**Creating One Planet Communities for the 21st Century: It starts with Conversations**

**Dr. Trevor Hancock, Retired Professor of Public Health, Victoria BC, CANADA and one of the founders of the global Healthy Cities and Communities movement**

The fundamental challenge we face together is how we live well, with high levels of human development and good health for all, within the limitations of this one small planet that is our home. Currently, high-income countries have ecological footprints of between 3 and 5 planet’s worth of biocapacity, and many other countries - such as Malaysia – aspire to be high-income countries. Clearly, this is unsustainable, and there is growing evidence that we are reaching or even passing the planet’s ecological boundaries as we enter the Anthropocene.

This will have serious implications for the health and – more broadly – the overall human development of the population. Moreover, the impacts on human development and health will be unequally distributed, with poor and disadvantaged communities – both within and between countries – feeling the worst impact; again, this is already apparent. A key implication of this is that we can no longer afford the luxury of treating ecological and socio-economic systems as independent entities; rather, we need to understand and manage our world as a complex eco-social system.

While there is no question that high-income countries bear a particular responsibility, in that historically they account for much of the impact, and continue to do so, we are all in this together. So while high-income countries will have to reduce their ecological footprints by 65 – 80% or more, middle-income countries need to find ways to achieve high levels of health and human development for all without simply repeating the development patterns of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Instead – and with the assistance of the high-income countries - they must leap into 21st century forms of ecologically sustainable and socially just human development. Indeed, since they are closer to a ‘One Planet’ way of life and have newer infrastructure, they well may be in a position to provide advice and guidance to high-income countries. Low-income countries, meanwhile, need economic development and growth – but again, in a manner fit for the 21st century, and must look to both high and middle-income countries for support in doing so.

What is clear is that our current social and economic path – which has led to this immense challenge - is not fit for purpose. So we need a transformative change in our current social and economic systems, and in the cultural values and social norms that underlie that system.

Cities and city-regions are and must be leaders

I firmly believe that cities already are and must continue to be leaders in this vitally important task. For one thing – and this is a very important point – cities do not measure progress in terms of GDP growth, as national and state/provincial governments tend to do. Instead, they have a more sophisticated understanding of the purpose of government and the process of governance, which

is – or should be – to prioritise human development and quality of life over economic development. Indeed, cities have often been well ahead of national governments, whether it is taking on tobacco use or climate change, and I am sure will continue to do so.

The challenge I will pose – one that I am working on in my own community through a group we call *Conversations for a One Planet Region* – is to become ‘One Planet Cities’; places that have a high quality of life and good health for all while living within the limits of our home planet. Meeting this challenge will require the full and genuine participation and engagement of all sectors of the city – public, private, community and NGO, youth and schools, seniors, academic, faith and other partners must learn to work together for the common good of the people as well as the planet.

Learn – Discuss – Imagine – Design – Create

We take the view that right now communities are not even talking about the massive global ecological changes that constitute the Anthropocene, or the implications of those changes for our entire way of life and for future generations; to the extent that we are, we are focused almost exclusively on climate change. So we start with Conversations, which are free, open to anyone and held in the evening in the public library.

We only use local speakers and leaders, since we believe we have the expertise, experience and leadership we need in our own community – although we are aware of and try to be informed about the many examples from elsewhere that we can use and adapt to our need. (We hope soon to webcast these Conversations so we can have speakers from other places in our community, and they can gather in their own neighbourhoods and have their own conversations following the presentations.)

Our presentations are deliberately wide-ranging, addressing more than the obvious issues – energy, transportation, housing, urban design, water supply, waste management, food supply and so on. We have discussed the role of the arts and of faith communities in creating a One Planet Region, what sort of economic and education systems we will need and how to manage cities and regions as urban eco-social systems. And we focus less on defining the problem and more on presenting and discussing potential solutions.

Once we begin to understand the challenges we face and the potential solutions available to us, we need to begin to imagine it, before we can design and create it. We have some thoughts about developing a region-wide, community-based multi-year charette to design a One Planet Region, linked to advanced systems modelling in an iterative process.

This year, we are hoping to begin to reach out to municipal councils to provide some basic information and ideas about the long-term challenges they need to be considering, beyond climate change. We also hope to educate and train groups of citizens – especially young people - so that they can appear at municipal council meetings to support policies, programs, plans and proposals that move us towards being a One Planet Region – and oppose those that do not. And we have thoughts about a conference/trade fair/film festival and other ways of advancing this vital agenda.