



**“Economics is extremely useful
as a form of employment for economists.”**

Galbraith

June 2012

SAGE Annual General Meeting at 7 p.m., June 7th at the Fish & Game Hut.
(Don't forget to renew your membership)

Oldman Watershed Council AGM on June 8th, 3 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

Park Place Mall Receives National Recognition

Park Place has implemented dedicated environmental efforts to reduce waste (almost 400 tonnes last year), to manage energy, and to make 'green' decisions regarding facility operations.

In addition to the highest BOMA BEST level four designation they achieved last fall, Park Place has been recently recognized with a

national Certificate of Excellence by the Building Managers and Owners Association (BOMA). They were also presented with a regional Toby award for outstanding building of the year.

The general manager of Park Place, Kevin Brees, is committed to the ongoing efforts

to make Lethbridge more sustainable in the future. He has been an active representative on a steering committee of informed individuals and organizations working to develop a local organization that will create and share best environmental practices to the benefit of regional resilience and economic prosperity.

7.7 Billion Reasons to Better Manage the Environment

Canada's environment auditor recently observed that Government of Canada will not likely meet its promised 2020 targets in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 178 million tonnes. The federal plan, Scott Vaughan says, 'lacks coherency' and does not address the projected costs to

the Canadian economy.

In addition to the costly risks of not reducing GHG emissions, the report recognizes the \$7.7 billion that Canadians are currently liable to pay for cleaning up contaminated sites across the country -

mostly abandoned mines and industrial fields dating back 70 years.

These 22,000 sites will continue to "impose human health risks and environmental and financial burdens for generations to come."

Not Enough Science to Ask for More Science

The Council of Canadians with the support of environmental and citizen groups had requested that the City of Lethbridge consider the many concerns about potential environmental and health effects from the hydraulic fracturing of oil & gas wells in the region.

The City's Environment Committee drafted a **resolution** to bring these concerns to the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association to discuss a moratorium on this process until better monitoring is applied, and until scientific study indi-

cates that it is safe to people and the natural environment.

As stewards of the community, Councillors Mauro, Carlson, Mearns and Coffman supported the resolution.

Mayor Dodic **asserted** that the province already knows what is necessary to protect its citizens, and that no studies or reports were provided that would support the resolution asking for scientific study. Councillors Wickersham, Parker and Ellis also voted against the resolution and it was defeated.

Eco-Fair at McKillop United Church

Regional congregations of the United Church shared an Eco-Fair event with a guest sermon from the Very Rev. Bill Phipps on the theme "Called to Live with Respect in Creation".

The **sermon** presented ecological awareness as spiritual awareness - a connectedness between our impact on creation and our collective behaviour. He provided an insightful summary of the science of climate change and an uncompromising connection between human consumption and the deterioration of the natural world.

Rev. Phipps' call to the congregation spoke to our impact on earth systems as a moral failure. As moral failure, he cited Hosea: "Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying." Said differently, Rev. Phipps said that Mother Nature is heart broken - as indeed she is.

The Eco-Fair to follow had many interesting displays from regional advocates for social and environmental justice.

Canadian Businesses Ill-Prepared for Climate Change

A **new report** from the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE). It is the fifth report in the series on *Climate Prosperity* which have shown 'how unabated climate change presents an economic risk to Canada and how global action to arrest emissions and domestic action to adapt to climate change makes economic sense.' The new report, however, identifies the inertia of Canadian business in formulating strategies and practices to prepare for the impacts of climate change.

The NRTEE report derives three recommendations: "*First*, governments and organizations that engage with businesses need to improve communications about what adaptation to climate change is, how it is relevant to business, and why a proactive

stance can pay off. *Second*, adaptation to climate change will rarely be a first priority for business until it hits, so building resilience now within the firm from the boardroom right along the supply chain is sound business strategy. *Third*, collaboration between the public and private sectors to share climate change information and data, communicate across sectors, and invest in long-term critical infrastructure will be necessary."

The report makes it abundantly clear that by not responding to the impacts of global warming, the bottom lines of Canadian businesses are at risk. By extension, a weakened economy will make it more difficult to mitigate, and adapt to the effects of climate change: "The failure of businesses to

adapt to future climate realities has implications for their bottom line, for their investors, customers, workforce, and ultimately, for our economy and society."

Because global warming is global, but the effects are local, the NRTEE report notes the importance of the role of government in proving research and information relevant to helping businesses plan for the future. The report also notes the necessity for government to build capacity and make critical infrastructure more resilient, and to prepare for future policy innovations including the uptake of new technologies for adaptation.

The Government of Canada, in its March 2012, announced its decision to shut down the NRTEE suggesting its research was no longer necessary.

The Climate of Public Opinion is Changing

A public opinion poll conducted by **Ipsos Reid** at the end of April in British Columbia shows that 72% of citizens of the province believe "the BC government should continue to take an active role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and fighting climate change." Only 8% of respondents disagreed with the statement.

Almost 8 in 10 believe the government should be working to create jobs in the clean-tech sector by creating incentives for business. Less than 10% objected.

By contrast, during the latest Alberta election, concerns about the environment fell well behind issues around health care, education, deficit/budget ... and a mild rash developed by Muffie-the-Cat.

In addition to the rift in values between the provinces, there is a growing disharmony regarding the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline. This pipeline is designed to bring bitumen from the Alberta tar sands to super-tankers at the port in Kitimat. The pipeline is unanimously opposed by First Nations of the region, and is expected to become the major

election issue next year in the province. Economist **Robyn Allan** has suggested that the government might have a legal case against the pipeline because the full risks facing British Columbians have not been properly assessed. Furthermore, the recent federal budget legislation, that has placed the full authority over pipeline projects under cabinet (rather than the NEB), may be challenged because of the undue risk to B.C.'s sovereign rights.

It will also be interesting to watch the emerging concerns of Alaska, with their still-vivid memories of the Exxon Valdez disaster, as they weigh in against the project.

Interesting Links:

Foreign Ownership of Tar Sands http://forestethics.org/downloads/FEA_Tar_Sands_funding_briefing.pdf

Proposed Pipeline and Tanker Spill Risk for BC <http://www.robynallan.com>

Water Bottles Linked to Breast Cancer <http://www.desmogblog.com>

Facing the Elements: Advisory Report <http://www.nrtee-trnee.ca>

Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE)

A Leading Voice for a Healthy and Environmentally Sustainable Community.

Visit us at: <http://sage-environment.org/>

If you are interesting in getting involved, contact us at:

sage-communications@sage-environment.org

Rebel Cities (2012)

One of the outcomes of the emergence of New Social Movements worldwide has been the growing understanding that income inequality, exploitation, racism, sexism, and environmentalism are manifestations of the failure of current economic and political organization to meet the needs of most of the people (not to mention other living things) on the planet.

David Harvey is a geographer who has spent his career studying the urban environment as it relates to class conflict, political economy, and community. With over half of humanity living in urban environments, change will have to originate within the city.

Harvey identifies three compelling questions that must be answered by any agenda for change: "1) The first is that of crushing material impoverishment for much of the world's population, along with the concomitant frustration of the potential for the full development of human capacities and creative powers. ... 2) The second question derives from the clear and imminent dangers of out-of-control environmental degradation and ecological transformations. This, too, is not only a material but also a spiritual and moral question of changing the human sense of nature, as well as the material relation to it. ... 3) The third set of questions ... derives from a historical and theoretical understanding of the inevitable trajectory of capitalist growth" (p.127). In other words, a plan to reestablish the 'right to the city' must address inequality, alienation and exploitation of people; our disconnection with our relationship to the natural world; and the idea of perpetual economic growth on a finite planet.

The book begins with the concept that the city is a reflection of our values - or, at least, the values of those who control the design and growth of the city. Reclaiming the right to the city, therefore,

"cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be, what kinds of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold."

Harvey maintains that the urban environment is the social concentration of surplus product - in other words, the city is the product of our collective labour. Unfortunately, the product of our collective labour has been appropriated by a few. To get a feel for this concentration of wealth: "As of the end of 2009 (after the worst of the crash was over), there were 115 billionaires in China, 101 in Russia, 55 in India, 52 in Germany, 32 in Britain, and 30 in Brazil, in addition to the 413 in the United States" (p.15). As wealth accumulates for a few, misery accumulates for the many, and cities begin to reflect and sustain this inequality.

As an example of how the city absorbs surplus value, Harvey illustrates the investment in buildings and infrastructure and how it corresponds to financial crises. Building is speculative in the long term: as it relieves short term needs to absorb surplus capital, it tends to replicate overaccumulation and crises in the long term. In the lead up to the latest housing bubble, "Rising housing prices in the US increased effective demand in the economy at large. In the year 2003 alone, 13.6 million mortgages were issued (as opposed to less than half that ten years before), worth \$3.7 trillion. Of these, \$2.8 trillion's worth were for purposes of refinancing (for comparison, the total US GDP at that time was less than \$15 trillion)" (p.48). In short, most of the building in this period was pure speculation, but directly accounted for 7% of the GDP, and another 14% of the GDP was related to the purchasing of ancillary products, from furniture to cars.



Harvey shows a clear relationship between speculative building (while filling the buildings with things) and the environmental impact of this growing consumption.

The book describes the ongoing assault on the working class and the environment (by making them economic externalities) as a means to maintain the growth of accumulation. "The dismantling of the regulatory frameworks and controls that sought, however inadequately, to curb the penchant for predatory practices of accumulation has unleashed the *après moi le déluge* logic of unbridled accumulation and financial speculation that has now turned into a veritable flood of creative destruction, including that wrought through capitalist urbanization" (p.86). By contrast, he advocates the socialization of surplus production, and the establishment of a new commons.

Clearly the logic of the existing economic system cannot be sustained, and David Harvey believes that change will have to occur in the cities of the world. "It is for this reason that the right to the city has to be construed not as a right to that which already exists, but as a right to rebuild and re-create the city as a socialist body politic in a completely different image – one that eradicates poverty and social inequality, and one that heals the wounds of disastrous environmental degradation. For this to happen, the production of the destructive forms of urbanization that facilitate perpetual capital accumulation has to be stopped" (p.138).

Rebel Cities offers a different perspective of environmental challenges - through the lens of urban growth and design. He advocates that we begin to take back the commons, and regain the human sense of nature.

