

Mark Harcourt Zoom Presentation, October 5th, 2020

Former Premier Mike Harcourt was originally scheduled to speak to us in the spring, but the date was re-scheduled due to Covid-19. What he terms “Urban Tsunami” was the topic (and a major interest of his) that he had planned to speak about, which is his label for what our world is facing, namely the global issue of how many people live in cities and the huge growth in population that cities have experienced, especially in the developed countries, over time. The world had 6 Billion people in 2000 and now has 8 Billion people in 2020, with 5 Billion of those living in cities. Population is expected to expand to 9 – 10 Billion people in the next 30 years. But, because of the changing circumstances occasioned by Covid-19 and the fact that there are so many fascinating, horrifying, unpredictable events that we are currently experiencing, he decided to focus on local issues in the Greater Vancouver Area, closer to home, three areas in particular.

Firstly, the Downtown East Side (DTES). Currently he is part of a project with others working on issues in the Downtown East Side and environs, involving the homeless, mental illness, the opioid crisis and addiction problems which are a serious problem for the City and the Region. The group is called the Building Communities Society, and they are launching in October 2020, some solutions to provide supportive housing, continuous care, for 300 of the most vulnerable, seriously ill and addicted people, of about 2,500 mentally ill, chronically addicted people, many of whom are brain damaged. There are some solutions that can be applied fairly quickly.

Secondly, to comment about affordable housing and childcare, transportation and mobility – challenges we have on the North Shore.

Thirdly, the skill sets that we are going to need over the next 10 – 20 years and the mixing and matching of the post- secondary institutions we have to service the growth areas in our economy in high tech and construction in particular.

When we originally arranged for me to speak, there wasn't a provincial election scheduled until the fall, or the situation in the US. These are the 3 areas I thought I would speak about.

Start with DTES, where the situation is going from bad to worse, not just Hastings St., but Strathcona Park, Yale Town, the West End and many other parts of the city. He can't remember it ever being as bad as it is now. Homeless, mentally ill, seriously addicted people are creating a great deal of distress for our citizens. The problem is, we created this problem quite a while ago and I'll refer to two bad policy decisions that were made. One is the de-institutionalizing and closing down of Riverview in the 1980's and 90's with the idea that people would go into community care, but we just didn't build the facilities that they would need.

The second and probable dumbest decision in the last 50 years, was the elimination of the non-profit housing program in 1994. The elimination was for a good cause (to fight the deficit), but the result of that one decision is that we lost 25,000 non-profit co-op housing units a year being built across Canada. In Vancouver alone, we had one of the most aggressive programs in the country, building 1000 – 2000 units a year and we built 20,000 non-profit co-op housing units to go along with the public

housing being built before that. There hasn't been anything done since 1994, until just recently where there is a trickle coming back. That means 600,000 units of housing that we should have had but don't and a million and a half Canadians don't have a decent place to live in. When politicians and public servants, not thinking about the unintentional consequences of these decisions such as the two just mentioned, you wonder why we now have a housing crisis and homeless people without the services to deal with these very real issues. Working Together with another group, called "Street to Home", qualified representatives from the city, province, coast health and others, are going to hone in on the 300 most vulnerable, most disruptive people in and around the DTES - and make sure they have continuous care and are not just dropped off at the emergency ward, and sent back out on their own. The group includes very skilled people, a psychiatrist, and others with great experience and skills in this area, and are applying the Four Pillars approach of former Mayor Phillip Owen (Enforcement, Prevention, Treatment, and Treating Addiction). This project will be launching publicly in a number of ways -on CBC with Bill McEwan Currents, other media outlets, appearing before council, handing this out to all the candidates for the Provincial election. The hope is to start having an impact within 3-6 months and over the next 3 years starting to do the right thing for these people. (Would like some feedback on this.)

Regarding the BC Election, he was surprised, but understands the logic, and thinks this is a very important provincial election, and would like your feedback on what issues should be addressed, including larger issues around forestry and relations with 1st Nations. "Bringing hope beyond hope" to the natural resource based communities, about 140 Communities in BC still depend heavily on the forest products industry.

He finished up with remarks on what he called the astonishing situation in the USA where President Trump has been almost criminally negligent in his mis-describing mis-handling of the Covid-19 crisis and the USA is now suffering the consequences. He finds it very disheartening that over 200,000 people have died, and many others will suffer life-long on-going lung damage and other side effects from contracting the virus. He hopes Joe Biden wins a huge majority, stating that Joe is not an ideal candidate but is a decent smart human being that can provide stability and some of the right solutions to bring Covid-19 under control and contain it, and then get onto the economic recovery from the damage that has occurred, particularly in the tourism and hospitality area and other important areas of the economy.

Questions.

Q1: You have been quoted as saying Municipal governments don't have the resources to look after housing. Is that correct? And if so, do you still feel that way?

A: Yes, it is correct. Of every tax dollar that is raised, 50 cents is raised by the federal government, 42 cents by the provincial government, and only 8 cents (3/4 of which is property tax) is raised by the municipalities. The property tax historically has been seen as a source of revenue for the municipalities to provide services to people and their properties. 75% of the money goes to engineering, police and fire and another 20% goes to parks and recreation and libraries and everything

else that the city does. That doesn't leave much left for building affordable housing. But, the cities can provide sites, zoning, lessen parking requirements etc. to encourage senior government and non-profit societies to build affordable housing. There are solutions, with all working together. This is a very good question and one we need to come to grips with. The cities are being asked to do more than ever before and don't have the resources yet to tackle the huge areas of childcare, transit, transportation infrastructure, etc. He thinks we are at a crossroads now, having to re-think how to finance our cities and what city councils and citizens should come to grips with.

Q2: Can you comment on what needs to be done to increase focus on the education of K to Grade 12 Children of First Nations so that more children would go to University and get an education?

A: They need to become economically self-sufficient and it is really important to increase the number of students graduating from the educational system with a Diploma, and the marks to get into post-secondary institutions – colleges, universities, trade schools etc. Mr. Harcourt is working on a project now with others called “Dogwood 25” (check the website for this and you'll see that there are a number of pilot projects underway) and the whole purpose of this project is to, by 2025, raise the graduation rate for aboriginal students from what it is now (about 74%) to meet or beat the graduation rate of non-aboriginal students which is about 85% plus now. The fundamental issue in BC is still the changing relationship that we are trying to create together (the aboriginal and the non-aboriginal community) so that First Nations can become economically self-sufficient and self-governing as some Nations have done. There are lots of emerging opportunities especially for the urban groups, with many encouraging initiatives underway. For example, the Musqueam Development Corporation is co-developing a site right now beside UBC and the UBC Golf Course, and other land with other First Nation groups. They are creating a lot of jobs and a source of wealth that they are reinvesting into their communities for education, affordable housing, seniors, etc.

Q3: Many municipalities are not cities, yet they too have housing difficulties. It seems that many provincial laws and regulations are biased against landlords, have not worked and are part of the problem, and it is too onerous to be a landlord when you have a tenant who is not a good tenant. Have you considered provincial laws?

A: Yes. When I was in in Government we had 3 choices.

1. Do nothing.
2. Do rent controls and that had an impact in large cities through stifling private development.
3. Do rent regulation where increases can be done if there is a corresponding increase in the cost of renovations to qualify for this, and thence the appearance of “renovictions”. This could be problematic as some landlords were using this to try to evict people but not actually doing renovations.

This is a very difficult problem. The big solution is having a steady supply of affordable housing so you don't have the 0 – 1% vacancy rates which creates the squeeze in this area.

Q4: Speaking to the comments you made when talking about the population in cities earlier, when do you think the environmentalists, politicians and other well-intentioned do-gooders will start to pay attention to the real problem facing the world today.

A: Whether talking about the air pollution in Delhi or Beijing or huge slums in Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City and many other cities in developing countries, Mr. Harcourt encourages sustained international focus on the problems that the huge growth in population is bringing about. In Canada, we've gone through a huge shift in population since Confederation in 1867 when 20% of us lived in cities, and 80% in rural communities, mostly in agricultural, forestry, and fishing based areas. Now 50% of Canadians live in nine large cities, 30% in medium sized cities (about 110), and 20% in rural areas (of which 15% of these live in Xurbia ...close to but outside of the boundaries of the city but don't pay taxes into that municipal area even though they use the services.) So 95% of Canadians live in these 120 communities. The vast majority of 250,000 - 300,000 immigrants per year are going to the cities – 50% to Toronto area, 25% to Montreal and Vancouver, and the other 15% to Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg and Ottawa. This puts huge pressure on domestic population for affordable housing. Cities are created by us. Pick a future you want rather than one you don't. It's about choices – good and bad – and their consequences. Overcrowding, slums, traffic, extreme poverty, are real issues we have to come to grips with. A major report that has been done (PWC) says that the amount of capital investment that is required over the next 25-30 years to deal with these issues internationally is \$350 Trillion. The vast majority of it is private sector capital - \$185 Trillion, and \$165 Trillion is public sector investment – most of which will be borrowed in government sector bonds. So there is a tremendous opportunity for us to invest in projects as part of the post-Covid-19 recovery.

Q5: One of the worst policy decision was the closing of Riverview and there is some discussion about re-opening part of it. Do you feel this is part of the solution, particularly with the 300 you are working with now?

A: Good question. Yes it is. There is a smaller facility being built there now for 120 people which will be expanded eventually to 200. I think smaller discreet facilities throughout the region, including Riverview, and including the one in Burnaby at Willingdon and Canada Way, or the temporary ones such as the modular housing beside Cambie Bridge near the Olympic Village that sits on an old parking lot. It went up quickly, is discreet and fits into the neighbourhood. This type of housing is staffed with professionals to support mentally ill people are the answer, and will alleviate some of the anxiety for citizens dealing with situations like Strathcona etc.

Q6: What impact will working from home have?

A: Since Covid 19, a lot of people have found that they can do their work from home. Many others have to be physically at work such as first responders, fire, medical, and restaurant staff to mention a few. This is a profound change that we will see going forward. Technology is enabling us to do this. It will impact the design of houses, apartments etc. to provide for that. It takes pressure off roads, bridges etc. This is the start of a huge cultural shift.

Q7. In recent years about 1000 immigrant families are settling into Greater Vancouver every month. They need housing which means we have to build about 250 units every week. What do you say to people that say reducing immigration would go a long way to reducing the housing crisis?

A: I agree. But I also believe that immigration is one of the strong points of Canada's past, present and future. We have one of the best immigration systems in the world. There are only 5 countries in the world that accept immigrants to become citizens – Canada, USA, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. I think it has been good for Canada but the Federal Government has been irresponsible in not backing that up with required services eg immigrant reception services, English as a second language, affordable housing, skills training etc. Our communities have to be able to handle the growth from immigration.

John Elliott thanked Mr. Harcourt, saying that even after a long political career, you still continue to give back to the community. We appreciate that and thank you

Scribe, Darlene Dean