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Unsustainable development starts vicious cycle

Charna Macfie, Oceanside Star
Published: Monday, August 25, 2008

Perhaps it was the shock of seeing the changes caused by rapid growth in Oceanside when I returned to Vancouver Island after spending many years living outside the country. Perhaps it is my growing awareness of the extent of the global devastation of nature and ecosystems on our planet. Whatever the reason, I can no longer be silent and do nothing. And so I have begun a new journey.

The inspiration for my journey is seeing the continuous destruction and elimination of the natural beauty that was once part of our communities. It seems that no one has cared about, or even considered the consequences of these changes going on around them.

I began asking questions, collecting data on impacts of growth and researching development in the area. I spoke with people about their views on growth in their community. I read the local papers and looked for support from others who are concerned about growth in our communities. The more I learned, the more complex this journey towards sustainability and restoration has become.

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resort and much more than we realize.

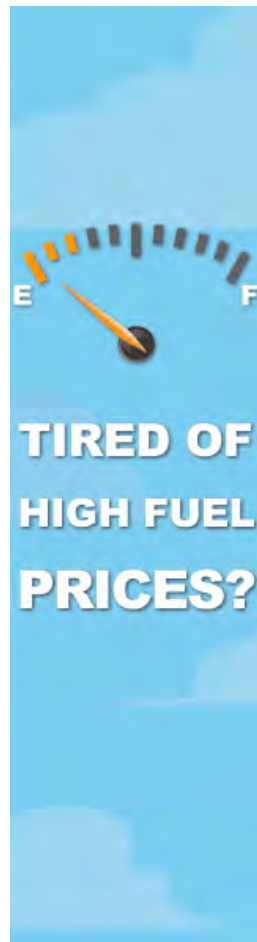
The new care facility built behind Parksville City Hall and another residential complex about to be started next door, consume most of a huge city block. All these residences will need City services, infrastructure and taxpayer money.

Many commercial and multi-residential zoned properties in town are yet to be developed. Three new developments planned for Corfield Street will remove acres of green space and result in the disturbance or loss of habitat for wildlife such as the neighbourhood eagle. How much of an impact will these developments have on Parksville's clean water supply, solid and liquid waste management, energy consumption, and toxic pollutants and emissions?

With such unsustainable development a vicious cycle begins. An increasing population leads to more vehicles on the road and more air pollution. Trees that produce oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide are cut down, further reducing air quality. The expansion and maintenance of basic City services to accommodate current growth and projected future growth add to an already heavy tax burden. The consequences of growth correspondingly diminish the quality of life for everyone but a few in the community.

The problems associated with growth are widely reported in the media. At the same time, some people and government agencies, blinded by an obsolete paradigm, continue to promote a pro-growth agenda.

Forward-thinking municipalities are struggling to find ways to accommodate growth in a bid to contain taxes and provide a quality of life for residents, while at the same time business is pushing in the opposite direction.



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Along my journey towards understanding the impacts of economic growth and development, conflicts such as these are the norm. Now I want to know how do we resolve the conflicts, what are the alternatives to growth, how do we find the path to a restorative economic model, and how do we implement change?

I continue to discover viable, alternative visions that focus on long-term environmental and economic sustainability. But exploring them means that changes must take place – changes in policies, bylaws and, most of all, new ways of thinking.

One important change that needs to happen is increased community awareness and political involvement. Everyone can actively participate in one way or another. The upcoming fall local elections are an opportunity to take action, and encourage all the candidates and voters to consider this an election issue.

Revising the Official Community Plan will be another significant opportunity to implement change. This process will give residents a chance to voice their views, and push for changes that will slow the growth, implement conservation and restorative policies, improve our quality of life and stabilize the local economy.

I encourage everyone to begin thinking and talking about the future of your community and prepare questions for our leaders to answer at all-candidates meetings. Together we can make a difference.

Charna Macfie is a native of Vancouver Island who has lived and traveled around the world for the past 25 years. She now lives and works in Parksville and wants to be involved in improving the quality of life in her community based on principles of long-term sustainability.

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