Mark Holland, Marilyn Hamilton Interview Transcript

RICK 0:10
Welcome to the Heads Up Community Mental Health podcast. Join our host Jo de Vries with the Fresh Outlook Foundation, as she combines science with storytelling to explore a variety of mental health issues with people from all walks of life. Stay tuned.

JO 0:32
Hey, Jo here. Thanks for joining me along with Dr. Marilyn Hamilton and Mark Holland, for this fascinating discussion about how we can use what we know about nature to plan, design, and build more livable, socially connected, and mentally healthy communities.

Before we dig in, a big thank you to our sponsors for this episode, the Social Planning and Research Council of BC, Emil Anderson Construction, and AECOM Engineering. I've known and admired both Marilyn and Mark for years, and I'm thrilled to reconnect to talk about the proven link between healthy built environments and mentally healthy citizens. Welcome to you both, thanks for being here.

MARILYN 1:18
Thanks so much Jo, and it's wonderful to be with Mark again since I moved to Findhorn Ecovillage in Scotland in 2018. It's been a while since we've connected directly. I love the theme of your podcast today.

MARK 1:29
Thanks and yes Joanne and it's great to reconnect with you and thank you for putting the time and effort into this podcast. And Marilyn, it's great to reconnect as well. It's been a long time. Findhorn, lucky you it's good place to live.

JO 1:39
Marilyn's accomplishments are too numerous to mention here. But in short, she's an international thought leader, author and founder of Integral City, a global nonprofit that fosters holistic and conscious communities. Based on the concept of the human hive mind, Marilyn uses Integral City frameworks and tools to help multi-stakeholder groups transform their cities and eco-regions, into habitats that are as resilient for humans, as beehives are for bee. Marilyn, first of all, congratulations on your huge and influential body of work, truly remarkable. How long have you been doing this?

MARILYN 2:23
Well, I would say in some ways, I've been doing this all my life, because the discovery of Integral City Meshworks about 20 years ago, rests on my exploration of the development of individuals, and then

families, and then organizations, and sectors, and communities, and eco-regions. And I learned that they're all fractal patterns and natural human systems that are included in the city.

JO 2:46
Your website states that out beyond the smart city, out beyond the resilient city, lives the integral city. There is a knowing field, we will meet you there. Can you help us understand your concept of the integral city as outlined in your book of the same name?

MARILYN 3:06
When I answered the call to look at cities, I realized that I could bring new vision if I explored them as evolutionary, as complex adaptive living systems from a holistic perspective. I was influenced by Ken Wilber's integral framework and Spiral Dynamic's Integral Development Research and realized that cities could not just be technologically smart and environmentally resilient, but also consciously aware and culturally connected. So an integral city framework embraces the bio, psycho, cultural, social aspects of cities at multiple fractals.

JO 3:46
Can you elaborate on the link between social structures and systems in beehives, and how they can inform and inspire the planning and design of more sustainable cities?

MARILYN 3:59
I was influenced by Howard Bloom, who is the author of many books including the Global Brain, and I wanted to look at cities through a biomimicry lens. And that was just the time that Janine Benyus published her book on biomimicry. So what I was noticing was that the four roles of the beehive that Bloom identified, could be translated into the city. He had observed that bees have four roles in the hive that enable them to achieve their annual goal to produce 20 kilograms of honey for hive survival. That really caught my attention. Oh, you mean that bees have a goal?

There is a group of the bees, he calls them conformity enforcers, and they're about 90 percent of the hive. And they fly out to flower patches and gather pollen and nectar. And when they come back to the hive two results happen. First of all, they communicate their findings by the famous bee dance at the entrance to the hive, and they tell the rest of their sister bees where to go, the type of flower, how much there is there, the angle of the sun, the distance, it's quite amazing. So when 90 percent of the hive are dancing like this, it is what I would say a real dance party, a kind of a rave even.

The second result that occurs is that the resource allocator bees, and they're about three percent of the hive, reward the conformity enforcers for their productivity with bee fuel, if you want, to return and bring back more energy. There's a third group of bees called the inner judges, which many anthropologists might consider the hive mind these days, and they keep track of how the hive is doing in meeting its intended goal of 20 kilograms of honey.

Meanwhile, the fourth group, the diversity generator bees, maybe about five percent of the hive, they're flying to other patches of flowers and they're bringing back other resources, but different information, so they have instead of a line dance, they're doing a Scottish jig if you want. When the conformity enforcers are so productive, the diversity generators information gets completely ignored. But as the conformity enforcers keep visiting the same patch of flowers, they bring back less and less, and get rewarded less and less, until eventually the resource allocators cut them off entirely. This is

really a terrible result for the conformity enforcers and causes them to become depressed. And it's amazing, but we can measure depression in bees by their pheromones.

Meantime, our trusty diversity generators continue to bring back alternative resources. And finally, the depressed bees notice the little party going on when the d.g.s return. So the conformity enforcers pick up these regenerative pheromones, if you will, and take off in new directions. And they swing the hive back into full production, and we have success on the move again. Of course, at this point, the diversity generators take off in yet a newer direction, to be ready for the next dip in the conformity enforcer production.

And this is kind of a double sustainability loop that the resource allocators, and the inner judges continued to monitor and integrate the information and the hive development to achieve the hive goal. So there you have the story of how the bees do it. And what I've learned to adapt to cities.

JO 7:28
Tell us about the link between a functional human hive mind at a community scale, for example, and community mental health.

MARILYN 7:40
I would say that I would look at being able to draw the connections between the four roles that Howard Bloom identified in the beehive, and how I see this in the human hive. Those four roles become what I call the four voices. And the four voices, our citizens instead of conformity enforcers, they're the business innovators instead of the diversity generators. They're the civic managers instead of the resource allocators, and the third sector instead of the inner judges. And I think when all of those four voices are at the table, and able to listen to one another, then we're creating the conditions in the human hive, for us to be able to achieve something like a hive mind.

JO 8:31
Can you give us some examples of communities that have embraced this concept and have benefited from it?

MARILYN 8:40
The first one I would point to is where I last lived in Canada. I lived in Abbotsford, British Columbia, which is near Vancouver, and I was there for 30 years. I was very impressed. When I saw that it was living in a, I would say quite balanced way given the economic challenges that it faced in 2018 when I left. And I was equally impressed from far away over here in Scotland, when I saw how the city came together to support individuals and collectives during the terrible floods last year, when somebody told me that Highway One was under eight feet of water, which is pretty disastrous.

Another place that has been influenced by my work is a small city in Oklahoma called Durant. They invested in Integral City approaches to whole city development. And they were actually able to grow their economy even during COVID, because they had followed one of our principles. If you want to improve the health of a system, connect it to more of itself.

And the third example I'll give you is where I live here now in the Findhorn Ecovillage. I guess I would say right here I am a firsthand activator or witness to how we have survived the loss of 80 percent of our economy because of the COVID lockdown, through active community collaboration. And we've also used art to create, in fact, a Phoenix mosaic around our universal Hall. We didn't know how prescient this was

because the year we finished, we also had two fires, one that burned down our community center and the other our main sanctuary. And I've been able to see how the community has been able to cooperate to redesign and rebuild these real hearts of our community.

I could go on and point to other cities where all of the 50 plus people who have taken my courses reside around the world. Nottinghamshire, Knaresborough, Arnhem in the Netherlands, even Living Cities Russia network. So I would say Amsterdam with its integral city selfie for donut economics, where prosocial does its commons with biomimicry principles, and Social Change 2.0 who've been doing block by block development in California cities.

JO 10:52
It must feel truly remarkable to have had this kind of impact around the world and to be leaving such an incredible legacy.

MARILYN 11:02
Well, thank you for saying that. It's very humbling Jo. I have gone to Russia before it was closed down in 2014, when they published my book, and they had banners up and my logos up and they already changed hundreds of cities. And I know that work still continues. And the reason that we've created living cities outside of Russia and calling it Living Cities Earth is because the work must continue because it's so important.

JO 11:29
Time to bring Mark into the conversation. He is a LEED accredited, award winning planner who holds professional degrees in landscape architecture, and community and regional planning. Three of the many hats Mark wears are as President of Holland Planning Innovations Inc., based on Vancouver Island, as Adjunct Professor in Community Planning, and as author of a widely reference book on agricultural urbanism. For bios and contact info for both Marilyn and Mark, visit freshoutlookfoundation.org/podcasts.

Mark, kudos to you as well for your long and strong career. Mark, you've been at this a long time. Was there any focus on community mental health when you were starting out, and how has that changed over time?

MARK 12:22
The history of our communities is an interesting one, Jo, because the priorities and the frameworks and the mental models that we all have, as professions and politicians and in our economic models, has had a mixed relationship with health. If we look at the historical origins of the modern city over the last 250 years, initially cities emerged during the early and mid-industrial revolution, as really a purely economic agenda. And even physical health was hardly paid any attention to, it was all functional.

There was a lot of pushback once we started building them out and saw how horrific that world became. And so the response to that was probably mostly a physical health and safety response. I think we saw a really interesting change as our cities exploded in growth in the 20th century. And the structures of society as we knew it began to change, to pay a lot more attention to rights, to what people needed, as opposed to maintaining certain social structures that in some cases even included slavery.

The 20th century was a remarkable moment in time, as we began to build a lot of cities and needed mental models. And then the mental models had to be based on some rationale. And so health began to

become more and more of an understood issue, both in society generally, and then it slowly began to become a much more important agenda within the city planning field. I would say when I started my career, studying about 35 years ago in this field, there was some attention to it.

The very first sort of I think, formal, healthy community conversations that began in the planning field, emerged in the 80s. So right around that time, and they were getting their heads around it, often stimulated by some large international meetings, habitat conferences that would bring people from all around the world. Some of the large international organizations like the World Bank, and the IMF, we're spending a lot of money on helping cities become safer and healthier, and we needed framework. So it was a very exciting time then at the very early stages.

It kind of went quiet. Sustainability took over and it sort of got absorbed into that over the next several decades. But it has come back as we've talked about here and as your podcast is a witness to more clearly. And so I would say that now, there's a lot more conscious understanding of the issues of health and increasingly mental health, just in the last decade and a half. It takes a long time for communities to change. Once you put up a building, you don't go in and change really anything in that building for 20, 30 years.

While we're getting our minds better accustomed to understand even thinking about mental health, it takes a long time before those ideas translate into words, because we often don't change our city plans or even change any words in those for at least a decade, decade and a half at a time. And we still have a long ways to go before we have a new common vocabulary of both words and concepts, but also of physical expressions of those words and concepts for our community.

JO 15:23
So getting back to the focus of our Heads Up podcast, I want to talk about mentally healthy communities. I know it's a complex concept, but for the purposes of this conversation, let's simply define mental health as psychological, emotional, and social well-being. Marilyn let's start with you. Given your decades of work in this area, how would you describe a mentally healthy community?

MARILYN 15:51
I think that bringing the four voices together, that is the citizens, the civic managers, business innovators, and the third sector or civil society, as you say in North America, I would say that having those four voices at the table, able and willing to listen to one another, is creating the conditions for a healthy community.

There's many other ways that we can consider this now. I was just listening to a Russian researcher, a medical doctor, who was pointing out the conditions around the pandemic, that they realize that mental health requires a deep need of people connecting to one another. And so we've seen in the last two and a half years where people have been isolated, that there has been a very steep decline in mental health. This is something that we noticed a lot in Findhorn Ecovillage on an anecdotal basis, and really worked hard during the lockdown to counteract.

JO 16:49
Mark, given your perspectives as a planner with extensive municipal experience, how would you define community mental health, or what would that kind of community look like to you?

MARK 17:01

Going back to what we've all been talking about, it's how we think, why this is important is because it changes how we think. I remember having a conversation with a dear friend. She and I founded the Healing Cities Institute and ran it for a number of years before we went our separate ways. And I remember explaining to her that in the development and design process of any building or landscape, there is no teaching in school. There is no large piece of paper where you actually start looking at that health layer. She was shocked, actually, that something that's so fundamentally critical to our lives, and frankly, to our budgets of our province.

Forty to 50 percent of our budgets are going to healthcare. Forty percent of those are chronic diseases that, which a good deal of them can be linked straight back to the physical world we've created for ourselves. How can we not be looking at this? It's just an interesting observation that it's not something that we typically think about. It's both very real and very intangible.

I've had the privilege of working on a big project where we were endeavoring to create the healthiest neighborhood in Canada and spent a lot of time working with a very broad range of health care professionals, and was also one of the advisors for the Healthy Built Environment Alliance on their mental health report. Really interesting learning experience on all accounts. I think this would probably fit in with Marilyn's hive model of individuals and collectives.

I don't have proof one way or the other of this idea of community mind or large collective mind. I know it's certainly a concept considered in progressive psychology, Buddhism, and others. There may well be truth to this stuff. I do understand the creation of culture. And I think that when we look at community mental health, we need to look at the mental health of the individuals within the community, because the community and culture as we know it is really a product, it's an outcome of the behaviors. By that I mean, the thoughts, the words, a full cognitive kind of psychology framework here, of a whole lot of people all interacting together. And then when we step back, we see these patterns. And so culture as we think about it is a thing, if you will, it feels like it has substance.

I'm definitely a postmodernist in this one thing that I believe we're producing our culture on a daily basis based on how we think, and what we do, and what we say, and how we interact. I would say that community mental health is, in some ways, at one level. It's all the individual bees in the hive. So it's how is the hive? How is our cities, our communities shaping, supporting, creating stressors? What is that relationship and how healthy are the individuals in their mental emotional state?

I would suggest that maybe we even think about two other things. I think the connection between our physical health and our mental, social, emotional health is undisputed. I would say that there's very definitely a physical reality to this. If you are worried about your ability to put food on your table, take care of your family, and keep a roof over your head, your mental and emotional state is going to be pretty stressed. So there's a physical connection there directly. And the other one, I think that's an interesting one.

Our world has become significantly less spiritual in the last 20 years, for better or worse. I think certainly Marilyn's work pulls us out to the level of patterning, which could be deemed as almost a spiritual collective, whether or not there's some external entity or cosmology underway. There's sort of that larger feeling of meaning. I think maybe our secular world, we would look at this as meaning, if you will. Community mental health is at some level, the sum of both the individuals in that community and their state, the sum of all of that, and the culture that it creates. And that culture then shapes how we think,

and whether we care for each other as Marilyn has raised, et cetera, to make us healthier and happier or not.

MARILYN 20:36
Mark, you remind me of something that I put into my first book that related to BC healthy communities. It had a very integral framework to it. And I have actually a little figure in my book that describes basically, I think, what you were pointing to right now Mark. The inner and the outer of the individual, and the inner and the outer of the collective was how they pulled together the psychological and spiritual for inner work of individual, the evidence for the outer individual was physical and behavioral. And the inner collective was the cultural that you're pointing to Mark. And the evidence for the outer collective, they looked at natural systems and social systems, and they really focused on salutogenic factors. I think there was actually a great long, somewhat of a lineage out of BC that actually did look at community mental health through those terms, and they had a very strong spiritual connection as you point to Mark.

JO 21:33
So what are you both hearing from the research community about community mental health and the need for social connection?

MARK 21:42
There's an increasing amount of interest in the last 10, 15 years. A lot of the research community is driven by funding that they can get through universities and professors in universities, which do a lot of this kind of research. They're set on their own agendas. So we're starting to see more interest in this. And obviously a huge number of links between elements of our communities or cities, and our personal physical, mental health, and that we can put together.

I'm going to reiterate Charles Montgomery's great work with his Happy City Organization in the book that he wrote there, and really having pulled a lot of it together. We had students and researchers working for us for a while digging a lot of that. I don't have all that information here, but it's with me on this call. But there is just a lot of research that's showing direct relationships. And the Healthy Built Environment Alliance toolkits that you mentioned Jo, especially their mental health one is just a real rich resource for that. It's still a little bit intangible and we're working slowly to better understand how to integrate mental health outcomes, and the physical and functional patterns of communities that affect mental health outcomes and get them into the plans and policies of cities.

Let me give you just one example. One study showed that if you garden, pretty much regularly every day, many times a week, the statistical probability of getting dementia drops by 30 percent. So if you think about how many people in the modern world are on statins, just because of maybe a slight risk of heart issues. If we had a pill that we could all take that reduced the probability of dementia by 30 percent, we'd all be on that. We'd all have subscriptions to that pill. Well, that pill's called gardening.

Okay great, but then if you live in a city in the high-density, mixed-use environments that we're all trying to get everybody into, where do you garden? So the City of Vancouver instituted a tax relief program. So for developers that buy a lot, and it takes sometimes up to five years to get your project approved. So there may be this empty lot sitting there, you get tax relief if you put in a community garden.

And so we actually can go into downtown Vancouver these days, and see community gardens on some of the biggest intersections of the city. There will be a tower there someday, but in the meantime,

there's a community garden there, and then maybe when that tower gets built, someone's going to be knocking down an old derelict building nearby, and they'll just move the garden over. It's little examples like that around how we can actually move fairly quickly to begin to get things into our cities, which do really begin to help give us much better mental health than we might otherwise have access to.

MARILYN 24:02
I think that I would point to Vancouverite Dr. Gabor Mate who is looking at trauma. And he along with Thomas Hubl, and a very large group of researchers around the world are realizing that where trauma exists, and it seems to show up in pretty well every individual and collective history, then some of the ways that we can actually improve our mental health is to walk into the refiner's fire that is at the heart of trauma clearing, which actually is embodied. So it's interesting.

I said earlier that I always think of cities as being the human system writ large. And so if that's the case, then I imagine that by doing this trauma work on individual and collective basis, it can change mindsets, it can change the ways that we look at the world. And I've been really impressed by the commitment of somebody like Gabor Mate. I just saw him be the keynote speaker at Integral Europe Conference. And he's just so clear, and able to give really valuable practices and processes to individuals and groups that they can take right away. And from British Columbia in Vancouver, his perspective, he learned it on the street, he learned it through his own history. And I think he is a wonderful model for us to look for approaches that we can actually learn fairly quickly.

MARK 25:27
I think it's really great that you raised Dr. Mate. He's clearly an intellectual and spiritual leader in the Vancouver environment, but through his writing and speaking around the world. Joanne, this is an interesting issue that Marilyn has raised here around mental health. And we see this embodied in the neighborhood that Dr. Mate has really spent a lot of his life working in. And that is a neighborhood known as the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver, the poorest postal code in the entire country.

I lived on one end of it, and my office was on the other for about 10 years. So I got to know it fairly well. And it is several dozen blocks of 24 hour-a-day tragedy is what's going on there. And it is just this massive impact. When we find ourselves as a society, not taking care of ourselves and each other, then folks get into trouble. And when they find themselves in mental health problems, and many others, we all look to various substances.

The official one, and it's fully accepted, is alcohol. But that can be quite a problem and not just a relaxation. And there's a massive industry out there, illicit industry, in responding to the problems of essentially mental challenges of perfectly fine folks, including those without mental illnesses, and certainly well with those with mental illnesses. And when it all really goes off the rails, the healing process becomes a really big and even more challenging one. It's just like any kind of health, once you become really unhealthy, it takes a lot more effort. And you may never fully get back to your original levels of health because damage is done.

And I think across our community, we often think of healthy cities and happy cities, our minds really fill with middle class images. But in reality, that healthy communities, we need to do them as essentially prevention to inoculate and to support people, so they don't end up falling off the rails or falling between the cracks. When they do, they're still part of our community. And we still need to respond to them. And that takes just an enormously greater amount of investment and care to move into this. And this is where the learnings from working with those who really have fallen between the cracks, Dr.

Mate's forte, and we're so lucky that he shares what he has learned to help us understand things a little differently. Because it's not an aspect of the health of our communities that most of us choose to spend our lives dealing with.

JO 27:43
I think it's really interesting, the concept of community trauma.

MARILYN 27:48
A friend of mine wrote a book many years ago about Glasgow. The name of the book was called the Tears That Made the Clyde. The Clyde is the river on which Glasgow sits. And it is the story of alcoholic addiction and the impact that it has had on the community and the lineage of Glasgow over generations. So that, I would say, is a story of community mental health in serious challenge. But it takes a whole community to really heal a whole community. We say it takes a village to raise a child, but the healing also requires the whole community. And it does require a lot of courage for people to come together and recognize that healing is needed.

I don't know if either of you have ever encountered Family Constellation work. I do know it is alive and well in Vancouver. I use it in Scotland here and I've used it for cities for a long time to show me the invisible patterns. Systemic Constellation work is very powerful approach to being able to work with not just individuals or families as it originally started, but it is now used widely in Europe for organizational work. And I have a colleague who actually lives in Ottawa who does social constellations at society levels. These are all new ways of using soft technology that allows for consciousness and culture to make a change to behaviors and systems.

JO 29:16
I recently worked with a volunteer writer for our Heads Up Community Mental Health programming on eco-grief in youth and climate anxiety in particular. Now, that is a huge mental health issue, and it will grow as climate change becomes more and more of a serious and urgent issue from a municipal perspective. Mark, how well are cities responding to climate change, and are they aware of the impact of that change on community mental health?

MARK 29:55
Very powerful question and a very timely one Jo. A lot of communities in our country, have declared their acknowledgment of the climate emergency. A very significant number of them now have climate change action plans that they're working on. Some are obviously much more advanced than others. But I think the general awareness in most communities is that this is real, and that it is serious, and that we're going to need to prepare for it, mitigate our climate emissions on one level, but just the impacts of climate change in terms of flooding, and heat domes, and other meteorological events is simply just driving it home.

The deeper question of the mental distress that this sort of multifaceted crisis is bringing into our lives, I'm not seeing that discussed very much. I think it may be part of the same challenge, Jo, that our society is facing around mental well-being in general, and the difficulty that we have in talking about struggles with mental well-being and mental illness. I don't think we're very far advanced on that, certainly not at the level of the kind of conversations that I see municipal councils in the political realm or much of the public realm in our communities speaking about.

I think part of it is because we're not quite sure what to do with it. And so it's become quite an existential sense of anxiety. And that's where I think we're beginning to see that the medical health professionals and mental health professionals are actually giving this a name and encountering it quite frequently. But I also am very optimistic that we will get our heads around this, and find a strong footing, and find an action plan, and be able to really make a lot of progress on maintaining a sustainable and high quality of life and expanding that across the planet. And I think Jo, the work that you're doing here is part of that, having folks hear from each other, take action, and not feeling like everyone's alone by themselves trying to figure out what to do with this existential crisis.

MARILYN 31:48
Mark, I think you've outlined well, the dilemmas and not necessarily high uptake from city councils, or I'd even think health care systems. Before I emigrated from Canada, I had many friends with youth, children, and they despaired of the health system being able to support them. I think the word that you're using around existential crisis is also one that I would agree with. And I think that the descriptions you use, Jo, of eco-grief in youth and climate anxiety are just newer names for mental health, and it's emerging from something that has been quite taboo. We just really haven't been prepared to speak about it.

For most of human existence, it's just been considered as something that demonstrates that a person is vulnerable, and that somehow it cast aspersions, not only on the individual, but the family and the culture. I think that what is being called forward is something related to what I was referring to earlier, around the four voices of the community, that as Mark has spoken in many ways, that it isn't just the city health authorities, or the people who are at city hall that need to address this. We need to actually call all four voices, not just the civic managers, but citizens, and business innovators, and civil society together, and really address this as a theme that interconnects, really, across all the other things that we've been talking about.

I had talked earlier also about the work of Gabor Mate, in trauma healing. And I think that the kinds of approaches that he's taking, also embrace this kind of eco-grief and climate anxiety, that it's time that we recognize that this is the kind of work that does call us to work together most effectively in neighborhoods, to be able to be with our neighbors. What we've learned in the pandemic, is that we can do this, in fact, we're very willing to do this. There's a whole initiative around community action networks or community connection networks. And we know that the experience over the last two years, that we have been willing to help one another.

I think that we need to also call on generations, so that the adults amongst us must be willing to step forward and hold the space for youth who are going through these difficult times and share as Mark has done. And it may be the grandparents and their great-grandparents even that share the traumas of wars, of prior difficult situations from many natural disasters. We've had a world full of fires, and floods, and all kinds of hurricanes and tsunamis that have existed as long as humankind has. But we don't always have a recognition that there now are cultural, social technologies, approaches that can actually release these traumas.

This is not only something that's nice to do, I think it will be absolutely crucial and necessary for us to do. Because energetically, when we lock those kinds of traumas into our systems, into our bodies, we actually do without the energy that it takes to keep them stratified in our bodies and locked down. And so if we do the necessary work as a community, to come together and do the trauma healing, we can also restore ourselves and regain all that energy. So like Mark, I am optimistic that we know how to do

this. So I think we need to bring our readiness and willingness forward. And those people who have a calling for doing this need to be supported, and we can do this as a community.

Getting down now to the nuts and bolts of building livable communities involves planning, design, and construction. These are laid out simply in the Healthy Built Environment Linkages Toolkit, created under the auspices of BC's Provincial Health Services Authority. The link is included in the show notes for this episode.

The framework outlines five key components for healthy built environments, neighborhood design, natural environments, food systems, housing, and transportation. So Mark, regarding the neighborhood design, it lists the needs for complete, compact, and connected communities. Tell us more about these, and what does this mean for mentally healthy communities?

I think that when we're looking at mental health, there's a kind of look at the question of what is it that you need, which if you don't have that, is going to create mental distress. That's a little different than a deeper issue of mental illness, but it's on that continuum. One of the first things that we need for our lives and for our families, is a range of what we in planning would call land uses. In regular life, we would call them the place that we live, the places we work, the place we shop, the place we have daycare, where we get our health care, things like that. There's an underpinning structure of regulation that planners use through land-use zoning. Primarily, there's a couple of different layers. They're done a little differently in each community, but they generally determine what kind of land-use goes where.

So when we talk about a complete community, what we're talking about is having within, ideally, let's say a 15 minute distance from where you live, most of the types of uses that you need, so that you can have a range of types of housing available to you. You can have places to buy food, shopping for other things, your school, health care, daycare, things like that, as well as open space. When we talk about a compact community, we kind of go back to my comment around 15 minutes. Before the car, we couldn't travel long distances very easily. And so by nature, most communities, cities, villages, all had all these different uses within walking distance, because there was enough population to support them, because they weren't getting in their car and driving halfway across the region in order to go to Costco. So everybody spent their money and spent their time locally. And so we historically had fairly complete compact communities.

Once we invented the car, in a good deal of the 20th century, we really started to spread out. And so everyone is familiar with the word sprawl. Essentially, these very large areas of say, just single family, or just industrial, or just commercial areas. It was a theory and planning for a period of time in the 20th century and got seriously challenged very quickly once we saw how it laid itself out. That being said, it still is the dominant zoning pattern for many cities. We're all working to try and bring that back, to be a little more compact in how things develop. So you don't have to get in your car and drive everywhere. Because we know that sitting in your car, and traffic, and gridlock is not good for your mental health.

In terms of connecting, that kind of goes to how we move around, picking up on the conversation around the car, and this large-scale sprawl of highways, and everybody using the vehicle to get everywhere. We've been really trying to shift away from that, in large part for health reasons, health with the global environment, and its impacts on air quality and ourselves. Climate change emissions is

really radically changing a whole lot of our planets in our lifetime, and in our children's and grandchildren's lifetimes. We're trying to slow that process.

We're really trying to get folks out of their car. That means then that we need other options to get around, whether that's a bus or a bike, or increasingly today, an electric bike, or ideally walking, which leads us back to the compact approach because traveling long distances by walking takes a long time. In some ways, we're kind of going back to the historical village where we would walk between different areas for what we need in a day. So those are sort of the three primary areas that we're looking at. Have all the different kinds of uses that you need, have them in a fairly compact way, and be able to get between them without having to spend very much time in a car.

JO 39:49
Marilyn, how does the Integral City Framework envision this type of neighborhood design and related mental health outcomes?

MARILYN 39:58
One of the predecessors of the BC Health Services Authority was the BC Healthy Communities group. And they mapped out that there were four different realms that community is connected through. And they identified both the individuals, so inner and outer for individuals, which would include psychological, and spiritual, and physical, and behavioral. And then they also looked at the inner and outer of the collective, and that would include cultural, and natural systems, and social systems.

One of the ways that Integral City would be embracing each of these ways of defining a city is that it would be thinking about these four different perspectives, and seeing how each person had an experience of those to keep themselves whole, balanced, and not just mentally healthy, but as Mark has referred to, physically healthy too, so that interacting in a walkable city, and something that's 15 minutes, as Mark is identified, is really something that sets up a much greater well-being than getting in a car and driving someplace that you're not personally connected to.

JO 41:07
Another consideration is natural environment. And the Toolkit calls for planning that preserves and connects surrounding natural environments. That's a really broad statement. Mark, can you tell us more about the link between nature and mental health from a planning perspective?

MARK 41:27
It's, in fact, one of the most important, I would say, when we look back into the history of understanding our mental well-being, and our spiritual well-being, and the communities in which we live, definitely one of the most important, particularly in larger cities. And that is the ability to connect to some natural green space in some form. There's a lot of medical evidence that's emerged that even being able to look at trees and green space from, say, a hospital room can increase your healing process quite rapidly. And it especially has a lot of impact on our mental well-being.

When new development is occurring within existing areas, it's really one of the very important aspects of planning and development is to try and get as much green space as we can into these areas. Now, if we can plan them in advance, then we can identify kind of a network of parks and greenways. And by parks, I mean sort of larger spaces of green space. They may be a forest, they may not be, they may be a recreation field or something like that but has different uses, or both. And the greenways are generally seen as sort of narrower links between them that maybe have trails.

They're also extremely important for natural habitat for organisms like birds and pollinators. They really need to have these greenways that connect these larger parks and patches. It also goes a little beyond that we need larger, more pristine environments for climate change, GHG absorption, for habitat for species that don't necessarily want to live very close to us, or it's not safe for them to live close to us. So we need much larger areas. But within our city environments, it becomes really important to get these parks and greenways.

A lot of the leaves on trees have a structure that helps take pollution out of the air. All of the plants basically live on carbon dioxide. They pull carbon dioxide out of the air, they cool environments, increasingly, as climate change advances, and in a lot of the areas that are in hotter climates, what we call an urban heat island, becomes a very, very key issue. What it means is that between the pavement, and all the buildings, and the lack of trees, the temperatures in cities can be five to 10 degrees hotter than they are in the immediately adjacent, more natural areas. That has all kinds of impacts. It actually causes premature death in people, makes a lot of folks very unhappy, it's linked to a lot of mental disturbance and a lack of well-being situations including leading to more crime in some cases. And it's a very serious distresser.

It also causes more energy consumption with air conditioners, in order to cool all of this urban heat island. And so the integration of trees, and plants, and parks, and greenways, and gardens into our cities is really, really key. We've got some evidence from medical studies that suggest that if you can garden several times a week for a little while, your probability of getting dementia reduces rather significantly. And so our ability to interact with natural environments is really, really key for calming ourselves, for being in a physically healthy environment, and being more optimistic, and helping offset some of the stresses that we all mentally feel living in urban environments.

JO 44:25
Marilyn.

MARILYN 44:26
I would see that nature is absolutely integral to an Integral City perspective. And it's really very encouraging to hear Mark be so aware of the power and importance of nature in everyday life. I was noticing, since I live in the Findhorn Ecovillage in Scotland, that during the lockdown that most of the world was subjected to and parts of it still are, that one of the things that they allowed individuals to do was to go outside at least once a day. Here we have created an oasis of horticulture in the midst of our sand dunes. And I know it was completely restorative for us as individuals, but you could also see people walking. So even though we were being limited through physical distancing, just being able to see nature itself, and have nature as a welcoming environment for groups of people, that was really also very encouraging, inspiring, and great for mental and physical health.

I also love that Mark mentioned about gardening and getting your hands in the soil. So this is really just such a powerful way to do grounding. I have neighbors and friends and housemates, who are all gardeners, and I, myself, can look out my window here and see my potatoes growing away. So I know that that actually gives a feedback loop that's not only healthy in the moment that you're gardening, but of course, it's creating another way to bring in food into the city, and making the green spaces in the city become food forests, or food gardens, which is healthy also in a very holistic way.

The last thing I'd mention is I think that this connection with nature, one of the principles that we have at Findhorn that was created by the co-founders is co-creating with nature. All the ways that we are developing our human habitat here, we have this precept that we must do it by co-creating with nature. And so we will take the time to listen and see what the intelligences of nature are telling us.

Those are some of the ways that I think that this connection with nature in our urban environments is absolutely vital. And I would go so far as to say that cities need to completely recalibrate not only how they connect with nature in the city, but with their bioregions and all the nature that has traditionally supported them in the ways that we were able to get resources from the bioregion, but we need to create circular economies that return those resources to the bioregion. And that's another larger scale to be connecting with nature.

JO 47:09
The third component of a healthy built environment is progressive food systems. Mark, I know you love this one. How does this particularly support community mental health?

MARK 47:22
This is an exciting piece of thinking and work that's gone on in the last 30 years, to begin to bring this conversation back into urban planning. Historically, a lot of folks lived in smaller villages. The farms were right up adjacent to the village, and everybody was interacting with farmers, and we grew a lot of our own food close to where we lived. And that was part of the history of humankind.

With the industrialization of the world, and particularly today with global transportation systems and an economic model of just-in-time production and comparative advantage, that some countries should produce lots of food and other ones where it's maybe harder to produce food produce less or almost not at all. And we still have a fairly good agricultural economy in most countries, and mainly for those with lower incomes. But we really pushed the whole food production agenda away from where we lived, and that we stuck it in large industrial buildings. And so we've really become very disconnected from this fundamental and essential piece of the biosphere, which keeps alive.

What we've been doing in the last number of decades is that many of us in planning have begun to pull these back together. Colleagues and I wrote a book called Agricultural Urbanism, which was an interesting project based on an interesting framework and approach, that we created based on a project just outside of Vancouver, on some agricultural land where the owner was quite responsible and very committed to this approach. And we were able to come up with ideas and strategies, and it's now under construction, to integrate the whole food system, essentially food production, food processing, food storage, distribution, food education, food retail, obviously, and restaurants, and eating and food waste management, all into actually where our communities are.

Now this can take a very broad range of expressions. The simplest one is having gardens, basically small gardens that you can grow some herbs, or some garlic, or some potatoes, or something. And it really helps children to understand the world better, all sorts of benefits from them being able to engage with natural areas, parks, greenways, and gardens. Some studies have shown that children become more empathetic to the natural world, and essentially become more supportive of maintaining ecological health later in life, if they've been exposed to dirt, and bugs, and mud, and all of the things that many of us grew up with as kind of what was normal.

Finding ways to integrate food back into cities is really an important part of designing our communities for health, physical, mental, social, etc. Now, it actually has some very big challenges. The value of land for producing food is the lowest value of land pretty much of any kind of use you can have next to maybe a park when we're looking at cities, where every square inch of it is trying to have condos put on it, for good reason, because we need the housing, and we want to be compact, and we don't want to sprawl all across the farmland on the outer edges. Trying to bring some of that in becomes an interesting challenge. And it's beginning to raise discussions amongst many of us around the geometry of our cities, thinking that our cities may need to be more linear loops, flower petal like, maybe more like a spider's web to allow more of this farmland to be able to exist closer to where we live, so that our children, and ourselves can have access to these opportunities.

Farmers grow their produce and create their food very close to where the markets live. It's kind of a whole new discussion that we're thinking about how to get these food systems back into our cities, because they just have so many benefits. As I mentioned a little earlier, evidence that being able to just have your allotment garden and work in it on a regular basis is just a massive benefit. And I know from my own family's experience, my mother's 79, and she lives in a suite. And she has this very large allotment garden, and she just spends six months of the year out there. Without it she probably wouldn't even be alive today. It's just a source of physical exercise. She has great social interactions with people around her. She grows a lot of her own food, keeps her very healthy and fit. And there's just so many benefits to having more of the food system closer into where we live and integrating that into all of our neighborhoods. So we all can reconnect with this source of our very lives.

MARILYN 51:25
It's just a joy to listen to how much Mark knows about not only the traditional ways of producing food and its connection to cities, but how we're having to rethink cities. And I love the idea of bringing the food systems in. My whole perspective on revaluing land for all of the elements and resources, not just about the food, but the intercultural connections that it makes is something that's overdue.

A lot of new economic systems that include things like donut economics, or circular economics, are actually totally reviewing the relationship that we have, with what it takes in order to support sustainability and regenerative city within the city. And I think most of us can start to realize that food's pretty well at the foundation of all this, because it is really our basic source of energy for human life. I think that the relationship that we have in encouraging young children to know where food comes from, because they actually grow it themselves, is something that starts to build mental health at a very young age.

I'm working with a whole group now, we're talking about Living Cities Earth, and we would love that children grow up having the thought that this is very normal to think of the city as a living system, and not just the externals of bricks and mortar, and transportation systems, and communications. I also would point to some of the more well-known groups that have taken this initiative over the last number of decades, like transition towns, who set out to rescale people. When you are confronted with the opportunity of an allotment, sounds like a great idea to start with until you realize, oh, I don't really know that much about growing food. So that's one thing that transition towns and now Global Eco-village network, are actually giving people the skills to be able to not only grow small bits of food, but to plan how they manage their allotment lots over not just one season, but multiple seasons.

The last thing I would comment on is that when we're looking at the nature greenspaces, food gardens in the city, it's reminding us about life cycles. And this is also a very healthy thing because, of course, not

only various sources of food have their own life cycles, but humans do too, and being able to have our own life cycles mirrored to us through nature, and through I would also say, the incredible beauty that nature brings into our lives. And that beauty itself through much research these days, is being identified as a key source of mental health. So I think that we are blessed in nature with a natural aesthetic that is constantly feeding our souls.

JO 54:17
The fourth consideration is housing because of its critical influence on health and well-being. Marilyn, being the hive expert, tell us your thoughts on the link between housing and mental health.

MARILYN 54:31
Well, as you mentioned, I often describe cities as human hives because I've been influenced by biomimicry. I've been looking at how the beehive organizes the roles within the beehive in order to create sustainability for the hive, but also to re-pollinate the source of that pollen and nectar, which I would say is the equivalent of our bioregions. So I think that the things that Mark is talking about relating to the overall design of cities, the housing with incomplete compact and connected cities, is also something that we have to take into consideration.

One of the architects that influenced my thinking was Christopher Alexander. And one of the ways he thinks about housing in city neighborhoods, he thinks of the neighborhood as being kind of like the hull of a boat, or you might say, on the boundary of a hive. This gives us not only a container for us to notice what is appropriate to build in, and the housing not only individual ones, but their relationship to one another goes back to the walkability of the city. But he had a number of ways of identifying wholeness within these regions. And if you don't mind, I can just tell you what some of those elements are. And we can see that they really are coming, I think, from natural living system principles.

He talks about being able to look at the multiple scales in an ecology, that it has strong centers that were able to relate one to the other. We noticed that it has boundaries, it doesn't go on, as Mark has referred to into sprawl, it has repetitions. This is one of the beautiful things in nature, there's so many fractal designs that give us the kind of beauty that I was talking about, that it has good positive space, and shape, and symmetry. It's wonderful that we look out and see the elements that we could be building into our housing designs that look at how, internally, they interconnect. And externally, they even have edges or some interstitial zones that I would call a certain kind of ambiguity.

So he talks about also textures and contrasts and the echoing of patterns. I also love that he includes simplicity and inner calm. One of the things that I do on a regular basis now is actually lead meditations that I call islands of calm. These are the kinds of things I think that we need in our housing, both in individual places in our houses for each of us, and also within our neighborhoods, and even in our parks, to have places where calm is possible for us to enjoy, because we are connected with nature.

JO 57:24
Mark, on a municipal level, housing is a huge challenge right now. What can community leaders do to address this diverse and difficult issue, and its impacts on mental health?

MARK 57:37
One of the cornerstones of communities, the way a lot of us look at this, is that housing is like habitat for species. If there's not a home in a community that you can afford, and that meets your needs, then it's unlikely you're going to live there. And it's kind of just like not having habitat for species. So housing is

really probably one of the cornerstones of our community thinking. Just before I speak about that, I just want to thank Marilyn for bringing up Christopher Alexander's work. For those who are interested in mental health and communities, Christopher Alexander has just a rich wealth of ideas for this area. He didn't go into it initially aiming to address issues of mental well-being, but what he did do is he put together a team, and they traveled through Europe in the 70's. And they documented a lot of the communities and villages and some of the cities in Europe, that really felt like great places. And then they put together a famous book called A Pattern Language, which is essentially their way of codifying, or documenting all of these really great elements, some of which Marilyn has spoken to. It's a really great resource.

But to come back to housing, we've agreed as a society, Jo, that we're going to let the market build our housing, which is not a bad thing at all, because it's just such a massive piece of our world, and we need so much of it. And it's a very incredibly complicated field. The examples in the world where the public sector took care of a lot of the housing have not ended very well from the 20th century. So it's an appropriate way to go. But when we're planning those, we need to then understand that we're really dancing with the market. And this creates a really interesting dynamic to your point around municipalities and housing, because they're sort of gatekeepers, and they're the brakes and the steering wheel, if you will. But the engine and all of the fuel and all the energy and money and risk that's taken, comes from private market developers. And so we end up with a really interesting dance, because over the course of our lives, we need a lot of different types of housing.

When we're young, we go through many different types in a fairly short period of time. When we're old, likewise, we then work our way back down through the different types from larger, to smaller, and from totally independent to needing more support. If you think about over the course of, say 40 or 50 year life, when you're in charge of your own housing, it's quite an interesting diversity that is needed. Now, most developers and banks that finance these, they sort of look at diversity, but they look at it through a market lens as to who can afford to buy what at what price? And so we have this profit motive that drives most of the decisions around housing and yet, our needs for housing are fairly diverse. So we end up with the government needing to step in, in certain areas.

What's happened in the past 40 years is that the planners, and most cities, and some politicians really wanted to stop sprawl. And so they simply outlawed it in large measure. And as a result, everyone is trying to stick all their new housing in existing neighborhoods. And that results in very large towers and smaller and smaller suites, because concrete construction is very expensive. And it's had a lot of unintended consequences. So in some ways, some of the movements that have happened have essentially sacrifice some of our social, and certainly our mental health, in some of these very intense urbanized environments, with very little green space and very high costs, in exchange for maybe environmental outcomes.

I think we don't actually have to sacrifice these. I think if we rethink layouts of cities and how we approach housing, we can achieve them both. But we need a lot of different types of housing, we need different sizes of housing. Ideally, we need as many of those types within one neighborhood as possible. This is particularly true for later in life. Later in life, your social networks, and your social and mental well-being is really critical to your physical well-being, more so than at any other time in your life. And so when people get to a stage in their lives, where the large single family home that maybe they raised their children in is no longer appropriate to them. Maybe there's just too much work to care for it, or they don't want to pay to heat it all, or it's getting old, it's going to need a lot of upgrades, they don't want to put the money into it, then they need something that's a bit smaller.

If municipalities and developers have not embraced the housing diversity over the course of the previous decades in that neighborhood, then those people need to leave that neighborhood. And in some cases, they may have lived there for 30 years, and their relationships with their neighbors are just a fundamental part of their mental well-being. So we're finding ourselves as planners really working hard to try and get different sizes of homes, different price points of homes, all within sometimes the same building.

The other night, when I was speaking in front of a council for the first readings of approval for a 12-storey tower that I'm working on with clients, the whole discussion ended up coming down to three bedroom units. We had studios, and one beds, and two beds, and two beds and dens. We didn't have any three beds. And we have them in buildings that are immediately adjacent the project, the same company, but not in this building. And there was a very deep conversation about the need to have the three bedrooms for people who work at home, but mainly for families to try and keep families in these neighborhoods. It's become a very, very large and important discussion in our communities, because sometimes the market doesn't actually give us exactly what we need.

We also need to have subsidized housing. The price of land has become very expensive, through this process of trying to fight sprawl. So we have all the developers fighting over every single piece of land and bidding each other up. And it gets to be quite an expensive endeavor now for many folks, and it's really caused quite a housing crisis for us. Now, if you want to give someone not a place of mental well-being, put their housing at risk. And that's really where we've got to with a lot of renters, and a lot of folks, particularly older in life, who housing has just become extremely difficult. And folks who are going through a mentally troubled time, may not be a full mental illness, but certainly a period of some challenges. If they lose their housing at that point, they can quickly actually become homeless. And at that point, you're in a completely different challenge for mental well-being.

We just need a lot more housing of any type that we can get. We need the governments to continue to put money forward to provide subsidized housing for people who are on the margins, and just really don't have enough money to be able to afford market prices. And we need a lot of diversity of housing in our communities, so that we can find the different types of housing we need. But there's also a social, mental component of that within the concept of community is that while many folks like to live around people that are a lot like themselves, for a healthier community, because none of us are all the same and our kids are all unique people, and we all need to have a diversity of people around us in order to accept other people and maybe even find friends with folks that might be quite different than us. We need that diversity of housing to keep the diversity of people in our neighborhoods, so that they become complete neighborhoods of different kinds of folks, at different stages of their lives.

JO 1:04:05
The last consideration outlined in the toolkit is transportation networks. And I know Mark, you mentioned that earlier. More specifically, how does transportation and active transportation improve mental health if it's done right?

MARK 1:04:24
Transportation and health have been an interesting topic that's really surged in the last couple of decades, Jo, with a lot of actual academic research and a lot of really fantastic results coming from that work. Getting out and walking is one of the most important things. Getting some exercise, being outside interacting with others, interacting with green space is one of the most important things we can do for

mental well-being and mental health. And so if we only design our streets to essentially be large sheets of concrete with 4000 pound steel boxes hurtling down them, and at speeds that would kill you if you got too close to them, or got hit by them, we don't have a very safe place, and that's actually how we designed our cities, largely, and still do to a certain extent, but a lot less so now.

There's a concept, Jo, called Complete Streets, which is now widely being used in cities. And that is a street that has a place for pedestrians, a place for cyclists, street trees, green boulevards. It does accommodate all the vehicle use and some parking, but it tends to push back on the vehicle and begin to push back against these big corridors of asphalt, to make them better, make them manage stormwater runoff better, to provide better habitat. So this is part of the shift toward active transportation. By that I mean walking, and cycling, and scooters, and to some degree transit.

So this is really where we're going with our cities is to rethink what a street is to shift it away from the priority of being first and foremost designed for trucks and cars, and now instead make it designed for humans and birds and children. It still needs to be able to accommodate a vehicle, or delivery truck, or an ambulance, or a school bus, or a regular vehicle, but move that down to making it slow, making it maybe a bit awkward, making them take their time, pedestrians first, a lot of things like that. There's an example of these kinds of streets that are used extensively in Europe and Britain. In Europe, they're known as boonerfs, it's a Dutch term, or in Britain as homezones. They're essentially a street that was designed as a park but still allows a vehicle to go through it, and maybe park in the area.

I've presented these to a number of municipalities and been very surprised sometimes to see folks who wouldn't normally, you'd think, would be into this. They drive large four-by-fours and big trucks and things. And they just love them. It's kind of a whole new way of thinking about our streets. So this idea of building our communities for better mental, physical, and social health really often starts with the streets. And in many cases, some of the most progressive work being done on our communities now is the pushback against the car and how we do our streets, because historically, they've just been engineered for single objectives, move a vehicle, or a train, or a truck as fast as possible on concrete. And now we're going no, no, this space needs to be habitat, it needs to be a place to play. It needs to be a place to socialize, it needs to be a place to clean water that's running off roofs and things, because I think the sort of the new approach of streets is a really, really exciting cutting-edge area of rethinking our cities to support our mental health a lot better.

JO 1:07:16
Marilyn, your comments about the impacts of transportation on mental health.

MARILYN 1:07:21
I'm enjoying so much listening to Mark. What he reminded me of in his last description about those kinds of streets was wow, Jane Jacobs used to describe the streets he's talking about. I think she said that there needs to be eyes on the street. When we were building modern streets that were really serving the car, we pretty well removed eyes from the street. I was really inspired some years ago when Curitiba Mayor Jaime Lerner, decided that he was going to be the mayor of the people of the city, instead of having the mayoralty look after the cars of the city, and he completely changed the transportation there.

I think Mark's comments about housing, I would also transfer over to transportation, they are intimately connected. And what I'm thinking particularly of is his comments about the need for housing in different stages of one's lifecycle. And the same thing applies to transportation. In the Findhorn Ecovillage where I

live, we have a car share. So I don't even need to own a car here, I don't. And I'm able to actually not only select from our fleet of cars, but because we have wind turbines that are connected to our electric vehicles, I am driving the wind. So it's a really nice way to frame how transportation is shifting from a whole system's perspective.

When I look at the city, transportation is a natural need. If we relate that to the kinds of transportation we have and our own physical individual bodies, that includes how our blood moves around our bodies, our lymph systems, our oxygen, and all the kinds of waste management as well as input from food systems. So I always think of the city as the body, the human system writ large. And so to disconnect ourselves from transportation, and really encourage the kinds of huge resources that are needed when we build cities with sprawl, we really totally recalibrate the city.

Mark has mentioned the difference between many European cities and North American cities. So many of the older cities in Europe were built before the car, and so they are walkable. And it totally changes the way that transportation is strategically designed here. We're actually doing this interview at a period of time where the cost of fossil-based fuels has been going very high, and those of us who are driving non-electric vehicles are being faced with huge increases in the cost of our personal transportation. This is also being translated into all of the distribution systems that the transportation within systems are delivering to our retail and wholesale distribution sites. However, I would point out also, that when we're looking at human agency and the mental health that goes with feeling that we are in control of our life, every time there's a big change, it really has huge ripple effects.

There's many stories about the time when the motorcar was replacing the horse and carriage. So we lost with the horse and carriage, a lot of manure that was in the street. But we also lost a sort of pace of life, and as Mark pointed out the hurtling metal vehicles that actually endanger life and really create huge statistics. But now another example I can bring from our Eco-village, is there's more and more people who are choosing electric vehicles. So there is private ownership of vehicles here. And so one of our challenges, I'm imagining, is going to be the challenge of most big cities, and how do you set up those recharging points within the city?

I know I participated in a number of conferences where all kinds of technology actually has been created and trialed for something that's not a home-based recharging point. But if we're going to have transportation that is based on renewable energy, then the entire system of how we connect to that energy will have to change. What does that got to do with mental health? Well, I think it will have a lot to do, again, with how we're feeling that we can actually make choices in our lives about moving from point A to point B. And of course, that impacts family life as well. And that, as Mark has pointed out, goes through a whole set of life cycles.

One of the things I think we have to remember in cities is that we don't have just one or two generations alive in the city. The indigenous peoples tell us that for mental health of our cultures, we should be making decisions unto the seventh generation. And I think if you do some of the calculations that I look at in our cities, we've got pretty close to seven generations simultaneously alive in the city. So there is a huge dynamic of different choices and options that impact both our individual mental health, and how we live happily together as cultures and neighborhoods.

JO 1:12:29
We're on the homestretch now, just two more questions for each of you. First, being who you are, having watched your fields of endeavor evolve over many years, understanding the current challenges

and opportunities we face, and of course, considering all of these parameters that were outlined in the Linkages Toolkit, what do you think our communities will look like in 50 years, from a mental health perspective?

MARILYN 1:13:00
I'm going to take a breath before I respond to that one. I think that the kinds of things that Mark and I have been exploring, I would like to think are going to be taken on as very serious endeavors and changes of strategies, so that in 50 years, we will have much more healthy cities. If you look at the population of the world, I don't think we have much choice, because we're at more than seven billion now. And in 50 years, there's some calculations that would put us up into the nine and 10 billion people. That means that we're going to have to become very intelligent about how we use the resources that make up our cities, relate to neighborhood design, natural connections with nature, our whole food systems, our housing cycles, and transportation systems. At the same time, in 50 years, I think we will have new technologies. I think the renewables will actually enable us to be using solar energy much more widely than we currently do, not to mention the other ways that renewable energy can be brought into cities.

I also think that unless our cities use the tenets of what I would consider underlie strong mental health, and that would be that we have mutual trust and respect for one another, and that means that we're not just looking at from one neighborhood to another, but most of our cities really include a number of different cultures, ethnicities, and that will continue to accelerate, I think, over the next 50 years. It is my perspective that cities are going to be the source of new governance in the world. It's not likely to come at the national level, in my opinion, I think it will come at the city level. And that is because well-being and our day-to-day life demands that we figure out how to live together well and that includes attending not only to our physical health, but our mental, cultural and social health.

So I'm a radical optimist. And I think in 50 years, we will see the many different positive aspects that Mark points to in building our cities become much more widely used, and that we will be looking at our grandchildren's grandchildren at that time, who are living in a world that is supporting life for all beings, not just human beings.

JO 1:15:33
I'm sad, I won't be here to see it.

MARK 1:15:36
There's some really great points that Marilyn has been making. And I appreciate her speaking about Findhorn periodically, because it's been one of the leaders in conscious, intentional, and thoughtful communities probably on the planet. Certainly, for my entire lifetime. It's been a place that many of us look to for inspiration. What we're going to see, Jo, going forward is I'm calling this in my world, the rise of the neighborhood.

Our models of urban development were built historically on an assumption that we needed to be near each other in order to do business. Now, that was great at little village scale, but when we began to get very large industrial cities and populations over the last 100, 150 years, what we ended up with was these large downtowns with tall buildings. Many of them were built prior to the world that we live in today. And the concepts emerge prior to even the automobile in some of these large cities. And there was a moment in time where many of our North American and some European cities all had streetcars

that connected outer areas into these cities. But there's been this 100-year agenda to create these very tall buildings in downtowns, and then have everybody live somewhere out on the edges.

And the theorists and the philosophers behind them, say, Frank Lloyd Wright and his ideas of broadacre city, was everybody should have a full acre. It actually was a contributing philosophical driver behind sprawl in the United States. We've now been pushing back against that for a number of years trying to get people to live downtown. So we started building large concrete towers with very small units, all very expensive, with very little green space, trying and get people to live closer to where they work. I see the COVID experience that we've had here in 2020 to 2022, really kicked us about 20 years ahead to what I'm calling the rise of the neighborhood. And the base of the deal is that while many of us still need to be in physical proximity for our work and our services, and what we do, there's a very significant part of the population that doesn't, and increasingly, nobody wants to spend time stuck in traffic, idling and fumes, not a good healthy mentally place to be.

The mental health future of our communities is a neighborhood scale, where we're rebuilding our cities on these networks of transit-oriented corridors that have a mix of housing, and a mix of employment and service moments along them, and they're easily serviced with infrastructure, lots of good bike lanes, they're fairly close to the actual green space that's maintained on the outer edges of these corridors. And we have those sort of snake around our regions. And while we're still keeping the green space and the agricultural land intermixed in those and so really, everybody lives in this sort of 15-minute neighborhood, if you will, rather than in a 15 minute commute to some large downtown where the planners artificially decided to put all the jobs before the rise of the Internet.

And before the cell phone, you really kind of needed to be closer to each other to do business. Now with the rise of the Internet and the cell phone and all of our virtual capacity, we don't need to spend nearly as much time physically next to each other during our workday in order to keep our economy moving and do the things we need to do. And so I think that really folks are gonna want to live in neighborhoods. The city of the future is a city of neighborhoods more than it is a city of suburbs and high-density downtowns.

JO 1:18:39
Marilyn, what advice would you have for community thought leaders, planners, and decision makers to inspire human hive minds and their related mental health outcomes?

MARILYN 1:18:53
When I was thinking about this in terms of not just mental health, but in our VUCA world, one that's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, I asked myself, if I think that the city is going to be the source of new governance, what will that governance look like? And I said, well, I think it'll actually probably emerge from what I call the master code of care, where we must care for ourselves as individuals so that we can care for each other. And together, we care for our places, and all together, we care for the planet. So it's kind of a nested set of fractal caring. And then I looked around at all of the people that I knew who had been investing in thinking about an integral aspect of their work. And I created an imaginary possibility that all those people instead of being distributed around the world as I knew them, came together in one place. If they did that, could they make a change where they were, and I imagined and put it into a little e-graphic book that, if you'd like, I can send for your listeners the link so that they can download it on a free basis.

And so I brought together people who cared for the planet. So they used everything like Daniel Christian Wahl's Salutogenic City Indicators. So those are all based on health and well-being, certainly including mental health, caring for places and the local neighborhoods as Mark just described. I actually identified people who are working in British Columbia in the forest industry, in the Spokane integral forestry cooperative, where they've been developing not only the relationship of the city to the forest, but the community to itself. Also looking at people like Beth Sanders in Edmonton, who looks at not human hives, but she looks at nest cities, and how cities serve citizens, and the citizens serve the city. So there's a symbiotic relationship.

Then when I looked at people who were caring for others, they included everybody from those who are doing coaching in businesses, to Miriam Mason Martineau, who actually looks at how to parent with this way of thinking about cities, and interrelationships, and living systems. And then for caring for self, I had somebody who was looking at how not only the intelligences of living systems at the city scale, but how we think about that as our own life maps, and thinking about how we could map out our life, much as Mark has described over the life cycles of our both existing, say, our experience with parents, but also how we would imagine our life to be.

So when we pulled together, which I did about 20 of the people who were thinking about this way of living cities that are mentally healthy and holistically healthy for self, others, place, and planet, then I think that those are the ways that I would imagine that we can each make a difference every day just by asking ourselves, "How am I choosing to care for self, others, place, and planets, and at the end of the day, how did I do that, caring for self, others, place, and planet?"

JO 1:22:14
What would you say to the rest of us about our elected officials, and showing them that we're interested in building mentally healthy communities, and then holding them accountable?

MARK 1:22:26
It's a great challenge that you give voice to here, Jo, in terms of who needs to know what, who needs to be motivated, how, in order to move things, so we go in a better direction. Few observations, one thing is cities change very slowly. So we need to be patient in the process. When you put some of these roads in place, they may actually stay there for hundreds, if not even thousands of years, if we look at the Roman civilization as an example. Things are going to change slowly, even if folks are mentally in the right place. So that's, I think, just the first contextual observation to make.

The second one that I want to comment on is that we tend to naturally think about our elected officials, like they're decision makers, and are really the authors, if you will, the authors of our world around us, regardless of what level of government, but in this case, we're talking about city so local government. In reality, however, our elected officials play a role, but they're only part, they're really only, in my world of city building, they're only one quarter of the storyline here. The community play a key role in articulating what they want. And that has an impact on everybody who's engaging them, particularly the elected officials, because there's a direct democratic link to their motivation. And often the existing neighborhoods, and the existing residents are actively combating things that would be very good for our city for its sustainability, its climate change, performance, and its mental health performance. They have lived there, and they want it to stay exactly the way they want it to stay.

So I think some of the conversation needs to reach out to neighborhoods, in an educative model to begin to get folks to understand and fear change a little less. City staff are very, very powerful, and

planning consultants, and engineers, and architects, their professional industry is really powerful in this, more so than maybe most any, because all the city staff, and the communities, all the consultants that write the plans, all the work that's being done are being done by professionals who all studied at various schools, have a certain level of experience, and are part of industry and professional organizations with standards. And if we don't involve those, then basically the authors of the plans and the actual building designs and landscape designs and street designs, they're all not going to be paying attention to this either.

And that's actually one of the biggest concerns I have right now is our schools, engineering schools, architecture schools, landscape architecture schools, planning schools, many of them are not really talking about mental health. In fact, many of them aren't even thinking about it. So this is a really frontline of work we need to be doing is to get doing what you're doing here, Jo, and more to get this conversation, higher visibility of students doing their master's theses on these in the schools, and really beginning to bring the mental health agenda forward, because it's the professionals who are largely the authors of all the concepts, and do most of the negotiation, and write the plans, and write the design guidelines.

The politicians are, as I mentioned, a cornerstone of this work, but we generally get to them very late in the process. They are surprisingly not involved in a lot of the plan, making surprisingly low level of involvement in all the approvals process for buildings. Ultimately, they do make the decision, but there's so many rules around how politicians can engage the discussions in our local government acts, that they really are sort of these gatekeepers that often don't see very much about a project, until it shows up for the final discussion or a public hearing.

In keeping with Marilyn's comments about this integrated world that we all live in and need to understand it as an integral, interconnected, interdependent system, we actually need to reach out to every one of these major players in the process of building and approving our cities, and begin to emphasize the importance of mental health and what needs to be done in all these individual decisions, in order to create areas that really support and help our mental health.

JO 1:26:12
Thank you both so much for joining me and sharing your incredible insights and ideas. I truly admire and appreciate you both as visionaries, innovators, and long-standing players in the move toward sustainable and mentally healthy communities. I believe that with people like you collaborating with people like me and sharing with a diverse group of people like our listeners, I think we can fix this together. So thanks again for being here.

MARILYN 1:26:45
It's been my pleasure, Jo. And I've certainly been very appreciative of Mark's comments and reconnecting after all these years. Thank you so much, both of you.

MARK 1:26:54
Likewise, thank you Jo, for the leadership that you're taking in engaging this discussion and making forward, and Marilyn always a pleasure to see the world through your amazing eyes and the frameworks and the patterns that you're mapping, that most of us have not been doing that. It's a real breath of fresh air, thank you.

JO 1:27:09

So that's a wrap. To learn more about Marilyn and Mark's work, visit freshoutlookfoundation.org/podcasts. There you'll find contact info, complete bios, a list of resource links, and a complete transcript. Another big thank you to our sponsors for this episode, the Social Planning and Research Council of BC, Emil Anderson Construction, and AECOM Engineering.

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