

# Island municipalities need a fair share

By James Fletcher and Doug McArthur

Small towns and cities on Vancouver Island are in trouble.

The present model of local government financing simply doesn't work, and indeed, it can't work.

Over the past 32 years, successive provincial governments have chipped away at transfer payments, leaving local governments with little choice but to cut services and increase taxes. It also ended the provincial role of ensuring less well off communities can provide services comparable to the rest.

Compounding the problem is the massive economic transition underway in our province – one marked by the decline of high-value industries such as forestry. Only 10 years ago forestry contributed directly and indirectly to over 35 percent of the annual income and wealth generation in BC. It is now well below 10 percent. Likewise, 10 years ago forestry contributed close to \$3 billion in revenues to the province. Today, the figure is less than \$500 million.

For many towns the result has been a shrinking tax base as businesses close and workers leave. Small, resource-based towns are hit especially hard.

The results have been predictable – large corporations and small businesses alike are demanding tax breaks, well aware that their competitors benefit from more favourable tax regimes elsewhere.

Residents in Port Alberni saw their tax bills jump by 23.6 percent last year when Catalyst Paper refused to pay its taxes. The story in Campbell River, Crofton and Powell River is similar with residents paying higher taxes and receiving fewer services in order to make up for the tax revenue withheld by Catalyst Paper.

Shifting the tax burden from business to residents and driving up user charges increases the burden on residential property owners, takes money out of consumers' pockets, and ultimately, does not solve the real problem.

The need for a new model of local government financing is becoming more urgent with each passing year.

For the past year we have studied this issue, and have recently released a paper titled *Local Prosperity: Options for Municipal Revenue Growth in British Columbia*.

We argue that local governments in BC are far too dependent on property taxes and property-related user charges. In the past 10 years, municipalities have imposed a more

rapidly-growing burden of taxes and goods and service charges on local taxpayers than the provincial government placed on provincial taxpayers – a burden that is 52 percent higher.

The solution? BC's municipalities need access to a much broader range of revenue sources.

In our report, we propose dozens of new revenue generating ideas and promising economic development concepts.

The Capital Regional District's Hartland Landfill gas utilization project is an example of how local government can upgrade its existing infrastructure to generate new revenue. By capturing and burning the methane gas generated by the landfill, the \$2.8 million project generates 1.6 MW of electricity, enough to power 1,600 homes. This project also reduces greenhouse gas emissions and earns royalties for the CRD.

Nanaimo's sewage treatment plant has also been recently upgraded. Instead of flaring excess methane gas the regional district has installed a new cogeneration system that will be used to create electricity to be sold to BC Hydro.

Elsewhere in the province, Revelstoke provides a great example of how waste wood from the local mill can be used to fuel a district heating system and generate revenue for the city. In another example, Dawson Creek played an important role in helping to establish the Peace Energy Cooperative. This producer co-op helps small-scale electricity producers sell their power to larger distributors.

Local procurement policies and import substitution strategies can help to create markets for locally produced goods and services and reduce the need for more expensive imports.

But in order to take advantage of opportunities for economic diversification, small towns need a fair share of the tax revenues that are already generated in their communities.

This will require the provincial government to increase transfers, as well as broaden the revenue tools available to local governments.

Change is needed if smaller communities on Vancouver Island are to continue to offer a high quality of life and economic opportunities for the next generation.

To read our discussion paper visit: [www.thinkcity.ca/localprosperity](http://www.thinkcity.ca/localprosperity)

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and their grave markers are in photos in the book.

A piece of Canadian history that did not make it into our Canadian schools' curriculum!.

**PEOPLE OF THE LAKES, Translated Stories of the Elders**, Shirleen Smith, Editor, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA PRESS.

This is a giant of a book. It encompasses maps, photos, and stories of the peoples who occupy Northern Yukon to the shores of the Beaufort Sea. It is indeed the land of lakes (Canada has more lakes than the rest of the planet's countries). The sketches of tribal dress date back to 1848.

This book is a wonderful study of the people who had to put up with the arrival of white migrants from Europe!

**WILD HORSES**, by R. McLennan, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA PRESS

Some years ago I joined the Wild Horse Society and canoed up the Spirit River, north of Jasper, and viewed the wild bands. Later I visited the roundup results of the Nevada roundup. They took in 5,000, put 50 in each corral, put up a mound for the stallions. They dutifully took turns to stand on it.

With this back ground I welcome the chance to review *WILD HORSES*. It's a lively bit of romance, savoury but sans equines!

--Ron MacIsaac

Update:

## Say “No!” to Female Genital Mutilation

By Diane Walsh

VICTORIA -- Female Genital Mutilation is a heinous crime still perpetrated against girls. On February 6 throughout the day, the entire world community was asked to chant a resounding “No!” in unison with all activists against female genital mutilation.

As this was the date marking the 8<sup>th</sup> International Day on Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation, collectively, it was a time when we could honour the global concerted efforts which rarely get media attention, but which represent both practical and existential struggles against FGM tradition practice.

Since February 6 fell on a Sunday, the UN-sponsored meeting, backed by the World Health Organization, took place in Geneva on Monday, February 7, at 9 am at “Le Centre International de Conférences” (CICG).

It has been a long wait, from many activists' point of view. But it is encouraging news as the proud two-pronged theme for 2011 has finally emerged: “Building Bridges between Europe and Africa”, with emphasis on “engaging media” and “engaging governments”, which is an indispensable factor to being able to reach zero tolerance to FGM.

The Inter-African Committee, which was scheduled to take the floor at Monday's Geneva meeting, issuing this statement, in advance, from IAC Addis Ababa, Ethiopia:

“The objective of celebrating February 6 is to call International, Regional, National and Community attention to the efforts needed to free women and girls from the adverse tradition of female genital mutilation and to accelerate action towards its total elimination.

“Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a violation of basic human rights principles, as stipulated in Article 24.3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), other International and Regional instruments, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights Relating to the Rights of Women in Africa, (Article 5) and the African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, 2004.”

The main actors on the anti-FGM front have traditionally been The Inter-African Committee, UNFPA, The UN Refugee Agency and UNICEF, and so it makes sense that these organizations/“branches” of the UN were designated hosts for the meeting. Formal media were represented as well, including Afromedianet. Equally, and European Network-FGM.

This signals to the whole world that concrete genuine steps are being taken to solidify the resources for anti-FGM initiative, within, government.

For far too long FGM has been pushed under the carpet. That's been the sentiment of many activists who have struggled to raise awareness over more than 40 years. Things are different now. For the first time in history chief world actors alongside prominent activists have agreed to band together. The work of all anti-FGM organizations has also been emboldened by the enthusiasm of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon stating unequivocally a UN-commitment to gender equality in September 2010 in New York.

Coupled with that, we've seen the emergence of UN Women on the scene, with its new website out in January 2011. Of course the work of impressive former president of Chile Michelle Bachelet, who Ban Ki-moon appointed Executive Director/ Under-Secretary General of UN Women, allows for a different climate to flourish. This year's International Day is significant in that the overall strategy is being upped in part as a result of UN Women putting weight behind the anti-FGM cause.

The formidable contribution of The AHA Foundation; No Peace without Justice, Ban FGM and FGM NETWORK are obvious central keys as well to the current and overall political fervour galvanizing support behind ending the practice around the world.

Furthermore, TOSTAN out of Senegal; The Orchid Project [Davos winner] with ongoing endorsement from Nick Kristof of the NYT; and The Waris Dirie Foundation are core developing partnerships with the same common goal of eradication. Equally UNICEF operates in tandem with the mandate

of Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices, whose personnel then work with several NGOs on the ground in Africa e.g. New Vision and Reach. By no means is this above list exhaustive.

Moreover, the commitment to eradicate FGM is exemplified by current initiatives taken place at a high-governmental level, both nationally and internationally. These include a global Appeal to Ban FGM world-wide, underscoring efforts to bring forth an actual UN Resolution into the UN General Assembly at some point in the near future. This would seek a ban on the practice of female genital mutilation world-wide and would carry the weight of international law against torture behind it and along with it the lofty goal to make the UN Resolution— ultimately—the 9<sup>th</sup> of the 8 Millennium Goals.

There is reason to have hope. A draft copy resolution is in the works, spearheaded by the Inter-African Committee, a giant in the anti-FGM movement. As currently endorsed by UN headquarters in Geneva, Donor Working Group and Global Alliance against FGM, a German-Canadian group now operational out of Geneva, we're seeing several federating efforts.

Using knowledge-sharing, a global portal is being developed with the aim to centralize all FGM-based resources, in addition to providing a vehicle for monitoring situations on the ground and immediate media-outreach. It will be a one-stop click to enable readers to view all resources pooled around FGM in one website.

In addition, with the ability to add to it, it will be possible to mobilize and communicate strategies between Europe, Africa [and the Middle East in due course] and allow for new partnerships, evolving every day, to be posted.

There is neither danger, nor contradiction, in the varying approaches to eradicating FGM which include legal, political and cultural. These can include but are not limited to strategies helping communities with unlearning harmful-to-girl cultural theory methodologies; sensitization and education; alternative employment measures for excisors—many different ways to fight FGM—but always complementary.

There are reports of successful law enforcement and arrest of excisors—making the criminalization of FGM an accepted paradigm and an integral part of an overall sensitization strategy. In Geneva, ambassadors from Burkina Faso, Egypt, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Kenya, Ethiopia will be heard speaking at session.

Those African delegations to the UN who opposed this movement going forward at the UN September 2010 New York conference have been successfully marginalized, in part on account of the tremendous unification of mobilization efforts agreed upon by the aforementioned plethora of organizations working on the front-line.

Importantly 2011 is a synchronization of strategies between Europe and Africa. It is only through world-wide awareness of the ongoing existence of FGM that true eradication can begin to take place.

If you know something, get in touch. It only takes a tweet or email or a FB post to get involved. Know that excisors practising FGM or those condoning or lending credence and supporting babies, little girls and women's genitals being sliced amidst societies of fear, coercion, and confusion are under watchful eye. The future can and will be better. If you see FGM happening, speak out. Don't be a witness and do nothing.

Diane Walsh, MA, is an investigative journalist based in the Pacific Northwest. She contributes to new media outlets, newspapers which by some miracle haven't gone under, and magazines in the US, Canada and Europe.

## Ron reviews:

**INUVALUIT NAUTCHIANGIT, Relationships between People and Plants**, by R. Badringa & Inuit Elders, contact email [ICRC@IRC.INUVALUIT.COM](mailto:ICRC@IRC.INUVALUIT.COM)

This outstanding book (10 years in the making) with its marvellous photos, brings the Arctic into brilliant perspective. It displays how the resident Inuit lived, and explodes the common perspectives of barren lands and inhospitable terrain.

The study *Election Chill Effect* is [available at www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca).  
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