

# EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

Tuesday, April 27, 2010

## **Editorial: Taking Stock of a Green City**

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Is the full moon rising at the end of Earth Month laughing at our paltry efforts to save Mother Earth? With that cold silver smile that pulls our tides and our hearts, it is difficult to see whether she applauds the efforts to save our planet or secretly wishes we'd keep on with our destructive ways – nuclear and chemical weapons, mounting garbage and runaway diseases – so she could break free of her orbit and get lost in the macrocosm.

Would she be happy not to bear witness to the seas of garbage within our oceans, the mountains of waste upon our hills, the acid and the particulates in the air?

Might she feel the slightest tinge of relief not to have to look upon an Earth whose surfaces glow almost continually with artificial light, and, loosening the ancient rhythms of night and day?

From even a closer vantage point, it is easy to feel discouraged about the state of the environment. We might be green around the edges, but lifestyle in the industrialized world is still far from sustainable.

Not merely worldwide, but here in Evanston we are having difficulty living up to the pledge our previous mayor made to other mayors in the U.S.: reducing our carbon footprint to 1990 levels – a 13 percent reduction overall – by the year 2013.

Evanston seems to have made great progress as a community, and ironically the City seems to be ahead of the game in large things, but the small things are dragging us down. We have on our books a green-building ordinance and on Central Street a LEED-certified fire station. The water utility, one of our biggest consumers of electricity, will soon sport a photo-voltaic array on its roof.

For several years now, the City has practiced integrated pest management, a way to minimize the use of hazardous chemicals to control unwanted bugs and plants.

While we do not seem to be willing to close entire streets or street segments to bicycle and pedestrian traffic, we do have bike routes through the City and bike lanes marked on many street, even major arteries.

And perhaps a windfarm in the lake?

Yet we also have new recycling carts whose implicit message is not "reduce, live smaller" but "here's a way to take care of all your waste if you just sort it better." We are offered compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) with a similar message: "You can continue to keep your lights on, but using these will save you money." These items cater to the lifestyle of consumption, allowing inertia and present concern material goods to trump

concerns about the future and sustainability.

Community groups, not surprisingly, are ahead of the game. Keep Evanston Beautiful, which helped bring curbside recycling, continues to educate our children (and adults) about stewardship.

The Network for Evanston's Future has doubled and redoubled and more – taking on not only climate change but transportation, affordable housing and food in the quest to make Evanston a harmonious place to live.

The Talking Farm, with pilots and protégée (Kinglesey School's garden) in Twiggs Park, the Edible Acre at Evanston Township High School, and numerous school gardens offer a combination of nutrition and education.

So perhaps some of us will forgo a bit of lawn or an exotic shrub in favor of native native plantings, decide that tap water is as good as designer water, allow space between pavers to let storm water permeate the soil rather than fill the sewers or realize that cars are not the only or even the best way to get around – or, in the case of many Evanstonians, continue doing those things.

And maybe the moon when she sees that growing fringe of green will again feel the pull of the earth and not wish to wander in despair.

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