



rRemarks Data for March 21, 2023 Village Council Meeting

Agenda Section: Active

Agenda Item: A. RES 2023-9884 A resolution endorsing the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus' Greenest Region Compact.

Commenter: David Rose

Comment: What, pray tell, is the purpose of voting on a resolution to 'endorse' the GRC when a majority of the current council seats is up for a vote in the 04 April election?

If the resolution is approved by the current council, does it have any formal impact on the next council? Not to my knowledge. Even if it did, ...

What is the purpose of 'endorsing' the GRC when the scope of alternatives conveyed by such an endorsement is so broad that endorsement is basically meaningless?

Why would anyone vote against the resolution? "I'm AGAINST being 'environmentally friendly'?" Where's the resolution to endorse motherhood and apple pie?

Furthermore, NONE of the options described include JOINING the compact, a step heretofore anathema to CC Barnett and VCs of which he has been a member.

Or is 'endorse' DG code for 'join' or 'kinda join'?

So what's really the point of the resolution?

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Comment: Comment on GRC report and associated comments

PART 1

For anyone following VC closely, member comments on the GRC report yielded a perfect score with the report serving as a rorschach test of where each member stands on the political spectrum.

With what may seem to be two exceptions, CC Barnett and CIW Hose.

Both feigned an openness to the GRC, an idea each has vehemently resisted in the past. Since both are political animals and lead from the rear of the parade (aka want to be re-elected), such 'openness' is not all that surprising. Would CC be so 'open' to the idea were he running unopposed, were he not facing an opponent who favors DG joining the GRC and reviving the ECC? We'll never know.

But the historical evidence is clear: neither CC nor CIW during their lengthy tenures on VC has taken ANY initiative to raise the idea of either joining the GRC OR of empowering the ECC. As I noted in my e-remark of 07 Feb, one of CC's first acts as CC was to shut down the ECC's nascent effort to re-examine its role and operations. And no one on VC said boo about that edict ... until now.

That Village Manager (VM) takes pride in being staff to the HSC while ECC sits dormant speaks volumes about his priorities and knowledge as well.

Of course, VM's ignorance is self-evident since he is the source of the bastardized definition of ENV5 VC persists in deluding itself with: "green its services when possible." Textbook adulteration.

And now with the new report of 07 Mar, we see the splendor of not only the lipstick on this pig but the complete, decked-out ball gown embellishing the bastardized definition.

As with the State of the Village report, more LDLAS. Or what VC characterizes as "all the great things DG is already doing" to show its concern about the environment.

DOES DG CARE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT?

In his public comment Mr Lerner of the PDHA thanked Comm S-F for putting the item on the agenda.

I happened to attend a PDHA meeting that took place right around the time S-F took office. PDHA had invited her to attend its meeting in order to give S-F and PDHA members an opportunity to introduce themselves to each other.

So should we be thrilled a mere four years later, S-F brings the item forward? And Lerner applauds it on behalf of PDHA, saying “it’s been a long time coming”?

What has PDHA been doing since that get-acquainted meeting to prod actions it is now claiming to support?

Former Comm Earl and departing Comm K are to my knowledge card-carrying members of PDHA. Where was their leadership promoting joining GRC and resisting neutering/killing ECC?

Pillar of the community Gordon Goodman is a longtime member of PDHA. He affirmed to PDHA at meetings I attended years ago my assessment ECC has been a joke. Did PDHA then voice its concern to VC and push against ECC’s dormancy? Not that I saw.

Shortly before things shut down with the pandemic, a group called the DG Clean Energy Task Force (led by Vera Miller) tried to generate interest in promoting clean energy in DG. To my knowledge, it was the only environmental group operating in DG at the time.

VC encouraged/tolerated task force members’ input on identifying enviro friendly traits VC consider for the new village hall. Then the pandemic hit, stopping everyone in their tracks.

A Facebook page suggests Miller continues to promote solar energy in various ways, but as far as I can tell neither she nor her group has pushed to reverse CC’s clampdown of the ECC or push for DG to join GRC.

Her Facebook page suggests she remains a believer, in spite of my pointing out to her group, as I have done to VC and others, that so-called renewable energy relies on non-renewable resources. Which begs the obvious question for believers/promoters of ‘clean energy’ (wind, solar, wave): Does ‘clean energy’ scale from its currently low single-digit proportion of total energy consumed to replacing non-“clean energy” (fossil fuels) and nuclear? The unfortunate answer, which promoters/believers refuse to accept, is “no.” (More on this point below.)

In the last few months Louise Kelly has spoken several times to VC. I gather she and some friends have taken steps to start up a new group to push for more environmentally

friendly actions in DG, including joining the GRC and resuscitating the ECC. Their/its impact remains to be seen.

Should we be encouraged by candidate Schmitt's support for GRC and ECC? Compared to CC Barnett's long and dismal track record, it's easy to believe Schmitt will be a major improvement.

The caveat however is that neither Schmitt's professional expertise nor his past civic involvement gives much indication what that support might mean once he is in office. Indeed, his corporate affiliation suggests he too would tread carefully in order to avoid damaging personal professional repercussions.

Further, unless the next VC is comprised of members also wanting to change direction from past VCs' attitudes and behaviors on ENVS, Schmitt's individual preferences will not matter much.

Thus, unless Schmitt and the next VC are willing to go beyond the bastardized definition and the notion that "friendly" — whatever THAT is supposed to mean — is the best DG can do, my critical comments on ENVS over these past years will stand.

If by 'environment' the next VC means simply the space defined by the municipal boundaries of the village, it will simply join the chorus of past VCs singing self-praise of DG.

Residents of DG want to protect the space in which they live.

Are they much concerned about the impact their way of living has beyond those boundaries? Not from what I see.

Certainly not enough to address the fundamental question I keep raising that VCs keep ignoring:

when the way of living in DG, in the region, in IL, and in the US is NOT ENVS, what is to be done?

Clinging to its bastardized definition, VC refuses to address my question.

Of course, in political life, leaders do that sort of thing all the time.

And because I have no political movement or group behind me, I'm easy to ignore.

But my reason for continuing to press the issue, as I have noted previously, is that I am not the final arbiter here.

ENVS is a rate of resource consumption issue. Whether people like it or not. Whether they use and understand the phrase properly or not.

Which is to say ENVS is ultimately a political economic issue, not simply some kind of earth sciences, biological sciences, or technology issue.

If a society consumes resources at an unsustainable rate, it will by definition be forced at some juncture to change and lower its consumption until the two align. I'm still waiting for someone to explain to me how we get around that reality.

Talking about being 'friendly' in this context is not only self-deluding, it's self-destructive.

What is a 'friendly' rate of resource consumption? We're going to consume resources at a "friendly rate when possible?" "When possible?" You're either consuming at a sustainable rate or you aren't. And the longer you consume at an unsustainable rate, the worse the predicament you create for yourself.

History is replete with examples of societies large and small unable to recognize this reality and avert its consequences.

Nature doesn't care.

That is the test humanity faces today. Can we recognize this reality and change course with as little additional devastation and death as possible?

Thus far, the all-too-obvious tragic answer is NO. Including here in DG.

ASSESSING VC's GRC REPORT — MORE LDLAS

Now we know from everything we see around us these days that people are very good at deluding themselves, at ignoring any- and every-thing they don't want to hear or see. That is another part of the reason ENVS is such a huge political economic problem.

Both public and VC comments applauding the report as evidence DG is already doing so much is a textbook example of such self-delusion.

As is often the case in American government, when the standard is too high the solution to achieving it is to lower the standard.

I see the GRC criteria as a lowering of standards. Why? For the two kinds of manifestations discussed below.

DOING SOMETHING = "SUCCESS"

Is the GRC set of criteria a useful basis by which to gauge a town's actual performance?

By my take, only if one has the lowest of bars for measuring. As the VC report's use of the GRC criteria substantiates.

For we see here again as we saw in the SoTV report — aka LDLAS (lies, damned lies, and statistics) report — government's self-assessment uses the metric that ANY action on any item is deemed a success, an achievement.

Or as the old saw goes, "Good enough for government work." Meaning good enough for government officials to claim they are doing something. Since "doing something is better than doing nothing."

Aka "best practices" ... "when possible" aka "to the extent we're willing (and able) to pay." "Best practices" tend to be 'demonstration projects' designed to launder the civic conscience but typically fail to scale due to high actual financial cost or high perceived opportunity cost.

"Doing something" = "success" is analogous to claiming "run" = "fit." As though the capacity to run any distance — 5 yards, 10 yards, 20 yards — is deemed evidence of fitness.

It's a Lake Wobegon-like mentality, a fanciful place where as Garrison Keillor used to say, "all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above-average."

In a democracy, government's usual standard of accomplishment is defined as that which is "politically acceptable"/"politically achievable." And/or allows government officials to make favorable comparisons to one's self-assigned peers, as CC did in highlighting DG's tree canopy, or to one's past.

[Kudos to Schmitt — see his 12 Mar Facebook page entry (link on marshallformayor dot com) — for looking into the details of the tree canopy data and pointing out that matters are NOT quite as CC portrayed them. Gee, there’s a surprise.]

The whole GRC report enumerates ‘successes’ under the canopy of the bastardized definition.

Which merely conveys that government uses the currently faddish term “sustainable” to lump almost everything municipal government does (other than perhaps policing) as something contributing to its bastardized definition of ENVIS.

One might as well be debating how many angels dance on the head of a pin.

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PART 2

FAILING BIG TIME ON THE METRICS THAT MATTER

The bigger problem is the GRC report’s sleight-of-hand.

Specifically, the VC’s report illustrates how lowering the standard by changing criteria and/or multiplying the number of criteria yields ‘successes’ that in fact hide failure.

All the window dressing distracts from the metric that purportedly really matters, the variable on which DG and all current members of GRC are failing miserably: greenhouse gas emissions.

Has DG reduced its GHG emissions? Has ANY member of the GRC done so? Have the members as a group done so? “No,” “I doubt it,” and “almost certainly not,” respectively.

Does DG even know what its emissions are? By the report’s own admission, NO!!!!

What is the point of EVERYTHING else the report claims to be doing when you are NOT measuring and NOT lowering GHG emissions? THAT is supposedly the main objective of the compact.

Furthermore, ...

What really needs to be measured is the rate of consumption of resources of all types, most importantly energy-slaves — the BTUs of energy of all types — of one's way of living.

With the objective of lowering the rate to one that is sustainable.

And there, as I keep saying, is the rub ...

when by definition the vast majority of the energy-slaves we use (or hope to use, in the case of renewable energy) relies on non-renewable resources, resources whose supply we deplete by definition when we use them!

Unless and until you measure that, and until you reduce rate of resource consumption to a sustainable one, you are headed for social and societal collapse.

Embedded within that requirement is the additional need to equalize the rate of energy-slave consumption across social classes, a monumental challenge given the degree of inequality that exists both within and between nations.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Besides depleting the supply of a nonrenewable resource by mining it for human use, historical data shows the quality of the remaining non-renewable resource declines as supply is mined; it seems to be a reality that applies across metals generally.

Those familiar with the discussion of petroleum supplies know the acronym EROEI, energy return on energy investment. The fabulous increase in standards of living after WWII in the rich nations of the world was made possible because the EROEI of petroleum mining was spectacular for a period of time. It has been declining. Discussion of 'peak oil' tried to call attention to the implications of that moment in history when EROEI of oil stops being positive!

“Ore grade” refers to the amount of a metal retrieved relative to the quantity of material in which it is embedded — tons of rock mined and refined to yield X number of pounds of the desired metal. Because the grade of remaining supply of metal declines as its supply is mined, the return on investment in a materials sense declines not just for oil but for metals generally.

Which creates a HUGE problem both for techno optimists pushing for renewable energy and for fossil fuel devotees: the EROEI of energy mining declines as the demand for energy (slaves) rises for those used to mine the metals needed for producing energy (slaves), whether they consume renewable or non-renewable energy!

Which begs three related questions:

- 1) If increasingly more material and energy — energy-slaves — are needed just to produce energy and material, how many energy-slaves will be available for people to use for their personal work, life, and recreational needs?
- 2) how, when, and in what sector(s) of its economy facing this reality of mining does a society reduce GHG emissions to the level targeted to avoid worsening climate chaos?
- 3) understanding productivity as output per energy-slave-amplified hour of work, how do companies in an economy whose supply of energy-slaves is shrinking pay their debts?

Do you see the problem(s) here? What’s the work-around?

Which suggests absent international cooperation and massively reduced consumption by the rich, the global economy is likely entering an extended period of chronic inflation thanks to the past unwillingness/refusal to analyze return on investment from a materials standpoint. The fallout will not be pretty.

All of which underpins why I keep asking:

Is capitalism compatible with ENVIS?

Is democracy?

Is relentless pursuit of economic growth?

If you can't rely on growth to solve social problems, including the objective of providing everyone with means to live sufficiently well in terms of material goods, what is to be done?

What does 'development' mean when one confronts the realities of ENVS, that is, the need to use resources sustainably?

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, as a way to evade the issue, some (especially within the economics profession) have tried to sidestep the challenge by replacing 'growth' with the term 'development,' as in "sustainable development."

Given that the term arises within a framework of differentiating between 'developed nations' and 'less developed nations' for example (recognizing at the same time the contrast applies at levels below nations), the term hides the material reality of rich versus poor. That is, "development" implies some kind of notion of the poor becoming less poor.

So how should one interpret 'sustainable' in this effort to become less poor? And what are the rich doing while the poor strive to become less poor?

Most importantly, do the respective rates of 'development' of rich and poor yield a level of system-wide economic activity that consumes resources at a sustainable rate?

The term "development" is also used to convey the possibility of somehow detaching measures of economic performance from consumption of material resources. In effect, to measure economic growth as a mainly qualitative effect, similar to the notion of the 'value' of a house rising even as its traits remain the same. For some years now, this effort has sought to develop indices of societal 'happiness' to replace the metric of GDP. A corollary objective of the effort is to demonstrate people/societies can be happy without attaining high levels and rates of resource consumption.

[Another corollary objective is to differentiate wealth from illth, which a metric such as GDP does NOT do. GDP simply tracks economic activity. When a society mitigates past pollution, for example, the cost of mitigation adds to GDP. Why wasn't the illth avoided in the first place? Ask the capitalist whose profits would have been reduced by doing so.]

What that effort unfortunately leaves unanswered is the question of how to STOP the rich from consuming resources at an unsustainable rate. In effect, the problem is measuring societal happiness when some significant portion of the society — the rich — deem their personal/group/social class happiness increases with increases in social INequality. An attitude which is/becomes grounded in the idea that the happiness of the poor (understood broadly as the non-rich) doesn't matter because they are sub-human. Incapable of 'developing' or 'developing much.' So why should the rich care or bother?

As we witness at both the inter and intra-national level, problems arise when the unsustainable rate of system-wide consumption manifests as a declining standard of living for widening segments of society, individuals and groups who find themselves being left behind, i.e., thrown into the set of people who don't matter.

Which exposes the obvious answer to the question posed above: when the rich refuse to willingly lower their unsustainable rate of consumption, the only option is for everyone else to stop them. Using the means available and necessary.

Which, as I indicated over a year ago to VC, is precisely what underlies the conflict in Ukraine. That objective also underlies the recently announced rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia brokered by China. Both seek to thwart the US continuing to be the globe's premier rentier economy by operating as bankster to the world.

Along with other steps being taken by Russia and China, and India and Iran and the rest of the (non-rich) world, they signal the death knell of US dominance of the post-WWII world. Life in the US is about to become dramatically different.

Forced to operate as a 'normal' nation, will the US embrace a way of living and working that is ENVIS?

Stopping the US and the other rich nations from free-riding the world's peoples and resources is only part of the task, of course.

The over-arching global challenge of ENVIS remains: What international political economic order must the world's peoples build to ensure we consume resources at a sustainable rate WHILE simultaneously ensuring ourselves as individuals and groups our right AND responsibility to develop to our potential?

THE WEAK (NON-EXISTENT?) LINKS OF GRC COOPERATION

So how do the rich and poor work together to achieve a way of living that is ENVIS?

Does the GRC provide guidance?

If one understands GRC as an effort to identify steps local government can take to protect their local physical environment, GRC may be interpreted as a useful working document.

However, If you're a municipality that doesn't have the funds to take the recommended steps, of what value is belonging to the GRC?

Does coordination/cooperation between members carry with it a willingness by the property rich to help the property poor towns? In what ways?

For example, are the towns (such as Harvey, Robbins, and Dixmoor) whose water infrastructure problems have been in the news recently getting help of any kind from their GRC neighbors? If the property poor towns are not members of GRC, are they encouraged to join in order to receive both the professional and financial help it will provide?

I jest of course. Because we saw quite clearly from the example of the K12 education funding legislation IL passed a few years ago: financial support is NEVER forthcoming if it means the property rich towns have to constrain their own spending in order to help the property poor.

Residents of property rich towns have worked hard to exploit residents of property poor towns via the private sector, and they certainly don't want to lower the benefits of that exploitation any more than they have to. [Which means I misspoke above: policing IS part of ENVIS. How else can the property-rich afford their pleasant downtowns and quiet tree-lined neighborhoods?]

Environmental justice be damned.

Environmental sustainability be damned.

So GRC is a compact municipalities join in order to do what ... as a collective?

GRC: A USEFUL COMPACT OR A SELF-SERVING ILLUSION?

As I observed in my e-remark of 07 Feb, like the IPCC's work on reducing CO2 emissions worldwide,

The GRC has NO substantive enforceable meaningful goals!!!

Either individually or collectively!!!

And politically, THAT is deemed part of its appeal!!!

But ...

Only if you have a goal can you then fill in the details of how you are going to reach the goal:

Show me the path,

show me the timeframe,

show me the data!!

Furthermore, a goal relative to one's past — as in "N% less than some prior rate/amount" — does not get the job done. It must be relative to a sustainable rate of operation! Which, it must also be emphasized, is NOT the same as a "sustainable rate of growth," unless one wishes to believe growth is without limit.

Since VC has no substantive enforceable meaningful goals with respect to ENVIS, why would VC hesitate to join GRC? As both VC and GRC are presently constituted, joining or not doesn't change anything in DG!!

Do residents really believe VC's 'green services when possible' articulates a set of goals?

As the report screams: there is

no goal,

no path,

no timeframe,

and “data” is deemed “doing something” that VC defines as “doing something ‘green!’”

But hey, we can console ourselves that all the great work DG is doing to protect its environment is pretty much what everybody else — in the region, in IL, and in the US — is doing.

Which I keep insisting is NOT NEARLY ENOUGH! Not by a long shot.

Because we refuse to define ENVS properly and treat it as a real goal.

Because doing so then demands changing way, way, way too much.

And as everyone knows, the American way of living is not negotiable.

Except, as I argued above, while WE in the US may think that, the rest of the world does not. And the rest of the world is now acting upon their belief.

Which means, sadly ...

THE SHOCK AHEAD FOR THE GOLDEN BILLION

So long as leaders (in the US and around the world) refuse to address the questions raised above, they commit our societies to a path of war and/or self-destruction. Which in our nuclear age should be understood as one and the same if the people living in the rich nations — the ‘Golden Billion’ — refuse to face reality.

SO which is it: Does DG cling to an unsustainable way of living, or does it change course?

Is a resuscitated ECC likely to take up that question? As I indicated previously, CC Barnett killed ECC precisely because he did NOT want the ECC using ENVS to affect in any way his and VC’s continuing push for economic growth. His ignorance and lack of curiosity about the breadth and depth of ENVS as an issue remain steadfast.

Would an ECC under a Schmitt-led VC take up these hard questions? There’s only one way to find out.

Will DG joining the GRC matter? So long as the GRC fails to acknowledge the way of living in the region is NOT ENVS, the answer is “no.”

Constructing a way of living that is ENVS is the core challenge of our time.

If YOU do NOT understand these questions and issues AND YOU make NO effort to try to understand them, then you implicitly (or in some cases, explicitly) number yourself among the rich American portion of the Golden Billion who are more than happy to delude yourself believing you — and your way of living — are not the problem.

Or you do understand the situation and make no effort to change because as a proud member of the rich American portion of the Golden Billion, you are not going to change until the great unwashed lesser billions make you.

On such a set of beliefs is the foundation of collapse and/or conflict laid. As we see all around us.

The contemporary incarnation of building statues on Easter Island. Writ large as a global phenomenon.

Presuming our obdurateness doesn't lead to an exchange of weaponry that ends life as we know it before then.

If DG wants to be a real leader, VC joins the GRC, resuscitates the ECC, and, most importantly, residents finally address the difficult questions I keep asking.

Unfortunately, I see little evidence residents are inclined to undertake that task ... until events in the larger world leave them no choice.

More likely then ...

DG continues the path and tone manifest in VC's report and the self-flattering comments VC and the public made on 07 Mar about the report. In so doing, DG remains true to its culture and history, a village dedicated to staying well behind real leaders. But pleased about all the great things it is doing. Whatever VC decides about joining the GRC and reviving the ECC.

And as with a run on a bank, everything will seem fine ... until it isn't.

And if he is still in office when the SHTF, CIW will surely recite my favorite of his lines: “Who could have seen that coming?”

Agenda Section: Comments of a General Nature

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Comment: What is a banking crisis?

What does it mean to lose confidence in a nation’s banks?

To be blunt, in a capitalist society, it’s a recognition that the nation as a whole has been deluding itself about its well-being, both in the present and in the future, about the way it operates, about the things it takes for granted.

THAT’s why a banking crisis is so dangerous.

But political leaders can’t admit that.

Which is why political leaders work so hard a) to define the crisis as a very specific and ‘narrow’ one — “confidence in the banks” — and b) to assert the crisis is under control — “restore confidence in the banks”.

A banking crisis is at root a crisis of valuation of financial assets within the society.

When a banking crisis is allowed to worsen (by being papered over), as happened with the Great Recession in 2008-09, sorting out the subsequent version is only that much harder. That’s where we are now.

Financial analysts such as John Hussman (hussmanfunds dot com) look at long-term trends in the economy and assess present valuations compared to those long-term trends.

Hussman’s analysis is that for future financial returns on investment to resume trend rates of growth current valuations have to fall quite dramatically.

www.hussmanfunds.com/comment/mc230319/

So whose ox will be gored, as they say?

I contend even more problematic is that presumptions past historical financial trends CAN resume once the bad debt and prices and unprofitable companies are eliminated typically FAIL to assess whether the social and material resource underpinnings of those past financial trends allow trends to resume.

Asked as a question: how does an economy whose assets and structure were built oblivious to the sustainability of its rate of resource consumption (and associated rate of exploitation of labor), both domestic and foreign, return to trend once the financial and social implications of its material unsustainability kick in?

Technology optimists who believe in the inevitability of growth believe (by definition) human cleverness necessarily increases (over the long term) at a rate faster than supply of energy-slaves falls. (Unless of course they don't believe the supply of energy-slaves falls over the long term, in which case cleverness can increase at its own 'pace' and humans will simply reap the benefits when it happens.)

But as my lengthy comment on the GRC report implies, key questions technology optimists typically avoid (because their focus is on rich nations) are a) whether growth is balanced (i.e., equitable across classes and regions) or unbalanced and b) what to do when the international political economic order is unbalanced.

That is, technology optimists tend to presume cleverness is politically agnostic and economically (profit) oriented, as if technology simply 'happens' and its 'goodness' is measured by sales. Think Steve Jobs, iPhones.

However, do we not have enough disturbing evidence from the past say 70 years to wonder: On what basis does one argue against societies striving to develop cleverness cognizant of overcoming inequality while simultaneously mindful of the constraints of ENVS?