

## Salem Fiddles While the Planet Burns

Profanity spewed from a moving car missed its point. “Hey, you #@&#, if you use wood products, you’re in favor of killing trees!”

I heard this as I was about to join several dozen people carrying picket signs along Mission Street. We were protesting the needless destruction of beautiful ancient trees by Salem Hospital.

My sign said, “More trees, less parking lot.” A woman held up a message that could be re-used for other environmental outrages in this town: “I’m really MAD!”

Some of the trees were over 250 years old.

They survived from before the American Revolution through floods, fires, windstorms, and so much else. But City officials and Salem Hospital finally succeeded in killing them. Shameful.

They weren’t considered to be “significant” by heartless corporate executives at the hospital. So the chainsaws and logging equipment came out, even after a recent legal ruling required Salem Hospital to reduce the size of its parking lot, allowing many trees to be saved.

If they hadn’t been cut down already.

This sort of giving-the-finger to people who care about preserving what’s left of the natural world may play well in Texas, but its become a major irritant to environmentally-minded Salemians.

Officials at City Hall currently are led by a Mayor, City Manager, and city councilors whose general attitude toward caring for our one and only Earth is decidedly at odds with the values of most local citizens and Oregonians as a whole.

Last year I wrote to them, asking if they believed global warming was happening, humans are mostly responsible, and we need to do something about it.

Only two out of the ten top City of Salem officials said “yes.”

The rest covered in a science-denying hidey-hole, unwilling to admit that their support for environmentally destructive actions was at odds with the obvious necessity to do everything possible to avert catastrophic changes to the ability of our planet to support human civilization.

So while both the Earth and the western United States experienced record warmth in 2014; while ski resorts in Oregon face steadily declining snowpacks as hotter air causes more precipitation to fall as rain; while drought becomes an ever-increasing threat to farmland and forests...

Salem's clueless politicians and corporate executives go on their merry Screw the Planet way.

Pushing an unneeded billion dollar Third Bridge that would encourage more carbon-emitting autocentric sprawl. Cutting down precious trees for parking lots and "just because we want to." Stifling adequate mass transit bus service. Pouring many millions into highway projects while ignoring the need for safe bike lanes, sidewalks, and pedestrian crossings.

The guy who yelled at picketers didn't realize that this protest wasn't just about the trees.

It was about much more — putting the need to prevent further climate change and environmental destruction at the forefront of Salem's must-do list, rather than an afterthought.

There's a book about the reality of global warming called "This Changes Everything." So far in Salem, it hasn't.

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Strange Up Salem seeks to lift our city's Blah Curse. Give us a Facebook like. Brian Hines blogs at [hinesblog.com](http://hinesblog.com)

