

AVERTING CRISIS¹

Gordon O'Connor[©]

Think twenty years into the future and imagine the type of community you'd like to be living in...

The Our Home is Not For Sale campaign asked that question to hundreds of people over the past year and their answers have been almost identical: People imagine a community with a stable economy, a secure source of healthy food and a strong sense of social equality. In the CRD we have a unique opportunity to realize these objectives. This is one of the richest most naturally abundant regions in the world and it is well within our means to make sure everyone who lives here can benefit from our natural wealth and enjoy a healthy, sustainable living situation. If we choose to, our community could become one of the most equitable places in the world and experience an enormously more pleasant living environment.

But, current financial and ecological realities are turning this opportunity into an urgent necessity. We are living in an economy that is propped up on stilts, based on quickly depleting resources in an environment that is teetering on collapse. Insulating our home from these crisis' and realizing its potential for sustainability should be a priority. Developing local ownership and control of our economy is an important first step. In an uncertain financial market it only makes sense to divest ourselves from internationally-owned companies that take resources and profits away from our community. Smaller, locally-owned businesses create more jobs and keep money circulating in our community instead of siphoning it out into the bank accounts of far-removed corporate shareholders. Locally owned businesses are also more likely to invest back into the community and support social projects that benefit all of us.

A practical starting point for localizing the economy would be to promote and support local food production. In 1969 Vancouver Island grew 70% of its own food, 40 years later that number is less than 5% (including a massive amount of Halloween pumpkins that no one ever eats) and we only have a two-day supply of fresh produce here at any given time. These are frightening numbers and as more and more of our farm land is buried under urban sprawl they are getting worse. There is an enormous level of interest in local agriculture, but the demand for unsustainable commuter subdivisions is inflating land values and making it impossible for farmers to survive. This problem would disappear almost overnight if the CRD and municipalities enforced their own rules and started protecting land from development. This action, in combination with programs to support local producers, could help us chase corporate grocery chains off the island and create a degree of food sovereignty that would benefit all of us.

Meeting the primary needs of every person that lives in Greater Victoria would result in a safer and more pleasant community. Social inequalities in this region evidenced by homelessness, poverty and the ongoing process of colonization present a complicated equation, but the collective motivation for solving them is incredibly basic. If the CRD was able to provide housing and food security to everyone in need they would also save millions of dollars in health care, law enforcement and other social service costs.

Dismantling the systems of power and privilege at the root of our social problems falls outside of Dogwood's area of expertise, but there are dozens of other community groups working on this. The abundance of wealth on this island makes the success of their initiatives seem like a simple

¹ Dogwood Initiative, Nov 18, 2010

matter of priorities. If we choose to, our community could become one of the most equitable places in the world and experience an enormously more pleasant living environment.

The CRD is poised on the verge of enormous economic and environmental change and it behooves all of us to look beyond the short term interests defined by profit motives and election cycles. We need visionary leadership from community members and from politicians to insulate ourselves from what lies ahead. In doing so the CRD could easily become a model of sustainability and equality for regions across North America to emulate. As the fate of our manufactured crisis's approaches, protecting farm land, localizing our economy and establishing a new standard of social equality is becoming more of a requirement than an option and the CRD is in an excellent position to start making these changes.