



### **Sustainability is Not Your Enemy**

You've probably read about the hullabaloo over Plan 20-50 -- A Regional Growth Plan for The Winnipeg Metropolitan Region (WMR). What you may not have heard are the details of that plan and why it's been the subject of heated debate.

So, let me lay it out. The WMR, with Winnipeg at its centre, includes a ring of 17 municipalities that encircle the city. Plan 2050 aims to encourage greater co-operation between those municipalities to ensure sustainable economic growth, the building of complete communities with easily accessible amenities – things like grocery stores, clinics and seniors residences - and long-term planning on land use and infrastructure.

It also includes, among other goals, the protection of municipal farmland and regional natural assets. The latter being the wetlands, grasslands and forests that sustain myriad species, are essential to the protection of our water supply and air quality and act as essential buffers to the mounting threat of climate-driven extreme weather.

Sounds pretty good, right? Well, as it turns out, there may be a downside. As one interested party explained it, the plan seems predicated on the belief that all development - whether suburban housing, road building or shopping malls - is a good thing. There's no mention of developers taking responsibility for the roads connecting their developments to Winnipeg, for example, thus placing further pressure on an already wildly overburdened city road budget.

Concern has also been expressed about the financial, jurisdictional and accountability structure of the body that will oversee the implementation of Plan-2050. The municipality of Selkirk, for example, doesn't want a regional body with the power to override local decisions or their climate action plan, one of the best in the country.

But while those concerns are legitimate, there's another group calling itself Concerned Citizens Canada that wants to scuttle Plan 2050 for a very different set of reasons. Which is why they claimed victory when Premier Kinew announced that any municipality in the WMR could opt out of the plan.

So who is Concerned Citizens Canada (CCC) and what do they believe?

Well, according to their Facebook page, CCC members believe that UN calls for sustainable local development are an international plot to deprive of them of their freedom and the "Canadian way of life." They also believe Plan-2050 is a blueprint to create 15 minute cities, the purpose of which, according to them, is not make their communities more liveable, but a conspiracy to monitor individual carbon outputs, deny them the right to their single family dwellings and farms as well as their freedom to drive gas-fueled trucks and SUVs.

There are also posts suggesting that immigrants are indiscriminately killing white people, and Elon Musk is speaking the truth when he says anti-hate laws in the UK are stricter than those pertaining to child pornography.



United Nation's 17 goals for sustainable development

But don't be tempted to write them off as passive armchair conspiracy theorists.

Concerned Citizens has links to trucker convoy supporter, Maggie Braun, and groups like KICLEI, Kicking the International Council Out of Local Environmental Initiatives. KICLEI wants, among other things, to keep Canadian municipalities out of a global network of more than 2500 local governments committed to sustainable development.

And they're far from passive. Just this July, a town in the Niagara region caved-in to Braun, and other climate denialists, and withdrew from a national partnership to reduce fossil fuel emissions. The City of Edmonton was so bombarded by KICLEI-style disinformation that they added a new paragraph to their regional planning document stating that their district plan was: "not about restricting movement, monitoring people or tracking an individual's carbon emissions."

And after watching a KICLEI video, I can see why people are buying in. The climate denialism is soft-pedalled, and the claims about a global anti-freedom conspiracy, underpinning calls for sustainability, sound almost plausible.

But they're dead wrong.

We live on a planet with finite resources, experiencing the most rapid global climate change to occur in 250 million years. To tackle that, local governments need, wherever and however possible, to act cooperatively, and yes, sustainably, on things like infrastructure, land use and environmental protection to ensure a climate safe future for our grandkids.

So, to the 600 "Concerned Citizens" in Niverville who shut down a public hearing on Plan 2050 and CCC groups in other municipalities, I'd say this:

You are not immune from climate change. And when rejecting a sustainable lifestyle leads to catastrophic water shortages, when out of control, climate-driven forests fires, floods or drought destroy your town and everything you've worked for, you'll only have yourself and your conspiracies to blame.

As to the rest of us? We need to ditch our complacency and defend our right to a sustainable future.

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