



SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS: PROSPECTS FOR A JUST TRANSITION IN CALGARY, CANADA'S PETRO-CITY

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Authors

Noel Keough

Given that we present this book as a work of reflective practice, it is important to say a few words about our personal narratives. My early adulthood and first career as a drilling engineer working for a multinational oil and gas company was marked by a foggy but discomfiting disenchantment with the technocratic status quo. My second career was in the field of international development, where my critical stance to the world was formed by experiences in post-revolution Nicaragua, in the Philippines after Ferdinand Marcos, and in the Middle East during the ongoing conflict in the region. Eventually, my attention turned back to my own community, where I engaged with issues of urban sustainability, first as a citizen activist and then as an academic. My sense of urgency about the ecological crisis was awakened by my witness to poverty, social injustice, and ecological devastation in countries of the Global South. It was solidified by my recognition that these issues are of a kind with the ecological, social, and economic devastation wrought in Newfoundland (where I was born and raised) with the collapse of the North Atlantic cod fishery and the closure of that fishery in 1992. Having been directly affected by the 2013 Calgary flood (my entire community flooded, with six feet of water in our basement), I also feel a visceral sense of urgency to address the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change through a sustainability transition in Alberta in both my city, Calgary, and my neighbourhood of Sunnyside.

Geoff Ghitler

Like Noel, I did not come to the study of urban systems in a straight line. My first training was in physical geography with a specialty in remote sensing. Essentially, I used computer algorithms to decipher satellite data of the earth with the goal of finding “hotspots” of biological diversity.

Identifying the sorts of habitat to which fauna is attracted is an essential first step in protecting both common and at-risk species. After ten years of public and private practice, I returned to university to do a doctorate based on two realizations: first, “good data” does not by itself bring about “good practice,” and second, the mechanics and evolution of biological systems like the forests that I studied apply generally to all sorts of systems, including cities. The scenarios described in this book reflect a broad sampling of the sorts of issues that, only when addressed together as a system, work to create sustainable places. As a species, we are socially and technically equipped to move forward and to bring with us, as we go, an environment that can properly and abundantly sustain us. But we are not on that pathway. The only true constraint to developing cities sustainably is political.

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