

“Climate Change and Local Development....Connecting the Dots”.

Presented by Bruce Fleming-Smith - QBRA AGM Oct 26, 2019

Good afternoon. For those of you who don't know me my name is Bruce Fleming-Smith. I'm a long term resident of the town, have served a number of terms on the APC and on the Board of the QBRA for a few years now.

The title of my talk is; “Climate Change and Local Development....Connecting the Dots”.

At the outset I'll say that the thoughts I wish to share with you in no way reflect those of the QBRA Board, or the Membership. I'm expressing here my personal observations and opinions.

I'll also say that Climate Change is a huge subject and my talk here is focused on only one facet of this massively complex challenge that faces humanity. I've been particularly interested in the relationship between climate change and the built environment for many years now. That interest was catalyzed over 30 years ago after having completed my graduate degree in architecture, when I lived for some time on nearby Lasqueti Island. This is still the only large island in the Islands Trust area that is without BC Hydro. Back then it was propane lights and generators. Now, almost all new construction is done with solar panels and no generator and the homes all run on solar and or hybrid non fossil fuel based power. Since that time I achieved my LEED accreditation and have become specialized in the Passive House standard. Both of these building performance standards - developed in the 90's - were developed primarily to address environmental sustainability and climate change.

What prompted this subject for me lay in an email that I sent to our Mayor and Council a few weeks ago with the subject: Emergency Prep Expo/Climate Change/Brewery at 233 Fern Rd....Please Connect The Dots.

Our town had just concluded hosting a big EXPO on EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS. . One of the four workshops offered was on “Climate Change on Vancouver Island”. However the major focus of the exhibitors and presentations was on emergency preparedness - a worthy subject.

We were in the midst of a national election campaign where climate change was front and center in the minds of many Canadian voters....not to mention Greta Thunberg taking North America somewhat by storm.

I wanted to draw Council's attention to the connection between some of the central Sustainability tenets of our Official Community Plan, climate change, and the approval under consideration to construct a Brewery on town-owned property. My central points were:

- 1) Given the project involves a 40+ year land lease by the brewery, the town bears ultimate responsibility for the degree to which this property is part of 'the problem' or part of 'the solution' to do with climate change and future sustainability of our town's resources.
- 2) Our OCP has numerous directives and policies that address matters of 'environmental sustainability'. Neither the APC nor Town Staff had addressed any of the fundamental deficiencies of this project from a standpoint of consistency with the sustainability objectives of our OCP.
- 3) The project as proposed failed to do justice to the objectives of our OCP.

For The Brewery to stand as a sustainable development that would address climate change impacts, I posed the inclusion of the following:

- A rainwater management plan for the whole site.
- Targeted building energy performance standards.
- Roof orientation and allowances for roof mounted PV for Net Zero energy performance.
- Roof water catchment and retention for on-site water usage.
- A submittal to the Town of projected annual water demand and contingencies for water impacts of the Brewery on the Town's aquifers during times of future water shortage.

In a nutshell, I felt there were reasonable criteria that the Town could attach to this development that would be consistent with our OCP and mitigate negative Climate Change impacts.

Needless to say Council approved the Brewery project and to my knowledge without inclusion of any of my recommendations. I wasn't surprised as I've been profoundly disheartened by this Council (and previous Councils) failure to do justice to the numerous progressive environmental policies contained in our OCP.

So here's a little background on our OCP, our Council's declared priorities and the degree to which they do justice to our OCP and how that all connects to local development.

Our current OCP only includes the words "climate change" a handful of times. However the if I had a dime for every time the word "sustainability" occurs, I could likely take a few of you out to dinner. The OCP includes a very important section titled "Sustainability Plan" and it's worth noting that the first version of the Sustainability Plan was drafted in 2009 - so now a decade ago. You'll all recall that 'sustainability' was one of the 'buzzwords of the day'. If you flip through the OCP what's evident is the centrality of the Sustainability Plan. In many parts of the OCP there appears a green 'Sustainability Plan Box' - at the very beginning on each section. The box references the applicability of the Sustainability Plan to that specific portion of the OCP.

For example:

- Manage Urban Growth
- Urban Containment Boundary
- Land Use
- Village Neighbourhood
- Residential
- Commercial
- Light Industrial
- Transportation
- Liquid Waste
- Stormwater and Watershed Management.....and so forth

If you wish to find guidance in our OCP on addressing Climate Change, it's important not to be hung up on those two words. This guidance in fact begins at the very beginning of the document on page 5 with the "Vision Statement", where you find the passage: "The Town will innovate in response to the social, economic and environmental challenges of our future".

I suggest that surely, Climate Change is the preeminent "environmental challenge of our future".

On the next page of the OCP one of the 'General Goals' listed is: "Prepare for Climate Change and Reduce Energy Consumption".

My take home from our OCP is as follows: While it lacks the present day references to "climate emergency" and "climate change", it has the fundamentals in place in the form of the Sustainability Plan with which to guide development decisions of our Council in a way which addresses environmental concerns and negative climate change impacts.

So the question then arises.....**does our Council appear to be taking this matter seriously?** To answer this, let's look at the 'words' and the 'actions'.

My reading suggests that the 'words' are not encouraging. Council's Strategic Plan lists their priorities for the 2019 - 2022 term. There are seven pages to this document including "Our Values", "Our Mission", "Strategic Goals", "Strategic Plan Implementation", and "Strategic Initiatives". There are only two mentions of "OCP" one reference to the "Sustainability Plan", and not one use of the words "Climate Change". Nonetheless..... the Strategic Plan will address a "ten-year capital plan"!

Forgive me if I'm naive in imagining that in order to consider a ten year capital plan one would have thought it necessary to give due consideration to the subject of Climate Change or the prospect of actual Climate Emergencies. I won't however, fault our Council on consistency though, because there was a motion introduced over the summer for The Town of QB to recognize a Climate Emergency..... sadly this motion was defeated.

Now consider the 'actions' that Council has taken. The long list would take too long. Our Mayor and Council have a very ambitious agenda (far too ambitious I believe, for a Council with only one member having any specific qualifications or prior experience in local government). A good number of the Town's 'projects' are very much in process, and many of them have involved a good deal of community engagement with final decisions still pending, And others are a 'fait accompli' or if in the midst of construction - Memorial Upgrade, and the New Roundabout for example.

In asking questions about the connection between Climate Change and Local Development it's worthwhile to look at a handful of Council's current initiatives.

You've heard a brief on my points relating to the Brewery. I'll mention briefly five examples of development initiatives that the Town is considering that highlight the ways in which Council's decisions bear on consistency with the sustainability guidance of our OCP and potential Climate Change mitigation.

New East Village Housing

The Town needs to ensure that the 'taxpayer owned' parking lot on E 2nd is leveraged to best advantage for the long-term interests of the Town and that environmental and sustainability goals are seriously considered.

Doesn't this make sense when considering Climate Change?

South Airport Light Industrial Area

During the public engagement process the Town failed to disclose that this large forested area was an officially recognized 'endangered riparian ecosystem'. The public survey on the New Airport Plan made no mention of this fact, and the Dillon Report which recommended a Draft Airport Plan, failed to address this fact.

One would have thought that changing a nearly 50 acre forested ecosystem into a light industrial park would be a flagrant betrayal of the sustainability aspirations of our OCP and one of the worst steps that a local government could take considering the challenges of ClimateChange.

Does the Town's plan with the South Airport Lands make any sense when considering Climate Change?

Estate Lands Subdivision Proposal

This application was only recently given consideration by Council. It would require an amendment to the Urban Containment Boundary - so effectively reclassifying as 'urban' what now is a large forested parcel. I am surprised that this proposal is being given consideration by Council. The Director of Planning gave many reasons why this application should not be approved. My reading suggests that if Council were to allow this application it would be in direct contravention of a number of stated policies in our OCP. Endorsing land use changes that contravene OCP policies, is in violation of the Local Government Act and could be open to court challenge.

The key issue is whether a large forested area should be developed as a residential subdivision of single family homes.

In terms of Climate Change impacts, it's clear that forests which sequester carbon and provide precious wildlife habitat, are not the right place to provide new housing. As a point of comparison; The Estate Subdivision is roughly 7.5 times the area of the Naked Naturals Proposal for East 2nd. The Estate lands would provide 16, likely quite lovely retirement homes. The Naked Naturals proposal with a fraction of the land would supply 32 rental apartments.

Does turning a forested parcel into a low density subdivision make any sense when considering Climate Change?

Pheasant Glen Resort Development

New development for 'hotel style' accommodation as part of a multi-phase project was granted a development permit by the last Council in September 2018. During Council's deliberations it was brought to the Town's attention that 'wildfire risks' posed by the building to forest interface, was not being given due consideration. Public comment also noted that approval was being granted with a site master plan that bore little relation to the development proposal which was approved.

Climate Change has dramatically accelerated the incidence of wildfires that impact on urban areas. The Pheasant Glen development is planned to be built in phases over possibly many years. If construction stalls or does not proceed, will the Town endorse further future development without consideration of the urban/forest interface and potential wildfire risks?

Does it not make sense that with Climate Change any new development in an urban/forest interface fully and carefully assesses potential wildfire risks?

Qualicum Commons & Bus Garage

This 'project' has only begun the first steps of dialogue between the Town and the public. All indications are that if Council follows the best possible process, these lands might one day be transformed into something quite inspiring, sustainable, and seriously addressing Climate Change mitigation.

There is extraordinary opportunity with The Commons to do many things 'right'.

Doesn't it make sense that Climate Change mitigation plays a key role in the planning process?

Am I optimistic? The idealist in me is always willing to entertain an optimistic outcome. But the realist says; "Look at the facts.....our Councils have often seemed content to settle for second rate results and to cherry pick which OCP policies carry the day". But given some of my comments on our OCP you might ask "can't we be encouraged by the guidance contained in the Sustainability Plan?" Unfortunately the short answer is "No".

For one reason, current and past Councils have mostly chosen to ignore this part of the OCP. And secondly, the way that the Sustainability Plan is incorporated into our OCP, it is considered as an 'aspirational reference'. It is intended to articulate a vision towards which the Town moves over time - 10, 20, 30 years or more.

The problem is that a decade has now passed. Residents have a right to expect changes and improvements in the way building and development takes place. The awareness of the massive dangers that Climate Changes poses is spreading finally through the general populace. Despite Greta Thumberg's passionate appeals we need to remind ourselves that she's merely giving voice to what has been said years earlier and many times over.

In reading a recent obituary on Jacques Chirac in the Economist, I was taken aback to learn that in 2002 he said these words: "our house is burning and we are looking elsewhere".

I've tried to connect a few of the dots in showing how Climate Change figures in the context of local development. Our OCP while already somewhat dated, includes much important guidance, but what's required of our Mayor and Council is principled commitment, leadership and political will - all appropriately aligned. If this doesn't seem forthcoming....then give them an earfull.