

Victoria businesses join global climate strike, some close shop

Andrew Duffy / Times Colonist

SEPTEMBER 27, 2019 06:00 AM



Paula and Nairn McPhee, owners of Zero Waste Emporium, at their store in downtown Victoria.

Photograph By ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

As many as 50 Greater Victoria businesses have signed on to play roles during Friday's global strike to pressure governments into action on climate change.

Dogwood B.C., a Victoria-based citizen action network that has been working with businesses to get involved in the fight against climate change, said more than 200 businesses in Greater Victoria and Metro Vancouver have committed to taking action.

Climate strikes have been planned in more than 150 countries on Friday with strikes planned for Victoria and Vancouver.

The movement started with young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg who protested outside of her country's parliament for several weeks in August 2018.

That protest exploded on social media and she expanded the movement to encourage kids to skip school every Friday to pressure global leaders to act.

The young activist and her Fridays for Future school strike followers are now calling on everyone to walk out of their commitments on Friday in a collective strike.

Some businesses in Victoria have committed to take part by doing things ranging from closing during the strike to allow staff to take part in the protests to displaying climate-strike posters and sharing information about the strike on the social media channels.

"It's really encouraging to see so many local businesses answer the call to action from this grassroots, youth-led movement and step up to the plate to highlight climate change as a serious issue that needs to be addressed," said Rob Fisher, Dogwood's development manager. "As members of the business community and employers of local [often young] people, the actions of local businesses carry a lot of weight.

"By participating in the climate strike, these businesses are sending a clear and powerful message to our elected leaders, as well as to their customers and their community, that they are a values-based member of the community that supports the rights of our children to have a safe future."

Around the world, as many as 3,000 businesses have registered to take part in Friday's events.

It's the least they can do, said Heather Benning, owner of Victoria's be love restaurant and Cafe Bliss. "This is critical. Are we going to sacrifice something now or a lot more later?" she asked.

Benning said after consulting staff, they have decided to close be love until 5 p.m. on Friday, missing out on what is usually a busy lunch rush. "I really feel this is a crisis, and I would do a lot more than [miss out on a lucrative lunch] to be honest," she said. "There is no bigger issue right now. I feel like this is something we are all going to suffer with for a long while."

Dana LeComte, owner of Tugwell Creek Meadery in Sooke, said they will be closed Friday so the entire family can get involved.

She said her partner, Bob Liptrot, their two teenagers and a group of other kids, will all be part of the strike action in downtown Victoria, while she will be in Vancouver on business and joining a protest there.

“Bob and I feel very strongly about it ... we debated even having children because of what was happening to the environment,” she said, noting they also moved to a farm on the Island from Vancouver 23 years ago for the same reason. She said they have seen first-hand the effect of climate change and the human element on their bees and their crops and that has spurred the entire family to action including driving an electric vehicle, installing solar panels and having their meadery certified as “green.”

Victoria’s Zero Waste Emporium will not be closing, but owners Paula and Nairn McPhee have given their six employees the time off to take part in the protests.

“We are staying open all day on the 27th and offering 10 per cent off everything in store to encourage more people to explore Zero Waste shopping/living, and 100 per cent of the profits from sales on the 27th will be donated to the Sierra Club of B.C., so they can continue the great work they have been doing over the past 20 years protecting our rainforest and wildlife, and encouraging a transition to green energy alternatives,” said Paula McPhee. “Closing would only limit people in the alternatives available to shop zero waste, but by staying open we encourage new people to come in while still supporting the strike.”

Other Victoria companies participating on Friday include Habit Coffee, Cold Comfort Ice Cream, Discovery Coffee and Silk Road Tea.

Nationally, Vancouver-based firms Mountain Equipment Coop and Lush Cosmetics have committed to closing operations to help raise awareness of the movement.

“Sustainability is really part of our DNA,” said Phil Arrata, chief executive of MEC.

The company will close its 22 stores until 5 p.m. on Friday to allow staff the opportunity to participate in protests.

Lush will shut down its 50 shops, manufacturing facilities and online shopping in Canada on Friday in an effort to encourage its 2,216 staff and its customers to participate in local actions. It closed some 200 shops in the U.S. last Friday, when the strike took place in that country.

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— with files from the Canadian Press

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