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Bowker Creek Forum advances a 'regional team approach' to achieving water sustainability in the Georgia Basin

What impressed me about the Bowker Creek Forum was the willingness of those in local government to elicit public buy-in. Without that, you cannot move forward. The Forum gives me hope for the future. It was refreshing; it was energizing. I was so thrilled to be part of the day. I felt the camaraderie; I felt an affinity with the people there.

Judy Williams, Co-Chair, Fraser River Coalition.



by Kim A. Stephens

Since 2007 the [Convening for Action on Vancouver Island \(CAVI\)](#) program has been bringing together engineers and planners in local government around water sustainability. One of the key outcomes of the CAVI initiative is relationship-building within, and between, the four populous Island regional districts: Capital, Cowichan Valley, Nanaimo, and Comox Valley. [editor's note: This area generally

matches that identified as the Real Estate Foundation of BC's [Green Values Vancouver Island](#) target area (the exception is the CRD).]

Over the past 3 years CAVI has been effectively getting the message out about the importance of a shared vision for Vancouver Island communities. *'Hands across the Malahat'* is the phrase the CAVI Leadership Team is using to draw attention to the need for a consistent Island-wide approach.

What will Vancouver Island look like in 50 years?

These four regional districts represent approximately 90% of the Island's population. This is significant. A *'regional team approach'* affecting 90% of Islanders has considerable leverage and impact. Focusing on collaboration and partnerships, this team approach can help communities to create the shared vision of what they want Vancouver Island to look like in 50 years.

To get there, the regional team approach seeks to align actions at three scales:

- provincial
- regional, and
- local.

Everyone needs to agree on expectations and how all the players will work

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COMMUNITIES IN TRANSITION INFORMATION RESOURCE

Communities in Transition (CIT) was a signature program of the Real Estate Foundation of BC from 2004-2010. CIT was created to help increase the ability of non-metropolitan communities to address the challenges they face when planning for use and conservation of lands. For information about CIT program goals and online resources associated with CIT initiatives, please visit the Initiatives section of the [Foundation's website](#).

Note: This site is now an archive, available for information and interest only. The Real Estate Foundation is not maintaining the blog function.

Tim Pringle

Director of Special Programs (retired)
[Real Estate Foundation of BC](#)

Hans Peter Meyer

Editor & Writer, CIT Information Resource

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together. After that, each community can reach its goals in its own way.

The CAVI vision is that we will build and/or rebuild our communities in a way that achieves water sustainability over time. Furthermore, we believe communities can achieve 'water sustainability' by implementing 'green infrastructure' policies and practices. Underpinning a green infrastructure approach is a 'design with nature' philosophy. How communities get there relies on a change in mind-set. The CAVI role is to facilitate that change.

Georgia Basin Collaboration

In February 2010, CAVI partnered with the Capital Regional District and the Bower Creek Initiative to organize the **Bowker Creek Forum**. Held at the University of Victoria, this event was a celebration of a new way of doing business in the Georgia Basin. The Bowker Creek Forum provided us with a platform for inter-regional sharing. It also gave us an opportunity to connect the dots between five Georgia Basin initiatives:

1. Comox Valley: An Integrated Watershed Approach to Settlement
2. Regional District of Nanaimo: Action for Water
3. Cowichan Valley Regional District: Cowichan Basin Water Management Plan
4. Capital Region: Bowker Creek Blueprint
5. Metro Vancouver: Integrated Liquid Waste & Resource Management Plan

We are emphasizing the Georgia Basin context because Vancouver Island and Metro Vancouver are learning from each other, and are moving in the same direction. The common vision for all these initiatives is: *to influence land and water practitioners to learn about and use practices that better balance the necessary relationships of settlement activity and ecological assets in local and regional landscapes.*

Mission possible

While the context of the Bowker Creek Forum was Georgia Basin, the spotlight shone most brightly on the [Bowker Creek Blueprint](#). Located in the urbanized heartland of the Capital Regional District, the Bowker Creek watershed is shared by the City of Victoria, City of Oak Bay, and District of Saanich.

Established in 2004, the Bowker Creek Urban Watershed Renewal Initiative is precedent-setting. A multi-jurisdictional effort, it brought together local governments, community groups, post-secondary institutions, and private citizens around a common goal. Major breakthroughs happen when decision makers in government work with grass-roots visionaries in the community to create desired outcomes. This is the essence of the Bowker Creek story.

The Cowichan Valley, Nanaimo, and Comox Valley regional districts have all established provincial water-centric planning precedents; however, these are at a watershed-scale. Looking ahead, the Bowker Creek Blueprint can serve as a catalyst to help all three jurisdictions drill down to the local scale and truly integrate water cycle and land use planning.

About the Bowker Creek Blueprint

The Bowker Creek Blueprint is a "100-Year Action Plan." It will guide watershed and creek corridor restoration as the built environment is redeveloped over time. Because change can be slow in the urban environment, implementation will take decades. Having an action plan in

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place will ensure that positive changes can happen incrementally, and that opportunities for major improvements can be realized as they arise.

To put it simply, the Bowker Creek Blueprint gives the community a road map for achieving water sustainability in an urban watershed. It's a practical model for other communities with similar aspirations. This is an impressive achievement. The Blueprint goes well beyond any other plan I have seen in my 30-plus years in this field, in terms of how it has achieved consensus and galvanized commitment to move from planning to action on the ground.

Conclusion

The Bowker Creek story is important. When we reflect on what the Bowker Creek Initiative has accomplished, we see that the resulting Blueprint is all about a new form of governance. It starts with a shared vision. Then comes community involvement, followed by support from municipal decision-makers. After that, it's a matter of applying a [Design with Nature](#) approach to all development. The result is a pattern of development and change that supports water sustainability, a future that Island communities want.

The Bowker Creek 100-Year Blueprint is an outstanding accomplishment not only because it leads to a desirable future, but also because it demonstrates how a 'top down bottom up strategy' leads to practical action. It's an inspiring achievement, one that CAVI believes has the power to positively influence what happens in other parts of the Georgia Basin.

about the author:

Kim A Stephens, MEng, PEng, is Program Coordinator for the [Water Sustainability Action Plan for British Columbia](#).

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Posted by hans peter meyer at 8:20 PM



2 comments:



Anonymous March 17, 2010 at 11:08 AM

This is excellent.

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Anonymous March 17, 2010 at 10:06 PM

I agree 100%.

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