

Over the Back Fence  
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Approx 640 words

Signs of the times  
By Alva Wood

After the third big dump of snow this winter, Gerald Newberry shovelled out his driveway just like he had the previous two times.

Then he stood at the end of his driveway and stared down quarter-mile of gravel road that curves down the hill past Isabella Adams' house to the main road.

It hadn't been plowed. Again.

"Phone them!" says Louise.

"They won't come," says Gerald.

"They certainly won't come if you don't phone them," says Louise. "I didn't move up here from River City so that we could be cut off from civilization like we were living in Outer Mongolia."

Gerald has heard this before. They thought they were moving into a new subdivision, with all modern facilities. Except the developer barely got a few houses built before he flipped the land to another developer who wanted to turn it into a destination resort. Who promptly flipped it to a third developer who dreamed of creating a highrise condo complex and microbrewery.

The revised master plan is still being studied by the village administration.

Every time Gerald calls to complain about the lack of snowplowing, Freddie Fallis tells him, "I can't. It's not our road."

"Then whose is it?" Gerald demands.

"It hasn't been turned over to the village yet," Freddie says. "It's still the developer's responsibility."

"The one who started the project?" Gerald asks. "Or the one you're stalling?"

Instead of phoning Freddie again, Gerald stomps down through the snow to the corner, where Sam Burkholder and Isabella are chatting. Sam has come over with his farm tractor to plow Isabella's driveway.

At times like this, Isabella admits that agricultural land uses might have some benefit after all.

"I'd do your road myself," Sam tells Gerald. "But if they ever find someone else is willing to do the plowing for them, they'll never do it themselves."

"I understand," says Gerald.

"It's a matter of principle," says Sam.

"I understand," says Gerald.

"Of course, you could put up a sign to embarrass them," says Sam.

"I don't understand," says Gerald.

They take an old 4x8 sheet of plywood from Sam's barn. With a can of spray paint, they letter, "PLOW THIS ROAD!" on it in huge letters, with an arrow pointing up Gerald's hill. As an afterthought, Gerald adds, "Please."

Then they nail it onto the telephone pole on the corner, high enough that no one can miss seeing it.

The snowplow rolls right by, leaving a three-foot wall of packed snow across the entrance.

Two days later, Gerald watches a white pickup truck with a village logo on the door try to get through the mound left by the plow. It can't. A staff guy gets out. He stares at the sign. He measures it. Then he climbs laboriously over the wall of snow and clumps his way up the hill.

"Did you put up that sign?" he asks.

"Yup!" says Gerald.

"It is my duty," says the guy, "to inform you that your action is in violation of village bylaws governing the size and location of signs."

"Are you going to plow my road?" asks Gerald.

"Permanent overhead signage requires greater headroom," says the guy, ignoring Gerald's question.

"It's not permanent," says Gerald. "It's only there until you plow my road."

“In that case,” the guy says, “it exceeds the size limitations established for temporary signage. Further, the quality of lettering fails to meet the standards of the Official Community Plan,” he continues, handing a ticket to Gerald.

“Should you fail to pay within the specified deadline,” he finishes, “the amount owing will be added to your municipal taxes.”

He turns to stomp back down the road to his truck. “By the way,” he adds, “you’ll probably hear from B.C. Hydro about unauthorized use of their pole.”

As he leaves, he calls back over his shoulder, “Have a nice day!”