

The Daily Gleaner

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By Sonya Hull

Smaller Footprints lead to Sustainable Living

"Sometimes the questions are complicated and the answers are simple."

— Dr. Seuss

In his book "Seven Rules for Sustainable Communities: Design Strategies for the Post-Carbon World", Patrick Condon (Chair in Landscape and Liveable Environments at UBC) argues that transforming our cities offers the greatest potential for actually reducing overall GHG emissions and moving the world towards a sustainable balance between humans and nature.

Indeed, given that 80 percent of North Americans live in metropolitan areas, and these places produce an equal amount of the continent's greenhouse gases, this argument is not hard to accept. Condon states that current decentralized, suburbanized, vehicle-based patterns of development helped make North Americans the biggest generators of GHGs in the world per capita. For this reason, transitioning to less land and energy-consuming patterns of development will be crucial to reducing overall carbon production. He proposes that cities and regions, not national governments, will play the leading role in achieving these goals.

So how do we apply this knowledge right here at home – in Fredericton? City planners are well steeped in the knowledge that cities hold the key to a sustainable future. They struggle with it each day and for good reason, as our city is vibrant and growing. People want to live here. So their challenge becomes how to accommodate a growing population and keep them living within the city boundaries while maintaining high quality services; coveted parks, trees and green spaces; ease of moving around; and the small-town ambiance valued so highly by Frederictonians. This is a tall order.

So as citizens what can we do to support and work towards a sustainable Fredericton?

We can attempt to get our heads around the concept and importance of urban density – building up-not out, and dense-not scattered; even if this happens to be in our own neighbourhoods. Which of course means we will have to personally and collectively push back against our NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) tendencies.

We can try to understand the value of using our land wisely to house people and keep them close to the flow of their everyday lives – getting kids to school and activities, traveling to work, shopping for food, etc., without mandatory reliance on a gas-fueled vehicle. This kind of change requires an evolution in our thinking; away from a need for distinct and separate housing, retail and commercial areas and towards the acceptance of these areas intermingling. The goal is for citizens to be able to carry out many aspects of their life within a smaller radius than previously possible.

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We can even stretch out our thinking to consider what some environmental visionaries call “the death of speed”, or the notion that cars are not the future; and the more we can do now to set up our lives to incorporate walking, biking and public transit, the further along we will be on the sustainability spectrum. And maybe, just maybe, if we have the chance (a job change, a house move, a car buy to consider), we can begin to live some of these philosophies for ourselves as we make our way toward a more sustainable life.

There will be a tangible opportunity to practice some sustainable living practices when the Princess Margaret Bridge is closed for the next four months. Last year this “inconvenient” reality gave many Frederictonians the chance to consider what our lives would be like without easy access to speed. The results were impressive – trail use was up, vehicle travel was down, and predicted occurrences of traffic nightmares did not materialize. And the good news story was that many folks kept on with their new sustainable commuting habits because they liked their newfound fitness, the gas money they saved, their reduced stress level, or just the change. As Shrek once said so simply: “Change is good, Donkey.” In this case, right he is.

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