



the partnership
for water sustainability in bc

Waterbucket eNews on May 16, 2023
<https://waterbucket.ca/wscblog/>

Living Water Smart in British Columbia:

*Trust is the currency
of collaboration in
the Comox Valley*

Note to Reader:

[Waterbucket eNews](#)¹ celebrates the leadership of individuals and organizations who are guided by the vision for [Living Water Smart in British Columbia](#)².

The edition published on May 16, 2023 featured Nancy Gothard of the City of Courtenay and her “story behind the story” about collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries.

Nancy Gothard is the only person still with the city who was part of the regional team experience as an "experiment in collaboration" under the umbrella of the Georgia Basin Inter-Regional Education Initiative (IREI).

The umbrella for Partnership initiatives and programs is the [Water Sustainability Action Plan for British Columbia](#)³. In turn, the Action Plan is nested within [Living Water Smart, British Columbia's Water Plan](#).



Cover Image Credit: photo by contributed by City of Courtenay in 2007

¹ <https://waterbucket.ca/wscblog/>

² https://waterbucket.ca/wcp/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/11/livingwatersmart_book.pdf

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

Editor's Perspective

The Partnership describes the Comox Valley as an experiment in collaboration and collaborative leadership because there was no way to guarantee the outcome in 2008. At the outset, it was a leap of faith on the part of all the players that four local governments would be successful in collaborating as a regional team.

In recent months, I have interviewed more than a dozen individuals who have been part of the journey. Nancy Gothard is one of those folks. In our conversations, each person stepped back to take stock. They reflected on what interorganizational collaboration means to them and how their past experience has primed them for further collaboration.

In a matter of weeks, the Partnership will be releasing the story of the Comox Valley Water Journey. It is a legacy resource and weaves quotable quotes into a storyline much like a news magazine would. The key message is that collaborative leadership delivers results across organizational boundaries.

In this edition of Waterbucket eNews, we feature Nancy Gothard and her "story behind the story". Nancy joined the City of Courtenay soon after graduating from the UBC School of Community and Regional Planning in 2009 with her master's degree. She was immediately part of the "experiment in collaboration" under the [Georgia Basin Inter-Regional Education Initiative](#) (IREI) umbrella.

This experience has influenced the arc of Nancy's career evolution. In 2014, Nancy wrote an essay wherein she observed that: *"Everyone who has gone through the IREI has been 'seasoned' to be nimble and open-minded, and to genuinely be of assistance to others."*

Readers will learn that collaboration in the Comox Valley is enduring and there is no end to the journey. Collaboration has built trust. With trust, anything is possible.



Kim A. Stephens, MEng, PEng (non-practising),
Executive Director

Partnership for Water Sustainability in BC

May 2023



One-Minute Takeaway



“Trust is the currency of collaborative work, which the climate and every other societal crisis requires” - Nancy Gothard

Nancy Gothard joined the City of Courtenay in mid-2010 as the City’s first Environmental Planner. Currently, she is Manager of Community and Sustainability Planning. She also recently served as Acting Manager of Development Planning for 6 months.

Nancy is the only person still with the city who was part of the regional team experience as an **"experiment in collaboration"** under the umbrella of the [Georgia Basin Inter-Regional Education Initiative \(IREI\)](#).

Nancy's tenure and commitment give her the perspective to reflect on her journey with the city and how what she was part of years ago has influenced what she does in her job today.

Commitment to a Career in One Place

“There is a view out there that professionals should be moving to different organisations and climbing ladders to lead a fulfilling and advancing career. I have not done that,” states Nancy Gothard. “Supervisors have asked me, where is the diversity on your resume?”

"My commitment is to the community that I love and so my career strategy has been different. It has meant I may not grow as quickly as I could, but in the passage of time I feel rewarded for staying with one organization."

"We are currently experiencing rapid change in our organization and priorities. Many staff changes, a re-elected and extremely progressive Council, multiple master plans now in place, and the recent adoption of a guiding vision (Official Community Plan) that focuses on climate, reconciliation, equity, and community well-being as cardinal directions."

Trust is the currency of collaboration in the Comox Valley:

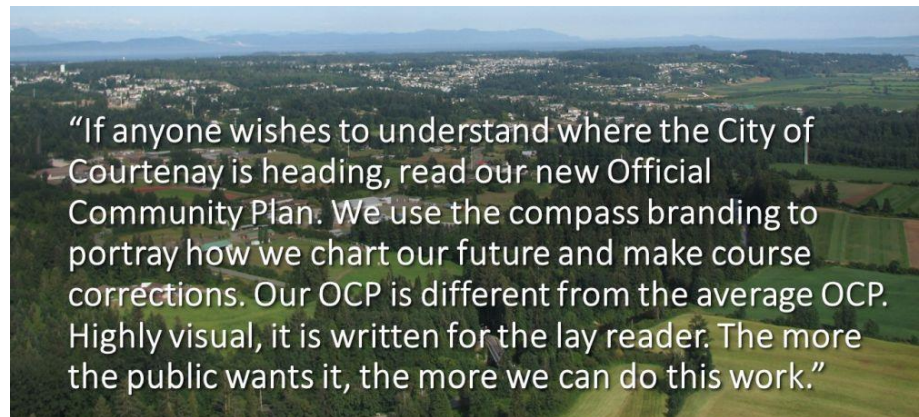
"With all this change there is a need for **institutional memory** to provide stability, insight, and rapid response to these new opportunities. Now that I have evolved into a more senior role, I feel the strategy of commitment and patience is allowing me to contribute more decisively and effectively."

"I know the history, I know the players, there is TRUST. Now we can get to work. As challenging as the work is, it is extremely rewarding."



STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

Trust is the currency of collaboration in the Comox Valley - a conversation with Nancy Gothard



“There is a book called the **speed of trust**. The message really resonates with me and guides my professional work. Trust is the currency of collaborative work, which the climate and every other societal crisis requires,” states Nancy Gothard.

“The reality now is we cannot keep up with the pace of work and there is a lot of tension in community planning work. Trusting the person on the other side of the call makes a world of difference to being in a productive frame of mind, to not be afraid to test new ideas, and feel comfortable enough to offer constructive criticism.”



“Trust is practiced in the day-to-day actions steadily over time. For example, when someone like Marvin Kamenz of the Town of Comox calls, I want to nurture that trust. We share common goals. He is helpful to me and vice versa. It can be as simple as that.”

PART ONE:

Asset Management for Sustainable Service Delivery - new baseline, new expectations

The Asset Management Bylaw adopted in 2019 put the City of Courtenay on the map as a national leader.

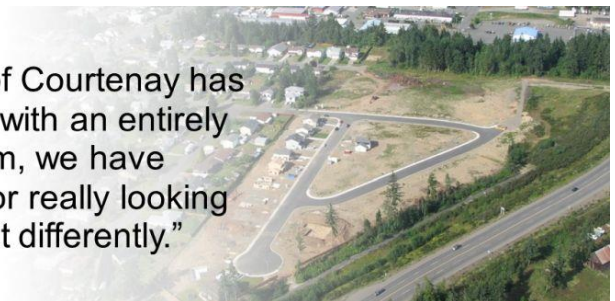
“We started talking about many of the City’s functions years back in terms of services that are provided by public assets, and the levels of service we want from those assets,” continues Nancy Gothard.

“Former CAO David Allen and senior advisor David Love brought that language which has become embedded and a shared way to talk about our role across departments. Everyone from staff to councillors use it. It is in every council report. It is the way we talk. It has permeated down. And there is a lot of value in that.”

Re-Imagining Development Services

“There is no question that asset management for engineered infrastructure is needed but it should not drive all decisions. Along with the wider policy and regulatory environment, society is also changing. There is a new baseline, a new threshold of expectations for the development sector.”

“Now that the City of Courtenay has filled the vacancies with an entirely new leadership team, we have amazing potential for really looking at land development differently.”



“And with a firm asset management framework in place, it is Development Services time to get some light shone on it. Now we are talking about the future of housing. We are talking about the future of community growth. We are ready to innovate in these topics as we did when establishing a commitment to asset management.”

"We had a number of vacancies in my department. This was challenging as we were already overworked. But I also see such an opportunity for transformation in our department. When you replace just one role, you are not changing the culture. The rest of the system is just moving. Everybody is used to their patterns."



PART TWO:

Official Community Plan - compass for charting change in the City of Courtenay

"The City's Official Community Plan is something that I have poured my life into over the past two years. It is very progressive. We intend to apply for an award for it. Climate, reconciliation, equity, and community wellbeing are the cardinal directions of it. Running through that, naturally, is a respect for the natural environment," explains Nancy Gothard. She is passionate about the OCP.

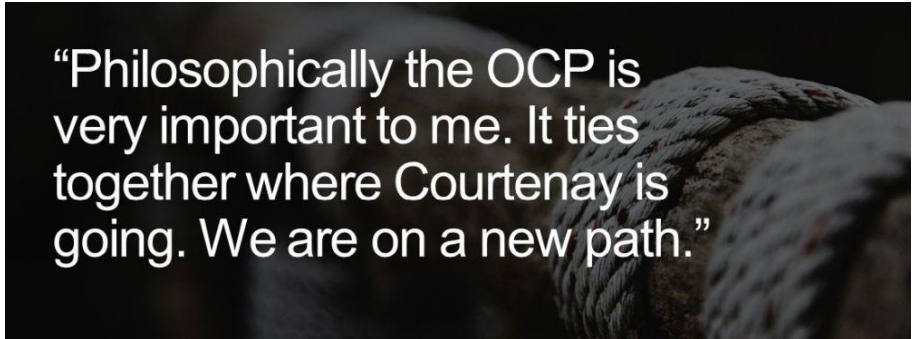
"The OCP is part of our journey. It is a picture of the future. We used the branding of a compass because we are using this idea to chart our change and course correct. The compass is important. If you want to know where Courtenay is going, it is our OCP. And we are protecting natural assets. There is no question. That is a goal."



The public must want something for it to happen

“The OCP is my passion. It is written a little differently than the average one. It is explicitly written to be colourful, with images and language to help the lay reader. Because we know the long game with these messages is everyday people. They have to want this stuff. The more they want it, the more we can do this work.”

“The only thing that will get us to where we need to go is the public. There is probably less trust between the public and institutions than ever before. Trust has eroded. That is the next nut to crack. How do we get the public on-side and realize that we are all excited by these visions and trusting us so that we can work on them.”



“Philosophically the OCP is very important to me. It ties together where Courtenay is going. We are on a new path.”

PART THREE:

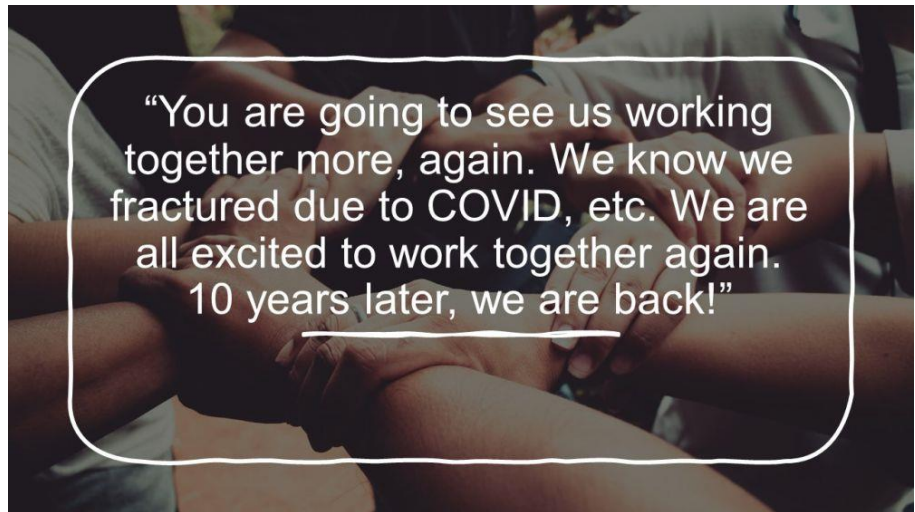
Comox Valley Regional Growth Strategy - nature knows no boundaries

“Pay attention to the updating of the Comox Valley Regional Growth Strategy. We will see where that goes. It has given me the chance to re-engage with the Town of Comox, the Comox Valley Regional District, and the Village of Cumberland. Once again, we are sitting around the table, and we are talking about how an implementation committee would move action items forward.”

“The thing too about the speed of trust in our community is the stewardship sector and its strength. It has always been strong. And that has long been part of the messaging out of the Comox Valley. Trust is so critical in forming relationships with interested parties such as the stewardship sector.”

“After the years of understanding each other’s perspectives, we can have a conversation about solutions. I can ask them questions because they have ears to ground, and they can ask me about and give input to regulatory changes.”

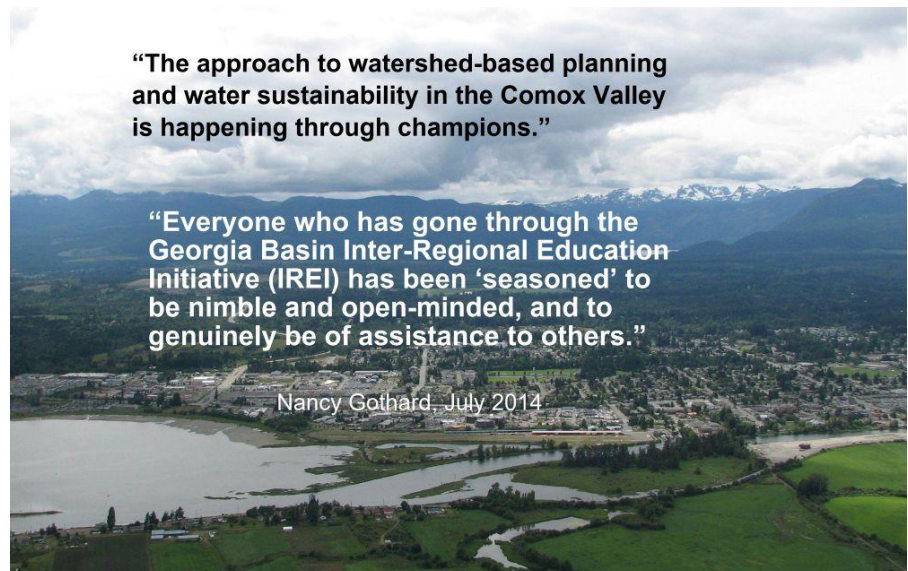
“We all know who each other is. This approach of course is important with any strategic partner, like the development community as well which we are committed to forming positive working relationships with as well. That will take time, and trust, but I believe we are getting there.”



Closing perspective on a promising future

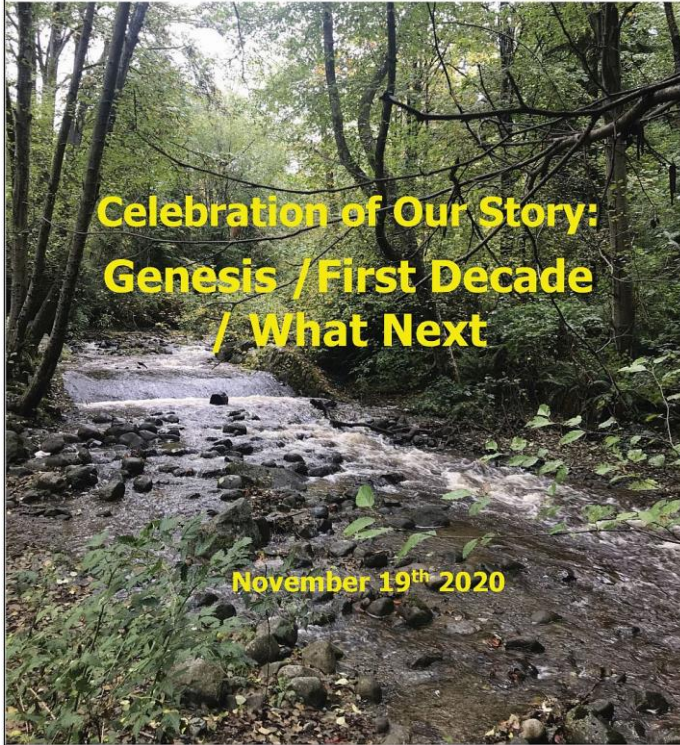
“I am excited. The tree that grew from the seed looks nothing like the seed. You have to go through a breaking point to create something new. It has been very hard due to so many vacancies. But I am willing to look through that because what I want is on the other side and it could be very promising.”

“If there is a meta-message here, I would not be surprised if Courtenay has the most progressive municipal council in all of BC. In terms of seeing the Comox Valley succeed, we now have the leaders who want BIG things. And that is why I am excited. They are going to push us to innovate and do award-winning work,” concludes Nancy Gothard.





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TO LEARN MORE, VISIT:

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

About the Partnership for Water Sustainability in British Columbia

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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