



the partnership  
for water sustainability in bc

Waterbucket eNews on May 23, 2023  
<https://waterbucket.ca/wscblog/>

# Living Water Smart in British Columbia:

*What organization serves  
only rural local governments,  
community leaders and  
First Nations?*

## 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 May 23, 2023 featured the story behind the story of the BC Rural Centre. It has a mission to act as a catalyst organization that sustains and advances rural wellbeing and development in British Columbia.

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**.



<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 readership of Waterbucket eNews encompasses local government elected representatives in every part of British Columbia. This edition is dedicated to those in "smalltown BC". Barry Janyk provides us with a window into their world, their issues, their concerns.

About six months ago, Barry Janyk made an observation that stuck with me. He described three main groups moving to the really small communities in BC. He characterized them as digital nomads, amenity migrants, and retirees. Barry talked about the unforeseen consequences.

That conversation is the context for the two-part "story behind the story" that follows. Part One is about the Keeping It Rural Conference that is bringing together community leaders in Kelowna.

Part Two is a short essay by Barry Janyk, He wrote it because I asked if he would reconstruct what he told me about the influx of digital nomads, amenity migrants, and retirees into smalltown BC. The essay is short but compelling.

### Flashback to the SmartStorm Forums

A lifetime ago, when Barry Janyk was the mayor of Gibsons, he was a driving force and our moderator for the series of SMARTSTORM Forums that an intergovernmental partnership held in Nanaimo, Sechelt, Abbotsford and Pitt Meadows between 1999 and 2001.

In 1999, it was Barry Janyk who coined the term 'Smart Development' to clearly differentiate the BC approach from the Low Impact Development terminology then being used in the United States.



**Mayor Barry Janyk**  
Town of Gibsons



**Dipak Basu**  
City of Chilliwack



**Kim Stephens**  
Inter-Governmental Partnership

**2003 UBCM Urban Forum Presentation Team**

SMARTSTORM created a buzz and generated the early momentum that led directly to [Stormwater Planning: A Guidebook for British Columbia](#), released in 2002. A year later, Barry Janyk led our 3-person team that delivered core content at the 2003 UBCM Urban Forum.

The Forum Chair, Surrey Councillor Marvin Hunt, stated in his closing remarks that the presentation "*showed how to make the 100-year vision real to BC's elected representatives. The take-away message is clear: If communities design with nature, the 100-year vision will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.*"

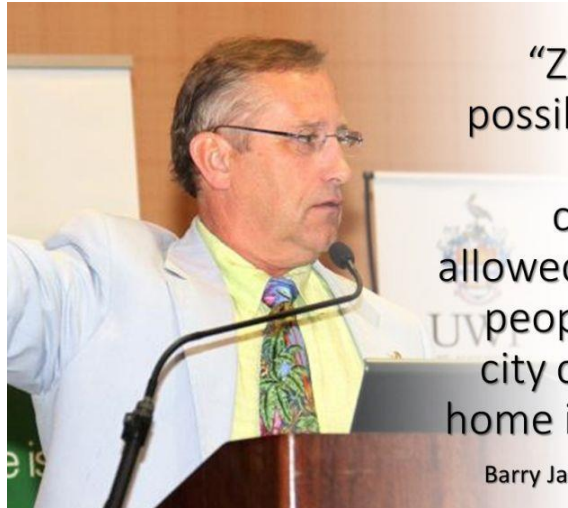
That is what Barry Janyk is striving to do with the BC Rural Centre's idea for a Rural Mayors, Chairs and Chairs Caucus. Create a self-fulfilling prophecy!



*Kim A. Stephens, MEng, PEng (non-practising),  
Executive Director  
Partnership for Water Sustainability in BC  
May 2023*



## One-Minute Takeaway



“Zoom towns made possible by high-speed internet in rural communities have allowed vast numbers of people to vacate their city condo for a family home in a rural setting.”

Barry Janyk, Executive Director, BC Rural Centre

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**“The Keeping It Rural Conference is bringing together 90 community leaders from all parts of the province to map a path forward for the rurals.” - Barry Janyk**

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Two decades ago, the devastation caused by the pine beetle resulted in the Southern Interior Beetle Action Coalition. In 2018, SIBAC evolved into the BC Rural Centre, with a mission to act as a catalyst organization that sustains and advances rural wellbeing and development in British Columbia.

In 2021, the board of the re-formed BC Rural Centre commissioned Barry Janyk, a former 4-term mayor of the Town of Gibsons, to go on the road and have conversations around the province. A set of research questions provided the framework for his conversations.

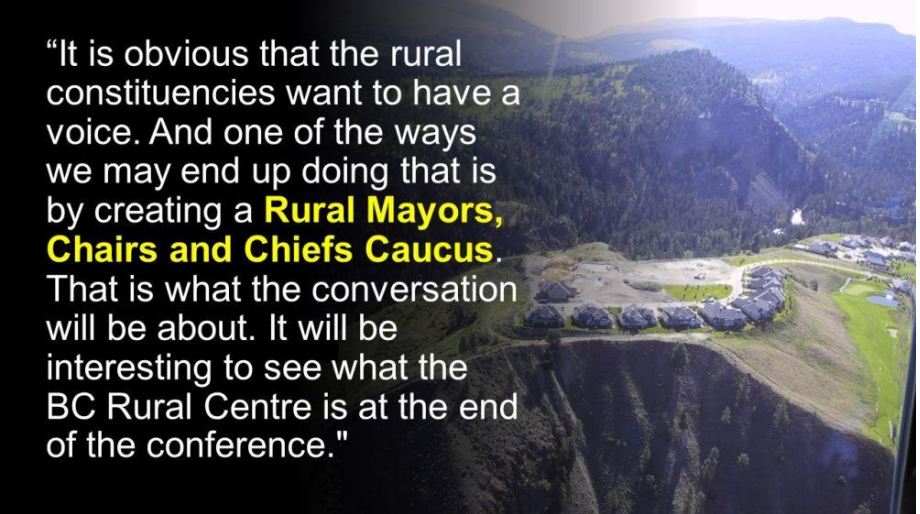
Barry met with senior coastal and interior business and industry representatives, elected representatives, and dozens of 'average folks' along the way. "All shared valid perspectives and clear opinions on why they choose to live rural and what they perceive the issues to be," he stated in his report to the board.

## **An idea for conference attendees to consider is a Rural Mayors, Chairs and Chiefs Caucus**

"I prepared a report that reflected what I learned from this travelling roadshow. The report lists 18 issues of concern to rural and remote communities," explains Barry Janyk. "The board said this is great. Now, as Executive Director, what could you do to solve these 18 problems? I was gob smacked."

"We had a strategic planning session in June 2022 to decide what the BC Rural Centre could realistically accomplish as an advocacy organization for rural constituencies. This is the genesis for holding the Keeping It Rural Conference a year later in early June 2023."

"The conference is bringing together 90 community leaders from all parts of the province to Kelowna to map a path forward for the rurals. Two keynote speakers, Chief Clarence Louie of the Osoyoos Indian Band and Sean Markey of Simon Fraser University, will inform the conversation about areas of critical need for action in rural areas."



"It is obvious that the rural constituencies want to have a voice. And one of the ways we may end up doing that is by creating a **Rural Mayors, Chairs and Chiefs Caucus**. That is what the conversation will be about. It will be interesting to see what the BC Rural Centre is at the end of the conference."

## STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

# Rural Constituencies Want a Voice

*- a conversation with Barry Janyk*

"The rurals have always been my passion. That is why I moved from Vancouver to the Sunshine Coast. And I have worked in or travelled to every corner of the province. And I love BC. It is a particularly nice place to call home."

"Because I know a lot of people, the board of the BC Rural Centre asked me to go out and ask some questions. So, I came up with a list, had the conversations, and produced a laundry list of issues."

"An observation is that rural issues tend not to be the issues that capture attention. In large part, that is the reason we are undertaking the Keeping It Rural Conference on June 1-2. To pull the shawl back on the issues that are the elephants in the room."



"Rural areas are known for understanding the fundamentals of life. They get those things. The conference has generated huge interest. It is remarkable how many people want to know about it. This year we want to feel people out, find out where the interest is, and then build on that."

"The simple way to explain the present situation is that we have done the work to identify the issues. Now we are trying to prioritize them. And we are also trying to get the ear of the provincial government to help us collaborate and address these key issues."

"We will re-group as staff and board after the conference and have our 2023 strategic planning session. That will determine our steps forward. A large part of it will be predicated on the results of the conference because that will be a good gauge of where the priorities lie."

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## **PART ONE: What organization serves only rural local governments, community leaders and First Nations?**

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"There is NO organization out there that is actually undertaking the work that the BC Rural Centre is doing. None," Barry Janyk states emphatically.

"What organization serves only local governments, community leaders and First Nations? We see the role being created. And it has to be inclusive of everybody that considers themselves a rural or remote community!"

"It is important to listen and become educated in the issues. That really is crucial. Rural areas want to be heard and the BC Rural Centre is an organization that listens. And that is important. We really do. How we can enact their issues and concerns into good provincial policy is a good question. That is a work-in-progress. We're on it!"

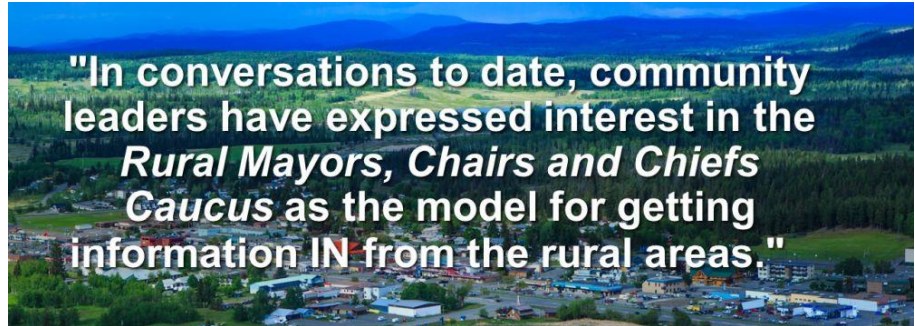


"We have been kicking around the idea of a Rural Mayors, Chairs and Chiefs Caucus. An organization should be what an organization wants to be. If the board believes that creation of the rural caucus is a good idea, then we will find a way to get that done."

"Rural communities are not going away. They have made that very clear. They say, '*we will thrive and survive*'. I hope the BC Rural Centre can be as resilient as the rurals that we serve because somebody has got to take care of them. Somebody has to help them. Somebody has to speak for them."



"And I don't see any other organization out there that has the same mandate. We will be careful not to step on toes. And at the same time we want to be that organization that can provide the back and forth between government in a timely way."



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## **PART TWO: Ripple effects when there is population outflow from the larger centres to rural communities - a short essay by Barry Janyk**

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"For the past decade rural communities had been devising clever population attraction strategies and finding occasional success in achieving incremental growth," writes Barry Janyk.

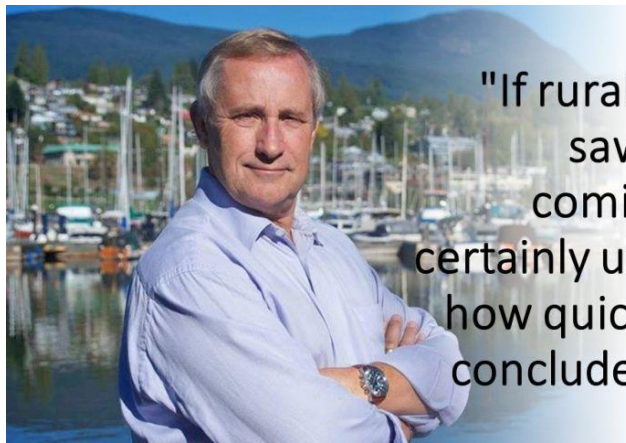
"Coincidental with the expansion of broadband communications, the global COVID pandemic and the predicted demographic upheaval, living in urban areas became less attractive. Many folks who had been considering leaving urban centres quickly did - to a rural region - often without undertaking significant research."

"Many individuals who were in - or approaching - the retirement demographic chose to pull the proverbial pin rather than face COVID implications, choosing a less expensive rural lifestyle while selling their urban properties - often with healthy sums banked and no mortgage payments. It became a glorious retirement solution at just the right time!"

"The impact of this human tidal wave hit communities by surprise, many experiencing housing and labour shortages, skyrocketing real estate prices, and an influx of newcomers with new demands. This rapid growth brought with it numerous challenges - workforce shortages, infrastructure and social services capacity issues - rocking community wellbeing and affecting quality of life."

"Zoom towns made possible by high-speed internet in rural communities have allowed vast numbers of people to vacate their city condo for a family home in a rural setting. While this may appear fortuitous for some, when existing rental homes are sold and new residents fail to contribute to the labour market as they brought their own jobs with them, they can quickly become a burden on local infrastructure."

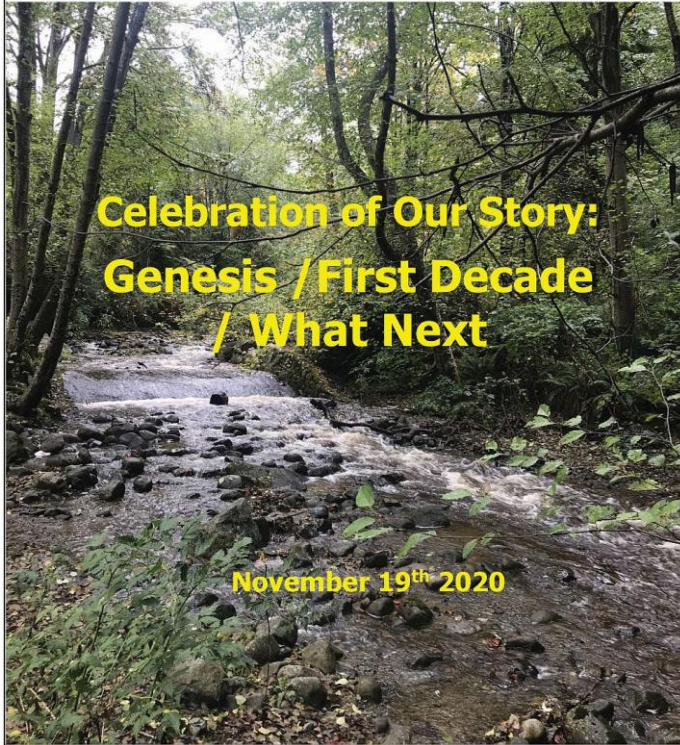
"New attainable housing must be built to support the local workforce that fill the jobs in the grocery stores, restaurants, the gas stations – basically the service sector positions. This creates a very protracted process. With nowhere to live, priced out of market, and available rental units being turned into short-term vacation rentals - members of the community that provide those services are forced to move away! We're the BC Rural Centre. We want to understand. We want to help."



"If rural communities saw this tsunami coming, they were certainly unprepared for how quickly it arrived," concludes Barry Janyk.



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TO LEARN MORE, VISIT:

<https://waterbucket.ca/about-us/>

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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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