

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

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Number Eighteen, February 24, 2020

## IN MY HUMBLE OPINION: OWEN SOUND COUNCIL GIVES LESSON IN COWARDICE

At its meeting of February 10, the Owen Sound Municipal Council reversed its earlier decision to hire a Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Coordinator – someone who could have helped the city to embed climate action in its strategic and official plans. By a five to four vote (with Mayor Ian Boddy casting the deciding vote), Council passed a motion put forward by Councillor Marion Koepke to delay implementing this position until the Council better understands this permanent position and investigates sharing the employee with another municipality – or finds an alternative to hiring someone for the position.

On February 18 Mayor Boddy, speaking on a CFOS Open Line program, defended the decision using several exotic species of logic that best belong in a rhetorical zoo. Confusing sobriety with a coma, Boddy told CFOS, *“And in sober second thought we looked at it and went ‘well, what else is going on?’”*

Mayor Boddy says the Council backed down because of “loud and clear” push-back from residents – who don't seem to have been concerned enough to form a delegation to council. The only “loud and clear” heard by the public so far has come from the voices of citizens concerned enough about climate change to make presentations to Council in public sessions. Yet having raised the spectre of unnamed “loud and clear” voices in the CFOS interview, Boddy discounts community voices altogether by saying *“We know what's going on to a lot more depth than the public does”* and *“If we only do what everyone tells us to do, that's not leadership”*. It sounds like only one kind of voice matters to Boddy – voices that say what he wants to hear.

Boddy attempts to further dilute an organized public voice from the community by saying:

*“There are so many people in that group that were from West Grey, that were from Chatsworth, that were from outside of Owen Sound coming in and demanding that Owen Sound must do something and you know, they're not necessarily taxpayers so should we be listening to people outside the community?”*

The last time your Dear Editor heard this argument made with such ignorant clarity was during the Civil Rights era, when local Southern officials dismissed citizen protests on the grounds that the protests were fomented by “outside agitators”. **Declaration:** I am an “outsider” from Grey Highlands who attended two Owen Sound Council meetings in support of delegations concerned about climate change. As an outsider I was very much in the minority (keep in mind that some outsiders work and shop in Owen Sound, and pay a disproportionate part of the county portion of their municipal taxes to support services and jobs there).

The Owen Sound Council has responded positively to none of these public “loud and clear” voices that made presentations to Council:

- Council chose not to declare a climate emergency or crisis, even though as a coastal and riverside city it is more vulnerable to anticipated extreme weather events than thousands of other municipalities across the world that did see fit to prudently make such declarations.
- Council decided not to create a climate advisory group, saying that it would be hiring a Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Coordinator who would provide advice, so an advisory group would be unnecessary.

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

---

Number Eighteen, February 24, 2020

Consider, dear reader, the Orwellian double-speak of Owen Sound's current position:

- **"We don't need a climate advisory committee because we will have a Climate Coordinator to advise us"**
- **"But we're not going to hire a Climate Coordinator"**.

Owen Sounders concerned about climate change have shown great flexibility. It was not a group of citizens that dreamed up the idea of a hired Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Coordinator. That idea came from the City Manager. But since their own suggestions had been rejected by Council, concerned citizens embraced the one initiative the City had chosen – the hiring of a Coordinator. This led to a bizarre spectacle on February 10: a delegation of concerned citizens defending (through questions to Council) an initiative that wasn't their idea in the first place, while Council tore down that same initiative that was their idea in the first place.

But there was a bright side to the Council meeting. Four Council members out of nine voted against the motion to delay. Some of them spoke passionately and with logic against the delay. In the next issue of **The Village Green** we'll tell you a bit about these far-visioned Owen Sound elected officials.

Most members of Owen Sound Council don't want to hear the voices of their climate-concerned citizens, but there is no reason why those voices should be muted – and Owen Sounders have at least two upcoming opportunities for "loud and clear" voices to be heard yet again (and perhaps heeded):

- As part of its Official Plan Update, the city has created a short on-line survey to provide input on Owen Sound's growth and development vision for the future. The survey closes on March 31 and can be accessed at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/OwenSoundOP>. It would help if you, every friend, neighbor and lover you've ever had, and every relative, completed the questionnaire from the perspective of climate and environmental concern.
- A Community Engagement Session for the Owen Sound 20-year Official Plan Review will be held on **March 2 at 4:30 pm** at the Harry Lumley Bayshore Community Centre, 1900 3rd Avenue East in Owen Sound. **The more climatoids there, the better.**

## CLIMATE CHANGE & HUMAN RIGHTS EVENT TO BE HELD IN THORNBURY

Amnesty International, Group 82, in association with the Blue Mountains Climate Action Now Network, will host a community session on March 8 entitled **Climate Change & Human Rights: Two Sides of the Same Coin!** The event, held to celebrate International Women's Day, will be held **from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm on Sunday March 8** at the L. E. Shore Library at 173 Bruce Street South in Thornbury. All are welcome

It will include remarks by Sonja Klinsky, Associate Professor at the School of Sustainability, Arizona State University and Senior Sustainability Scientist at the Julie Ann Wrigley Global Institute of Sustainability. Professor Klinsky's work centres around the justice dilemmas presented by climate change and climate change policy design. She has been an observer to the UN framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations since 2009. Our readers from The Blue Mountains tell us she's a great speaker!

The event will also involve a showing of a TED Talk with Greta Thunberg, and information on climate action in and around The Blue Mountains.

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

---

Number Eighteen, February 24, 2020

## COLLINGWOOD CLIMATE ACTION TEAM WILL HOLD SPRING, FALL FAIRS

Despite all seriousness of environmental and climate action, The Collingwood Climate Action Team (CCAT) thinks we can have fun too as we learn and connect. Thanks to a \$1,500 grant and an in-kind donation from the Town of Collingwood, the Collingwood CAT will host two Down to Earth learning events – one this spring and another in the fall – to promote sustainability and environmental consciousness and to motivate positive change. The Spring event will be on **Sunday April 19**, coinciding with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day (April 22).

By highlighting local sustainable and progressive businesses, groups and individuals, these free fairs will help people answer two questions: **“What can I do to live a sustainable life – and how can I do it?”** There will be lots of opportunities interact with others and to ask questions, get answers from experts and learn about the community’s many resources.

The last issue of **The Village Green** profiled the Collingwood CAT’s *Carbon Conversations* initiative. We’re glad to report that volunteers from Collingwood, Blue Mountains, Owen Sound, and Georgian Bluffs are being trained to lead six-part community discussions this spring on looking for a low carbon future, energy at home, transportation and travel, food and water, and consumption and waste reduction. We’ll let you know when workshop dates are established.

The Collingwood CAT’s next full meeting will be on **Tuesday March 10 at 7 pm** on the 3rd floor of the Collingwood Library. You can keep track of CCAT activities at [www.collingwoodaction.com](http://www.collingwoodaction.com) and via Facebook (Collingwoodclimateactionteam) and Instagram (collingwoodclimateaction).

## CLIMATE ACTION TEAM BGOS AND GREY BRUCE SUSTAINABILITY NETWORK WILL HOST CLIMATE MUSICAL

Would you like to be entertained and educated, and support climate action groups at the same time? Then songwriter and activist James Gordon’s *Emergency Climate Musical* is for you! It’s his new ninety-minute environmental one-person show with 20 songs, projected images, videos, stories, rants, a creepy puppet, audience participation and an exploration of concrete ways to face the climate crisis – and it’s a fundraising partnership with Climate Action Team BGOS and Grey Bruce Sustainability Network.

The musical is on **Thursday, April 16 at 7:30 pm** (doors open at 7:00) at the Harmony Centre, 890 4th Ave East in Owen Sound.

Before the 2015 federal election, James Gordon barnstormed his way across the country with his hugely successful one-man show *Stephen Harper: the Musical*. Now he’s back with his *Emergency Climate Musical*, investigating the most important issue of our uncertain times.

As a solo singer-songwriter and with the trio Tamarack, Gordon has released over forty albums and has toured the world. He has written for symphony orchestras, musical theatre and dance works, film scores, and for more than ten years he was CBC radio’s songwriter-in-residence for the *Basic Black* and *Ontario Morning* programs.

Gordon is also a City Councillor in Guelph, where he has introduced climate change motions, and he’s a member of the National Climate Leadership Caucus. More information on his stellar career is at [www.jamesgordon.ca](http://www.jamesgordon.ca).

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

---

Number Eighteen, February 24, 2020

## ARTISTS CALL FOR REAL CLIMATE ACTION

James Gordon is part of a burgeoning climate action movement within Canada's artistic communities. One focal point for this action is the organization **Artists for Real Climate Action** (ARCA), a non-partisan group of Canadian actors, filmmakers, musicians, playwrights, graphic designers, directors, digital marketing folks, all sounding the alarm over our climate crisis. Says the ARCA website at <https://www.thisisnotadrill.ca/>:

*"Get out in the streets. Call your MP. Talk to your neighbours, your kids, parents. Share our videos. Make your own. Share your climate action art with us on our ARCA FB Group. Make a sign. Be noisy. Be ubiquitous. Because this is not a drill. It is the real thing. And no one is coming to our rescue. It's down to us. Use your voice. We need to act as though our house is on fire. Because it is."*

A collection of short videos made by ARCA members as part of the lead-up to last October's federal election is on YouTube at [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoYRZt\\_KFCk2dPuHYxfR9eg/videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoYRZt_KFCk2dPuHYxfR9eg/videos). Two rants by Marg Delahunty are highlights of the collection.

## DRINK AND DREAM IN OWEN SOUND

Just a reminder that **Pints for the Planet** (or "Booze for the Blue Ball" if you'd like) is a gathering held at 5:00 pm on the last Thursday of each month at Owen Sound's Mudtown Station for folks interested in climate issues. It's sponsored by the Bruce Grey Owen Sound Climate Action Team. Join kindred spirits for music, quaffs, questions and noble quests at the **Pints for the Planet** "Let's Dream Together" gathering at Mudtown on February 27 at 5.

## AMAZON FOUNDER COMMITS 10 BILLION TO CLIMATE ACTION

Jeff Bezos, Amazon's chief executive and the world's richest man, has committed us\$10 billion of his own money to address the climate crisis in an initiative called the Bezos Earth Fund. It will fund scientists, activists and nongovernmental organizations, starting this summer. Says Bezos:

*"Climate change is the biggest threat to our planet. I want to work alongside others both to amplify known ways and to explore new ways of fighting the devastating impact of climate change on this planet we all share."*

In September, Bezos said Amazon would meet the goals of the Paris climate agreement 10 years ahead of schedule, becoming carbon-neutral by 2040. He also said Amazon would buy 100,000 electric delivery trucks. In that same month, Amazon said it emitted about 44.4 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> in 2018, the equivalent of burning 600,000 tanker trucks' worth of gasoline.

Bezos is a latecomer to climate action. Amazon employees have spoken publicly and staged protests (even in the face of company retaliation) about the need for Amazon to reduce its carbon footprint. Responding to Bezos' funding announcement, the group Amazon Employees for Climate Justice applauded his commitment but said:

*"One hand cannot give what the other is taking away. The people of Earth need to know: When is Amazon going to stop helping oil and gas companies ravage Earth with still more oil and gas wells? When is Amazon going to stop funding climate-denying think tanks like the Competitive Enterprise Institute and climate-delaying policy?"*

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

---

Number Eighteen, February 24, 2020

## MICROSOFT SAYS IT WILL WIPE OUT ALL ITS EMISSIONS, EVER

In mid-January Microsoft pledged to remove all the carbon it has ever emitted into the atmosphere since it was founded in 1975. It promises to become carbon-negative by 2030. To do this, the company and its supply chain will reduce emissions and also remove carbon from the atmosphere, eliminating nearly 10 million tonnes of the gas per year to make it carbon-negative.

In addition to using 100% renewable energy and electric vehicles, Microsoft aims to use afforestation and reforestation, soil carbon sequestration, bioenergy with carbon capture and storage, and direct air capture of CO<sub>2</sub>.

Skeptics doubt Microsoft can achieve its ambitious goal because many technologies needed to meet its target won't be commercially viable for several years. Microsoft says it will invest us\$1 billion over the next four years in new and existing carbon removal technology.

## GREENWASHING VILLAINS

We're likely to hear a lot more about "greenwashing" in the coming year as companies stretch the truth to appear more environmentally friendly than they are (do you remember the British Petroleum ads after the company's disastrous Gulf of Mexico oil spill that tried to brand BP as "Beyond Petroleum"?).

A February 9 article in *The Guardian* identified five companies that had ads banned by the UK's Advertising Standards Authority for greenwashing. One that should interest Canadians: In a 2008 ad, Shell Oil described a Canadian tar sands project, involving the strip-mining of 140,000 square kilometres of Alberta, and the construction of the world's largest oil refinery in Texas, as "sustainable". Said ASA:

*"Because we had not seen data that showed how Shell was effectively managing carbon emissions from its oil sands projects in order to limit climate change, we concluded that the ad was misleading."*

Meanwhile BP has announced that it will become a "net zero" company, meaning that it plans to reduce emissions from all company operations to net zero. That includes emissions from things like gas flaring at the wellhead, company cars and the electricity it uses to run its operations. While this sounds good, the fossil fuels it produces through its net zero operations will remain far from net zero (a little like a company that produces poisons agreeing to use no poisons in its factory). BP would do a bigger favor to the environment if it promised to never again pay a lobbyist to lobby governments on behalf of the fossil fuel industry.

## J. P. MORGAN BANK ISSUES CLIMATE WARNING

In a stark report to J. P. Morgan Chase's investment clients, economists for the bank David Mackie and Jessica Murray have said that without action being taken on climate change, "We cannot rule out catastrophic outcomes where human life as we know it is threatened." They said carbon emissions in the coming decades "will continue to affect the climate for centuries to come in a way that is likely to be irreversible." Climate change could affect economic growth, shares, health, and how long people live, the economists said. They added that climate change

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

---

Number Eighteen, February 24, 2020

could put stresses on water, cause famine, cause people to be displaced or migrate, cause political stress and conflict, and could hit biodiversity and species survival.

The report ends on a gloomy note by saying that cutting net carbon emissions to zero by 2050 will require a global tax on carbon, but that *"this is not going to happen anytime soon... It is a global problem but no global solution is in sight."*

The bank said the research team was wholly independent from the company as a whole.

Climate activists have previously criticized JP Morgan Chase for its investments in fossil fuels.

## INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE TALKS GREEN

The Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), not noted in the past as a climate champion, appears to be a convert. On December 5 its Secretary General John W. H. Denton sent a letter to the world's finance ministers pushing for concerted policy actions *"in support of sustainable development and bold climate action."* Said Denton, *"sustainable finance remains a market exception at a moment in history when people and our planet require it to be the norm."*

Among Denton's suggestions:

- Sustainability-related risks and objectives should be added to the mandates of the world's central banks, because their focus on financial stability *"can no longer be separated from sustainable-development imperatives"*.
- Climate risks should be included in the risk-management policies of financial institutions.
- The estimated us\$100 billion of "dormant" assets (left behind when financial institutions lose contact with the assets' owners) should be unlocked and invested in UN Sustainable Development Goals projects.
- Incentives should be created for green projects by promoting sustainable-finance partnerships and public-private investments.

## ANTARCTIC GLACIER AT RISK

Using a robotic submarine, scientists have looked underneath Thwaites Glacier, a massive and increasingly unstable ice formation on the edge of Antarctica. This research indicates that warm water from the deep ocean is welling up from three directions and mixing underneath the glacier. Says glaciologist Erin Pettit, *"Thwaites has got these three guns pointed right at it."* The finding has increased fears that the glacier might collapse, which could raise global sea levels by more than half a metre.

## POPE FRANCIS CONDEMNS AMAZON'S DEFILERS

Pope Francis, hailed by many as the "ecological pope" after his encyclical '*Laudato Si', On Care For Our Common Home*' was published, has written *Querida Amazonia* (Beloved Amazon), released by the Vatican on February 12. The document, called an "apostolic exhortation" in the language of the Catholic Church, condemns wanton exploitation in the Amazon basin:

*"The beloved Amazon region stands before the world in all its splendor, its drama and its mystery... The businesses, national or international, which harm the Amazon and fail to respect the right of the original peoples to the land and its boundaries, and to self-determination and prior consent, should be called for what they are: injustice and crime..."*

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

---

Number Eighteen, February 24, 2020

*I dream of an Amazon region that can jealously preserve its overwhelming natural beauty and the super-abundant life teeming in its rivers and forests... The inescapable truth is that, as things stand, this way of treating the Amazon territory spells the end for so much life, for so much beauty, even though people would like to keep thinking that nothing is happening."*

José Gregorio Díaz Mirabal, coordinator for the Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon, reacted to *Querida Amazonia* by calling Francis "a powerful ally, this valiant Pope" in addressing the complete of governments in destroying Latin American forests:

*"Throughout the rainforests of Latin America, we are battling governments that treat us like criminals for saying no to projects that would dam our rivers, carve roads of ruin through our forests and turn our land into lifeless deserts and our rivers into liquid poison."*

Some people within and beyond the Catholic church have criticized Pope Francis for not including in *Querida Amazonia* detailed proposals for achieving the ideals in the document. Others fault him for not also agreeing with a request from Catholic officials in Amazonia to allow married men to become priests, given the shortage of priests in Amazonia. .

The full English text of *Querida Amazonia* is at

[http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20200202\\_querida-amazonia.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html).

## MEXICO CITY PARK WILL BE HUGE

Mexico City is built on what was one of the most productive wetlands in North America. Today its buildings sink into unstable soil that is at risk of liquefaction during earthquakes, it is prone to flooding and it endures massive lingering air pollution because of its position in a bowl surrounded by mountains.

But Mexico City is doing something to turn back the clock a bit. It is constructing the **Parque Ecológico Lago de Texcoco**, covering 12,300 hectares (30,394 acres) and stretching 16 kilometres from end to end. The park will be more than twice the size of Manhattan, much of it seasonal wetlands.

The park could help reverse historical disruptions to the region's water systems. Spanish conquistadors drained the valley's lakes after they took over the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan where Mexico City now sits. This forced Mexico centuries later to construct hundreds of miles of pipes to bring in 30% of the city's water and to pump the rest from an underground aquifer. The city now pumps water out of that aquifer twice as fast as water returns via rainfall.

Says Mexico City architect Iñaki Echeverría, executive director of the park project:

*"The problem is we cannot turn 500 years of history and go 180 degrees overnight," Very few times you are offered the possibility that can have an impact that can really change things. If we manage to do this, it changes the direction of the history of the city and the valley."*

The park will lie in the basin of former Lake Texcoco, which dried as Mexico City expanded. The area is uninhabited due to annual flooding. The park will restore most of the area to its former state, including rejuvenating lakes that were drained, as well as wetland areas. It merges the concepts of public spaces and green infrastructure, providing hiking trails, sports courts and lakes for recreation, while bringing back the lakes to rebalance the Valley of Mexico's water system. That includes routing stormwater runoff into the wetlands and replenishing aquifers.

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

---

Number Eighteen, February 24, 2020

## FAITH CLIMATE ACTION WEEK: FOR THE LOVE OF TREES

This year, Faith Climate Action Week – sponsored by thirteen Muslim, Jewish, Christian and inter-faith organizations in the U.S. – runs from April 17 to 26. This year's theme is "For the Love of Trees". Congregations across North America will use the week to plant, bless, learn about and care for trees, aided by a Faith Week Action Kit sent to interested congregations by the climate-focused faith organization Interfaith Light and Power (which also maintains a U.S.-wide list of Climate Action Week events at <https://www.faithclimateactionweek.org/>).

Despite well-founded cautions against viewing tree-planting as a climate action cure-all, trees remain a powerful and beloved symbol of the natural world. Using this symbol without distorting it may well be an ongoing challenge for the environmental/climate movement. Tree-planting is becoming increasingly politicized now that Donald Trump has announced tree-planting as a priority in his recently announced U.S. budget proposal (while he continues to wreck the world's environment). House Republicans have proposed planting 3.3 billion trees over the next 30 years as a carbon-cutting measure, and Trump himself has promised a one trillion tree program. This initiative could absorb up to 205 gigatons of carbon emissions but it would take decades for the trees to mature – too late to make much difference to the looming global heating crisis.

## MEAFORD TO SCREEN RENOWNED TREE FILM

As a visual pre-spring tonic, all are invited to watch the documentary ***Call of the Forest: The Forgotten Wisdom of Trees*** at Christ Church (Anglican), 34 Boucher Street, Meaford at 7:00 pm on Tuesday February 25.

A discussion will follow the film, which follows scientist, conservationist and author Diana Beresford-Kroeger on her journey to the most beautiful forests of the northern hemisphere – from the sacred sugi and cedar forests of Japan, the ancient Raheen Wood of Ireland, the walnut and redwood trees of America, to the great boreal forest of Canada.

## CARBON EMISSIONS FROM ENERGY FLATTENED IN 2019

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), global energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions "flattened" in 2019, after two years of increases. The flattening resulted from greater use of renewable energy and an increasing shift from coal to gas.

IEA said electricity generation produced around 33 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> last year, despite forecasts that emissions from power would continue their upward trend. IEA also said that emissions from coal, the most polluting fossil fuel, fell nearly 200 million tonnes, around 1.3% below 2018 levels. This was largely offset by increases in emissions from oil and natural gas.

Overall, developed nations saw their emissions fall, while emissions from developing nations grew. Nearly 80% of that increase came from Asia, despite slowing growth in China and India.

But flat-lining isn't good enough, said Michael Mann, director of Penn State University's Earth and Environmental Systems Institute. *"We need to bring emissions down by about 10% a year for the next decade if there is any hope of keeping warming below the 1.5C danger threshold,"* said Mann.



# THE VILLAGE GREEN

---

Number Eighteen, February 24, 2020

## U.S. POLLS SLAM TRUMP ON CLIMATE

Trump has tried to ignore climate change, first calling it an outright hoax perpetrated by China, then arguing it is a natural cycle that will return to its normal state. But for the past year polls show a trend: climate change is Trump's most unpopular position, outranking health care, immigration and foreign policy in the race for lowest marks.

In July a Washington Post-ABC News poll found Trump's lowest rating was on climate, with 29% approving and 62% disapproving (the widest spread in the poll). An August survey from the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs found that 64% of the 1,058 people surveyed disapproved of his record on climate, and 32% approved – the lowest approval level among six issue areas that the poll asked about, including immigration (38%) and health care (37%).” the AP reported.

A Politico/Morning Consult poll released in late January, during Trump's impeachment trial, asked 2,000 voters about his performance on issues ranging from jobs, the economy and terrorism to trade, climate, immigration, foreign relations, health care, and draining the swamp. Voters were least impressed with climate action. A majority – 54% – gave Trump a D or F, while just 21% gave him an A or B.

Not surprisingly, Democrats think climate action is important and think Trump is doing bad job dealing with it. Some Republicans think he's doing a bad job with it too, but they are less likely than Dems to consider this to be a crucial issue. However, in climate-vulnerable states like Florida and North Carolina, climate issues rank higher with people of all political stripes.

The results of a mid-January Pew Centre poll released last week show that for the first time in the survey's two-decade history, a majority of Americans (52%) said dealing with climate change should be a top priority for the president and Congress – a 14 percentage point rise from four years ago. As well, 64% said protecting the environment should be a top policy priority. In this poll as in others, there is a massive disparity between Democrats and Republicans. The Pew poll, like others, also continues to show the disparity in priorities between young adults and older ones – with young folks significantly more concerned about the twin issues of the environment and climate change. When asked what should be top priorities for Trump and Congress, the top five priorities for adults age 18 to 39 were the environment (77%), education (74%), the economy (66%), and health care costs and climate change (both at 61%). The top five priorities for those 65 and over were terrorism (81%), social security (74%), health care costs (73%), crime (68%) and immigration (65%).

The American Conservation Coalition, a group representing younger conservatives, has done its own polling of 1,000 conservative voters across the U.S. under age 35 that shows that 77% said climate change was important to them and that they want to see more solutions from their party.

While concern about climate change is growing (albeit modestly) among Republicans – and among conservatives generally across the world – the solutions that concerned Republicans / conservatives espouse tend to be solutions that are too weak (by not quickly and deeply tackling carbon emissions for instance), and that take too long to bear fruit (putting faith in not-yet-developed technologies for removing and sequestering atmospheric carbon for instance).

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

---

Number Eighteen, February 24, 2020

## UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH STUDENTS STAGE CLIMATE SIT-IN

On February 21 about 40 University of Pittsburgh (“Pitt”) students and their allies began what they call an “indefinite occupation” of the University’s Cathedral of Learning, demanding that the University divest fossil fuel investments from its \$4.3 billion endowment. They brought sleeping bags and other provisions for a multi-day protest. Some held signs that read “*Pitt Funds Climate Violence*” and “*We’re Still Here. Ask Us Why.*”

Discussions at Pitt about climate change and university investing practices date back a decade and led to a five-year campaign by the Fossil Free Pitt Coalition, a group of campus organizations.

The sit-in comes a week ahead of a Pitt board of trustees meeting during which members are expected to consider establishing a policy for socially responsible investing but are not expected to vote to divest — the core demand of the Fossil Free Pitt Coalition.

## BLOCK-FED GRAVITY TO GENERATE POWER?

We’ve covered TC Energy’s proposal to create gravity-produced electricity near Meaford by pumping water uphill from Georgian Bay using electricity at off-peak hours, then letting it flow back through turbines when electricity is most needed. Such water-based projects run into environmental snags, but the same principle can be used without needing hills or water. Instead, it uses a crane and heavy blocks to create the equivalent of a storage battery, without the cost of complex battery farms with short life spans.

Switzerland and California-based company Energy Vault envisages cranes that would stack heavy blocks weighing 35 tonnes made from recycled concrete in piles up to the height of a 35 storey building using off-peak electricity. When electricity is needed the cranes would lower the blocks at exactly the speed needed to provide electricity continuously. Complex software would let the system gauge when to switch from storing power to creating power and how to lower the blocks to maximize smooth power generation. This system wouldn’t rely on lithium storage batteries: lithium mining uses huge amounts of water and risks toxic leaks.

Energy Vault has secured funding to develop its idea and has built a small prototype of the device in a Swiss town. The first customer to signal its intention to buy a scaled-up system from Energy Vault is the giant Indian electric utility Tata Power.

If the system were to prove workable, would we need a hill (the Niagara Escarpment) and water (Georgian Bay) to generate power through gravity?

## CHINA LEADS BIODIVERSITY PUSH

In Issue #11, *The Village Green* described the Chinese concept of “the ecological civilization” (“shēngtài wénmíng” in Chinese), a concept the country doesn’t always live up to in practice. But China does seem to value its natural spaces and claims to esteem the flora and fauna inhabiting those spaces.

It now has a chance to live up to that claim. Nearly 200 countries have gathered in Rome to develop a major plan to stem the precipitous decline in biodiversity across the world.

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

Number Eighteen, February 24, 2020

The summit was scheduled to be held in the Chinese city of Kunming but it was relocated because of the coronavirus epidemic. China is expected to take a prominent role. The negotiations will set the stage for the 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Kunming in October, which China will also host, marking the first time the nation will lead global talks on the environment. An accord to be signed at Kunming in October will replace the current accord, signed in 2010. Ecosystems are vanishing rapidly, and close to one million plant and animal species face extinction.

Countries have largely failed to meet the 2020 deadline for the current CBD goals, such as preventing species extinctions and ensuring that all fish stocks are harvested sustainably.

China has made progress on environmental issues, giving its diplomats some clout. The Chinese central government has established thousands of nature reserves and parks and it is drawing up ecological “red lines” to restrict human and industrial activity over about one-quarter of the country. But it has also had high-profile failures. Last December scientists said the giant paddlefish in the Yangtze river was extinct, and no Yangtze river dolphin has been seen since 2002. China also has a less than stellar record of respecting environments in other countries where it does business. It imports large amounts of environmentally damaging products such as palm oil which contributes to deforestation in tropical countries like Indonesia. As well, much of the world’s illicit wildlife trade seems to be driven by Chinese demand for traditional medicines and delicacies.

## GONE

***“In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping,  
and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children,  
and would not be comforted,  
because they are not.”***

Matthew 2:18 (1611 King James Version)

Malabar civet Japanese Sea Lion Pemberton's Deer Mouse Alaotra Grebe Central rock rat Pinta Tortoise Formosan Clouded Leopard Caribbean Monk Seal Anthony's Woodrat Liverpool Pigeon West African Black Rhinoceros Darwin's Galapagos Mouse little Earth hutia Saudi Gazelle Christmas Island Pipistrelle Candango Mouse Madagascar Hippopotamus Puebla deer mouse Yangtze River Dolphin Japanese River Otter Lord Howe long-eared bat Lake Mackay Hare-Wallaby Forest Ox White-Tipped Stick-Nest Rat Vanikoro flying fox Desert Rat-Kangaroo Indefatigable Galapagos Mouse Montane monkey-faced bat Tasmanian Tiger Toolache Wallaby Desert Bandicoot Lesser Bilby Christmas Island shrew Pig-Footed Bandicoot Crescent Nailtail Wallaby De Winton's golden mole Red-Bellied Gracile Opossum New Zealand greater short-tailed bat San Martín Island Woodrat Nullarbor Dwarf Bettong Yemen Gazelle Bramble Cay Melomys Puerto Rican Hutia Gould's Mouse Little Swan Island Hutia Blue-Gray Mouse Bunker's Woodrat Guam Flying Fox Schomburgk's Deer Garrido's hutia Wimmer's shrew Wondiwoi tree-kangaroo Zuniga's dark rice rat Dwarf hutia Gloomy tube-nosed bat Angel Island mouse elefomin cuscus Aru flying fox Emma's giant rat Bouvier's red colobus.....

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

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Number Eighteen, February 24, 2020

## OUR READERS KNOW A THING OR TWO

Aer reader vastly more computer literate than your beloved Editor has drawn our attention to an app that allows folks to better calculate their personal and family carbon footprint. The app, called North, automatically calculates the climate impact of your daily choices by connecting to apps and services you already use. The app is available at <https://north-app.com/>.

North was developed by a company called Tomorrow that describes its mission this way:

*“The global economy is in the midst of the most profound transformation in history. The move to a low-carbon future will require insights about the climate impact of every decision we make. Tomorrow’s mission is to power this transition by getting the world to understand and reduce their carbon footprint.”*

Tomorrow’s web site includes a blog at <https://www.tmrow.com/blog> and a clear and thorough climate change primer (*Climate Change: A Pragmatic Guide*) at <https://www.tmrow.com/climatechange>.

## HUMAN-CAUSED ATMOSPHERIC METHANE MORE THAN PREVIOUS ESTIMATES

Research published in Nature last week indicates that human-caused methane emissions from the fossil fuel industry may have been “severely underestimated”. Researchers who examined ice core samples from Greenland and Antarctica suggest that natural emissions of fossil methane that seep out of the ground are a much smaller proportion of total methane emissions than previously thought. This means that the levels of fossil methane in the atmosphere are likely being driven by methane escaping from extraction and transportation of coal, oil and natural gas (leaky wells and pipelines for instance).

If emissions come from fossil fuel production rather than hard-to-stop natural processes, enactment of regulations to force fossil fuel industries to reduce methane emissions will significantly decrease atmospheric methane.

## FACTS THAT HELP YOU CHANGE THE WORLD

The top five U. S. coal companies have declared bankruptcy since 2016. Apple is bigger than all the oil and gas companies on the S&P 500 combined, largely because they’ve earned negative returns over the last decade, even after accounting for dividends. Fossil fuel companies are suffering because the alternatives are cleaner and cheaper. Two-thirds of earth’s population now live in countries in which wind or solar are the lowest-cost ways of generating power.

source: *Corporate Knights* “clean capitalism” newsletter, February 13, 2020

Only 9% of all the plastic waste ever created has been recycled. In 2019, the Food Packaging Forum (FPF), a Switzerland-based not-for-profit focused on the science behind food packaging, compiled a database of more than 900 chemicals “likely” associated with plastic food packaging production worldwide and another 3,400 “possibly” used. Of those 4,300 chemicals, 60% did not have any available hazard data. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s standards rely on manufacturers to determine the safety of any chemicals used across the food system.

source: *The Guardian*, February 13, 2020

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

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Number Eighteen, February 24, 2020

By 2050, if the world continues on its current path, the global economy could lose us\$327 billion annually from the loss of natural coastal protection from coral reefs, mangrove forests and other natural systems. Another us\$128 billion could be lost annually from forests and peatlands that store carbon. Agriculture could lose us\$15 billion from lost pollinators and us\$19 billion from reduced water availability. The ten economies worst affected by nature loss by 2050 (measured as % reduction in national annual GDP) would be Madagascar, Togo, Vietnam, Mozambique, Uruguay, Sri Lanka, Singapore, New Zealand, Oman and Portugal.

source: *Global Futures Report*, World Wildlife Fund, February 2020  
[https://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/global\\_futures\\_technical\\_report.pdf](https://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/global_futures_technical_report.pdf)

## SHE SAID / HE SAID

***“This is the decade in which, contrary to everything humanity has experienced before, we have everything in our power. We have the capital, the technology, the policies. And we have the scientific knowledge to understand that we have to half our emissions by 2030...***

***But we can only choose it this decade. Our parents did not have this choice, because they didn't have the capital, technologies and understanding. And for our children, it will be too late. So this is the decade and we are the generation.”***

Christiana Figueres, founder of the Global Optimism group  
and head of the UN climate change convention  
when the Paris agreement was negotiated

***“On the short drive home from the hardware store, I contemplated the cashier's idea of a self-terrorizing city. I'd already recognized that my fellow New Orleanians and I lived in a self-terrorizing state. Louisiana sits at or near the bottom of national rankings related to education, health care, crime, and infrastructure. New Orleans monetizes what it can. The marketing of our culture has led to a crush of tourism and a heavy reliance on low-paying service-industry jobs, reinforcing our legacy of racism and poverty and stressing our already precarious built environment. In 2018, 46 tons of toxic Mardi Gras beads were extracted from the drainage system that's supposed to keep our streets from filling up like the canals of Venice. Meanwhile, half of our city's children attend schools whose quality is rated by the state as either D or F...***

***A community that genuinely cares about itself does not just let problems fester.”***

Anne Gisleson, *New Orleans Needs a Better Way to Do Mardi Gras*.  
The Atlantic, February 20, 2012

***“I am convinced that a community-called-beloved is possible. This is an admittedly fragile possibility, but it is not a utopian dream. I believe that people of good will harbor a persistent hope that our planet can be a place of belonging for all its inhabitants.”***

Dr. Barbara Holmes

***“One of my images of God is that of Grandmother, the wise old Native woman with gray hair and eyes as ancient as the Earth. She takes my face gently in her hands and holds me in Her gaze as She tells me what She thinks I need to know, forming the words slowly so I can remember them and let them sink in.”***

elder of the Choctaw Nation and retired Episcopal bishop Steven Charleston

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

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Number Eighteen, February 24, 2020

***“I dream of an Amazon region that fights for the rights of the poor, the original peoples and the least of our brothers and sisters, where their voices can be heard and their dignity advanced.***

***I dream of an Amazon region that can preserve its distinctive cultural riches, where the beauty of our humanity shines forth in so many varied ways.***

***I dream of an Amazon region that can jealously preserve its overwhelming natural beauty and the superabundant life teeming in its rivers and forests.***

***I dream of Christian communities capable of generous commitment, incarnate in the Amazon region, and giving the Church new faces with Amazonian features.”***

Pope Francis, *Querida Amazonia*, February 2020

**Hello! Light the fire!  
I'll bring inside  
a lovely bright ball of snow**

Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694)

**For information about *The Village Green*, or to subscribe to it (free),  
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