

COMMENT

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We need a better earthquake early-warning system

BILL SEYMOUR

A commentary by an Esquimalt resident who worked for disaster and emergency management agencies in B.C. and Alberta.

Monday’s devastating earthquake in Japan demonstrates the extent and effort the country expends in mitigating disasters and preparing for their eventuality.

In Japan, the first signs of an earthquake automatically unleash a comprehensive and co-ordinated effort, including warnings, to reduce injury and damage.

Island residents should be interested in the advent of an earthquake warning system (“Early-warning system for quakes expected to be ready in April,” Dec. 23) but even if the system works, public warnings are unlikely. And even if some jurisdictions can issue an advance public warning, a significant chunk of people here will not likely receive it.

The on-ground sensor network is a proven technology to signal a quake is coming, but the accompanying system to potentially warn the public in real

time likely won’t work.

The purpose of public alerting is to issue immediate life-saving information to people so they can take action to prevent injury or harm. It tells people what the hazard is, what to do and where to go for assistance or more information. The most effective alerting jurisdictions issue alerts judiciously and sparingly.

By legislation and design, British Columbia has created a jumbled public-warning system. To fill the gap, local governments and others have invested in a myriad of systems to meet their community and legislative needs.

However, these systems are flawed with significant gaps that leave people excluded as well as manifesting other weaknesses preventing effective alerts from being issued.

For example, in Greater Victoria, several competing alerting systems are in place in different municipalities. The public alert system may be different in the place where you work and where your children go to school versus where you live.

Compounding this, local governments and others must rely on voluntary subscriptions from

those who want to receive alerts. This model simply does not work and reaches only a minority — if not a fraction — of those in the alerting region.

The private companies that house and provide the infrastructure for our public alerting platforms are more than happy to sell the qualities, flexibility and functionality of their system but there are weaknesses inherent in any system that they don’t discuss.

Research and evidence point to the most glaring deficiency in alerting systems across Canada: Training. Simply put, the people issuing alerts are generally not trained or practised enough to issue alerts.

There are exceptions, but they are few and far between. One type of alert, Amber Alerts, issued by the RCMP and local police forces are issued by trained individuals. These people are selected, rigorously trained, certified and regularly re-certified to be able to issue Amber Alerts.

Some of the people issuing public alerts in B.C. may have training. But what there is, is neither consistent nor rigorous. The result in this province is a

jumbled and haphazard alerting environment with user surveys, construction notices and water-main flushing notices sharing space with flood and wildfire evacuation orders.

But the public, you and I, have a role, too. Earthquake early warning systems work where the public is engaged in what is happening and what the expectations are.

The Dec. 23 article used Japan as an example of how an effective early warning system potentially saved lives. What is missing is the money and resources spent in Japan — almost as much as the system itself — informing and educating the public, what the system did and what to do. That is not happening here.

The rapid pace of innovation, the advent of 4G LTE networks, and other advances make public alerting one of the most dynamic and changing fields of emergency management today. We are well beyond our grandparents’ use of sirens to tell us something bad is coming our way.

A system does exist to broadcast immediate alerts over television, radio and SMS on mobile

phones. The Alert Ready system is centralized with the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness. Furthermore, there is a process for local governments to request EMCR to issue an alert.

This could be a written request, an email to EMCR, simply asking for an alert to be issued.

Once received, EMCR reviews the request and there may be some back and forth prior to the message being created and sent. This process would go well over the seconds or even a minute of advance warning the sensor system provides.

Natural Resources Canada, the City of Victoria and others are to be congratulated for employing this system of on-ground sensors.

When it is fully operational and the first P-waves are detected, somewhere a gate may lock, or a door open automatically.

But it will take much greater co-ordination, partnerships and money before the public’s first warning of an earthquake will be something other than the shaking of the ground.

Censorship to satisfy a vocal minority

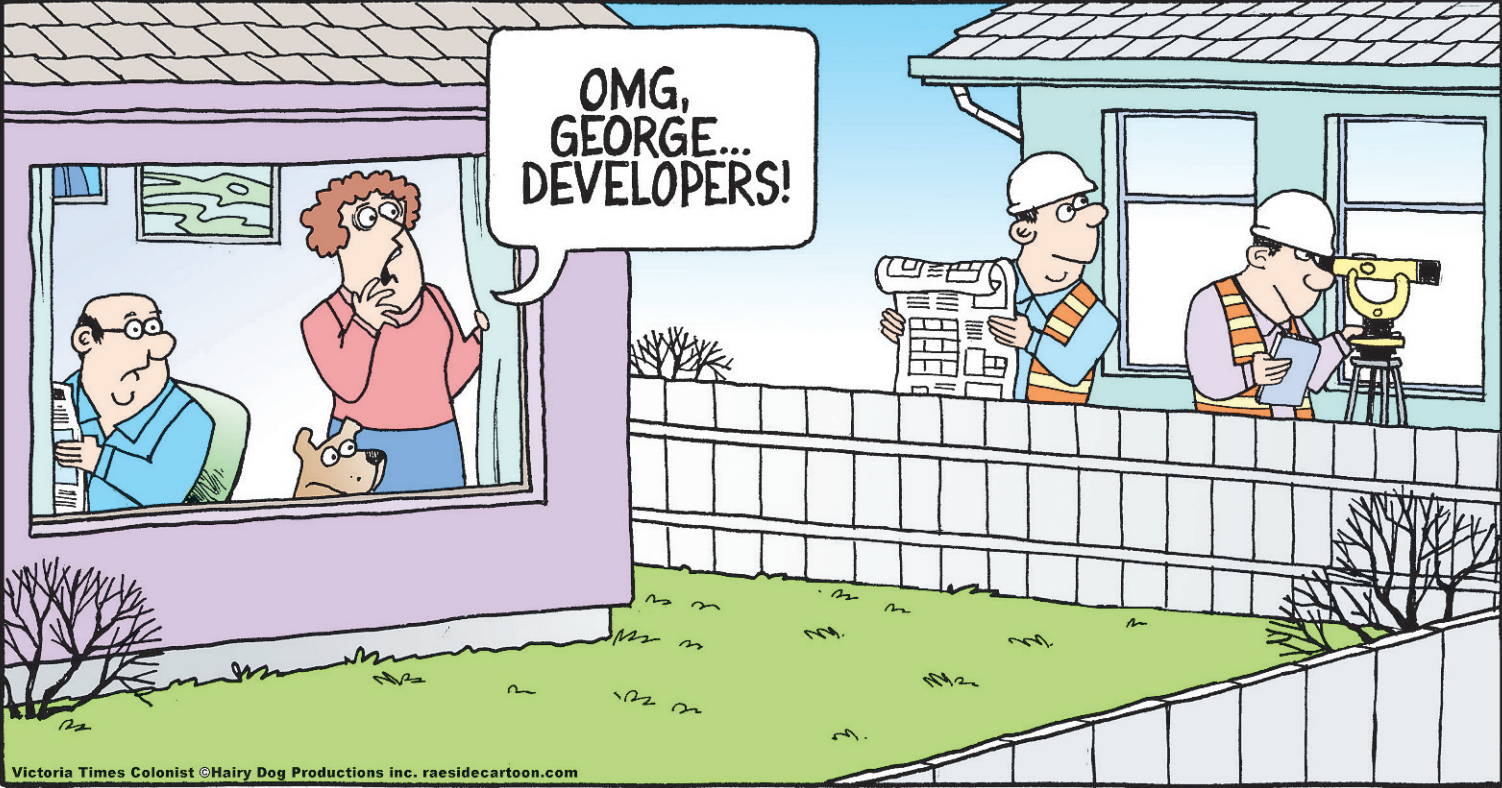
It was with much dismay that I received a notice from the Belfry Theatre that it is cancelling *The Runner*, a play about an Orthodox Jew in Israel and his job as a ZAKA member.

ZAKA is a volunteer organization not only responsible for honouring the Jewish dead after a calamity, but also engages in search and rescue internationally after major catastrophes.

The play rises above politics. It is about the humanitarian efforts of Jacob, the ZAKA member who saves the life of an Arab woman wounded by Israeli gunfire on suspicion that she stabbed an Israeli soldier to death.

Censorship of the arts because of the opinion of a vocal minority group in Victoria sets a dangerous precedent. What comes next: The banning of a Palestinian play? Who decides?

Ruth Schreier
Victoria



We can’t ignore the dead in Gaza

Re: “After weeks of demonstrations, enough is enough,” commentary, Jan. 4.

I wonder if the 30,000-plus civilian deaths in Gaza are “enough?” If not, how many more civilians must die at Israel’s hands before the rabbi sees the humanity of Palestinians?

Protesting against Zionism is not protesting against Judaism.

Anna Cordon
Victoria

Consider the barracks in Paris and Barcelona

In a generous clutch of Jan. 3 letters opposing density, one writer says, “So first we had former Victoria mayor Lisa Helps inviting Canada’s homeless to Victoria....”

Here is a lesser-known fact: Helps is also responsible for the enormous populations of homeless in all other Canadian and American cities. Yes, a powerful



The Jukebox building on View Street in Victoria. GOOGLE STREET VIEW

woman, Helps, such a shame she didn’t put her powers to better use, like curing cancer, eradicating poverty, putting an end to death itself.

Also, several writers invoke the image of Soviet-style residential barracks to limn their opposition to density. Funny, they never land on the “barracks” of beautiful Barcelona or Paris or Bologna — filled, no doubt, with people yearning for single-family homes in Victoria.

Where I and the letter-writers can agree is that most of Victoria’s downtown

towers are derivative, lacklustre and unwelcoming (I exclude Don Charity’s and Fraser McColl’s wonderful Jukebox and Mosaic re-do, almost everything by the Jawls — with architect Franc D’Ambrosio — and a few others). But that’s a different fight from the class warfare of Fairfield/Gonzales.

Gene Miller
Victoria

Want to take away rights? Go somewhere else

Re: “Direct homeowners to develop vacant space,” letter, Jan. 2.

The letter recommended that homeowners or renters be identified and directed by government to “make modest alterations to their homes” and be forced to allow renters to occupy the space.

It also said homeowners would be forced to pay higher taxes as a result of this income stream.

We live in a democracy where freedom of choice, freedom of expression and freedom of association are fundamental

tenets of our society. I spent 40 years in uniform as a soldier and police officer protecting those rights and freedoms.

If the letter writer wants to live in a society where the state makes those types of decisions and can direct you where and how you live your life, he can take a one-way flight to any communist country he likes.

Failing that, he better be the first person to offer up a bed in his home to a perfect stranger. People spend much of their lives working, saving and then building a life where they can enjoy a retirement with family and friends.

Very few want to spend it as a landlord.

Mike ter Kuile
Gulf Islands

SEND US YOUR LETTERS

- Email: letters@timescolonist.com
- Mail: Letters to the editor, Times Colonist, 201-655 Tyee Rd., Victoria, B.C. V9A 6X5
- Aim for no more than 250 words; subject to editing for length and clarity. Provide your contact information; it will not be published. Avoid sending your letter as an email attachment.

Roundhouse proposal in Vic West would ease the housing crisis

DANIEL MELNYK

A commentary by a 13-year resident of the Bayview Place hilltop community.

We purchased our home thinking that it might be for just a few years, but we loved living here so much that we stayed.

As the proposal for the next phase of the community, which the applicants call the Roundhouse at Bayview Place Phase 2, heads to public hearing on Thursday, I want to share my perspective as a native Victorian of 36 years.

Embracing more homes through increased housing density with this development is not just a necessity but a rare opportunity to address the pressing housing and climate crises. It will also strengthen our downtown, which is clearly struggling.

In the midst of the housing crisis, this development presents a chance to provide many badly

needed new homes, a blessing for a community grappling with the reality that we just haven’t been building nearly enough.

Further, these homes would include a thoughtful mix of market apartments, rental and affordable housing, all of which we also badly need.

The proposed affordable housing provider recently referred to the land donation in this project as “game changing” and “once in a generation.”

As a business owner who spent years struggling in the local tourism economy, I witnessed the challenges of employees unable to afford housing in Victoria, primarily due to the scarcity of supply.

I observed hoteliers getting involved with housing their employees, something business owners should never have to do. Recently, the city worked with the tourism community to try to improve this situation, but much more needs to be done.

Supporting this project

is vital for the creation of a vibrant, affordable, and livable Victoria. Stubbornly restricting housing supply, based on the density preferences of some, risks hindering our city’s potential to achieve a dynamic and inclusive future for all.

In addition to the homes we badly need, the proposal will provide shops and services we can walk to in the reused and protected heritage buildings, as well as new daycare, playgrounds and public spaces, all in a complete community.

Too often, we treat increased density as a bad thing instead of recognizing it as more homes for people and more support for local shopping. We’ve seen over and over that without enough local population, retailers won’t come or can’t survive if they do.

I’ve observed the Roundhouse applicants, Patricia and Ken Mariash, constantly demonstrate a genuine commitment to listening to and speaking with our neighbours. They’ve literally

been doing this since I was in high school.

Their willingness to address concerns and issues shows their dedication to the community and the collaborative process. They want to do something truly exceptional.

Their contributions to our community, through both the proposed project and past examples, reflect their long commitment.

I suspect that more ordinary developers might have cut and run rather than engage with us the way the Mariashes have.

When council has to make a decision like this, it’s important that the public is working from truth rather than from misinformation.

Unfortunately, while walking around our neighbourhood, I’ve seen posters attacking the project on almost every telephone pole. Flyers are being passed around, and there are online campaigns.

The images I have been see-

ing don’t match the proposal that council will be considering.

While misinformation campaigns seek to create unnecessary fear, it is imperative that we focus on facts, including the many tangible benefits that projects like this offer to our community. We need homes, not hate.

As our community navigates the complexities of urban development in an increasingly challenging world, let’s not lose sight of the positive contributions that can be made toward a brighter and more sustainable future.

Blocking this development would be not just a missed opportunity, but a disservice to our community’s present and future.

Support the Roundhouse rezoning when it gets to city council next week. There is no other site like this in the city that can do what this site can do.

We’ve been playing catch-up for too long. Let’s get on with it!