



the partnership
for water sustainability in bc

Waterbucket eNews on February 11, 2025
<https://waterbucket.ca/wscblog/>

A photograph of a residential yard undergoing construction. A concrete retaining wall is being built along a sloped area. A red wheelbarrow is parked on a concrete pad in front of a blue shed. A pile of white blocks is visible on the right.

Living Water Smart in British Columbia:

**Confront the problems,
operationalize sustainable
service delivery!**

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 February 11, 2025 featured an essay by Arnold Schwabe of Asset Management BC. He shares his vision for building on the foundation created by Wally Wells, his predecessor as Executive Director (2010-2024). His core message is that it is time for a re-set in terms of how local governments deliver services.

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 Kim Stephens of Parkside Creek channelization in 1987 to mitigate the downstream consequences of urban residential development on the Seymour benchlands in North Vancouver

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

"We have no more excuses. We need to move past our anxiety, confront the problems, and operationalize asset management for sustainable service delivery!"



"Inability to effectively communicate the purposes of local government as defined in legislation...*Community Charter* as well as the *Local Government Act*...has had an unintended consequence - and that is, distrust of staff on the part of elected officials and taxpayers."

Arnold Schwabe

Confront the problems, operationalize sustainable service delivery!

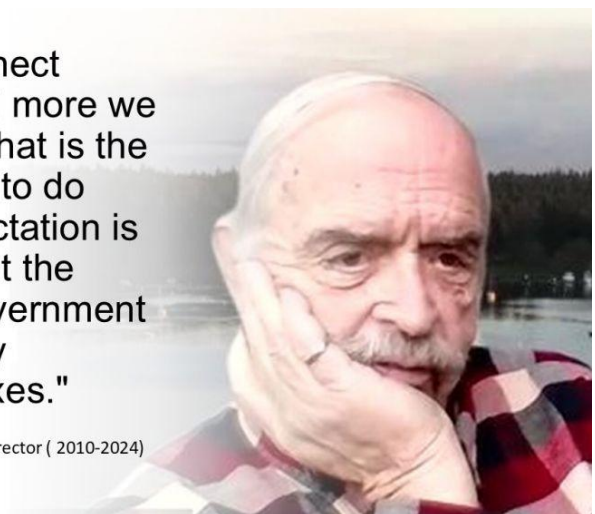
In his new role, Arnold Schwabe has the Asset Management BC Newsletter as a communication platform. This edition of Waterbucket eNews features the inaugural opinion piece written by Arnold. In **the Story Behind the Story** that follows, he shares his vision for building on the foundation created by Wally Wells through hard work over 15 years.

In Fall 2024, Arnold Schwabe succeeded the indomitable Wally Wells as Executive Director of Asset Management BC. Wally Wells is often described as a living legend in the world of asset management. He is a tough act to follow but Arnold Schwabe says he is up to the challenge!

Arnold's focus is on what local governments are supposed to do. Too often, he observes, councils do not understand the purposes and function of local government in providing services.

"There is a disconnect because more and more we hear people say what is the government going to do about it. The expectation is that no matter what the problem is, the government will fix it. Then they complain about taxes."

Wally Wells, Executive Director (2010-2024)
Asset Management BC

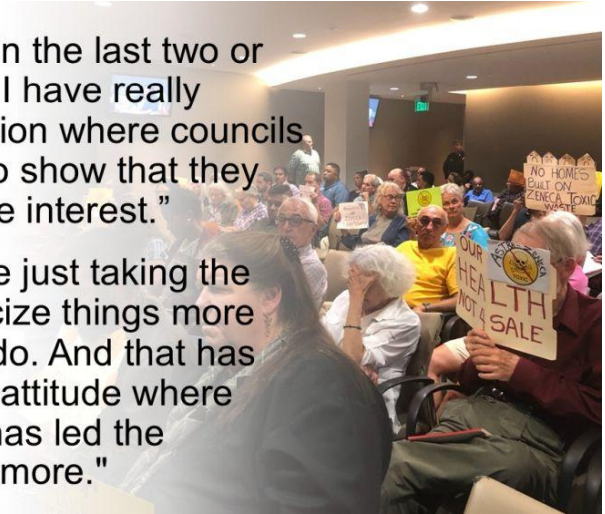


CALL TO ACTION: **Operationalize asset management for sustainable service delivery**

"Downloading is a real issue and local governments are frustrated with the Province," observes Arnold Schwabe. "I say that from the perspective of someone whose career experience over 35 years includes working for and with all three levels of government. My last 17 years were with local government."

"It is probably within the last two or three years where I have really noticed a progression where councils and boards want to show that they are taking an active interest."

"But really, they are just taking the opportunity to criticize things more than they used to do. And that has brought about this attitude where their complaining has led the public to complain more."



"From my perspective, however, there is hope because we are seeing renewed interest by local governments to talk about how to operationalize [Asset Management for Sustainable Service Delivery](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/local-governments/infrastructure/local-gasset-management-for-sustainable-service-delivery)⁴. When I receive requests to talk to elected officials, that opens the door for me to help them understand that their job is about the service not the assets."

⁴ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/local-governments/infrastructure/local-gasset-management-for-sustainable-service-delivery>

Editor's Perspective by Kim A Stephens

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.

Arnold Schwabe has written an outstanding article. He sets the scene, defines the problem, and closes with a call to action. The way he weaves his storyline makes it a 'must read' article. So, I asked Arnold: *What was going through your mind as you wrote this?*

Kim Stephens, Executive Director,
Partnership for Water Sustainability in BC



It is time for a re-set in terms of how local governments deliver services

"I would like to say taxpayers are unhappy but that would be an understatement. They are angry! Everywhere there is distrust. Things are changing in local government and we need to get a better handle on what direction that change goes," Arnold Schwabe emphasizes.

"And I believe that distrust results from failure to communicate the purposes of local government as defined in the [Community Charter](#) for municipalities and in the [Local Government Act](#) for regional districts. When elected officials get so far into the weeds that they tell staff how to do their job, that creates problems."

"So, what do we do? We reset. It is clearly a time of change. I think it is an appropriate time for local governments to reflect and self-evaluate the services they provide and how they provide them."

"This isn't about blame. It is about putting pieces together. To some degree, I see Asset Management BC in the same position in its history. It has become well-established. With Wally Wells moving on, it is time for self-evaluation."

Sustainable Service Delivery explained

Glen Brown, co-chair of UBCM, coined the phrase Sustainable Service Delivery in 2010. "It is all about the service", said Glen Brown. "Basically, well-maintained municipal infrastructure assets are worthless IF THEY DO NOT provide a service. Also, for any asset management approach to be successful, it must not focus on the infrastructure asset by itself."

"Asset Management is the task. Sustainable Service Delivery is the function," Wally Wells stresses in conversations and in presentations.



Glen Brown

In 2010, Glen Brown coined the term **Sustainable Service Delivery** to describe a life-cycle way of thinking about infrastructure needs and how to pay for those needs over time.

At the time, linking infrastructure asset management and the protection of a community's natural resources was a bold new idea.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

Confront the problems, operationalize sustainable service delivery! - an article by Arnold Schwabe in the *Asset Management BC Newsletter*

The article by Arnold Schwabe is structured in four parts. First, he introduces an historical perspective. Then he foreshadows how he envisions Asset Management BC will adapt to what is happening in local government. After that, he states the "purposes" of local government. He closes with a discussion on why he believes the precursors of change are in place for a re-set to take place.

May you live in interesting times

May you live in interesting times is a well-known expression.

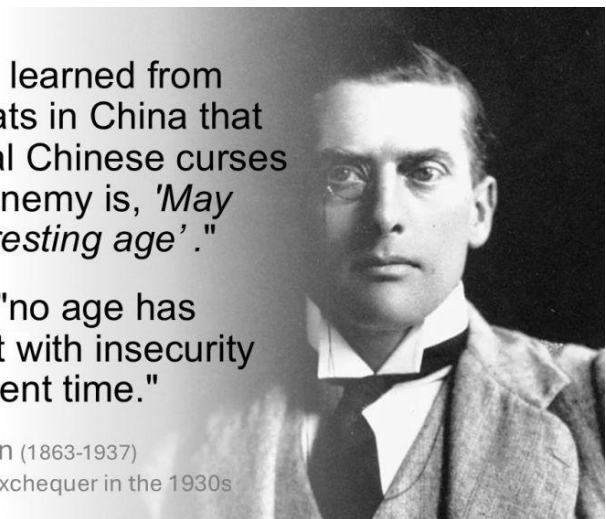
"Whether you believe this is an English expression or that it is claimed to be a translation of an old Chinese curse, the implied message remains the same," wrote Arnold Schwabe.

"Sir Austen Chamberlain (son of Joseph Chamberlain, British politician and social reformer) wrote the following in a letter to Frederic Rene Coudert Jr."

"Many years ago I learned from one of our diplomats in China that one of the principal Chinese curses heaped upon an enemy is, '*May you live in an interesting age*'."

"Surely", he said, "no age has been more fraught with insecurity than our own present time."

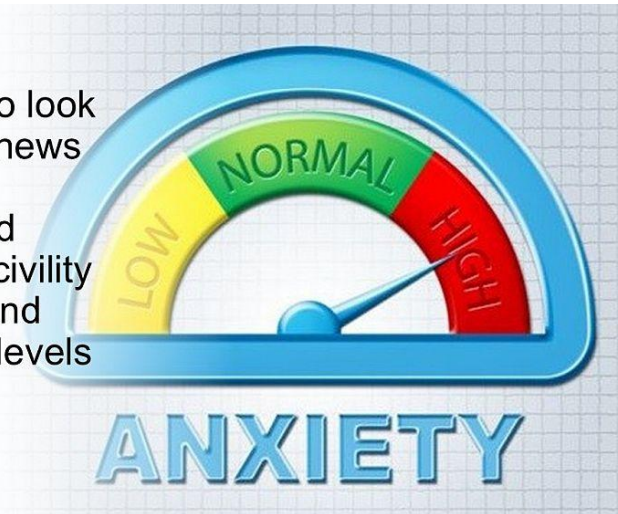
Sir Austen Chamberlain (1863-1937)
Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer in the 1930s



"You can be forgiven if you have never heard of these two people. That quote is from 1936, almost 90 years ago, but it could have easily been written yesterday."

"Significant wars are taking place, governments are toppling, new Provincial governments have been elected in Canada, and we are seeing a general feeling of unrest in our local governments as well."

"You don't have to look very hard to find news stories about the public and elected representative incivility towards people and process, anxiety levels seem to be at an all-time high."

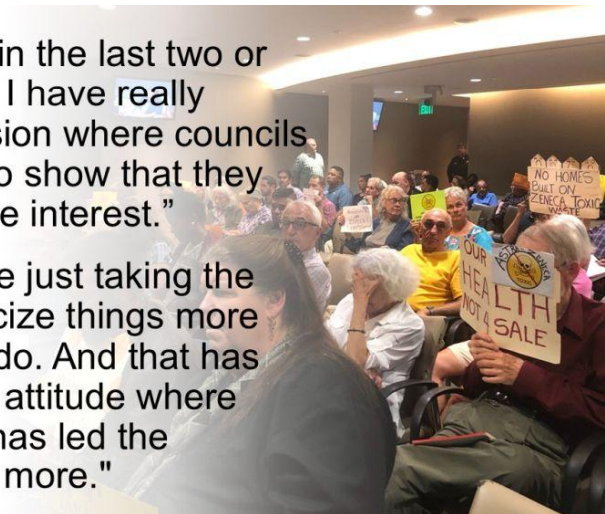


Who is Arnold Schwabe and what is his vision for Asset Management BC?

"This is where my story begins. I started in my new role as Executive Director of Asset Management BC on October 1, about a month before the 2024 annual AMBC conference, so the bulk of my first two months was spent on conference preparations and wrap-up."

"It is probably within the last two or three years where I have really noticed a progression where councils and boards want to show that they are taking an active interest."

"But really, they are just taking the opportunity to criticize things more than they used to do. And that has brought about this attitude where their complaining has led the public to complain more."



"I have spent the last 35 years working in private organizations, working for and with Provincial and Federal government branches, and in a municipality and regional district. I am now taking on the full-time role in Asset Management BC (AMBC) and will step into the shoes of Wally Wells, a legend in the asset management community."

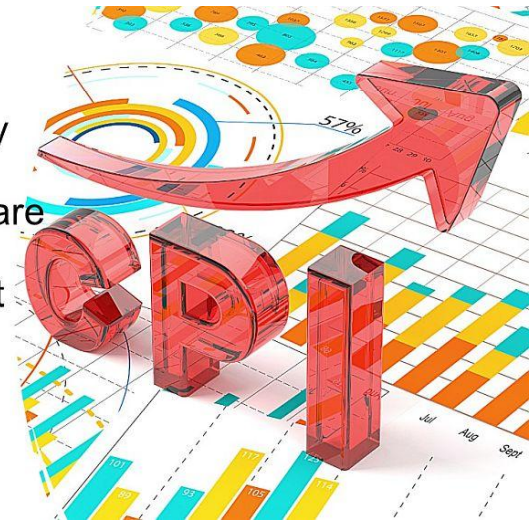
"AMBC is changing and the next few years will involve a review of the organization, the "5 W's" of the services we provide. We'll also be looking at the "How" in an effort to increase awareness and identify problems, in an effort to change, to adapt to what is happening in local government. I prefer to call it a reset."



"I believe the current situation at AMBC is a reflection of change that is happening in local government. We have seen rapid increase in inflation, downloading of services from other governments, a focus on housing, a focus on tackling climate change, integration of natural assets, and a continuing demand for social services."

"I realize CPI is not a good indicator of cost increases in municipalities, and that elections are often won on the promise of keeping taxes low, but I do not think we have done a good job of explaining those details, or people no longer care. They demand change."

"I would like to say taxpayers are unhappy but that would be an understatement, they are angry. They are angry over tax increases that are two-to-three times the current Consumer Price Index (CPI)."



Legislation provides contextual framework for operationalizing Asset Management for Sustainable Service Delivery

"But, the flavour of the month cannot be allowed to distract us from our purpose. If you need a reminder, all you need do is read Section 185 from the Local Government Act (LGA) and Section 7 from the Community Charter (CC) on the 'purposes' of local governments."

"I may be biased but I would consider parts 'b' and 'c' to be the most important of these. I do not believe a community can provide services or guarantee the well-being of residents without a sound foundation of infrastructure upon which to live, build, and grow."

Seven precursors of change must be at least partially present for change to occur

"We have no more excuses. The concept of *Asset Management for Sustainable Service Delivery* has been around long enough for staff and elected officials to have an awareness of the issues. We need to move past our anxiety and confront the problems."



Community Charter & Local Government Act



- a) providing good government for its community, (LGA and CC)
- b) providing the services and other things that the board considers are necessary or desirable for all or part of its community, (LGA)
providing for services, laws and other matters for community benefit, (CC)
- c) providing for stewardship of the public assets of its community, (LGA and CC)
- d) fostering the current and future economic, social and environmental well-being of its community, (LGA and CC)

"A large part of that involves re-evaluating services and better informing taxpayers on costs and resulting decisions. Governing bodies must have the courage to make that change, before the decision is made for us. This generation may be on the brink of financially and environmentally bankrupting future generations."

"If you follow Kim Stephens' articles in the Waterbucket eNews, you will see these same sentiments. It is not a coincidence that our articles have a similar theme, we have discussed these issues. We are at the end of three decades of evolution and appear to be at a standstill."

"Kim has identified nine factors that must be in alignment for change to happen. Many of them require the willingness for change and the courage of staff and elected officials to confront the problems and bring about lasting, meaningful change."

Cascading factors that must be in alignment for change to happen	1997 - 2005	2006 - 2011	2012 - 2017	2018-2024	2025 and beyond
	Crucible Period	Golden Period	Unfulfilled Promise	Memory Loss	Overcome Amnesia
Shared Vision	✓	✓	✓	✗	what if
Political Commitment	✓	✓	✓	✗	what if
Champions	✓	✓	dropping out	✗	what if
Forums	✓	✓	infrequent	✗	what if
Credibility, Respect and Trust	✓	✓	✓	✗	what if
Collaborative Leadership	✓	✓	lacking	✗	what if
Learn by doing	✓	✓	declining	✗	what if
Funding	✓	✓	inconsistent	✗	what if
Roundtable for action	✓	✓	missing in action	✗	what if

"While I was writing this, I ran across a book by Fred Hanna on **The 7 Precursors of Change**, qualities that must be at least partially present in a client for change: *a sense of necessity, a willingness or readiness to experience anxiety, awareness, confronting the problem, effort of will towards change, hope for change, social support for change.*"

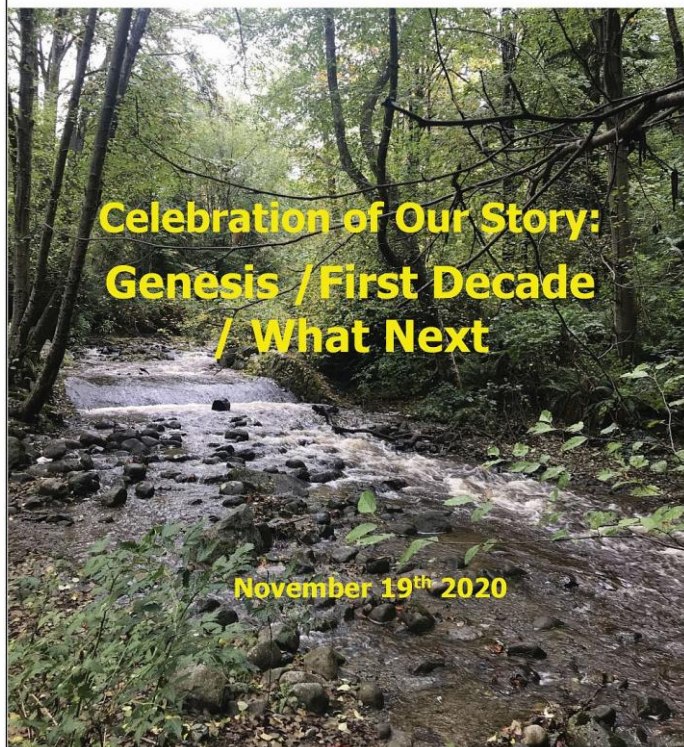
"I want to believe all of those things are in place for change to occur, for a reset to take place."

"I am looking forward to my years as Executive Director of AMBC, there are interesting times ahead."





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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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