

COMMENT

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There is a crisis on the streets of Victoria

DON EVANS

A commentary by the CEO of Our Place Society.

There is a crisis on our streets, and the fallout is concentrated on the boulevard in front of Our Place. People are frightened: They are frightened of dying in alleyways and stairwells, and so they congregate in front of Our Place and next door at The Harbour (Island Health’s Supervised Consumption Site) because they know we are their best chance for survival. Unfortunately, the public can easily misconstrue this sanctuary as the opposite of what it is, and often blame Our Place for the

homeless situation in our community rather than one of the few organizations that is attempting to solve it. Here’s a bold statement: If there were enough overnight shelter beds to accommodate everyone, there would be no need for anyone to sleep on the sidewalks in front of Our Place or elsewhere. People sleep outside, on the cold cement and wet grass, because they have nowhere else to go where they feel safe or welcome. As a community, we have rallied around the model of Housing First. We hold it up as the gold standard for doing the right thing. Unfortunately, it takes a long time to build housing and also the reality is that for so many people, they just aren’t capable of keeping that

housing without adequate support. And while we wait for housing to be built, we shouldn’t sit on the sidelines and do nothing while people are dying on our streets. We need shelter beds right now! We need beds for different populations, but most of all we need beds with built-in support services for those who are struggling with addictions and mental illness. Individuals with addiction issues often won’t go into an overnight shelter. If we want to address the street problem, we also need to address the issues surrounding it. Once we have shelter beds for everyone, only then can we begin to address the underlying issues that have caused people to become

homeless in the first place. The last shelter to be opened in Victoria was My Place on Yates Street, which Our Place opened in 2018. It accommodates 48 people. We also operate an overnight shelter in the gymnasium of First Metropolitan United Church that provides sleeping mats for an additional 60 people. Both of these shelters are full every single night, and you can imagine how heartbreaking it is to turn away the ever-growing wait-list of people desperately wanting a safe place to sleep. Plus this doesn’t address those individuals who don’t see shelters as a viable option for them due to addiction issues and mental health challenges. For these people we need to offer creative options.

People often ask why the city police can’t move overnight campers off the sidewalks and boulevards. The answer that Chief Del Manak will tell you is that sadly, there is no place to move them to. As a community, we need to come together in order to find a solution. At Our Place, we are constantly searching for a suitable building to lease or piece of land that can be used to temporarily house the people who have no home to go to. It’s a daunting challenge, but we can’t simply turn our backs on people who are so vulnerable and who need our support the most. Let’s all work together to make our community a better place for all.

The science of global warming is real

Re: “Facts matter in discussing fossil fuels,” column, Aug. 18.

Trevor Hancock deserves our thanks for setting the facts straight regarding the article by Gwyn Morgan on climate change. Hancock was correct when he wrote that it would be tempting to ignore Morgan’s article, which I did. I simply dismissed it as obvious sophistry. However, Hancock is correct — the stakes are too high for life on this planet to allow this mumbo jumbo to go unanswered. The last time CO2 levels were this high, there were massive extinctions, really massive extinctions. I have a very personal recollection from 45 years ago of industry proselytizing the opinion that the few parts per million of methyl mercury in the English River in Ontario were insignificant. Yet, even today we live with the continuing tragedy of Minamata disease from mercury poisoning among the people of the English River. Knowing, as we did then, that less than one part per billion can only remotely be considered tolerable, it was simply too late for the people affected. There are countless other examples of corporate greed distorting fact. With respect to global warming, the science is real and we should not let the greedy or the power-hungry get in the way of what needs to be done.

Al Vaisius
Emeritus associate professor of chemistry
University of British Columbia

Hate and violence are the key concerns

Re: “People having guns a danger to the public,” letter, Aug. 25.

You cannot solve a problem without defining the issue at hand. To state “people are running around with guns and shooting them off ... make them illegal in our streets” proves the point. Obviously the letter-writer is unaware of the regulations that are in place for the ownership, display and transportation of firearms in Canada and the various states in the United States. The difficulty is that the solution proposed is not only unworkable, it would also create other unacceptable problems. If we continue to accept the red herring that is frantically put under our collective noses regarding gun ownership, we will never solve the issue of hate and violence that exacerbates the unacceptable actions of one citizen against another.

Lavonne Huneck
Cobble Hill

Fernwood development plan worries residents

Regarding the land swap between School District 61 and the City of Victoria in order to facilitate the Vic High seismic upgrade and build 155 affordable units west of Vic High. Fernwood residents love our heritage school, and our mixed and vibrant community. However, we are deeply concerned about the renovations of subsidized tenants at the Caledonia suites at 1211 Gladstone Ave. to make way for the new development. These tenants have lived with black mould for 10 years and more. Current tenants are being shuffled off to less convenient, non-accessible suites to permit a higher-density building in its place. Renovation is not possible, says the Capital Region Housing Corporation. The new suites will be smaller and without amenities such as the patios the residents enjoy. In Fernwood, we question whether the CRHC will better maintain the new buildings. We worry about the stress on vulnerable current tenants. We also question the proposed scale — five storeys high in quiet Fernwood. We worry about the pressure on already overcrowded Fernwood schools, given the



A coal-mining operation in Sparwood, seen in a 2016 file photo. A letter-writer suggests corporate greed is deliberately distorting facts about fossil fuel and climate change.

JEFF MCINTOSH, THE CANADIAN PRESS

number of new towers already being built. We worry about traffic on already stressed narrow streets. The plan does not follow our official community plan, so city council will push this through with an OCP amendment, a situation which Victoria’s neighbourhood associations are challenging. Consultation to date has been corporate window dressing with no real response to our concerns. We expect more from our progressive council in the way of consideration for current tenants, future tenants and our community.

Dorothy Field
Victoria

Downtown is for people, not just for cars

I am very impressed by how Mayor Lisa Helps and city council are working to make downtown Victoria a place for people, not just cars. The bike and bus lanes may upset dedicated drivers but they bring people in, and make it a place where people can live, and work, and shop. Council has picked up on what is being done, and has been done, in cities such as Tokyo, Copenhagen, Vancouver and Portland. Kudos to council.

Joanna M. Weston
Shawnigan Lake

Thank you, Victoria, for new bike lanes

It has been 17 months since we have cycled Victoria on our Cannondale tandem bicycle. This past week we returned to enjoy your city, cycling the streets and pathways throughout the city and surrounding areas. What a tremendous amount of work you have accomplished to make your city safer for pedestrian, cyclists, and cars. When we were here in 2018, there was a lot of construction on the roads, a bridge and future bike facilities. As tourists to your city, we want to thank you for all the work you have completed. As residents of Bremerton, Washington, we hope to use you as an example of non-motorized facilities. We hope to have our

city be as safe for all users as yours is. We know it is a work in progress. Please keep up the great work. We will be returning again and again. We are proud to be your neighbour.

Dianne Iverson and Paul Dutky
Bremerton, Washington

Bike lanes are perfect for our visitors

There has been much controversy about the value of building protected bike lanes along Wharf Street. These lanes, however, enhance the many shared values of our community. First, they promote the use of cycling and thus draw new people to this very sustainable mode of transportation. Second, they make cycling safer — and probably driving as well — since drivers have to be especially careful. Third, they also have a great tourism value. Every day, especially in the summer, hundreds or even thousands of visitors arrive from the United States on the Coho ferry from Port Angeles and the Clipper from Seattle. Many of them spend one or two days in Victoria before re-embarking for the United States. I can’t think of a better way for these visitors to explore Victoria than by cycling. Cycling on protected lanes is safe, and it allows for a more in depth exploration of the various parts of the city. Surely, this will benefit cafés, restaurants and stores in downtown and around. It is a win-win situation: protected lanes are good for business and they promote a positive image of Victoria abroad.

Bernard Henin
Victoria

City, Tourism Victoria at cross purposes

Victoria’s new bike lanes, especially those in the vicinity of Wharf, Government, and Humboldt streets have generated many on-point letters from, not surprisingly, experienced local cyclists. Here is another point of view. As a longtime Victoria “Step-on tour guide,” it is my responsibility, and up to now, pleasure, to guide drivers of visiting

tour buses and their passengers around the many beautiful and historical sights of Victoria. The area surrounding our Inner Harbour, is unquestionably, the jewel in the crown. Now, thanks to council’s puzzling concept for bike lanes, it has become a bewildering challenge for visiting coach drivers. Their verbal reaction can best be captured by: “You must be kidding!” Adding insult to injury is the wacky timing of traffic lights in this zone. In particular, the lights at the Humboldt-Douglas intersection, in the direction of the Inner Harbour, only allow two to three vehicles to cross at a time, creating long backups. Not all our tourists pedal their way to Victoria; the majority arrive in cars and coaches. We should make it easy for them to drive here, not force them to navigate through veritable obstacle courses. How welcoming is that?

George Baker
Victoria

Bike lanes are accidents ready to happen

Victoria’s bike lane system is a mess. The no-turn on right is not working. In the span of a week, I witnessed three cars turn right at Cook and Pandora against the red light. Clearly, drivers are not getting it. Bicyclists should not be allowed to pass a vehicle on the right even in their protected bike lane. It’s just common sense. Drivers have too much to contend with now on our downtown road network. Furthermore, cyclists should have liability insurance, just like cars since they are considered a vehicle under the law. It will take a death to fix this spaghetti system, I fear. In the meantime, I avoid driving downtown.

Bennett Guinn
Victoria

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