



## the partnership for water sustainability in bc

Waterbucket eNews on November 8, 2022

<https://waterbucket.ca/wscblog/>



# Living Water Smart in British Columbia:

*Affordable and sustainable  
re-investment in municipal  
infrastructure is essential*

## Note to Reader:

Waterbucket eNews<sup>1</sup> celebrates the leadership of individuals and organizations who are guided by the vision for **Living Water Smart in British Columbia**<sup>2</sup>.

The edition published on November 8, 2022 shared the “story behind the story” of Glen Browns source of inspiration that led him to coin the term Sustainable Service Delivery in 2010. At the time, Glen Brown was an Executive Director in the BC provincial government.

The umbrella for Partnership initiatives and programs is the **Water Sustainability Action Plan for British Columbia**<sup>3</sup>. In turn, the Action Plan is nested within **Living Water Smart, British Columbia’s Water Plan**.



Cover Image Credit: special thanks to Dan Horan, District of Oak Bay

<sup>1</sup> <https://waterbucket.ca/wscblog/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://waterbucket.ca/wcp/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/11/livingwatersmart\\_book.pdf](https://waterbucket.ca/wcp/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/11/livingwatersmart_book.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.waterbucket.ca/cfa/sites/wbccfa/documents/media/81.pdf>

## Editor's Perspective

"The two driving forces in BC's asset management landscape are Glen Brown and Wally Wells. The persistence and passion of these two mavens has helped ensure communities across the province - and even the country - are working to ensure sustainable service delivery for current and future generations. It is a legacy that we all benefit from," wrote Jan Enns in a post that celebrated the 2022 Asset Management BC conference.

From my perspective, Glen Brown and Wally Wells are the heart and soul of Asset Management BC. Without their inspiration, commitment and hard work, an idea whose time had come would not have been translated into reality.

At the first post-COVID Asset Management BC Conference, held in November 2022, it was my pleasure to present "certificates of recognition" that honour both gentlemen as **Lifetime Members** of the Partnership for Water Sustainability.



## What Do You Wonder About Glen Brown?

Formerly an Executive Director in the provincial government, Glen Brown is General Manager of Victoria Operations with the Union of BC Municipalities. He is member of both Asset Management BC and the Partnership and, along with Wally Wells, he is a bridge between the two entities.

Glen Brown is a Past-Chair of the Partnership's predecessor Water Sustainability Committee. He led the Partnership when it morphed from a water roundtable into a legal entity in 2010. During that period, Glen served on the National Asset Management Working Group. And that is when he met Guy Felio and had his Aha Moment: **"It is all about the service."**

**Reflections on Sharing a Mission** The collaborative nature of the working relationship between Asset Management BC and the Partnership, combined with our shared commitment to Asset Management for Sustainable Service Delivery, transcends our memorandum of understanding. We share a mission and represent complementary audiences and perspectives within local government.

In the local government setting, the Partnership sphere of influence is the **interface between watershed systems and municipal infrastructure** - that is, how water is used and how water runs off the land. Our experience is that when one gets the water part right, then other pieces of the land use puzzle are more likely to fall into place.



Kim A. Stephens, MEng, PEng,  
Executive Director  
Partnership for Water Sustainability in BC  
November 2022



**“Money – it should be about how to get the most value out of every dollar spent on municipal infrastructure. Too often, thinking stops after the capital investment is made. Yet everyone needs to be thinking in terms of life-cycle costs, including future recapitalization of the investment.”** -

Glen Brown, Chair, Asset Management BC

*“My inspiration for coining the phrase Sustainable Service Delivery came from Guy Felio, one of the original gurus of asset management nationally. Guy said, ‘It is all about the service’, because municipal infrastructure assets are worthless IF THEY DO NOT provide a service.”*

Glen Brown, Chair  
Asset Management BC

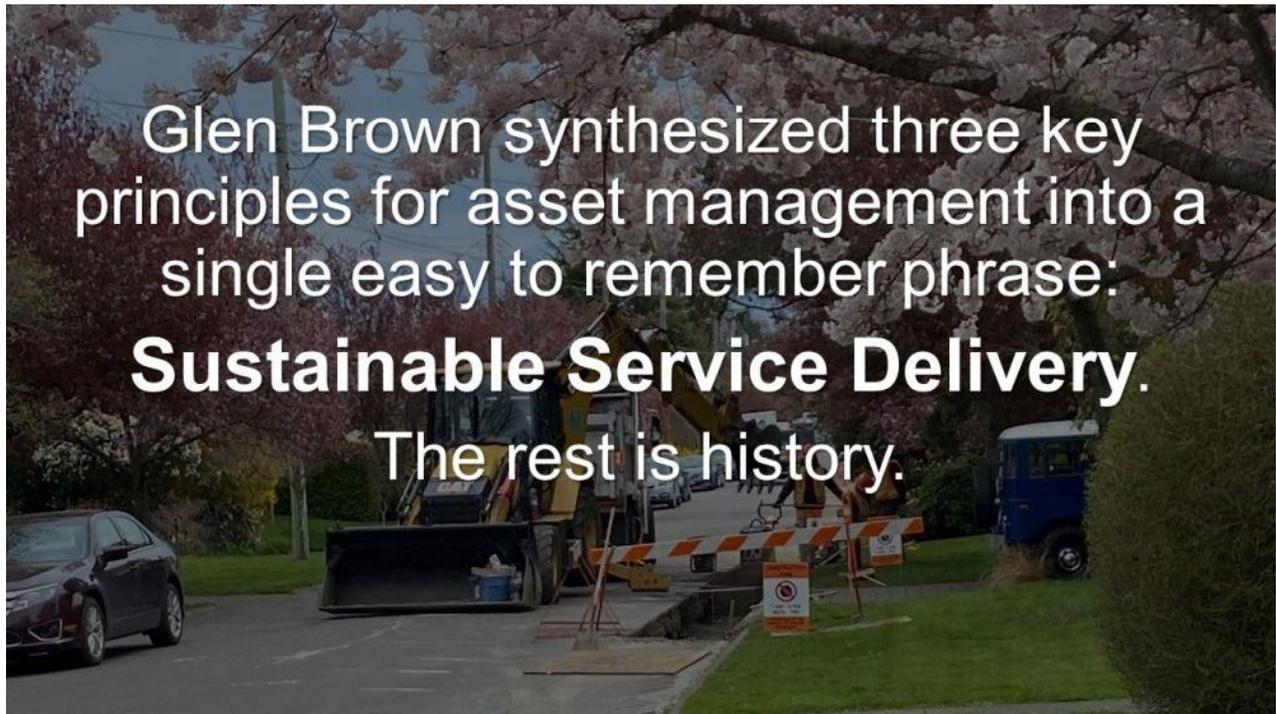
In British Columbia, local government elections were held on October 15th and the extent and nature of the turnover made headlines. Returning incumbents and rookie elected representatives were sworn into a 4-year term of office as of November 7th. They will be dealing with competing demands and priorities. And many will be on accelerating “learning curves”.

As the new folks learn the ropes of the Community Charter (or Local Government Act for regional districts) and grow into their new responsibilities, we hope they will come to appreciate the insights that flow from our "stories behind the stories". These are shared by those leading changes in thinking and implementing. Everyone learns from stories.

***Asset Management for Sustainable Service Delivery:*** In this edition, we feature Glen Brown, the visionary and thought leader who coined the term "sustainable service delivery" a mere 12 years ago. This way of viewing the local government sphere of responsibility changes everything about how local governments do business in an era of rapid change.

Section 7 of the Community Charter defines the roles and responsibilities of local government in terms of "*care of infrastructure and services*". In other words, **Sustainable Service Delivery**. This is a foundational element of local government. It goes to the heart of affordable and sustainable re-investment in municipal infrastructure assets to meet a level-of-service desired by the community.

Eligibility for senior government capital grants is the financial incentive to influence behaviour in a good way. Local governments must show how they are progressing along the [Asset Management for Sustainable Service Delivery](#) continuum.



## "Sustainable Service Delivery" explained

"The core document for asset management for BC local governments is [Asset Management for Sustainable Service Delivery: A BC Framework](#). The title is deliberate and important because the 'function' and responsibility of Municipal Councils and Regional Boards is Sustainable Service Delivery. The process to support decision making is Asset Management," explains Glen Brown, founding Chair of Asset Management BC.

"The Framework provides the basis for the entire asset management process for our local governments to follow. Funding agencies, as part of funding applications, request communities to identify where they are within the asset management process using the framework."

"While much attention and discussion focus on the Asset Management plan or plans, there is much more to the process than just the plan. In fact, for Council, the implementation strategy and long-term financial plan are more important documents than the asset management plan itself."

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“Different local governments will always be at different points and different levels of maturity along the asset management continuum. This is the reason why we **focus on outcomes** and do not prescribe what to do in BC,” concludes Glen Brown

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**STORY BEHIND THE STORY:**  
**Coining of the term 'Sustainable Service Delivery' in 2010**



I remember the moment so well when Glen Brown first used the term '**sustainable service delivery**' to capture what was in his mind. It was June 2010, and I was at the offices of the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN). John Finnie and I were on a phone call with Glen. The purpose was to develop Glen's part in the agenda for the [Nanaimo Region Water Pricing Workshop](#) in September 2010.

In 2010, Glen was an Executive Director in the provincial government and Deputy Inspector of Municipalities; and John Finnie was General Manager, Regional and Community Utilities with the RDN.

Our conversation took place the week after Glen had given a presentation at the Leadership Forum organized by the Local Government Leadership Academy. His title was a long one: **Financial Accountability, Infrastructure Sustainability, Service Delivery: Connecting the Dots with an Asset Management Approach**. Nowhere in that presentation did Glen use the specific term "sustainable service delivery".

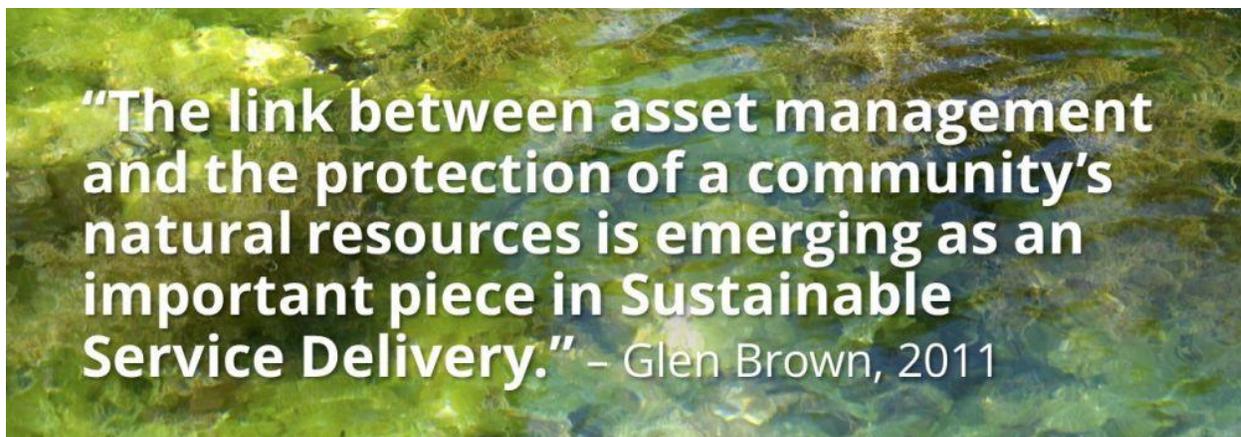
At that time, and thanks to the early work of the then newly formed Asset Management BC, chaired by Glen Brown, local governments were just starting to wrap their minds around the **"20/80 Rule"** – that is, the initial capital cost of municipal infrastructure is about 20% of the ultimate total cost, and the other 80% is unfunded. The 80% is described as a liability, deficit or gap.

### **An easy-to-remember phrase**

During our brainstorming, Glen made repeated reference to his Leadership Forum presentation; and expressed his desire to adapt it for the purposes of our upcoming event. As we talked, John Finnie and I kept pressing Glen to elaborate on what was in his mind so that we could help him crystallize a sound-bite for use as a compelling title.

There was an Ah-ha Moment and the penny dropped. Glen, John and I had a collective epiphany when we realized that Glen's headline should be ***What Does 'Sustainable Service Delivery' Mean to You?*** That became the title for his workshop presentation.

In a nutshell, what happened during that conversation was that Glen Brown synthesized three ideas - financial accountability, infrastructure sustainability, service delivery - into a single easy to remember phrase: **Sustainable Service Delivery**. The rest is history, as they say.



## It is all about the service

A decade later, I asked Glen about his recollections of why and how Sustainable Service Delivery clicked in his mind. He answered as follows:

“My inspiration came from Guy Felio, who is one of the original gurus of asset management nationally. In his own words, and in a slide that I have seen him use in presentations since the mid-2000s, Guy Felio said, ‘It is all about the service’.”

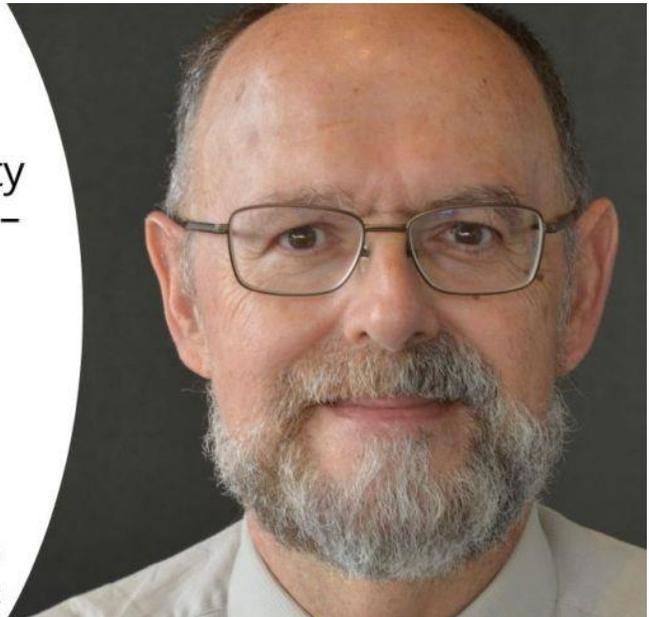
“Basically, **well-maintained municipal infrastructure assets are worthless IF THEY DO NOT provide a service**. That is what resonated with me. Also, for any asset management approach to be successful, it must not focus on the infrastructure asset by itself.”

“That way-of-thinking applies to nature and the environment as well – as long as we fully understand and appreciate the value of natural services – particularly when we leverage natural services to provide traditional community services, as well as those that are provided to support a healthy environment – that is, clean air, aquatic habitat, etc.,” concluded Glen Brown.

“This is the asset management space: plan, build operate and maintain over the asset’s life-cycle. Future climate uncertainty adds a new variable to the mix – one that cannot be dealt with using the traditional *‘factor of safety’* approach since the unknown is too broad and the probability of changes materializing too uncertain.”

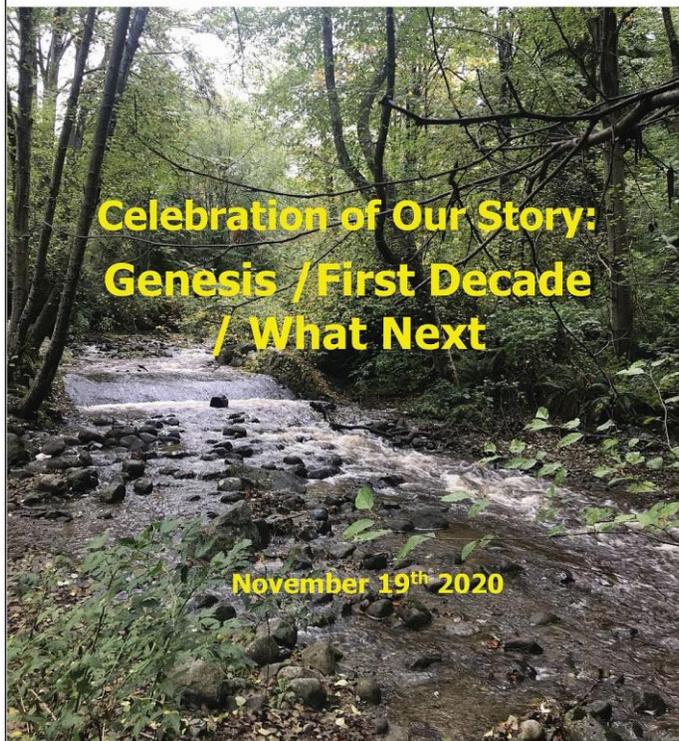
Guy Felio

Infrastructure Management & Resilience Specialist





the partnership  
for water sustainability in bc



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## **About the Partnership for Water Sustainability in British Columbia**

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Incorporation of the Partnership for Water Sustainability in British Columbia as a not-for-profit society on November 19, 2010 was a milestone moment. Incorporation signified a bold leap forward.

Over two decades, the Partnership had evolved from a technical committee in the 1990s, to a “water roundtable” in the first decade of the 2000s, and then to a legal entity. The Partnership has its roots in government – local, provincial, federal.

The Partnership has a primary goal, to **build bridges of understanding** and pass the baton from the past to the present and future. To achieve the goal, the Partnership is growing a network in the local government setting. This network embraces collaborative leadership and **inter-generational collaboration**.

The Partnership believes that when each generation is receptive to accepting the inter-generational baton and embracing the wisdom that goes with it, the decisions of successive generations will benefit from and build upon the experience of those who went before them.

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**the partnership**  
for water sustainability in bc