

Misinformation mars interchange project

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Guest Comment Denise Blackwell

Re: "The power of protest," Think About It, Dec. 19, 2007.

In his Dec. 19 column, G.E. Mortimer attempted to portray the Spencer Road Interchange protesters as a noble lot in the same league as the peaceful warriors of India and Bolivia. Mr. Mortimer characterizes their protest as a benign offence. He further goes on to describe the site of the interchange as being comprised of rare biological habitat and sacred native sites. This is simply not true.

The protesters have every right to protest but with the right to protest, I believe our citizens have the right to expect a measure of civility, integrity and honesty, not to mention respect for the community.

The protesters' approach in our community is characterized by misinformation, profoundly offensive behaviour and damaging actions. For example, the protesters have repeatedly handed out information pamphlets which are full of misleading information.

They indicate that the Langford taxpayers will be paying for the interchange. In fact, of the \$32-million project, the province will be paying \$4.9 million with the rest being picked up through developer contributions or development cost charges which they have already paid to Langford.

The same information pamphlet suggests that Goldstream River is somehow threatened by the interchange. In fact, the interchange does not drain directly into Goldstream River. Only a small amount of the interchange is located within the Goldstream River watershed and gets there slowly and indirectly through Langford Lake and ultimately to Goldstream River. The City insists on having storm water treated through bio-swales and storm water detention ponds as a matter of standard practice.

The protesters information pamphlets suggest that trailer park residents are going to be displaced. The fact is that no trailers are impacted by the interchange. An additional point of misinformation is that the protesters are attempting to characterize the interchange as being solely for Bear Mountain. In fact the interchange is for the community.

Ultimately, upon full build out, Bear Mountain residents may comprise approximately 20 per cent of the use of interchange. The area south of the TransCanada Highway will comprise 60 per cent of the use and remaining 25 per cent per cent will service areas north of the TransCanada Highway.

Removing the at-grade Spencer Road intersection improves the public safety for our community accessing and crossing the Trans-Canada Highway.

The protesters have done their best to be as offensive as possible. They have muddied the walls and washrooms in the City Hall and defaced both a map and the guestbook. During the New Years Levee they attempted to take plants from City Hall without permission.

Their actions go beyond these relatively minor offences to poaching deer and rabbits in the area and notwithstanding their stated desire to save the forest, their occupation of the forest is causing significant damage in the forest ecosystem and their continued use of spikes to climb the trees will, we are advised, kill the trees that they are purporting to save.

The interchange itself has been the long range plan of the Ministry of Transportation for well over 10 years now. It is supported by our official community plan and has been discussed in many open council meetings over the years.

With respect to the specific location of the interchange, that was identified through a very long process working with the Ministry of Transportation to ensure that it was located in an area that satisfied public safety standards for highways, as well as minimizing any environmental impact.

Langford has completed an environmental overview as well as species-at-risk surveys by qualified and reputable environmental firms and their studies indicate that the interchange does not impact any species-at-risk, there is minimal environmental impact and there are no rare ecosystems impacted. To that end, the interchange was specifically relocated in order to save a cave on the south side of the highway and the interchange has always been located in a way to ensure that it does not damage Spencer's Pond in any significant way.

The community needs the interchange, not only from a public safety point of view but also from the point of view of ensuring our transportation system works well. This in no way means that we rely only on highways.

In fact, the City of Langford is a principal proponent in advocating the development of a commuter rail system in the region. Further, we have a rapidly developing bicycle network and an award winning trail network.

However, notwithstanding all of these efforts, some efficiency and safety improvements such as this Spencer Road Interchange is necessary for our community. One has to only think about the growing traffic delays occurring on Millstream Road and Veterans Memorial Parkway to see how necessary the overpass is.

—Denise Blackwell is a Langford councillor and chair of the Capital Regional District board.