

'Watershed moment' for Greater Victoria creek

By [Ryan Flaherty - Oak Bay News](#)

Published: **March 02, 2012 5:00 PM**

Updated: **March 02, 2012 5:12 PM**

A stretch of the Bowker Creek next to Oak Bay high school will soon have a very different look thanks to an influx of cash from the federal government.

Conservative MP Alice Wong, Minister of State (Seniors) was on hand Friday to announce that the government is contributing \$738,000 to a restoration project that will help reduce flooding, improve water quality, and offer increased recreational and educational opportunities along the creek for members of the community.

"By investing in projects that contribute to cleaner air, cleaner water, and help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we are helping to ensure the long-term health and prosperity of Canadians," Wong said.

The money is coming from the federal gas tax fund, which is distributed to municipalities across Canada each year. In B.C., those funds are handed out as grants to communities selected by the Union of British Columbia Municipalities.

"This project is really a shining example of all governments working together," said Oak Bay Mayor Nils Jensen.

Members of the [Bowker Creek Initiative](#), which submitted the restoration proposal to the UBCM, are excited about what the project will mean for the community.

"It's a watershed moment, because it connects the future with all the work that was done in the past," said Soren Henrich, who represents the Friends of Bowker Creek on the BCI steering committee.

Much of the excitement during Friday's announcement centred on the educational

opportunities the new-look creek will offer. Oak Bay high school offers courses in marine biology, and this project will not only give them a chance to learn in the natural environment, but could mean the addition of a freshwater biology course as well.

"It's kind of the perfect storm for us in terms of developing our program, and the fact that we can have our students in essence be creek stewards, and monitor water flow and water quality, and to investigate the rehabilitation of the creek ... I think there's just some great opportunity," said Oak Bay high principal Dave Thompson.

Early conceptual designs created by the BCI envision a creek-level "viewing terrace" which can double as an outdoor classroom of sorts. The goal is to make the creek accessible for all who wish to enjoy it. BCI steering committee chair Jody Watson emphasized that the final redevelopment will go through design charrettes that incorporate public consultation and include input from students, whom she sees as the creek's future stewards.

"We actually want to work with the school to integrate into their curriculum ... the actual long-term monitoring of the creek," Watson said.

She added that the project also represents significant progress in the BCI's implementation of its 100-year plan for the watershed, known as the [Bowker Creek Blueprint](#).

"This is a huge catalyst for moving forward and seeing the fulfilment of the vision that's outlined in the Bowker Creek Blueprint," said Watson.

That vision is not lost on Jensen.

"This shows that (for) many individuals who have a dream and pursue that dream, this is how it can end up," Jensen said.

There are no firm timelines for when work will begin on the restoration, but it's believed that the project will take place at the same time as construction of the new Oak Bay high school, which is expected to open in time for the 2013/14 school year.

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