area so close to residential development. Instead, O'Brien started noticing that Garry oak leaves tend to fall after the fall germination of introduced weeds and grasses, meaning they're too late to cover and shade these interlopers. Native bulbs go dormant by late summer and don't reappear until early spring.

O'Brien began covering the ground with one-metre test patches of plastic, which kills existing grasses and keeps the seed bank from germinating. Her hunch worked beautifully, dramatically cutting down on weeding and providing a clear space from which native bulbs could emerge. Last year, she covered over 1000 square meters of the park's meadows, keeping the ground weed-free until the early spring emergence of native species. The effect of the plastic is visible as a reverse shadow—swaths that have been covered are cleaner, freer of weeds, and native species are more plentiful.

Saanich, which benefits from her techniques, also participates by keeping shrubs like snowberry from expanding their territory, and by employing a judicious use of grass-specific herbicides for stubborn species like couch grass, which don't respond as well to mulch or cover. After introduced species are removed, O'Brien can start to add other natives—increasing the population of some, like chocolate lilies or spring gold, and adding others, like woolly sunflower. "To me, this is precious. It's a small portion of land, but what I'm trying to do is show what is possible." It won't work, she asserts, without a lot of other people trying to affect change.

If there's one thing O'Brien wants to stress, it's that these places, and the species in them, belong to everyone. "There was one purple sanicle in Mount Doug," she says, "and someone dug it out." The rare species has a tap root and she thinks it probably didn't survive transplant by the collector. She shakes her head at the idea of stealing from a park. "These species are everyone's!"

> "TO ME, THIS IS PRECIOUS. It's a small portion of land, but what I'm trying to do is show what is possible."
>
> —*Colleen O'Brien*

Other jurisdictions are watching O'Brien's work, especially to see how rare species respond to her restoration efforts. She is fortunate that Playfair, which is only 300 metres from her house, lies in the District of Saanich.

Saanich's philosophy toward volunteer labour differs considerably from other municipalities, such as the City of Victoria's. By allowing volunteers to do what the municipality doesn't have the human resources to achieve in the parks, Saanich is tacitly admitting that volunteer labour is key to management; union members have agreed that volunteers can do the work they don't have the staffing to complete. Saanich's Pulling Together program unites 150 volunteers from around the municipality to remove invasive species from parks. O'Brien works closely with Saanich, and it does not make changes in Playfair Park without first consulting her. She has recently convinced them, she tells me, to add aggregate paths with brick borders to the meadow portions of the park. These will hopefully convince visitors to stay on trails and off of the increasingly large number of rare species found within the park's borders.

In the City of Victoria, conversely, volunteer labour is seen as a possible infringement on union agreements. Cheryl Bryce, who volunteers in Beacon Hill Park (see *Focus* January 2016), described encounters with unionized park workers who were disconcerted, to say the least, by the work she was taking away from them. Thus, work parties within Victoria's borders tend to be organized by "Friends of…" associations, such as the Friends of Uplands Park, which can result in fewer resources, including access to tools and equipment, and less funding for restoration efforts. "I'd love to see more people involved in doing this kind of thing—in Beacon Hill, in Uplands Park," she says. "If restoration is going to work, it's going to need to involve a lot of people or a lot of money."

As we tour the meadows, I remark that to walk through Playfair Park's meadows is like walking back in time. Almost, O'Brien corrects me. "What did this ecosystem look like? That's everyone's question." She isn't sure anyone can answer it completely.

Still, the work O'Brien is doing for Saanich and Playfair represents a profound respect for native species. Going beyond casual volunteering, she has completely transformed the site; it is an astounding example of a deep-soil meadow, free (in parts) of introduced species. The work is not easy, she admits. "It's really hard to stay optimistic. But I refuse to crawl into bed and pull the covers over my head." Thanks to her efforts, and the respect of those who visit, we have an idea of what this region might have looked like before colonization.

Also at Playfair Park is a large grove of mature rhododendrons and azaleas. Access is from Rock Street and at the end of Cumberland Road.

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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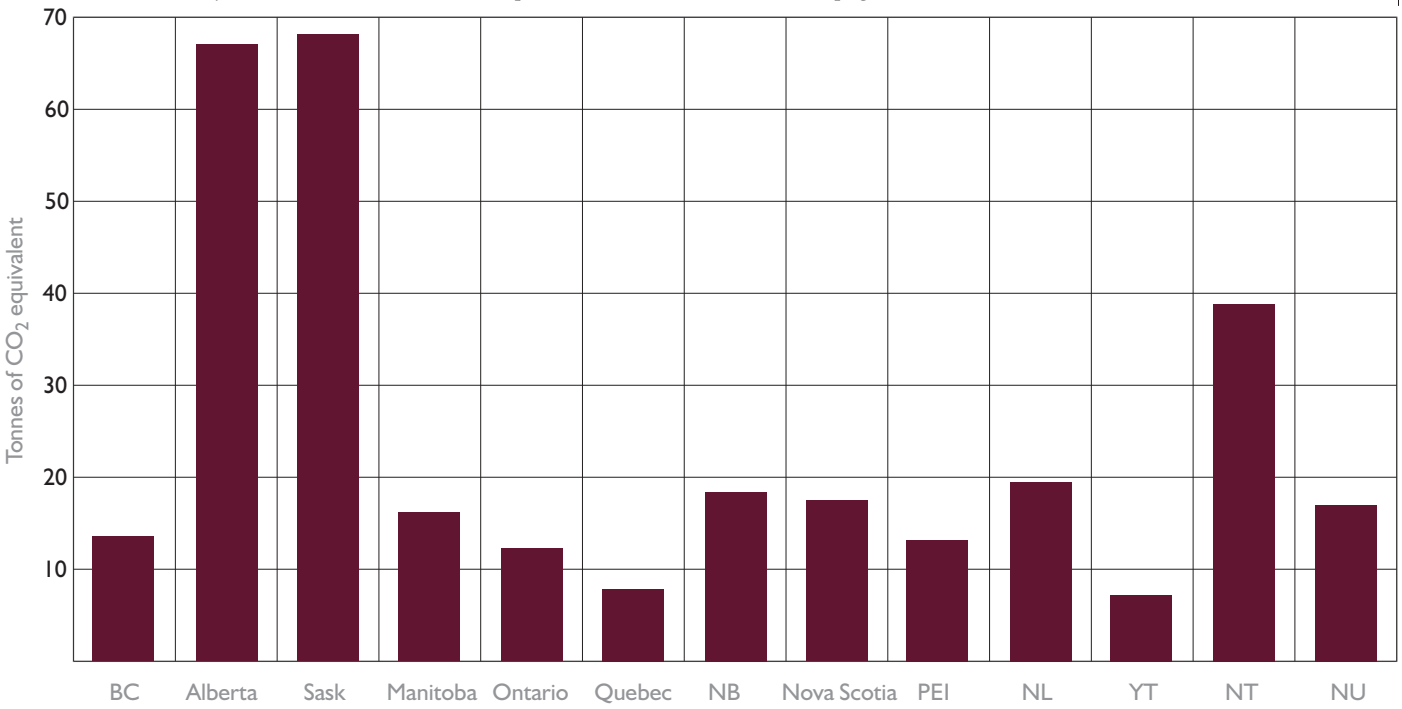
(Trudy Duivenvoorden Mitic and April Caverhill will return to this page soon.)



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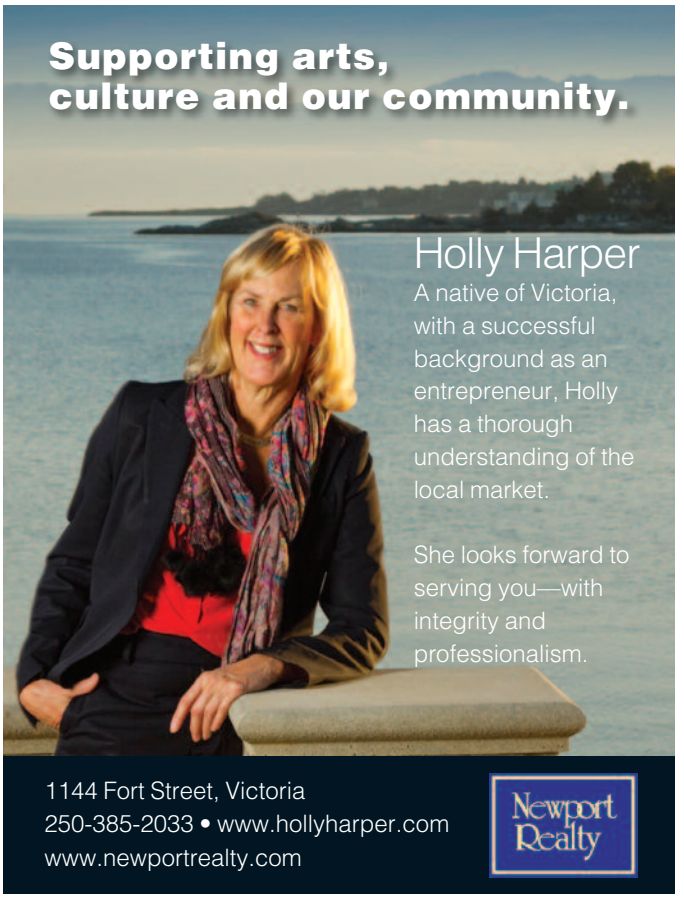
Tar sands mining operation in Alberta. Photo by Garth Lenz.



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