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Diary of a Mad Trustee
Open Board Meeting on April 16th, 2008

Principiis obsta...Finem respice
Resist the beginning... Consider the end

These days just reporting on the events of one board meeting misses the point though missing the point is almost a national pastime when it comes to managing our valued public services.

In the last few weeks we have had a grand stall on the closure process as we await the final pronouncements from special advisor, Dr. Lee Southern. This was followed by the unveiling of recommendations (included in attachment) on our facilities (without releasing the actual report) from Mr Connolly .This gentleman swooped in from the ministry in the wake of the AB Greenwell mould debacle to prevent another outcropping of high profile neglect that was the likely result of years of underfunding and painful triage.

So it is flowchart time - first we have to develop (with the full participation of our community-not meant to be ironic) an educationally based plan for the configuration of grades in our district. Then we must - on the basis of that education based set of guidelines-create a strategic facilities plan that will reflect the needs of that configuration. Then the district might be in a position to dispense thoughtful decisions around school closure after which we can proceed with our budget and finalisation of our staffing .Hell – we can do this standing on our collective heads and who cares if it has all been left to the very last minute. Like execution this should help concentrate the mind. Like most people I enjoy a bit of cabaret.

Now Mr. Connolly has indicated that this is what is required if we are to order ourselves in a professional fashion. Almost everything he comments on in the report equates to spending money we don't have, never had and that the ministry has no intention of delivering. If you read the recommendations- though they are not without merit – there is no reference at all to the accountability the government has to these problems or their solutions in light of the fact that they are the only legitimate source of revenue.

We have already trampled on one of these recommendations and I will make you guess which one (if you have a six year old in the house ask them and they will get it immediately).

Though the discussion around repairing the relationship between our Steelworkers and the senior management is phenomenally obvious and late in the day – it has not yet occurred to anyone in suits that unceremoniously kicking all the partner groups off the main board committees without any explanation (assuming there is one) was not likely to secure warm engagement.

As to the final recommendation – this is by far one of the truly low moments in the district's history and that is saying something when you ponder the stiff competition. This board is seeking to interfere with the community driven initiative

by another local government to better serve the valley with a bylaw change to the manner in which public school land can be used after closure. Indeed the CVRD and many of our more thoughtful citizens and elected reps are under the impression that some sort of careful, nurturing management of our common lands is in order. The Horror...the horror... Imagine a world where what any little tinpot self aggrandising twit wants to do with a piece of community owned property is the word of god and heaven help anyone who stands in their curly tailed little way. Oh right - that is the current reality. Again and again the board insists on and in this case is being encouraged to pursue a backward and primitive approach to democratic inclusion and common good.

Far from being the Pater Familias of our valley we now look like a cross between Bozo the Clown and Hitler. Well done!

Hopefully you have all now had your moment with our visitor from Victoria – Dr Lee Southern – a most affable and civilised gentleman. How affable and civilised he turns out to be will be revealed in his findings which hopefully will resonate with the wisdom of our valley after which he will be fired with extreme prejudice and dispatched to Resolute Bay to pack edible moss for export. I have been getting vivid reports from the school community on their interviews and dialogue in this process – everyone delivering the message that needs saying over and over – no planning without the presence of community. No plans that do not have at their heart community goals. That of course and the understandable vitriol directed at their various tormentors in this district. Dr Southern must wonder what the hell has been going on around here – or maybe he is not surprised at all because it is all more or less on schedule and part of Victoria’s well manicured libretto.

Our bus drivers have sent out their view of the proposed cuts to transportation in the 08/09 budget to valley parents and in their own eloquent and concise way have let management know that this damage to services will not happen without a fight.

Over the last five years, the SD79 Transportation Department has faced the challenge of balancing a shrinking budget with the rising price of fuel while maintaining the fleet. This has been achieved through cutting the mileage our busses travel and reductions in drivers hours. The Administration is now demanding a further \$200,000 cut in the Transportation budget.

As a result, serious reductions to the service provided to our students and their families will be required. Over the previous years the transportation department has managed to maintain the service to students and remain a mere 3% of the operating budget, even though the cost of running and maintaining SD79’s fleet of forty five busses has increased dramatically due to the rising cost of oil.

Yes – the drivers are fighting for our bussing, for the safety and equal access to programs for our kids, for a green means to travel between home and school – and quite rightly they are fighting for their jobs and their livelihood. Most of these people have been dedicated members of the school community for many years – they are well trained, they provide the interface between home and school, they watch over the kids and see they arrive safely despite the complexities of modern living arrangements.

They have families with kids too – and are part of our community. Some day soon some of our kids will grow up and secure employment with school boards and other public service providers – we should think carefully before we allow these sources of essential, decently paid employment rubbed out to satisfy short term aims for privatisation and dismantlement. When we pay for public services with our taxes one of the features we pay for is a meaningful living for our families. It is necessary to note that quality public service and vitality in our employment prospects go hand in hand.

Support your local school bus driver – chances are he or she has gone beyond the call of duty with your kids at one time or another.

Tomorrow is the Day of Mourning – this speaks to the tragic loss of life and the unnecessary threats to health and safety that continue to overshadow our working environments. The National Day of Mourning, held annually on April 28, was officially recognized by the federal government in 1991, eight years after the day of remembrance was launched by the Canadian Labour Congress. The Day of Mourning has since spread to over 80 countries around the world.

The Canadian flag on Parliament Hill will fly at half-mast. Workers will light candles, don ribbons and black armbands and observe moments of silence. Businesses are asked to participate by declaring April 28 a Day of Mourning and to strive to prevent workplace deaths, illnesses and injuries.

In Canada, some 786 employees die from work-related incidents each year, averaging more than 2 deaths every day. From 1993 to 2006, 11,002 people lost their lives in their workplaces. Another 900,000 per year are injured or become ill.

We can all pause for just a moment and reflect on the changes that are still required in all our workplaces to secure our wellbeing – soon our kids will be there if they are not already and only the best circumstances are good enough for them.

As SD 79 is the largest employer in the Cowichan Valley I will take this opportunity to speak for myself as a trustee though not of course a spokesperson for the board and offer my unqualified support for a safer future for our employees and their families as well as all the working families in this valley.

Your trustee pal
Eden



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