

Emergency Demands Action

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Thunder Bay City Council voted unanimously last month to declare a climate emergency, joining hundreds of others across Canada including the City of Kenora and Grand Council Treaty #3. It is a recognition of the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

However, one week later the Carrick/Vickers bridge proposal which was to provide a safe north-south link for cyclists and pedestrians was cancelled by Thunder Bay City Council. This is a missed opportunity to reduce greenhouse emissions from transportation and also to improve community health. One is reminded of last summer when the Government of Canada declared a climate emergency, then shortly thereafter gave approval to the expansion of the Kinder Morgan pipeline. Governments are good at doing the talk but not the walk.

The Carrick/Vickers bridge project had its complexities and this one decision will not negate the long-term efforts of Thunder Bay to implement climate plans. However, if over time insufficient progress is made on greenhouse gas reduction and climate adaptation, a declaration of a climate emergency will have been sadly only symbolic.

The progress the City has made over recent years are detailed in the Annual Reports from EarthCare Thunder Bay. The Corporation of the City of Thunder Bay has reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 26 % from 2009 to 2016, exceeding their goal. However, the entire community of Thunder Bay has reduced emissions by only 6%, far short of the goal. The new Thunder Bay Community Energy and Emissions Plan (CEEP) will be completed in January 2021. The recommendations should be implemented without delay if we truly recognize a climate emergency.

Damage from severe weather is now a foreseeable risk. The City of Thunder Bay adopted a Climate Adaptation Strategy in 2015. Preparing for flooding and other consequences of severe weather is very important for municipal governments and residents as they are responsible for repairing much of the damage.

The federal and provincial governments are seeking to reduce their rapidly expanding financial burden for disaster relief and are helping municipalities to be better prepared. In 2019 Thunder Bay received funding through the National Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund to help with the costs of the Community Flood Mitigation Project. The investments made into this project are considerable: about \$13 million from the Government of Canada and almost \$20 million from the City of Thunder Bay.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Insurance Bureau of Canada reported

last year that in order to avoid the worst impacts of climate change new investments in local climate adaptation will cost an estimated \$5.3 billion per year.

The Ford government cancelled the Ontario Cap and Trade program which was funding green initiatives. This invites the question as to how implementing greenhouse gas reduction plans such as Thunder Bay's CEEP and climate adaptation plans will be funded?

Increasingly governments around the world are being taken to court for their inaction on climate change. Fossil fuel companies are also becoming a target. Dr. Diane Saxe, the former Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, states that she expects "public opinion to increasingly welcome the idea of making the Carbon Majors pay." The "Carbon Majors" are the top fossil fuel producers responsible for most of global greenhouse gas emissions.

These legal avenues take time. Carbon pricing strategies are available right now if governments and the public support them.

The number of severe weather disasters around the world has quadrupled since 1980. The area burned in the current bushfire season in Australia is the largest on record by far. Anticipating the devastating impacts of climate change, the City of Darebin in Australia was the first city in the world to declare a climate emergency in 2016. Now over 1250 local governments and 25 countries have made climate emergency declarations, Thunder Bay being one of the most recent.

The Oxford Dictionary chose "Climate Emergency" as the 2019 "Word" of the Year. Let's hope next year is another double word. We choose "Climate Action" not "Climate Procrastination".