

COMMENT

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The talk I wish I had given about development

GENE MILLER

A commentary by a Victoria resident with a lengthy resume of community involvement with an urban design focus.

Good evening, fellow citizens, mayor and council, I'm Gene Miller — a resident of Victoria since 1970 and now temporarily self-exiled to the Western Communities.

These lengthy issue- and opinion-filled meetings take enormous energy and stamina. My gratitude to everyone.

I was born in Women's Hospital, 110th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, in Manhattan. Tall buildings don't frighten me and, in my experience, are perfectly able to house vertical neighbourhoods and fill the public realm with culture and people who mingle, work and shop, and grab coffee.

I don't especially admire the architectural expression of the buildings proposed for Bayview and wish they had more filigree, more ornamentation, more beauty.

But I also realize that tonight's meeting is not intended

to parse architectural esthetics.

I would, in my five-minute speaking slot, like to deliver a variant on my all-too-familiar "Cracks of Doom" speech.

We are in the early middle of a profound social, economic, political and environmental transformation, with lots more to come. Demagogues and autocrats are multiplying around the world and, threateningly, south of us, next door.

Economic shifts are leaving people, even in well-off countries, homeless, penniless and hungry. Community, cooperation, shared values and a sense of common purpose are almost upside down.

We say the words but, mysteriously, little around us supports them. AI may render countless millions jobless, and if that's not a recipe for social revolution, I don't know what is. And a pervasive message of ill health from the systems of nature penetrates our souls.

These things are shocking for all of us to experience, but what shocks me even more is the speed of this transformation.

It creates enormous challenges for all of us — for our

systems, for our organizations and our steadily degrading institutions. We think X is true, and the next minute Y is claiming all the space.

It's hard to catch your balance or stay up with things, leave alone get ahead of them. This is the definition of social climax, and its impacts are fundamental, limitless, ominous.

Who, a short decade ago, would have predicted the COVID-assisted abandonment of downtowns? Or vast homeless populations camped along streets and in doorways in urban centres everywhere, an all-too-visible sign of flawed social management?

Or technology-enabled work-from-home emptying downtown office buildings? And exponentially increasing online shopping with Amazon and other delivery vans busily cruising our neighbourhoods?

And all of it significantly affecting the financial viability of downtown retail and service businesses.

In lots of cities, people go downtown infrequently. Everything they need is elsewhere, and downtowns increasingly feel

everything from drab to threatening.

As well, the entire structure of social participation is being recast — a fancy way of saying that the old rules for downtown commerce and culture don't work so well anymore.

The traditional purposes of downtowns are up for challenge. You can sense the economic and social dereliction in central city environments, and Victoria is not immune.

Catastrophist that I am, I worry privately that in a decade or less, three-quarters of our downtown storefronts and offices will be vacant.

We count on our political leaders for knowledgeability, understanding, wisdom, a forward view; and out of these to conceive and implement a counter-force to threatening trends.

I can think of no other option than residential intensification in and around the city centre, coupled — and this is important — to a comprehensive public realm beautification and amenitization strategy and new-building design guidelines that would result in structures and

streets to make us the envy of other cities.

I think that force of circumstance is presenting all of us with new challenges and requiring us to shift our sensibilities, relinquish some of our conventional comforts and expectations.

We have been surfing on our fossil remains for a very long time, while history has been whispering: "Time for a new Victoria."

I believe Victoria, without losing its heritage assets or the still-viable parts of its character, has to develop a new and contemporary character, a new kind of singularity.

Communities, I note, often form in response to threat.

Our downtown is threatened. It needs a Community of the Whole.

An earlier speaker cleverly noted that a car's front window is larger than the rear. It's a telling image and it makes me hope our elected representatives will proactively — that word again: proactively — meet the future.

In light of the above, I encourage you, mayor and council, to support this Bayview proposal.

Bollard decisions not for the uninformed

It is certainly interesting reading the varying opinions about bollards on our regional trails. What I find most worrying, though, is that local politicians feel that this type of decision is within their purview.

Surely safety measures on our trails should follow best practices from elsewhere, along with industry standards, and would fall under the category of operational decisions.

That would certainly be my hope. It is worrying to think that safety measure could be decided by well-meaning but perhaps uninformed local politicians.

At the very least, ask Capital Regional District staff to report back about bollards on the trails, but please don't ask for them to be removed without the invaluable staff opinion.

David Screech
View Royal

Bollards, bicycles and polarization

What if we magnetically polarized all steel bollards and bikes positively, ending this polarizing commentary?

Bill Carere
Victoria

Brentwood-Mill Bay bridge is needed

The time has come to terminate the Mill Bay ferry and build a bridge to Brentwood Bay.

Why? All we hear is news about ongoing problems about the Malahat highway needing constant upgrades and improvements to the highway through Goldstream Park.

The provincial government should bite the bullet and build a bridge.

Building a bridge will give the traveling public a choice of routes to drive with commutes into and out of Victoria.

When an accident happens on the Malahat, traffic can still go through on the bridge. When the Malahat is closed due to weather conditions, traffic can still go through on the bridge.

On the Brentwood side, road improvements could be made for a direct route to the Pat Bay Highway to avoid resident complaints about more traffic coming through.

Leave the highway as is. Why? The Goldstream Park section is still exactly the same as in the 1950s except for an increase in traffic volume going through the park.

In summary, common sense prevails. Build the bridge and leave the existing highway as is. Problem solved and the ongoing complaints for highway improvements eliminated.

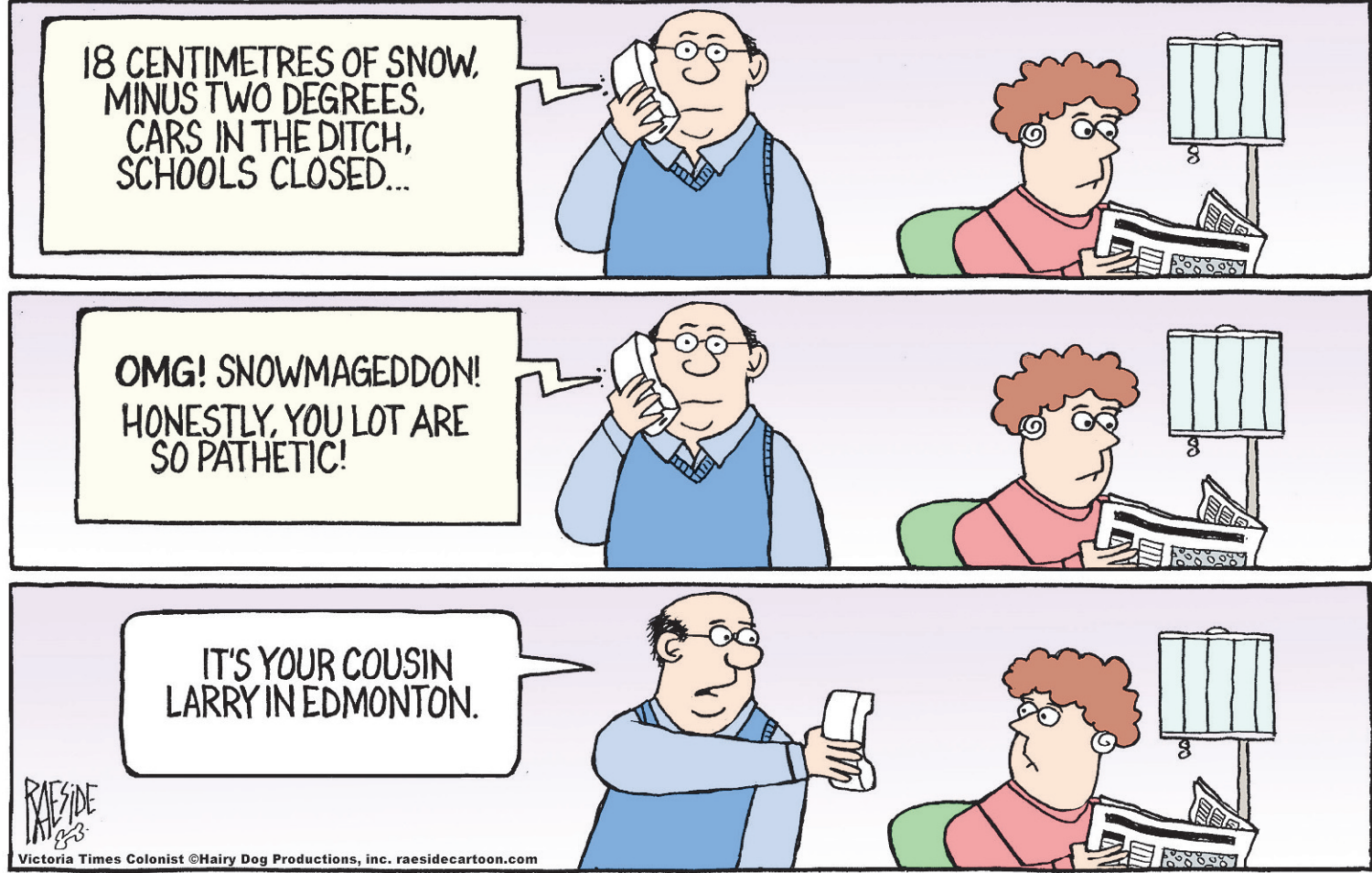
Any protests from environmentalists about a bridge can be ignored as Kelowna has a bridge crossing Okanagan Lake.

Joe Sawchuk
Duncan

Set a size limit for short term rentals

Victoria council has, in their own words, questioned the livability of rental suites between 314 and 523 square feet in the recent review of 937 View St. development.

The provincial government, in their broad brush approach to eliminate all short-term rentals, ignores this rational thinking and insists that it is meeting its obligation to provide housing for the



unhoused. Small suites of this size are best used as short-term rental, as these suites were intended to be rented as hotel rooms, not fully finished with kitchens etc. for long-term residents.

Rather than the broad brush approach, the Eby government should set a size limit that short-term rentals would be feasible (perhaps 400 square feet) and allow them to continue and supplement hotel accommodation for visitors.

That way they may not be gutting the retirement plans of many who are now faced with huge financial losses because of the government's blind approach to fixing a problem they could have worked on diligently for the past seven years but chose not to.

Ernie Kuemmel
Oak Bay

Gove recommendations were not followed

I hope that most people will hold the premier and his ministers to their word. The premier said the province has an ongoing commitment to ensure that "every child grows up in a safe, in a loving home" and that "the solicitor general will also ensure people who assault or threaten children face serious and immediate consequences."

This is a child-centred statement very much in line with the Gove Inquiry. The new minister for children can look again at that report and see that many of the recommendations were not incorporated. Children are our future.

Eric Jones
Victoria

Don't blame minister alone for children's death

The news that Mitzi Dean has been demoted in the child welfare ministry shows that the doctrine of ministerial responsibility is not entirely dead, even if rarely exercised at the federal or provincial level these days.

Full marks to the premier and to Dean.

But it is unlikely that Dean is truly the villain in the tragic death of Dontay Lucas and other neglected children under the care of the child welfare ministry.

It is appropriate that the deputy

minister be removed as well. But there are other workers in the ministry who, through their dereliction in carrying out their duties, allowed children at risk to be unsupervised for long periods.

They too should be dealt with by the department's disciplinary system up to and including dismissal from their posts, if warranted.

We can only hope that the shakeup in the ministry by appointing minister Grace Lore and a new deputy minister will make that department again fit for purpose.

David Collins
Victoria

All those supporters are not being paid

Letter writers have cast doubt on the sincerity of those who've been attending the weekly rallies to protest Israel's slaughter and destruction in Gaza. Allegedly, protesters are being paid to attend.

I've attended almost every rally since Oct. 14. And I have to admit to being remunerated. Not monetarily, of course.

I've profited from being in the company of so many others who are standing up for people described by Israeli politicians as "human animals" whose land must be "flattened."

But for those who insist on believing the fable that pro-Palestinian demonstrators are being paid, I have one question.

Are the highly supportive pedestrians, bus drivers, tourists, store clerks and restaurant-goers who spontaneously express solidarity with us also being paid?

I suspect that those who demand a halt to our marches are mostly worried about the very profound public support for Palestinians we see every week.

Cory Greenlees
Victoria

All that reduction, and more power used

I recently joined the B.C. Hydro Peak Saver challenge, considering it to be a good learning tool to do my part in conserving energy and reduce my impact on climate change.

Imagine my shock when I received notification asking me to try to reduce

my power consumption between one per cent and 20 per cent between 5 and 8 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 12, the coldest day of the decade!

Appreciating this cold snap was going to place a strain on the province's energy supply, I knuckled down to do my part, cooking at lunchtime instead of the evening, reducing the thermostat to 18 degrees, wearing an extra sweater, extra lights off, all curtains drawn, doors shut, draught excluders in place, no TV on, and so on, between the allotted time.

The result was an 89 per cent increase in power consumption compared to what I had used the three (significantly milder) prior days!

Is it really fair to compare consumption on days that have such a significantly different set of variables?

And I am wondering: Did anyone meet the challenge?

Joanne Wiggins
Victoria

Pickleball noise causing concerns

I am able to appreciate the concerns neighbours of the Wain Road pickleball courts have. Moving them is an option but please, not to Blue Heron Park.

I am in one of 54 units of the Regatta Park condominium development next door. The noise would be nothing less than a nuisance.

Cy Hampson has homes in the vicinity but it would affect far fewer residents. I believe a solution is to locate new courts in an area that is more industrial. Could a portion of land belonging to the airport authority be used? Perhaps something near the Rotary Park baseball diamonds?

Ultimately, it would be nice to see the courts remain on Wain with a noise abatement solution.

James Wright
North Saanich

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