

I have delegated to Council on more than one occasion about Mitigating Climate Change. Today, I'm here to say that I've turned a corner in my thinking. I still believe in Mitigation but my personal viewpoint is that we need to shift more towards Adaptation.

In 2019, Burlington City Council, along with many other municipalities in Canada, declared a "Climate Emergency". At the time, the International Panel on Climate Change stated that we had 12 years to 'mitigate' climate change. Well, we've got 9 years left before we pass the point of no return. Nine years to keep global GHG emissions below 350 parts per million. Sorry to tell you, but we passed 410 ppm a mere four months later. The IPCC (which the report references) told us that we needed to limit average temperature level increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius. We've blown past that. We now talk about 2 degrees, or even 3 or 4 degrees by the end of the century.

Nine years doesn't sound like a lot of time. Think back to 2011. Most of you could not even dream of sitting on City Council. None of you knew what a Zoom call was, or had anything more sophisticated than an iPhone 4. Electric vehicles? Dream on.

In 2011, a giant tsunami hit the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan; New Zealand suffered its worst earthquake ever; an island summer camp in Norway was the target for a white supremacist; an earthquake hit Virginia and Hurricane Irene hit the East Coast of the U.S.; a Russian plane crashed killing an entire KHL hockey team; in Germany, buried WWII bombs were uncovered; the Canadian Armed Forces was called in to help with the (seemingly annual) Great Flood of Manitoba. Meanwhile, the Deep Horizon off-shore oil spill was still being cleaned up.

We recovered from these crises but did we learn anything from them? In her book, "The Devil Never Sleeps: Learning to Live in an Age of Disasters", Juliette Kayyem says, for the most part we did. She writes, "It isn't that you can manage a disaster so that no harm will occur, ... Essentially, we can learn to fail, more safely."

I'm not here to criticize this report, nor am I here to complain about any person, department or agency of the City. I'm here to ask you to take the next 15 or 20 minutes and really concentrate on what this city – not City (with a capital C), but the community of Burlington can do to prepare to 'fail more safely' because we will fail when it comes to climate change, it's almost guaranteed.

I'm not an expert. You've got plenty of smart people on staff. You've already got a shelf full of reports, and you've got partnerships with good organizations with all kinds of environmental experience. What I want to impress upon you is the sense of urgency that I feel, that and my concern that while the report is extensive and has good information, the language used may not convey that sense of urgency.

Words are important. They can spur us into action or they can lull us into complacency. And don't fear, I am not here to give a lesson in semantics.

However, for example, the word Resilience is used quite often in place of Adaptation. Resilience is described as "the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties", or "the ability to cope with and recover from setbacks", or, "to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune".

Climate Change is neither a difficulty, setback or misfortune. It's a disaster waiting to happen. It's not a 'what-if' scenario. It's a when-it-will-strike, there will be consequences kind of thing.

The report talks a lot about 'collaboration' as if that were a new thing. One has to hope that the City already 'collaborates' with entities like Burlington Hydro, Enbridge, the RBG and other stakeholders. I respect that stakeholders were invited to the table, but the collaboration must go further than a dozen or so meetings. It must infuse the landscape. Every organization, company, developer, every resident, should ask themselves "Is this the best we can do to respond to a climate change event?" And, "what part can I play after a disaster has impacted my neighbours?" rather than let 'the City' clean up the mess.

The report talks about a 'bottoms-up' approach, and then goes on to focus on what the City decision-making process should include. Words and phrases such as "net zero carbon community... prepared for"; "leverage emerging opportunities"; "proactive measures to reduce damage"; and "climate-minded innovation" all scream 'Mitigation', not Adaptation.

We are fighting against a system that none of us created. A system of global off-shoring, over consumption, externalities, short-term thinking, a 'make it-break it-toss it' society that is leading us over a cliff.

Listen, I get it. Your e-mail boxes are over-flowing with residents' complaints about garbage, about potholes, about not enough ice rinks in the city. But you know what? Those fall into the category of the short-term thinking that got us here.

We, all of us, need to have the courage to say, "Stop it for a moment." We need to shift our focus to 'What will the impact of our decisions today, have on future generations?'. I've already spoken to Council about thinking, not in 20 years, or 50 years, but using the Indigenous wisdom of 'seven generations'. In seven generations, 200 years or so, hurricanes, drought, floods, war, famine, will all probably hit Burlington. What will we construct today that will help future generations to Adapt?

We need to acknowledge the things that we've done wrong, but also what we did right to respond to disasters. We can adapt to a rapidly changing environment. COVID taught us that. Will we heed that lesson?

Biologically speaking, adaptation is "a change or the process of change by which an organism, or species becomes better suited to its environment". Not us trying to change the environment to suit our needs.

We are heading down the train track and no one's got their hands on the brake. Here's an example. And it is in no way a slam against Burlington Hydro. Burlington has experienced 33 power outages since January 1 of this year. At this rate, is sixty plus outages acceptable when every house and building could have its own renewable energy source? Is 60 plus outages the new normal that we should expect? Again, I'm not blaming Burlington Hydro – it has to deal with flooding, wind storms, ice build up, drivers knocking down poles, and a few instances of preventative maintenance by the utility. Burlington Hydro is working with a system that was designed in the 1950's, built in the 60's and 70's, and feeding power from a transmission system that was created some 100 years ago. Doomed to fail.

At the same time, we are celebrating 96 EV chargers in our city and federal incentives to purchase electric vehicles. Burlington Hydro is concerned that a time will come when so many people might charge their cars at night, that it will overload the system. I don't agree with that and I am not for one second saying that we should stop the adoption of electric vehicles – but we need to think about the long term consequences of the top-of-mind 'solutions' we are throwing at climate change. We need to

think longer term. We are already failing at electricity transmission designed in the last century. Let's get ahead of this disaster curve. There I go, thinking 'mitigation'. It's hard to turn around the status quo way of thinking. And what I see in this report is too much Mitigation and not enough Adaptation.

The report also talks about setting up the process for a 10-year Action Plan. Sounds exciting doesn't it? First step – analysis and gather information. I could talk a lot about how there is so much information, so many entities that are doing great things, so many examples of how to achieve the goals we need to get to, but I'm going to use a nature-based analogy. Trees.

Trees have been around for centuries. They have withstood fire, flooding, drought, invasive species, not to mention clear cutting so that we could build our homes and sit around a cozy campfire. Trees are probably the best example of how we can live a long, healthy life.

We know that trees communicate with each other through their root systems. Their relationship with other flora and fauna is well known. Trees provide shelter and food. They protect against erosion. They've been called "the lungs of the planet". And even in death, they share their bounty with other creatures long after they have fallen down.

Let's turn to humans and trees. Say 50 years ago, a home owner (who by the way no longer lives in that house) wanted to beautify their property and planted a sprig of a tree. Today, the existing home owner is stuck with a tree that is clearly in the wrong place, probably overgrown, too close to the house or perhaps interfering with hydro lines, the house's foundation or water pipes. We tend to choose saplings based on the aesthetics, or cost, or whatever the nursery has in stock.

The City's Forestry department did a survey recently and discovered that a large number of trees in the urban forest were non-native, and an abundance of them were from one species – which invites invasive species or insects such as the Emerald Ash Borer or Spongy Moths. Fortunately, Forestry has learned a lesson and is diversifying, and planting more native species of trees.

Take-aways:

- Don't be lulled into complacency with aspirations and buzzwords.
- Give all City staff adequate training in first aid and disaster relief.
- Empower employees to assist and support the rest of the community, be it disaster, physical condition, mental health situation, knowing what to do and where to go in an emergency.
- Create more heating and cooling stations, and emergency shelters.
- Make floodplain maps easily accessible and support Conservation Halton's program and frequency of new maps created.
- Instill a long-term vision in City staff, residents, local employees that we need to work together, support each other, for the common good.
- Work with developers, the largest group of game-changers, to build better, more equitably, and with robust safety features – additional stair egress, adequate fire protection and services.
- Recognize that disaster could happen at any time, in any location, and know how to respond.
- Learn to fail, more safely.

Hoping for the best and preparing for the worst is good advice. Preparing for the worst and hoping we don't need it, may be better.