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Chair

Mr. Mark Warawa

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

I want to welcome everyone to the 47th meeting of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development as we continue our study on urban conservation practices in Canada.

Go ahead, Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to move a motion:

> Given that (1) the Experimental Lakes Area (ELA) is an essential research platform for understanding the threats to Canada's water resources, assessing the risks of water pollutants and emerging threats, and developing and testing strategies for ecosystem-based management to improve water quality; (2) The ELA has operated a comprehensive meteorological station, which is a measurement site of Environment Canada's Canadian Air and Precipitation Monitoring Network; and, (3) the ELA falls under a number of Environment Canada programs, the Committee recommends that the Government of Canada should transfer the ELA to the Department of Environment.

I would ask that this be voted on in public.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): I move that the committee go in camera.

The Chair: There's a dilatory motion that we go in camera. It is non-debatable. We'll have a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We will suspend.

Witnesses, I'm going to ask you to leave the room temporarily. We expect to be back shortly and into regular committee business. Please stand by.

The meeting is suspended.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

● (1530)

(Pause)

● (1555)

[*Public proceedings resume*]

The Chair: I will call the meeting back to order, and again I thank the witnesses for being with us today.

We will hear from each witness group for up to 10 minutes, and then we will follow with some questions.

Mr. Bienenstock, founder of Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Adam Bienenstock (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee.

I should start by telling you a bit about who I am and what I do. I am the fortunate guy who gets to go around to cities to actually physically dig up the asphalt and drop pockets of nature into our cities. I do that across North America and more and more internationally now.

I was asked to come in and speak about urban conservation. I thought, “What do they mean by urban conservation?” I'll tell you what it means from my perspective.

It means a bunch of signs. It means stay on the trail, sensitive area, no rock climbers, no biking, no camping, no trespassing, stay out, keep out. Generally speaking, for me, when I interact with urban conservation, that's what it means.

The question I have always had is, what are we conserving and who are we conserving it for? What's the end in all of this?

From my perspective, urban conservation has been wildly successful. The situation right now is that people aren't going out into nature anymore. They're staying away in droves. Two to three per cent a year fewer are going to our national parks. Visitors are staying away. The average age of a national park visitor is 52. The average age of a member of the Royal Botanical Gardens is 62. They are literally dying off. We are being enormously successful in keeping people out of our little pockets of urban nature.

I look at this and see that we're facing a crisis of becoming irrelevant. When I look around the room, I see a group of people in front here, and all of us. I'm preaching to the converted. We've probably camped. We've probably spent time outside. We've probably been in touch.

I'm going to ask a question. By a show of hands, how many of you were told when you were kids to come home when the street lights came on or when dinnertime rolled around? Basically, that's most of us beyond a certain age.

The average roam rate right now for an eight-year-old is 150 yards unsupervised. The average roam rate when I was growing up was somewhere between five and 10 kilometres unsupervised, so I had a sense of ownership. What happened was that I know the creeks up the escarpment. I know the trees. I know where the blue clay is, and the grey clay is, and the red clay is. That is my creek, so when I got older and the Borer Logie watershed commission asked for some people to help with the conservation of that creek, I went to conserve my creek because I own that creek. I learned how to own that creek by spending time there.

If we only have 150 yards where our kids can roam and we don't start to create these little urban pockets of nature where we engage people, if we don't shift the conversation from a conservation ethic to a stewardship and engagement ethic, then there's a whole generation that we will miss and that we are missing. We are enormously successful at missing all of them right now.

As a result, things like this happen. I went to do a guest lecture. I walked into the landscape architecture school, and one of the first questions I asked was, "So how many of you people, you future designers of our conservation plans for our cities, have camped overnight?" Thirty-eight out of 40 of them had never been camping, so my opinion, frankly, is that they should all fail. They should not be allowed to design the natural pockets in our cities. Without that stewardship and that engagement, how can we expect the next generation to even show up? We aren't being successful at that. Stewardship and engagement are the key.

If you shift the conversation to early childhood educators, to teachers, we teach them too. I had a conversation with them about the importance of getting out and getting in touch with nature—how dirt is good, and you should get it under your fingernails, and you should plant things and pull them out and explore them, because dirt's good. It's good for the immune system. You have to ingest your peck of dirt. It turns out our parents and our grandparents were probably right: you have to get your peck of dirt before you die.

● (1600)

One of them—and this is a bunch of very young, predominantly female, new teachers, the ones who are going to teach our kids about their experience with nature—put up her hand and asked, "At snack time, how much dirt should I be giving them?"

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: There is a total disconnect with what this means. It is that level of a disconnect that we have reached. We're going to have to start giving up some of our urban conservation ethic in our cities and we're going to have to start turning it over.

The next step for us is to start tearing down some of the signs and to invite people in. I've been in conversations when I worked with Robert Bateman to look at creating the Bateman trail system throughout 18 kilometres of ravines in the city of Toronto. I was in a meeting when the person who's the head of the trail said, "Hold on, let me get this straight; you want more people to use our trail? They're going to wreck it."

That's for the sake of conservation. They're saying, "Let's not connect people through our urban natural spaces, because they're going to wreck it. We're going to have to maintain it."

I wish we had this problem. We don't have this problem right now. We need to get more of them in there and we need to teach them about stewardship.

There's one other little point, which is that when it comes to what ecological restoration actually is, the cities I work in are a full climatic zone different from what they used to be. That's just the way it is. Every one of the cities across this country along this border where 80% of us live is a different zone from what it used to be.

What's our urban conservation plan for ash trees, for elm trees, for birch trees along there? We don't have one, because they're dead, so it has to be a shifted set of priorities, and we are not going to be able to even have native trees as successful urban street trees at the rate we're going. The only way we're going to be successful is if we have people who decide, "I own this, and I'm going to conserve it. I'm going to spend the time. I'm going to volunteer." We don't have enough money anymore to even look after this stuff.

We create these parks and we create these settings so that people have a place to engage. It's now the only choice we have to actually go after the place they engage. Remember that roam rate, that 150 yards? If we don't create the space when and where they play, they will not get there. It doesn't matter if you're on the edge of a world biosphere reserve like the one near where I live; the kids aren't there. They're at their schools, and the schools are paved, predominantly, from tip to tail.

As a result, it takes six to eight hours for a typical teacher right now to get their kids to go and spend one hour outside, because they have to sign a raft of papers to engage their kids with nature because they can't do it on their school ground. It's time that we started to think about the places where our kids spend time and engage them there.

There are three levers that our government can pull. It's funny that you talk about urban nature, because you're not really in our cities. The federal government doesn't have a huge amount of jurisdiction there, but you have legislation as a tool, you have taxes, and you have funding.

In terms of legislation, I would like to see some of the "no child left inside" legislation that's starting to go through the U.S. so that every kid right across the country spends two hours outside every day. That pushes the parents outside. That pushes the kids outside. That pushes the teachers outside. As a result, they will be more healthy. They will be more intelligent. Yes; in fact, their IQs go up if you do this. They will get an experiential education that won't cost any of you a dime, but you'll look good.

Second would be tax credits, because you have taxes as a lever. I'd like to see tax credits for people who are increasing levels of biodiversity in our urban spaces where people connect, meaning our playgrounds, our parks, our hospitals, and our school grounds.

So the second thing is a tax credit. What you'll find if you actually increase the amount of stuff that happens here, in terms of the built environment, is you will end up with a bigger, better GDP. We'll no longer be taking plastic and steel that's produced in China, designed in California, where we take on the risks. You'll actually be producing a local economy-based solution to this, and the money stays here.

Finally, we need to aggressively fund two things. One is outdoor schools that are making a difference. There are two right now that are great examples. One is the North Vancouver Outdoor School. In order to graduate from North Vancouver school district, you have to spend a week out in nature at this school, and it's a gem. The next one you actually own, as our national government, and that is the Palisades out in Jasper, which is a brilliant place where people come from around the world to learn about how to do it right.

● (1605)

The last one is public-private collaborations, and that's the stuff that I directly work on.

You cannot do this by yourselves, as government, anymore. The money is not there. You need to collaborate with people who are in the cities, because you don't have a jurisdiction and you don't have a mandate there. You need to properly fund the collaborations that are going to get more people to engage in nature. Otherwise, we're not going to have the future conservationists, and all of us who have this understanding that who we are as Canadians is tied to the land are going to miss that.

The last little thing I'll say is that sometime you need to Google “Canada” and hit “images”. You will find all of the pristine stuff that we talk about conserving. You will not find that if you Google any other country. We have a limited window to take advantage of the way that we perceive ourselves. We need to get to work.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Next is the Canadian Institute of Planners. We have the president, Andrea Gabor.

You have 10 minutes.

Ms. Andrea Gabor (President, Canadian Institute of Planners): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee.

My name is Andrea Gabor, and I am the president of the Canadian Institute of Planners. I'm accompanied by David Wise, who is the chair of our planning advisory committee. Unfortunately, Steven Brasier, our executive director, is unable to join us today.

We're very pleased to have been invited to speak to your committee and we have prepared a brief presentation to respond to some of the questions you put forward to us. We have brought some examples of urban conservation that respond to some of the opportunities that Mr. Bienenstock has talked about in terms of making them active places.

I would like to take a minute to tell you about our organization. The Canadian Institute of Planners is the national voice of Canada's planning profession. We've been in place since 1919, and we've been dedicated to the advancement of responsible planning throughout Canada. We address matters around professional standards, planning practice, and public policy, both domestically and globally. We undertake research on climate change and sustainability.

We have about 7,000 members working at the local, regional, provincial, and national levels of government, or as private sector consultants, as David and I are. A lot of our work bears on the design, management, and regulation of sustainable community development.

When you first talked to us about urban conservation, we said to ourselves, “What do they mean, exactly?” David is going to interpret for you what we think it means.

Mr. David Wise (Chair, Policy Advisory Committee, Canadian Institute of Planners): The Canadian Institute of Planners has defined planning as the scientific, aesthetic, and orderly disposition of land, facilities, and services, with a view to securing the physical, economic, and social efficiency and the health and well-being of urban and rural communities. That's our definition in which we encompass our own particular professional practice, and that's the framework upon which we view the idea of what urban conservation might be.

When we look at urban conservation within the definition of a planning practice, we consider that part of the mandate of our planning profession is to understand, analyze, and inform the decision-making and good policy development of the usage of these urban land resources, be they environmental, cultural, economic and so on, to their best and most equitable effect.

If we were to define urban conservation in such way as to give our own definition of it from our own planning practice, we would say it speaks to the idea of conserving, protecting, enhancing, and in some cases creating special places of note and character within the urban setting, for the ongoing use, enjoyment, and utility of current and future generations, without compromising unnecessarily the nature of the place itself.

Conservation, in our view, does not imply preservation. Rather, conservation implies a stewardship and a regulation of a range of uses and potential activities so as to maximize that economic, environmental, and net social value. This involves balancing and at times reconciling competing interests, and finding opportunities to combine solutions that maximize that benefit of the public interest.

If I could wrap it all up in one final encompassment, we believe urban conservation is all about developing cultural and environmental landscapes that operate to the maximum benefit, and we believe urban conservation truly occupies a three-pillar approach to urban space. It requires a multidisciplinary perspective from a number of different groups.

● (1610)

Ms. Andrea Gabor: We're going to now give you three examples of urban parks. The first is Rouge Park, which is a national urban park. It comprises over 40 square kilometres and spans the communities of Toronto and Pickering, at the middle, really, of our greater Toronto area. One of the most important things about Rouge Park is that it's accessible by transit. You don't need a car to get there. That's an important characteristic of a place that is accessible to the community.

One point I'd like to make is that as our urban areas become more and more intense and as we preach intensification and transit and all of that, we still need to have reachable urban areas where we, our children, and our grandchildren can experience nature without having to drive for two hours. Rouge Park is not two hours away; it's a bus stop away, or, for some people, maybe a couple of bus stops.

It's particularly interesting because it has a human history that goes back more than 12,000 years. I can't even imagine what that means, but we've got artifacts and archeology referring to the Paleoindian and the Archaic periods. Then you've got the European settlers who came in the 1650s. You've got natural heritage resources in the park. One was an Indian portage, which then became used by the European settlers. The other is Bead Hill, an archeological site with the remains of a 17th century Seneca village, a national historic site accessible along the trails within the park. That's an important aspect of all the things that you can bring together. This is a huge park, and we're very lucky that this park has so many attributes.

It also has numerous significant plant and animal species and communities within its borders. Its natural beauty and biological diversity have attracted people to these lands, which are now protected in Rouge Park.

The cultural and natural heritage contained within the park is definitely a resource worth preserving. You can see on this map the different land ownerships encompassed within Rouge Park. To create it, lands and funds were given from the Province of Ontario, the Government of Canada, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, municipal governments, and other agencies.

In the throne speech of May 2011, the federal government announced its intention to create a national urban park in the Rouge Valley. This would become the first national urban park in the country and one of the largest in North America. This is truly a momentous achievement for all the partners in this Rouge Park and for the public and the visitors who visit it and have so many resources at their...I was going to say "their fingertips"; it's more at their footsteps.

The Evergreen Brick Works is another one where we have collaboration by our newly found friend. We hadn't met before today, and he said, "I know your partner. I did the first plan for the Brick Works", and I said, "Well, that's funny, I'm talking about the Brick Works".

This is a 40-acre natural heritage park—not really a totally natural heritage park—in midtown Toronto. It's at Bayview Avenue and Pottery Road. You couldn't get much more in the middle of Toronto than this. Originally, it was the site of a brick factory that created many of the bricks for the houses in Toronto. It's connected to the Don Valley ravine system and many Toronto neighbourhoods. You can see it's not very far from our huge downtown. It's about a 10-minute drive from the CN Tower. Accessible by transit, by bicycle, and on foot, this park is something that acts as an environmental community centre.

They started building this in 2002, and it's been open since 2010, led by the City of Toronto and the Toronto Region Conservation Authority. Fundraising is an interesting question. They secured an initial $3 million in private funds from David and Robin Young, who are noted sponsors in Toronto.

● (1615)

That was pivotal to their achieving a provincial commitment of $10 million, and that was pivotal to the federal Infrastructure Canada giving them $20 million.

Am I over my time?

The Chair: You have a minute.

Ms. Andrea Gabor: I just want to say that this is an excellent example of heritage and sustainability—you can go two slides down—and there's also a new, modern LEED Platinum building that integrates the historic and the sustainability aspects.

Mr. David Wise: We'll just give you one final site and wrap it up quickly.

You can see that this is a local site on Crown Street in Vancouver. It's an example of microscale green infrastructure and ecological processes all coming together on a small neighbourhood scale. It's a very fascinating site. I urge you to look it up.

Finally, we have a series of four recommendations: best practice leadership, funding sources to inspire progress, reviewing standards for federal funding, and integration with the other federal initiatives that you have ongoing. You have a lot of very interesting programs that are ongoing. We feel there's a real opportunity to tie those things together in the name of urban conservation.

I'd be happy to speak more about that in the question and answer period.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, again, Madam Gabor and Mr. Wise. We really appreciated that testimony.

Next, via video conference from Halifax, Nova Scotia, we will hear from the Ecology Action Centre, with Ms. Powley, coordinator, and Mr. Butler, policy director.

Mr. Butler will be making a statement on behalf of Ms. Powley. The statement was written by her.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Jennifer Powley (Coordinator, Our HRM Alliance, Ecology Action Centre): Thank you.

I'm Jen Powley. I'm a wheelchair user, and on Friday my wheelchair died. I'm in a new wheelchair, but I don't have the right support, so Mark agreed to speak for me.

Mr. Mark Butler (Policy Director, Ecology Action Centre): Jen is the brains of the operation, and I'm the voice. I am reading from her submission.

For the past two years, Jen has been coordinating the Our HRM Alliance through the Ecology Action Centre. The Ecology Action Centre is Nova Scotia's oldest and most respected environmental action organization. The Our HRM Alliance is the Ecology Action Centre's municipal campaign. Though the EAC has a provincial focus, the fact that HRM, or Halifax, makes up 40% of the province's population means that it needs special attention. The Our HRM Alliance is a coalition of over 40 member groups, which includes health groups, business groups, and environmental groups from across the municipality—urban, suburban, and rural—who have all agreed to principles of sustainability and conservation.

Jen is trained as an urban planner, and through her training she was exposed to the regional municipal planning strategy for Halifax Regional Municipality. In theory, it's to be the plan that guides all community decisions about where and how to develop. That includes where residences are built, where commercial and industrial activity are guided, and what areas should be preserved. In the years from the approval of the plan to the first five-year review that is currently under way, we have seen a lot of development that seemed to go against the principles outlined in the plan. We have sprawl, we have development on sensitive lands, we have beautiful wilderness areas being threatened by residential development, and we have a downtown that is losing key businesses to business parks on the fringes.

The regional plan is built on the principles of sustainability, and it is just not being adhered to.

When it comes to urban conservation, the focus should not be on the municipality or community as a whole, but must specifically target downtowns, uptowns, and the centre of the community. These are the areas that often were built 100 years ago and were essentially left to develop themselves while the municipalities and cities focused their attention on other areas, such as suburbs and industrial parks. In HRM, no investment was made in the downtown for the past 50 years. The downtown now desperately needs investment.

Society is making the shift back to urban cores. The attention of government must also shift. There was a move away from car-oriented suburban life back to urban lifestyles that involve living within walking distance of work and other amenities. As people age, they recognize the value of this kind of lifestyle. Younger people don't want to spend their money or time on the highway. A U.S. study, "Exploring Changing Travel Trends" , found that the average number of vehicle miles travelled per person is decreasing.

According to a report by the Frontier Group entitled "Transportation and the New Generation: Why Young People are Driving Less and What it Means for Transportation Policy", more North American young people are choosing not to drive a private vehicle. This means they are taking transit, walking, and biking. They are not even bothering to get their driver's licence, because they know that a more active lifestyle is better for their health and easier on their pocketbook.

The ill effects of sitting in cars is well documented. An article entitled "Obesity relationships with community design, physical activity, and time spent in cars" concludes that each additional hour spent in a car per day is associated with a 6% increase in likelihood of obesity, while each additional kilometre walked per day is associated with a 4.8% decrease in obesity.

We know that having cities expand outward threatens agricultural and forestry lands. Once a field is paved over, it cannot be used again for growing the food that the citizens of the country need to survive. We know that the health of our watersheds, our lakes, and our streams is threatened by development and the ensuing effects of a substantial population living nearby.

To deal with this, Our HRM Alliance proposes a suite of seven solutions to help HRM get back on track. These same seven solutions would help any municipality. This is not the forum to go into the details of the solutions, but they are meant to be adopted as a suite. Choosing to implement one and not the others will not achieve the type of conservation that is needed as we navigate a world rife with the challenges of an aging population and climate change.

The seven solutions proposed by the municipality include greenbelting, investing in downtown cores, prioritizing transit and active transportation, adhering to residential growth targets, evaluating development charges, protecting water—and we have a lot of it here in HRM from our lakes and rivers to our coasts—and committing to measuring successes and deficiencies of identified actions.

● (1620)

The first solution, to use greenbelting, is a multi-faceted approach that centres on the use of an urban containment boundary to require that cities make the best possible use of existing infrastructure.

The greenbelting solution proposed by Our HRM Alliance consists of four separate but interlocking areas to cover the municipality as a whole, starting with perhaps the most protected areas and natural corridors, which are great places for overnight camping.

The second category is natural resources and agriculture. We don't have much agriculture in HRM, but we have a lot of forestry going on, so that's where forestry would take place, along with fishing and hunting.

The third category is rural communities and coastal management area, and the fourth is the regional centre and suburban growth centres.

It calls on the municipality to replace, repair, and maintain the sewer and water pipes that it already has in place, rather than building new ones. Within the municipality of HRM, there is enough serviced land to handle at least 30 years' worth of growth, even at the highest growth scenario, yet the municipality is approving sewer and water line extensions. The new federal standards will require massive upgrades to the existing pipes, so we ask why we should put in more infrastructure.

While obtaining federal assistance on new projects is great, most cities are facing the same problems as Halifax. They need to maintain existing infrastructure. A report compiled by the Canadian Urban Institute, entitled “The Value of Investing in Canadian Downtowns”, substantiates this point.

Having this concept recognized by the Government of Canada would move the issue of urban conservation ahead. According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada in 2011, over 81% of the nation’s population lived in urban areas. Having a department dedicated to the conservation of the urban areas they live in is crucial.

The urban containment boundary would ensure that agricultural and forestry lands are preserved for that purpose. Wetlands and watersheds would also be protected. At the same time, investment in transit within the urban containment boundary could happen. A federal vision for transit would support this.

The HRM Alliance's second solution calls for a tri-party investment in both the downtown core and in the downtown main streets of the 50 other municipal growth centres in HRM. Candidates in the municipal election have agreed that this type of investment, as long as it is led by the federal government, is crucial for the conservation of all the municipality's urbanized areas.

Finally, the idea of urban conservation must look at preserving green spaces within our urban areas. It must also look at maintaining the areas already built. It is by giving these already-built areas primacy that there will be a disincentive to add more pavement to the size of the city. It is possible for cities to grow and develop without vastly extending their footprints.

Things will need to be done differently as society's standards and expectations change, but with this change will come a more sustainable urban environment.

Thank you very much.

● (1625)

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Butler.

Many of us on the committee think back with fond memory of our visit, when you hosted a number of us and showed us the beautiful natural parts of Halifax, so thank you so much for that. It was a wonderful part of that trip.

We are going to begin the seven-minute round of questioning. Colleagues, I remind you of the scope.

To the Ecology Action Centre, thank you so much for having that on the back of your presentation. You've actually listed those seven scoping questions and then answered them. Thank you for that.

With that in mind, seven questions addressing the scope of the study are as follows:

1. What is urban conservation?
2. What could be the goals of connecting urban Canadians with conservation?
3. What are the best practices in Canada?
4. What urban conservation initiatives are currently at use?
5. What are the economic, health, biodiversity, and social benefits associated with urban conservation?
6. How do we define a protected space?
7. What role should the federal government play?

We will begin our seven minutes with Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to all our speakers for their wise words.

Mr. Bienenstock, you took me back to my childhood in Winnipeg. When I thought about roam rate, that's exactly how I lived. Even though I represent a remote rural constituency the size of Denmark now, I like to think that the creek close to where I lived in Winnipeg, which I adopted as my creek, gave me that lifelong love of nature and set me on the path that I'm on now.

I share your concern about children who have limited experience in nature. You're well aware of the phrase “nature deficit disorder”. Can you comment on what effect that has on a child as he or she grows older, if they've not had exposure to nature? Keep in mind that in our three million years of evolution, most of that was spent in nature. What happens to a child who suffers from nature deficit disorder?

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: Nature deficit disorder is a phrase coined by Richard Louv, who wrote a book called *Last Child in the Woods* in 2005 that brought a lot of this stuff together. I've worked with Rich for the last five years as part of his strategic planning committee in the U.S.

I'll throw some stats out. Right now the average screen time for an 8- to 18-year-old in North America is 52.5 hours per week. That's average. That means that there are a lot of them who hit 70, and there are a few who hit 30. The Kaiser Family Foundation did this stat two years ago. They didn't believe the stat when they did it, so they tested again with thousands more people, and they ended up with a bigger number.

What happens? What happens is the difference between the kids who hit 30 hours a week as their average screen time versus the kids at 70. What's different between them? There was one specific question that they addressed—one thing, one statement—that they had that was different. It was that almost all of the ones in the 30 range—94% of them—could remember a moment before they were eight years old when they had an immersive, important, life-changing, memorable experience in nature with a grown-up. For the ones at 70, the numbers were around 40% to 45% of them.

There is something significant that happens. In some of the research, they talk about how it's akin to imprinting, just like a duckling imprints. We imprint on this stuff. Right now, we're working awfully hard as a society to make sure that they don't have that moment when they imprint on nature.

What does 40 hours a week mean in terms of health and well-being—40 hours a week of not being in front of a screen, but actually 40 hours more of engagement? It means they're not going to be obese. This is the first time in history when we, as the grown-ups around this room, are going to have a longer lifespan than our kids.

They are going to die faster, they are going to cost more, and that's the big change. That's the big payoff. It saves us loads of money. There can't be an easier intervention: go outside.

● (1630)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I really appreciated your distinction, too, between the conservation ethic and stewardship and engagement. Again, in the rural areas that I represent, the word “stewardship” is a much friendlier word when it comes to our interactions with the environment, as opposed to the word “environment” itself.

You talk about public-private collaborations, Mr. Bienenstock, in terms of urban conservation. Would you see a role for rural people who have the concept of stewardship in their bones to work with their urban counterparts to perhaps present real-life experiences?

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: There is no question that those lines need to be crossed.

One of the interesting things to mention, of course, is that in that stat of 52.5 hours, there's only a three-hour difference for rural Canadians. It drops to 49 when we get outside of the cities. It is actually not a significant change. We are staying in and sitting in front of our screens more and more, but absolutely, the more people with the experience who bring that experience to others, the better it is. People-to-people interaction is what's going to make a difference, such as the idea of bringing trained park rangers from our national parks to the cities to do things there and to engage.

We design parks, specifically right now, that are reflections of the nearest national park, and we bring those and plonk them down in the middle of the city so that our national park rangers have a place where they can actually go and talk about the things that they are good at, that they are familiar with, so they can deliver a program and teach stewardship.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I have just one thing I'd like you to consider as well. I don't know if you do this or not, but rivers are very important in most of our cities, and you see that urban angling is a very popular activity. That may be a way to start engaging kids.

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: Fishers, hunters, you know.... I was involved in a conversation recently in which they talked about how they didn't like Richard Louv in particular saving our children from nature deficit disorder, because he was supporting hunters. We need a societal shift of mammoth scale, and we're falling way behind. We can have the argument about whether or not you should hunt, or whether or not you should be into photography, or whatever. If you're out there, and you're engaged in nature and learning about it —and hunters are very good conservationists—then we'll have the conversation about how many angels we can fit on the head of a pin in 10 years if we actually succeed, but we don't have a chance any more.

We should absolutely include anglers, hunters, bikers, mountain bikers—all of them.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I like the biker idea. That's just a joke; sorry.

Mr. Butler, in your presentation, you used a lot of words that imply to me “command and control” as the answer to urban conservation. You used the phrase that I find a little bit Orwellian, “urban containment”, whatever that means. I understand where you're coming from, I think, but in that command-and-control philosophy that seems to have come out in your presentation, do you see any role for enhancing individual liberty and freedom in our cities?

● (1635)

Mr. Mark Butler: What we're seeing in Halifax is that the city has grown in ways that is costing us financially and environmentally, and some of the suburban and rural areas are losing the qualities that they value. You talked about hunting and fishing. A lot of the members of our group are rural folks. There are some hunting and fishing groups, and what they value is protecting the lands around our municipality for enjoying nature, hunting, fishing, and logging.

We think there is some value in containing growth to where you have the services and they're delivered efficiently, and then protecting the green spaces around those areas so people have access to them.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Monsieur Pilon is next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): First of all, congratulations to you all. I found your presentations very interesting.

Let me start with Mr. Bienenstock, going somewhat along the same lines as my friend Mr. Sopuck.

You rightly deplore the fact that most city green spaces and playgrounds have become sterile, paved places over the years. What effect would better conservation of our urban green spaces and playgrounds have on people's health and on Canada's economy in general?

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: The question of health is important and has been subjected to a lot of research. Playgrounds are important for us. If you leave kids on their own to engage in a natural space with trees and rolling hills and boulders and the things we recall as nature, they'll be there for just over an hour. An hour and four minutes seems to be average. If you send them to a plastic and steel space, one of those post-and-platform things, then they're there for 19 to 22 minutes, so the amount of time that they engage is significantly increased in nature.

ParticipAction is one of our partners, and ParticipAction has now realized that it's not just field sports or organized sport that makes a difference to the health of our kids; it's this unstructured play. These are the spaces we're talking about, because that's where they play.

Active Healthy Kids Canada just last year designated nature as one of the main predicators of the health of our children. It is one of the simpliest, easiest, cheapest ways to make a difference in the health of our children.

If you look at a standard playground or standard green space or even these paved spaces, the children engaging in physical activity are predominantly the A-type kids. About 40% of the kids are getting more than 80% of the physical activity levels. If you make this shift and they spend time in nature, all of a sudden it levels off, so the children you most want to learn about nurturing, those aggressive king-of-the-castle kids, are the ones who actually start to calm down, and the ones on the sidelines who aren't participating normally—the ones with high obesity rates, disabilities, cultural biases, social collaboration problems, phobias—are the ones whose activity levels exponentially increase.

Even though the activities are the same in both, these natural spaces provide us with the opportunity to hit the ones we most want to engage.

● (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: My next question goes to Ms. Gabor.

What is the essential balance we need between urban development and urban conservation, so that an urban conservation plan works for planners and environmentalists alike?

Mrs. Andrea Gabor: My earpiece was not working. Could you repeat the question?

Mr. François Pilon: Clearly cities have to grow, but there has to be some balance between urban development and the environment. What might that balance be, in your view?

Mrs. Andrea Gabor: There must be a balance. I do not have any statistics on that, but I feel that everyone has to be able to have access to green spaces and places to play and enjoy nature. It could be in ravines, beside water or even in parks next to schools. But there has to be a good balance, otherwise children will have no opportunity to play in and enjoy nature.

I do not know if that answers your question.

Mr. François Pilon: Yes. Percentages will come. We do not know; I understand that.

My next question is for Mr. Butler.

Nova Scotia is a coastal province. If the government wants an urban conservation plan that is at all respectable, it is critical in the Atlantic provinces for the plan to address the coastal waters as well as the green spaces.

What recommendation would you make to the government about that?

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer Powley: Right now the municipality certainly can't do it because of all the federal cuts they've made over....

Mr. Mark Butler: You're quite right. We are known as Canada's ocean playground and coasts are really important to us, so as part of greenbelting or protecting our green spaces, protecting our coast and making sure that we have enough coastal parks so that people can go to the beach is of central importance. That's where you'll find all Haligonians on a hot summer day in Halifax.

Maintaining coastal access too is something, because often in some of our coastal communities when new people buy property and build right adjacent to the coast, people lose that coastal access. Protecting those areas as part of a planned approach to growth is important. We know we're going to get growth, but we don't want to lose those things that make life worth living, such as being able to go to the beach in the summer with your kids or—somebody mentioned angling—being able to go fishing off a wharf in Bedford Basin or downtown Halifax. Three weeks ago I was fishing for mackerel and squid off a wharf in Bedford Basin. What better experience is there than that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: I do not have a lot of time left. You can all answer in turn, but very quickly.

What is the most pressing urban conservation issue at the moment?

Anyone can answer. Go ahead, Mr. Bienenstock.

[*English*]

The Chair: Time has expired, so just give a short answer.

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: The most pressing one is this: who are the next generation of urban conservationists? Where is their sense of ownership with the natural world? Where is their sense of Canadian identity going to come from?

We have a tradition in Canada of being tied to the land, and we are losing that. An entire generation is losing it. We're not coming up on the cliff, we're on the edge of the cliff and about to fall off; we have to learn that we're either going to fly or we're going to fall, and what we do right now matters.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you.

Time has expired.

I'm going to ask Ms. Ambler to ask questions. You have seven minutes.

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today. Your presentations have been absolutely fascinating, and I thank you for them.

Mr. Bienenstock, in particular, I was saddened.... You are completely 100% correct about the roam range. I've never heard it put that way before, but it's so true. As the mother of a 13-year-old—and we live in the suburbs—I wasn't sure if I just worried more than my mother ever did, but times have changed. I do let my son walk around the neighbourhood and walk down to the park, which is close by, and there's a little man-made pond and some swings and things like that, but I do not let him go alone, and he's 13 years old. It's a different life from the one that we led, I think.

I wanted to know more about what you do. You talked about ripping up asphalt, so I want to know exactly how that works. How do you decide where to rip up the asphalt, and then what do you do? Can you give us an example of the type of work you do, the natural playgrounds that you build?

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: It's my pleasure.

There are a lot of different places. Basically, anywhere you'd see one of those plastic and steel things, you would find us working there. I'll give you some different examples.

A private school might call us and say they have this plastic and steel thing. Bishop Strachan School did this in downtown Toronto. They had it for a year and a half. They spent $95,000 on it and they broke three kids' arms in a row. It was the standard break, the radial arm break that snaps right here. That's the standard break off a slide and a swing. They had one too many, and they decided this was crazy. They said, “We have a Reggio Emilia curriculum for experiential education, and we have a flat space with rubber and plastic and steel. Can you come and help us?”

So we go in, we make the change, we dig all of that up, we put in hills, slides on the sides of the hills. Our play structure is a tree that lies sideways in the space. There's a boulder to climb on. There are forts. We're not focused on gross motor activity in our spaces. We're focused on all aspects of child development.

We watched the statistics for bullying rates drop by 90%. We watched the statistics for vandalism in the school drop by 70%. We watched the injury rates drop. They haven't had a major injury yet.

We do city parks. We do consultations with the city and we rip out what was there and put this stuff in, but we do that through a consultative process with them, so they decide what they want and we put that in with them.

We do a community-building process as part of every one of these, because you only get a certain number of points for renaturing these spaces. The rest of the points come from how you animate the space, how you consult with them so they know it is theirs, how they make their decisions, and then how they program the space afterwards. This is why we work with the Canadian Wildlife Federation, ParticipAction, Parks Canada, Right to Play, and Scouts Canada. It's because they all provide programming. We need to animate these spaces once we're done. It's not enough just to build it, so we get involved with how we animate the space afterwards.

Another quick example of the work would be a place like Moss Park in downtown Toronto, which would have traditionally had some really bad statistics. We went in with a sponsor to pay for it, and on a community-build day there we worked with the community to renature their space. We did it as a reflection of Georgian Bay Islands National Park. Parks Canada came and started to deliver a program there, and they were taking youth from there back up to Georgian Bay Islands National Park, and now those youth are actually scouts. As well, they started a Scouts group there that wasn't successful.

Each one of these groups on their own could not be successful in that space, but if all of us collaborate and layer it properly, we can create a complete social change there. That's what happened with their statistics of engagement and the amount of crime. It used to be a place to buy crack, and that has disappeared recently as a result of all of this change. That's consistently what happens if you do this work.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: That's incredible, and those are incredible statistics. I'm surprised to be talking about bullying in the environment committee, but I thank you. I like the term “renature” .

For the record, you talked about P3s. I laughed when you said government doesn't have the money anymore, so I want to know more about P3s and how you think they might work. Have you worked within this framework at all in your natural playgrounds?

● (1650)

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: Yes. The last project I described was a perfect example of that.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: You said you had a sponsor.

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: We brought in a sponsor to pay for this to happen. They brought $150,000 to the table. We brought in a national charity, ParticipAction, which was involved from how we engaged with the community to some of the programming that goes on afterwards.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Therefore there's a federal funding opportunity there, possibly.

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: Yes, absolutely.

The one thing that has been disappointing up until now is that the amount of money committed by all of our federal partners doesn't even amount to the tax we've paid to do the work that we've done, so you're quickly losing your right to be involved, and if it weren't for the fact that I really believe in my heart that we need to get more people back into our national parks, we probably wouldn't be able to justify affording it.

We need to find a federal partner willing to invest in some of these partnerships as well in order to make it work a bit better.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: I'm glad, then, we're talking to you today and that part of it is through this urban conservation study.

Can you tell me the response of parents and communities to your natural playground products?

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: On the whole idea of these renatured spaces, I have a quick story. One parent said, “I hate you.”

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Why?

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: I said, “Oh, God, here we go.” She said that she hated me because she used to have her day planned. They would go down to the local park and they would get out, because 20 minutes later they would be bored. They would get back in and go.... “Now, when we go to your place”, she said, “it's an hour later, and one of them is an airplane and another one's a horse or something.” She said, “I don't know what game they're playing, but they just go on and on.” She's not able to control it.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: And the mother can't get away from the playground—

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: There's something about the interpretative quality of nature in an urban setting that jogs our memories. We're hard-wired on an evolutionary scale for this. We are a hunter-gatherer species. You re-engage with this stuff and you allow people to imagine, and they change. That's ultimately....

I just need to say to Monsieur Pilon—to answer both questions, because they are tied—that in terms of the value of these spaces, we track the property value surrounding these parks. The property values surrounding these parks consistently go up by 20% for places within immediate access. If you want to talk about what that means in terms of taxes available, taxes for our municipalities, these things actually increase the value consistently over the neighbourhood values by about 20%. We do much better when they are in much worse neighbourhoods.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: That's amazing. Thank you.

The Chair: Your time has expired.

I hope there will be some comments for protected green areas, fishery setbacks and whatnot, so that we can take advantage of using those and have access to them, yet still protect those sensitive areas.

Ms. Sgro, you have seven minutes. Welcome to the committee.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Thank you very much. I am filling in for my colleague, who had to leave.

Mr. Bienenstock, I've seen several of your creations in Toronto. They really do make a massive difference in a community.

I'm interested in knowing if, when we talk about the partnerships outside of government itself, you're finding the development industry open to working with you when they are proposing various developments, to ensure that you have the funds required.

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: There's a certain amount of that going on, but that's with an enlightened developer. Without any legislation or any bylaws in place to promote this in some of their work, they're going to do what's easy. They're going to default to what's easy. They have to provide some money for a playground. It has to be done, but what we do is not easy. This is not picking a thing out of a catalogue. This is a thoughtful process. We have to think about what is indigenous to the area, and then we have to use that stuff effectively to fulfill the needs of the community. We don't get to do that out of a catalogue. We don't have a catalogue; there's no point.

Hon. Judy Sgro: We wouldn't want you to have one.

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: It makes it very difficult, in fact, from a developer's standpoint for them to justify it. One place where we have been successful is Collingwood, because they have an urban design standard that has been set up by urban planning as part of.... The planner is a member of the institute or of the association, and he has done a remarkable job in pushing and making it law that you have to be thoughtful about this stuff. As a result, we're having more success there.

● (1655)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Can you suggest one city in Canada that is really using the healthy cities model going forward and is very open to ensuring that you get opportunities there?

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: Honestly, for me right now the city that I'm most excited about is Collingwood. The urban planner there is a guy by the name of Robert Voigt. They have produced a remarkable document that is very outcomes-based and is focused on connecting that community and on saving that community's main asset, which is its natural beauty. They've done a good job of focusing on that.

What they've done hasn't been prescriptive, but it has been outcomes-based, so someone like me, or any one of the designers of these spaces, can go in and interpret that but still fall into that category of renaturing and engaging, using some of the flora and fauna from the local area as the palette.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Butler and Ms. Powley, with regard to the work you're doing in the Halifax area, can you point to some of the specific benefits as a result of your work and your clear commitment to the environment and urban conservation?

Mr. Mark Butler: What we've done is put an alliance together of very different groups—business groups, environmental groups, health groups—that for various reasons all support greenbelting and all support good planning. We now have, as part of this work, three large protected areas within 15 to 20 minutes of downtown Halifax. That's an incredible opportunity and quality of life for the residents of Halifax, and I think overall it makes Halifax a really attractive destination.

I hope I'm not getting repetitive here, but controlling and directing growth delivers financial, economic, environmental, and health benefits.

Excuse me; Jen and I are just conferring here.

Jen wants to make the point that good planning opens up opportunities and maintains the quality of life of urban, suburban, and rural residents. A lot of rural residents are supportive of the work we're doing, because they don't want to see their quality of life and their recreational opportunities taken away.

Does that answer your question?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Yes, but when you talk about good planning, it's often in the eye of the beholder or the municipality that you're dealing with. What kind of a grade would you give the Halifax area when it comes to their planning?

Ms. Jennifer Powley: Great planning, but follow through.

Mr. Mark Butler: If the plan is good, then stick to it, because it was created for a reason. As I think we all believe, if you're going to have a plan, stick to it and follow it.

We just had our municipal election on Saturday. One of the big themes right across the board, I think, was that we need to stick to the plan. Otherwise, over time you can actually bankrupt a municipality if you grow in such a way that it's too costly to provide the services. I mean, to some extent we've let development drive our plan versus asking what's the best for all citizens of our municipality.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Congratulations on your new mayor.

Mr. Mark Butler: Yes.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I know him well. He's very committed to the environment and so on. I'm quite confident that if the plan is there, and they have people like you and Ms. Powley monitoring it, you'll stay on top of it to ensure that the environment is protected and that conservation has to be top of the list. Congratulations to you both.

● (1700)

Mr. Mark Butler: Thank you. There's a lot of hope now.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Good. We'll all be watching to see just how it goes. Hopefully it goes well.

To Ms. Gabor, you've done a lot of design work in cities like Toronto. When it comes to the density that we're dealing with in our large urban centres, there's less and less space to be able to do the kind of wonderful projects that Mr. Bienenstock was talking about. How closely are you working with city planners in Toronto?

Ms. Andrea Gabor: Very closely; I mean, we have a lot of work, and it's on either the public sector side or the development side. It's both sides of the fence.

Hon. Judy Sgro: No matter where you look in the city of Toronto, you see cranes and more cranes, and less and less green space. Has the city adopted anything specific when it comes to land conservation at all, or is it still...?

Ms. Andrea Gabor: No, but I think that Waterfront Toronto is actually coming to fruition now. Over the last year a number of really fantastic parks have opened. There's Cherry Beach, but the most important, I think, from a sustainability point of view is Sherbourne Common, which is a stormwater management park where the water is treated below grade, and at grade the children in the summer have splash parks and splash ponds and in the winter they can skate. The treatment is done underground, and then it comes up in these—I don't know if you've seen them—really beautiful, art-like towers that spew the clean water out into a canal that takes it back to Lake Ontario.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Time's expired. Thank you so much.

Now we'll begin our five-minute rounds of questioning.

[*Translation*]

Your turn, Ms. Quach.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for coming before the committee.

[*English*]

I'm going to speak in French too.

[*Translation*]

My first question goes to Andrea Gabor or David Wise.

You mentioned transit and active transportation. You also mentioned federal infrastructure for LEED houses and sustainability.

I met two researchers from the Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomiques in Montreal who told me about a report from the United States describing best practices in efficiency. The report is called *Energy Efficiency Job Creation: Real World Experiences*. It talks about renovating whole areas of a city in order to make them more energy-efficient. It creates jobs and it uses no oil, either.

At the end of your document, you make four recommendations dealing with best practices, sources of funding and studying federal standards. How do you see the role of the federal government in energy-efficient construction in its various forms? Also, what would be the economic, social and health benefits of such a federal role?

[*English*]

Mr. David Wise: Thank you very much.

We certainly think that the federal government has a significant role. One of the main things the federal government can do is provide a source of research and innovation through its various agencies.

CMHC is doing marvellous work right now. An example is in Kamloops, British Columbia, where they recently just did the EQuilibrium home, a net-zero energy house done very cost-effectively, very cheaply, in a practice whereby you might actually be able to replicate that in a cross-disciplined fashion.

That's an interesting one because it was done on the Tk'emlúps Indian Band reserve by Sun Rivers Development Corporation. It also involved Thompson Rivers University as well, so a whole variety of different interest groups and whatnot were working their way in getting through there. That's an example of where the federal government can leverage the power of its crown corporations, the power of its crown agencies, and the research and innovation wings at its disposal to drive innovation, to drive pilot projects, and to drive new and creative thinking towards how we're going to handle and deal with some of these challenges.

I think the other question you had was.... Sorry, there was a second part to the question as well, I believe.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Yes. It dealt with the standards that can be applied to construction. I would like to know the advantages of green infrastructure construction for health, for the economy and for job creation.

[*English*]

Mr. David Wise: That's very interesting as well. Of course, one of the things that has been prevalent across the industry right now is the LEED certification standards, the LEED-certified silver, bronze, gold, and platinum standards. These have had quite a pervasive effect upon the development industry. They've really brought up standards. Ontario now has a much more stringent building code as well, which you could argue has been a response to the idea of being able to provide measurable indicators and to be able to track where we're going.

The importance of being able to quantify and understand the values and to be able to compare them is just unmatched. LEED, although it's not perfect, certainly has provided us with a mechanism to be able to provide those indicators and to do that kind of measurement.

LEED-ND will be the new standard for how we look at neighbourhood development and subdivision plans. That includes all kinds of very interesting indicators that will have profound potential impacts, including access, density, access to park space, overall residential density—all kinds of different indicators. All of these things are good things, again, because although they may not be perfect solutions all by themselves, they allow us to have a measurable base level upon which we can now compare different areas of performance. We can look at a LEED-ND subdivision, for example, and compare it to a traditional subdivision. We can look at those performance indicators and measure and track whether we're actually making progress.

● (1705)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Quach, thank you.

Next is Mr. Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mark Butler, I want to thank you for that great trip that you hosted. Some of our committee were on the trip to Micou's Island. I also wanted to commend you on that great partnership with the St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association and the Department of Natural Resources in the province. Everything's about partnerships today. The trip out to Indian Point and the mussel farm there was instructive. We saw the tunicates, something I think most of us will not forget, and witnessed the challenge posed by an invasive species, or a species moving in where it didn't used to be.

Your salmon enhancement and streamkeepers have improved the creek we were walking along. I know those kinds of projects are very popular in the west and you're engaging a lot of people in them. I wanted to say how much we appreciated the time we spent with you on the bus and seeing all those great spots where your work is being appreciated.

Can you tell us about the engagement of local citizens in the projects you're talking about?

Mr. Mark Butler: Well, it's a key point. It's about creating opportunities for people to enhance their quality of life by having natural opportunities on their doorstep. You talk about St. Margaret's Bay, a place with a lot of history and beauty, and the efforts of the community and other partners, federal and provincial, to protect that island. This way, as development continues in that area, there's still the island that they can go to where the kids can experience the beach.

We were at the Sackville River, dip-netting gaspereau in that river. They still have salmon. Unfortunately, Atlantic Canada doesn't have the same richness when it comes to salmon, but we do still have some rivers with Atlantic salmon. There you have Atlantic salmon swimming up through Halifax Harbour, through Bedford Basin and right up the Sackville River, an area that is fairly well developed. The key there is to make sure that the water quality isn't affected and that growth is directed to certain areas so that people can still walk along the river and anglers can still fish. It's making sure that places for kids to play remain and are available.

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Bienenstock, thank you for your remarks earlier. That was a new comment about the average roam time or roam rate being 150 yards. That's a new concept for us.

I grew up in Manitoba, near the Red River. We crossed the river in the winter on snowshoes and went up and down the banks, playing on the hills in what we called the sticks, the bush. That was the way we grew up.

You mentioned that when you have a conversion from plastic and steel to a renatured park, the playtime expands from an average of 20 or 22 minutes—I didn't catch the figure. What do you end up with on that?

● (1710)

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: It's times three.

Mr. James Lunney: Three times is the expansion.

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: Yes, if they're left to their own devices, it expands by a factor of three, and there's a shift from 40% of the kids getting 90% of the physical activity to an even spread throughout. All of the kids engage. The 60% that you're missing is now what you engage.

Mr. James Lunney: You were talking about the connection with nature and how that has so many positive benefits. Where I come from, our first nations community have a word they like to use. *Hishuk ish tsawalk* in the Nuu-chah-nulth language means “everything is one”. It means we're part of nature, and nature's part of us. It's pretty hard to get away from that, and when we do get away from it, we have pretty nasty social effects.

You mentioned levers the government can pull to help make a difference. I didn't get them all down, but I wanted to pick up on your third and fourth points. You mentioned “no child left inside”. I liked that. You mentioned tax credits for increasing biodiversity. What was your third point? Could you go over your third and fourth points?

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: The last one is funding—taxes and legislation about what you fund. There are schools out there that are fantastic examples of engaging people in participatory education in the outdoors. North Vancouver Outdoor School is one. Another is the Palisades. Schools like this need to be helped. They are falling away and they are not being funded. If we don't institute a pedagogical approach to education in nature in these cities, it's soon going to be virtually impossible.

The last thing is that there need to be more urban park rangers, stewardship programs, and collaborations with people who are doing it already.

The Chair: Thank you. Unfortunately, time has expired.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Choquette, you have five minutes.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for joining us today.

My question is for Mr. Butler and Ms. Powley.

Of course, we have urban conservation now. It is also becoming part of the national conservation plan that we have recently studied. We are just going deeper into it. We have to see urban conservation as a whole. You said so and other witnesses have said so as well. We have to be looking out for human health, both physical and psychological. Nor must we forget the war on climate change. In that respect, research has recently been done on what are called climate change jobs, the jobs that allow the war against climate change to be fought. We talked about science and so on.

You also mentioned that we must make sure that we are close to nature and we do not have to sit in a car for an hour or two in order to get to it.

What interests me is the role of the government in all this. A lot of levels of government are involved in these areas, it must be said. The municipal and provincial levels are there, but what can the federal government do?

You suggested creating a department for this. What exactly is your idea behind that? Are there other things that the government could be doing, such as establishing stricter environmental rules and providing a place for research, for science and for innovation?

Mr. Mark Butler: Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

We're just going to confer for a second.

That's a big question. There is a reduced role, in some ways, for the federal government in urban planning. A lot of the important decisions about how and where our cities grow have to be made by the municipality. How your city grows and develops is the most important thing that affects one's quality of life—how you travel and whether you're stuck in traffic and all these things.

Where the federal government can come in—and this is perhaps a big statement—is to see and recognize how important protecting the environment is for our national identity and our children's future, and how nature is such a good teacher.

I have a son, and as Mr. Bienenstock has mentioned, when you put him on a beach, that is the best playground ever. Off they go, and they don't come back until it's suppertime.

We need to protect these places, and we need the legislation, be it fisheries or otherwise, to protect our nature. It's really important for our psychological health and the well-being of Canada as a nation.

● (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much.

I understand that we have to have very strong legislation. You gave the greenbelts, the Rouge Park and the Evergreen Brick Works Park as examples. Should there be examples like that all over our municipalities?

I am thinking of the municipality of Drummondville in my constituency. It is a medium-sized city with more and more urban sprawl. Earlier, you said that downtown cores were becoming less and less vibrant. They are losing the vibrancy to the areas of urban sprawl. There is a lot of deforestation in Drummondville, though we still have a lot of trees. Our environment is also becoming very fragmented.

How can we address this problem? Should the government have a strategy? You talked about city planning. Should the government become more involved, in cooperation with the provinces or the municipalities?

[*English*]

The Chair: Please give a very short answer. We have about 20 seconds left.

Mr. Mark Butler: The answer is yes. Using mechanisms, as the previous speaker mentioned, such as tax credits, is attractive and encourages activity. Tax credits now exist for physical activity, but expanding those tax credits would be good.

The Rouge Park is an exciting initiative, and it perhaps changes our way of thinking about parks. They're not some place far away; they're closer. Certainly having parks that are near and accessible is a great move, so more urban parks like that would be wonderful. I believe the Rouge Park in Toronto is part of their greenbelt.

Let's all work together—provincial, federal, regional—to create a network of green areas so these are accessible, and also accessible to all—

The Chair: Mr. Butler, unfortunately time has expired. Thank you.

Mr. Woodworth, you have five minutes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Thank you very much. It is good to see you, Mr. Butler and Ms. Powley, and thank you for your attendance with us. I am hoping to get back to that issue of accessibility in a moment so that you won't feel cut off, I hope. Thanks also to the witnesses who are with us here in person.

I have one or two specific questions, but I want to preface them with some personal reflection to tell you how I get to them. I will begin by especially thanking Mr. Bienenstock because I appreciated, if I can put it this way, your treetop analysis.

I really think you have done a good job of pointing out some of the social implications of what we're here to talk about. Having said that, you took me back, as you did some of my colleagues, to a time that got me interested in such matters. I have to tell you I am a wilderness canoer. I have loved it; the most fulfilling, happiest days of my life have been spent out in the wilderness. When I was listening to you, I was thinking about how the heck that happened, because I grew up in a city.

There were a couple of things that were different when I was growing up, one of them being that our city had only 80,000 or 90,000 people. It is now more like 230,000 people. In those days, with a quick bike ride or even an hour or two of walking, you could get to the fields and forests that we learned to enjoy.

The second thing was that I think we had, in my parents' generation, a generation of educators in a way that I don't think my generation has been. There were always people in our community willing to run Girl Guide or Boy Scout troops and take us out into natural areas in a way that I don't think my generation has done for our children.

Third, the population of Canada, I hate to say, was then only 18 million to 20 million people; now it's 34 million people.

The only thing I would disagree with in your analysis, Mr. Bienenstock, is that some of the parks I visited are getting pretty crowded. Algonquin Provincial Park has almost become domesticated; it's no longer really what I like to think of as a wilderness park. I moved on to Quetico Provincial Park, which used to be more wilderness, but the number of American fisherman in there is outrageous, in my opinion, so I have to go further afield. Having said all of that, what I realize from these presentations is that having accessible green areas when I was young was an extremely important thing.

I am interested in the greenbelting idea that Ms. Powley and Mr. Butler have come up with, but from a federal perspective I am concerned about how I can contribute to that. The only thing I can think of is in terms of the incentives in federal infrastructure money that we might provide. Could we make that money conditional on ensuring that there is adequate green space, or could we make it conditional on only being employed to renew our city centres? Then I come up against the question of whether it is really our job to make those decisions and to set those kinds of local priorities, and I am not sure it is.

I'd like to hear from a planning perspective how I can resolve that conflict for myself. Where are the decisions best made—in Ottawa, or in Halifax or Kitchener or wherever it may be? May I ask Ms. Gabor and Mr. Wise to comment on that first?

● (1720)

The Chair: You have only one minute. I'm going to have to end you then.

Ms. Andrea Gabor: Okay, I will talk really fast.

In the examples I showed, the initial impetus wasn't from the federal government. It was local. Whether it was Rouge Park Alliance or the Evergreen folks, it was local. They went and looked for funding. If the federal government is open to partnering with municipalities or with the provinces, that's where.... I don't think it's up to you to necessarily go in and say you're going to create a federal park. However, when there are initiatives to create parks, it would be really advantageous to partner financially.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: The problem is that we give them the money and they decide.

The Chair: Time has expired. Sorry about that.

Mr. Harris, you have five minutes.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): The clock is always our enemy in committee.

Mr. Woodworth, Algonquin Provincial Park is one of my favourite places in the world. There are still wonderful experiences along the Highway 60 corridor, but you want to get away from that if you want to avoid people.

Ms. Gabor, earlier you were speaking about some of the new parks in Toronto. You mentioned Cherry Beach. I think you actually meant Sugar Beach, which is the new one.

Ms. Andrea Gabor: Yes, I'm sorry, it's Sugar Beach, and HTO beach is the one a little further down.

Mr. Dan Harris: They're all wonderful new urban spaces, especially in that area along the waterfront, which has just been inundated with condominiums in the last decade. Spaces for people to use have certainly been sorely lacking.

I've noticed a few things today. First off, regarding Rouge Park and the Evergreen Brick Works—again, both wonderful locations—you mentioned the accessibility by transit. This is an absolutely critical point for the use of these parks, but we're still a long way from having good accessibility by transit to those locations.

Take Evergreen Brick Works, for instance. The buses are only running on Saturdays right now. At Rouge Valley park, we're looking at a two-hour transit ride by TTC from downtown Toronto. There are still large improvements that need to be made there.

One of the comments you made that was part of the initial presentation was about reviewing the standards for federally funded projects. Could you perhaps elaborate a little on the kind of review you would like to see on federally funded projects?

Ms. Andrea Gabor: I think that was David's comment, so I'll pass it over to him.

Mr. David Wise: The federal government has a number of initiatives currently going on right now. One of them would be the national infrastructure strategy. We presented on that to Infrastructure Canada a couple of months ago. Part of it has to do with the whole idea of green procurement strategies. How does the federal government leverage its funding and leverage its involvement when we're talking about fairly large-scale development programs? That's a significant opportunity right there, to go back to the question from Mr. Woodworth.

When the federal government is involved in issues with Canada Lands Company, for example, or involved in the Windsor-Essex corridor in considering the second crossing of the Detroit River, those are tremendous opportunities to have a significant formative change and to have that federal initiative.

It's not enough to simply provide those green spaces. You have to be able to get to them. One of the things that I think Canada Lands does, especially with some of their interesting developments such as Garrison Woods in Calgary, Garrison Crossing in Chilliwack, and the Rockcliffe air force base here is by emphasizing LEED-ND. By emphasizing a complete community package, you're not simply talking about access to green spaces; you're also talking about how you get to those green spaces and how you move around within those communities.

Those are at the very fundamental essence. Those are different ways of looking at infrastructure provision. It's a different way of looking at community building, and it's certainly an area where we think the federal government can and should be playing a role.

● (1725)

Mr. Dan Harris: That's great. Thank you.

We believe that, while decisions need to be made locally so that the local considerations take precedence, certainly there's a large role that the federal government can play with respect to leadership and helping to provide that leadership across the board. Whether we're talking about an infrastructure plan or a transit strategy, certainly there is a role for them to play there.

Mr. Bienenstock—

The Chair: I'm sorry to say your time has expired.

Our last—

Mr. Dan Harris: I was going to ask about enlightened developers.

The Chair: Yes, thank you.

The last four minutes will be for Mr. Toet.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have to first thank Mr. Bienenstock for bursting my bubble, because he did align with my children. I thought I was quite a young man, but I was sitting here nodding my head and thinking, “Okay, my kids are right. I am getting old.” Thanks for reminding me of that today.

In all seriousness, though, one of the things we've touched on a lot is the space and the need for the space, but what we haven't talked about is the ability to interact in the space.

Mr. Bienenstock, you did talk about it a little bit, but I'd love to get some feedback also from our other witnesses regarding this whole thing of signs, because I've seen it myself. You go to a park space, a beautiful green space, and you can't go here and you can't go there, and you're not allowed to do this and you're not allowed to do that. How do we address that?

I think one of the fundamental issues that we have there is basically liability, so we have to be able to cross those two things. I would invite a very quick response on how we can deal with that liability issue at the same time as we open up those spaces.

Ms. Andrea Gabor: I can't speak really to the liability issues, but I think that programming is very important to getting people to interact there.

The Evergreen Brick Works has a lot of activities, whether they are for school kids coming in for art lessons and then using the fields as venues or for people growing things on their lands, interacting, and having the farmers' market, or using their new building as an event space. There are ways, through programming, to get people to interact. That's one of the most intensive examples I can think of.

I'm not as familiar with the Rouge Park, but I think there are ways of making people interact, and it's by providing excellent programming that draws people.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: There's one other point I want to get to, and I want to make sure I don't run out of time.

One thing we've talked about a lot, and Rouge Park is a trigger for me, is the big urban spaces that we have set aside. I think they're great. They're fantastic, and I encourage them, but I get a sense—especially, Mr. Bienenstock, from what you've been talking about—that we can also do a lot of this on a much more condensed model and have great success rates.

Maybe you can you speak to the numbers you gave us characterizing the involvement of our children and how it has great social impact. What kind of space do you need in order to have a real impact in the neighbourhood?

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: There are a couple of things.

First I'll say, to agree with Andrea's point, that even though I love what I do, I would take an amazing programmer and an urban setting with a crack in the pavement and some weeds coming through over one of my spaces in terms of the number of people you can engage. People really are the most important asset we have.

I want to go back for a second to the liability issue. Invite the actuaries to come in and have the conversation. If you do, you'll find out that they actually are interested in this conversation, because fewer people are getting injured in these spaces. For some reason we think that the insurance guys are the bogeymen, and they aren't. They're you and me, the same people we are. They have kids too, and they want what's safe and what's right.

We have to get away from risk analysis and risk assessments and get into risk-benefit analysis. We have stopped doing that in the face of a short-term focus.

If we can force that conversation, the liability thing goes away. In fact, you will find that the insurers will start to be allies for some of this stuff.

Bloomberg has the most successful program. He decided that everyone is going to have a walkable green space. He took over more than 200 school grounds and turned them into public parks. He has the terrible problem of having more people with a million bucks apiece who want to have their name on a park than he has parks to put them on. That's not our problem, but it's a nice problem to have. Hopefully we'll get there some day. These spaces work.

What do these spaces need to be to engage? It's remarkably simple. Think about the woods and about a durable way of placing them into an urban setting. Just make sure that your palette comes from within a hundred miles of where you start and you will have a pretty good level of success. Landscape architects, although I railed against them, actually are pretty good—and some of our planners—if you give them that problem and force it.

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you so much. I want to thank each of the witnesses for being here. You did bring us back to our childhood memories—mine, of falling out of a tree. The fort I made tying logs to the branches didn't work very well, and I quickly learned the basics of gravity and engineering.

Mr. Adam Bienenstock: And of the health care system.

The Chair: Yes, exactly.

Thank you so much. It has been very interesting. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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