

the partnership for water sustainability in bc

Waterbucket eNews on February 6, 2024 https://waterbucket.ca/wscblog/



Note to Reader:

Waterbucket eNews¹ celebrates the leadership of individuals and organizations who are guided by the vision for Living Water Smart in British Columbia².

The edition published on February 6, 2024 features the story behind the story of Melony Burton, Manager of Infrastructure Planning with the City of Port Coquitlam in the Metro Vancouver region. Melony Burton's actions in driving positive change are guided by her no-nonsense approach to keeping it simple, practical and implementable.

The umbrella for Partnership initiatives and programs is the Water Sustainability Action Plan for British Columbia³. In turn, the Action Plan is nested within Living Water Smart, British Columbia's Water Plan.



Cover Image: photo of roadside infiltration trench in a new development **Credit**: image provided by Melony Burton

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

One-Minute Takeaway

"If the process is strategic and well thought out, as well as practical and implementable from the start, then it is just a matter of sticking to it until you deliver it across the line," states Melony Burton.



The "story behind the story" that follows weaves quotable quotes by Melony Burton into a succinct storyline. This preview about her experience in leading and managing change is extracted from an interview included in:

Chronicle of the Metro Vancouver region's Green Infrastructure Journey (1997-2023): Create Liveable Communities and Protect Stream Health

The Partnership will release this legacy resource in 2024. There is so much oral history to be documented. It is a story that begins in 1997 with passage of the Fish Protection Act. However, the genesis is actually the 1970s. Thus, the story is truly intergenerational in nature.

Keep it Simple, Practical and Implementable

Melony Burton is results-based and has a history of accomplishment, starting with the City of Victoria, growing with the City of Coquitlam, and now with the neighbouring City of Port Coquitlam (PoCo).

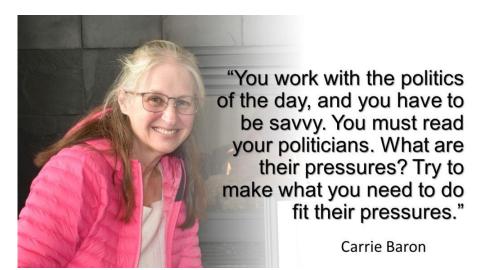
After joining Coquitlam in 2007, she led the city's watershed planning program under the direction of Dana Soong. Over a decade, Melony Burton developed nine Integrated Watershed Management Plans (IWMPs). This is a remarkable total. In 2017, she joined Port Coquitlam.

Drive positive change

Melony Burton's responsibilities at Port Coquitlam encompass the entire infrastructure portfolio, but drainage planning remains close to her heart. Viewed in a regional context, Melony Burton is a natural successor to Surrey's Carrie Baron as a thought leader and agent of change.

Melony Burton's actions in driving positive change are guided by her no-nonsense approach to keeping it <u>simple</u>, <u>practical and</u> implementable.

Flashback: Last November, Waterbucket eNews profiled Carrie Baron with a feature story titled Shifting the ecological baseline requires boldness.⁴ There were few women in engineering when Carrie Baron graduated in the mid-1980s. Leadership and innovation defined her professional career as Drainage Manager at the City of Surrey from 1997 through 2021.



⁴ https://waterbucket.ca/wcp/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2023/11/PWSBC_Living-Water-Smart_Carrie-Baron-ongreen-infrastructure-evolution-in-Surrey 2023.pdf

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Editor's Perspective by Kim A Stephens

Melony Burton and my paths first crossed In November 2011 when Carrie Baron and I co-organized and the City of Surrey hosted the Course on the ISMP Course Correction. Afterwards, Carrie encouraged me to profile the great work Melony was then doing with the City of Coquitlam. We published that story a decade ago, in January 2014.

The context is that regulatory action by the Minister of Environment in 2011 prompted the course correction in the way engineering-centric watershed plans, known by the acronym ISMP for *Integrated Stormwater Management Plan*, were being developed in Metro Vancouver.

Course on the ISMP Course Correction

The 2-day training event built on the foundation created by the Stormwater Guidebook and peer-based learning. The experience of local government champions who had developed precedent-setting watershed plans provided the curriculum backbone.

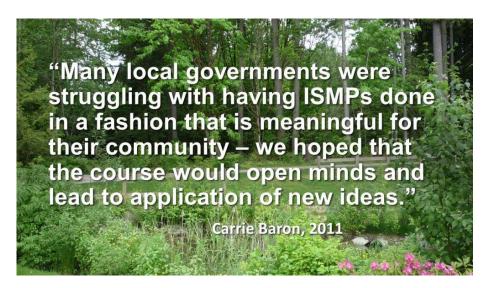
Participants learned how they could draw on inhouse resources, adapt the City of Surrey's ISMP framework, apply the Bowker Creek approach (in the Capital Region) to watershed team-building, and embed the vision for a watershed landscape restoration strategy in land use planning processes.

Inter-regional collaboration

Conversations during that 2-day course seeded an idea that flowered as the curriculum for the Georgia Basin Inter-Regional Education Initiative. Launched in 2012, the IREI continues to this day.

Carrie Baron and Melony Burton represented the Metro Vancouver region when the Partnership in collaboration with multiple local governments delivered the *Inter-Regional Collaboration Series on a Watershed Health Legacy* in 2014.

The series concept was that five regions view the Watershed Health Issue through complementary lens that together form a complete picture. Collaboration enables everyone to better deliver on regulatory requirements.



STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

Keep it simple, practical and implementable -

extracts from a conversation with Melony Burton

Delivering eight asset management plans in three years speaks to the track record and credibility of Melony Burton as an agent of change.

"This was at the same time as rolling out a new Master Transportation Plan and updated Development Cost Charge Bylaw with few staff, or no staff support," Melony Burton explains with pride.

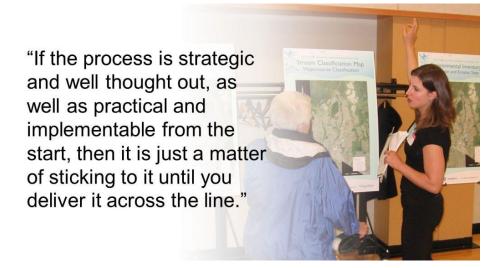


Take action, start small, stay practical

"In my work, I continue to apply the ten principles that I developed at Coquitlam when we delivered nine Integrated Watershed Management Plans in just 10 years. Three of the 10 are universally applicable to any area of infrastructure planning: take action, start small, stay practical.

"Staying true to these has helped me deliver so much. Develop a really good strategy coming out of the gate and stay super focused. Do not go down rabbit holes. You can always circle back later."

"Rather than just diving in, start with getting the lessons learned from what others have tried first. What is working for them. What is not. Then start your strategy."



Story of the Development Cost Charge Bylaw

"When I looked at the history of the DCC Bylaw updates in Port Coquitlam, for example, staff had tried to take it forward several times. They would almost get to the finish line, then trip and fall."

"Each time, it seems that they started fresh instead of looking at why the previous attempts had failed. The first thing I did was look at WHY THEY FAILED. They tripped over being too complicated or getting sidetracked."

"Keeping it simple and basic is what got the DCC Bylaw over the line. In five years, we can update it and make it more complex if we need to. Now we at least have an updated bylaw adopted."

Build on experience: don't re-invent the wheel

"While I was with Coquitlam, I chaired the Metro Vancouver Stormwater Interagency Liaison Group. That was a phenomenal experience. Being in that role also offered an opportunity to chair the technical working group that developed the monitoring and adaptive management framework for the Metro Vancouver region."

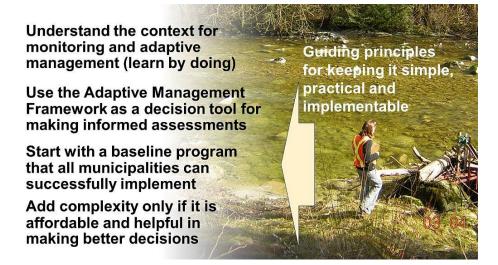
"The regulatory requirement for developing an Adaptive Management Framework was spelled out in the Minister of Environment's letter of approval for Metro Vancouver's visionary Integrated Liquid Waste and Resource Management Plan."



Do more of what works

"The purpose of the Adaptive Management Framework is to measure watershed health. How well are your ISMPs working? We kept it simple, practical and implementable for a reason. You are not going to measure everything every five years because it is unaffordable when you have multiple watersheds or limited resources."

"If you were to go back every five years and check, could you see your watershed health improving? How many of your recommendations have you implemented? ARE THEY WORKING? If they are, do more of those. If they are not working, reallocate your resources to doing more of the things that are working!"



Stay true to the fundamentals

"I have heard some people questioning the simplicity of the framework without taking the time to UNDERSTAND WHY IT WAS IMPLEMENTED THE WAY IT WAS IN THE FIRST PLACE. There again is this desire to change things or make things unnecessarily complex."

"And that is why I constantly stress keeping things simple, practical and implementable. You have the option to build in complexity over time. But that would depend on whether you have the resources to do that; and whether you are already covering the fundamentals. But often adding complexity comes at the cost of the fundamentals."

"I am never one for changing things for the sake of changing things. If something is working well, it does not need an overhaul."



Realistic and Achievable

"Be realistic in setting timelines. That is what I really picked up on with the 100-Year Plan for implementing the Bowker Creek Blueprint in the Capital Region. Otherwise, it is a recipe for failure."

"When you have too many goals and objectives, you end up with a plan that cannot be implemented, and a timeline that is unachievable. You need to narrow your focus and give yourself time to get it done," concludes Melony Burton.



APPENDIX A

A window into the green infrastructure journey in the Metro Vancouver region:

The complete interview with Melony Burton provides valuable context



Keep it Simple, Practical and Implementable
How to Deliver Multiple Large Plans
Blueprint for Rainwater Management Policy
How to Build on Experience and
Not Re-Invent the Wheel

Melony Burton, Manager of Infrastructure Planning City of Port Coquitlam (2017 – present)

Keep it Simple, Practical and Implementable

Melony Burton is results-based and has a history of accomplishment, starting with the City of Victoria, growing with the City of Coquitlam, and now with the neighbouring City of Port Coquitlam (PoCo).

After joining Coquitlam in 2007, she led the city's watershed planning program under the direction of Dana Soong. Over a decade, Melony Burton developed nine Integrated Watershed Management Plans (IWMPs). In 2017, she joined PoCo.

Her responsibilities at PoCo encompass the entire infrastructure portfolio, but drainage planning remains close to her heart. Viewed in a regional context, Melony Burton is a natural successor to Surrey's Carrie Baron as a thought leader and agent of change.

Melony Burton drew on a decade of experience to frame the **10 Principles** that have guided watershed planning and rainwater management in the City of Coquitlam, and now guide Port Coquitlam.

Refer to Figure B18.



Reflections on her inter-municipal collaboration

"When I look back to my time in Coquitlam, it is hard to believe that we delivered nine IWMPs in just 10 years. And they continue to implement the recommendations. That is a good thing," states Melony Burton.

"Now I am working with Coquitlam staff because we partner on IWMPs for our shared watersheds. It is really cool to pass on knowledge this way and see Coquitlam staff led by Jonathan Helmus and Padraig Harrington pick it up and get into it. The process has been a rewarding experience for me."

The fact that Coquitlam former colleagues and continue the mission that she initiated when leading Coquitlam's IWMP program.

and Port Coquitlam are adjoining municipalities with shared watersheds allows Melony Burton to collaborate with

"Sharing knowledge across departments is a big one for developing and implementing truly integrated plans. I am passing my knowledge on to others in PoCo. And I am still sharing *information with other* cities, and learning from what they have done as

well."

Reflections on being an agent of change

"In my work, I continue to apply the ten principles that I developed at Coquitlam. Three of the 10 are universally applicable to any area of infrastructure planning: take action, start small, stay practical. Staying true to these has helped me deliver so much, including eight asset management plans in just three years, along with a Master Transportation plan, and an updated Development Cost Charge Bylaw," continues Melony Burton.

"I am still focused on drainage, but I have lot more on the go as well. And, I have come to see myself as a change agent in the region. My passion is not tied to a particular topic. It is a deeper drive"

"It is passion about driving positive change. Being committed to goals. Setting long-term objectives. And committing to those until they are delivered. That is what gets these big items over the finish line."

Avoid rabbit holes: "In the beginning of a planning process it is all about keeping it simple, practical and implementable. Knowing that you have to put thought into it at the beginning and be strategic. Beware of getting sidetracked and going down rabbit holes. Develop a really good strategy coming out of the gate and stay super focused. You can always circle back later."



Drive positive change: "I have leveraged my career into a position that allows me to have more influence and positive change. This came, in part, from channeling the frustration at being limited in the role I was in. When you are comfortable, you are not motivated to make a change."

How to Deliver Multiple Large Plans

Delivering eight asset management plans in three years speaks to the track record and credibility of Melony Burton as an agent of change. "This was at the same time as rolling out a new Master Transportation Plan and updated DCC Bylaw with few staff, or no staff support," says Melony.

"In reviewing what others had done the past, I saw that asset management plans would normally take two years to develop and would be completed in succession. The plans would often get too complex or sidetracked, and the opportunities for crossover and consistency between the plans would be lost."

"I noticed that others would complete one or two plans, but several years later, had not gotten to their other asset groups. When a plan is too complex, everybody is fatigued by the process. If they've had a bad experience with the first one, they are certainly not going to be motivated to take on the others."

"Drill down and make your plans as simple as possible. So simple that you could bring multiple, multi-year plans forward at the same time, regardless of the resources you have on hand."

Story about the Development Cost Charge Bylaw

"When I looked at the history of the DCC Bylaw updates in Port Coquitlam, staff had tried to take it forward several times. They would almost get to the finish line, then trip and fall. Each time, it seems that they started fresh instead of looking at why the previous attempts had failed. The first thing I did was look at WHY THEY FAILED. They tripped over being too complicated or getting sidetracked."

"Keeping it simple and basic is what got the DCC Bylaw over the line. In five years, we can update it and make it more complex if we need to. Now we at least have an updated bylaw adopted."

This is what we are going for

"This formed the approach to developing all eight asset management plans concurrently in Port Coquitlam. In order to achieve that, we needed to drill down to the essentials and stay hyper focused."

"Keep it simple. Keep it implementable. Keep it practical. Avoid rabbit holes. Ask what is the most fundamental thing you need to do and make that your NORTH STAR."

And every time you get sidelined, you have to keep coming back to those basic principles. And those are set out at the beginning of any plan.....THIS IS WHAT WE ARE GOING FOR."

"And if we get other suggestions and they do not fit with where we are going, or our goals and objectives, then it is FOR ANOTHER FUTURE PLAN. It is for another time. We really must stay focused."

Blueprint for Rainwater Management Policy

This statement by Melony Burton provides context and sets the tone for what follows: "I think back to what I did in Coquitlam and how that has carried on, what I did with Metro Vancouver at the regional table and how that has carried on, and what I have taken to Port Coquitlam to implement and how that is carrying on."

"When I was with Coquitlam, I introduced the city's Rainwater Management Policy."

"This requires source controls for runoff capture in every watershed. Now I have a good template that I can carry over to PoCo."



Embed shared responsibility in cascading policies

"As well as the IWMPs, I introduced the Rainwater Management Policy at Coquitlam. It speaks to each of the plans to ensure the appropriate source controls are implemented for each watershed."

"The policy is still being implemented and has become part of the regular business process in Coquitlam Yet, it was a considerable challenge to get everyone's head wrapped around it when we first brought the Rainwater Management Policy forward."

"All that good work done over there (in Coquitlam) can be replicated here in Port Coquitlam; as well as in other municipalities that have yet to implement a policy for managing rainwater runoff at the source."

"We are looking to get that rainwater requirement into our Official Community Plan, and into a policy document that then speaks back to each of the IWMPs, and then puts it into the development process."

Focus on deliver: "Implementation of rainwater management and other IWMPs objectives are integrated, like the plans themselves – several divisions have a role to play in the process. Plans and policies can be driven from the engineering department, but must be bought into and implemented by others across the organization too"

"We can help and support the other departments achieve the objectives. Development of plans and policies is only half the challenge. There must also be a sustained and concerted focus on execution to successfully deliver them."

No need to reinvent the wheel

"After delivering our IWMPs, I will be looking to introduce a Rainwater Management Policy in Port Coquitlam. The good thing is that the blueprint has been set by what was done in Coquitlam. That is definitely replicable. So, I do not intend to reinvent the wheel."

How to Build on Experience and Not Re-Invent the Wheel

"While I was with Coquitlam, I chaired SILG," states Melony Burton. "That was a phenomenal experience. Being in that role also offered an opportunity to chair the technical working group that developed the monitoring and adaptive management framework for the Metro Vancouver region."

Coquitlam and Port
Coquitlam use the term
IWMP rather than ISMP.
The latter is an outdated
term that is engineeringcentric.



"Be realistic in setting timelines. That is what I really picked up on with the 100-Year Plan for implementing the Bowker Creek Blueprint. Otherwise, it is a recipe for failure. When you have too many goals and objectives, you end up with a plan that cannot be implemented, and a timeline that is unachievable. You need to narrow your focus and give yourself time to get it done."



1. Understand the context for monitoring and adaptive management (learn by doing)

"The purpose of the Adaptive Management Framework is to measure watershed health and the effectiveness of ISMPs. How well are your ISMPs working?"

"If you were to go back every five years and check, could you see your watershed health improving? How many of your recommendations have you implemented? ARE THEY WORKING?"

"If they are, do more of those. If they are not working, reallocate your resources to doing more of the things that are working!"

Timeframe for ISMP updates: "When I joined Port Coquitlam, they only had one IWMP under their belt and that was Hyde Creek. It was a joint plan with Coquitlam and was led by Coquitlam. Now we are back to a Hyde Creek IWMP Update. So that is a full cycle."

"Updates are supposed to be done every 12 years. The original was done in 2004. Now it is 20 years later. That timeframe makes me think of the 100-Year Action Plan for the Bowker Creek Blueprint in the Capital Regional District. Bowker recognizes the perspective of time in restoring watershed health in ways that are realistic and achievable."

2. Use the *Adaptive Management Framework* as a decision tool for making informed assessments

"Now that we have introduced the Adaptive Management Framework (AMF), we have a tool to assess whether we are making progress, and trending in the right direction," continues Melony Burton.

"With the benefit of the Bowker Creek lessons learned, and recognizing it will probably take 20, 50 or possibly even 100 years to implement all the action items in a solid IWMP, there is no need to re-do ISMPs every 12 years just because it seemed like a good idea once upon a time."

"The Hyde Creek IWMP was the first Coquitlam plan built on the ISMP Template. And now it is the first one ready for a re-do. It has been an interesting learning experience in bringing new Coquitlam staff up to speed on IWMPs in general, while at the same time trying to pass on what we need to focus on for an update."



"As new people have joined the regional table, it is interesting that one of the things that has come up in discussion is that the Adaptive Management Framework is good, but is not measuring enough things. It is not complex enough."

"There is currently no ISMP Update Template – and that would be a good area of focus for the regional table. the results of the monitoring program should guide what you do in your IWMP update. The key objectives likely remain the same. The update should be more focused on the implementation end.

Focus on what an update should focus on: "The initial scope of work proposed for the Hyde Creek Update looked just like the original ISMP Template. And it was though we were going to be starting from scratch."

"It should not be the same template as developing an IWMP from scratch. It should be more focused on the implementation side.! In general, how is your watershed doing? Are you trending in the right direction?"

"Look at the original list of recommendations. How many have you implemented? Have they been effective in mitigating development impacts and improving overall watershed health? And if they are working, try and measure how well and do more of those."

"And if not, figure out what changes you need to make to focus limited resources on the measures which are moving the dial in the right direction."

Understand WHY

"We kept the Adaptive Management Framework simple, practical and implementable for a reason. You are not going to measure everything every five years because it is unaffordable when you have multiple watersheds or limited resources."

"That is why we chose water quality, flow and benthic invertebrates as the three indicators s to measure every 5 years, as the bare minimum. If everyone only measures these every 5 years, they can determine if the health of each watershed is improving or decreasing over time, and we can also have consistency across the region."

"Getting this right was such a fundamental part of the year that we spent developing the AMF while keeping everybody focused on what is simple, practical and implementable."

3. Start with a baseline program that all municipalities can successfully implement

"There is a tendency to overcomplicate things and re-invent the wheel unless knowledge is passed on that explains the WHY. I am never one for changing things for the sake of changing things. If something is working well, it does not need an overhaul," states Melony Burton when she reflects on discussions at the SILG table about revamping the monitoring framework.



Figure out the key indicators and keep the focus on what is simple, practical and implementable: "I have heard some people questioning the simplicity of the framework without taking the time to UNDERSTAND WHY IT WAS IMPLEMENTED THE WAY IT WAS IN THE FIRST PLACE. There again is this desire to change things or make things unnecessarily complex."

"And that is why I constantly stress keeping things simple, practical and implementable. You have the option to build in complexity over time. But that would depend on whether you have the resources to do that; and whether you are already covering the fundamentals. But often adding complexity comes at the cost of the fundamentals."

"The framework was developed not that long ago. I question the need to change it, or any plan for that matter, without a complete understanding of why it was developed the way it was and evidence that it is failing to achieve the fundamental objectives for which it was developed in the first place."

"Unless there is a strong trigger for change – something is not working or having the desired outcomes – effort is better expended executing a plan than changing it again and again."

4. Add complexity only if it is affordable and helpful in making better decisions

"During the year that we spent developing the Adaptive Management Framework, people would ask, why not measure 50 things? We kept bringing it back to the fact that the monitoring has to be repeatable and simple, affordable and implementable," explains Melony Burton.

"It was designed to easy and accessible for all in the region, to ensure it can be executed repeatedly over time. Also, to be fair and remove barriers for smaller municipalities with fewer resources."

"It will not work if you turn it into a big behemoth of a monitoring program. The baseline needs to be set at a level that all 21 municipalities are able to afford and achieve. You cannot contemplate doing a region-wide program based on, for example, the City of Surrey's resources. Nobody is going to be able to do it."

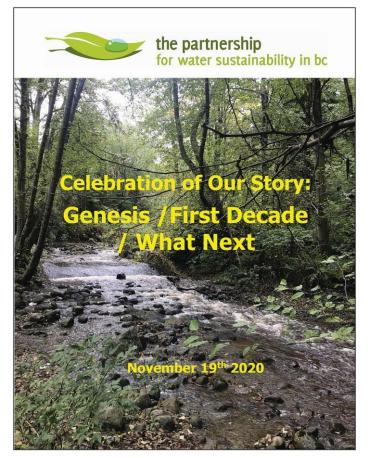
"Rather than just diving in, start with getting the lessons learned from what others have tried first. What is working for them. What is not. Then start your strategy, do your IWMPs and your adaptive management monitoring, and implement the IWMP actions that you said you would do. If you do all that, THAT IS SUCCESS!"

Keep it simple, practical and implementable: "A challenge is passing on that knowledge and understanding even though we built it into the AMF document. And if you were to read it carefully, the AMF document does reiterate that message many times."

"If you have the resources to do something more complex, measure as many things as you want. But at the bare minimum, make sure you are measuring the three key indicators because those will give you a good idea of how your watershed is doing."

"From there you can determine whether you need to measure more.. If one of indicators is trending up, you are probably doing something right. But if it is trending down, you know where you need to do some more investigation or testing. This is also a very cost-effective way to target limited resources where they are needed most," concludes Melony Burton.





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 intergenerational 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.

