



the partnership
for water sustainability in bc

Waterbucket eNews on April 7, 2026
<https://waterbucket.ca/wscblog/>

Living Water Smart in British Columbia:

**BCIT's green roof
programming an early
victim of an ebbing tide!**

Note to Reader:

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

The edition published on April 7, 2026 featured Christine Thuring, green roof champion. She is the founding executive director and public face of GRIN, which is the acronym for *Green Roof Infrastructure Network of British Columbia*. The GRIN story is a great story in that it links the past to the present and future and where GRIN wants to take a re-energized green roof movement.

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



Cover Image Credit: photo of green roof at Vancouver Olympic Village provided by GRIN

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One-Minute Takeaway

“In 2022, BCIT suspended green roof programming. Because green roofs no longer had a voice in BC, a group of us decided to do something about that. We created GRIN.”

Dr. Christine Thuring,
Executive Director with the
Green Roof Infrastructure
Network of BC (GRIN)

"We wondered how BCIT could suspend its green roof programming. The Centre had consistently been a visible expression of BCIT's commitment to sustainability.

In the meantime, 5 new buildings have gone up on Burnaby campus, and not one has a green roof."

Christine Thuring, PhD
GRIN Executive Director



"Twenty years after inception, BCIT suspended green roof courses until further notice in 2022," states Dr. Christine Thuring. Her claim to fame is that she is the first person in North America to obtain a green roof-focused master's degree!

Christine Thuring is the Executive Director of the Green Roof Infrastructure Network (GRIN), a newly created society. Recruited by Dr. Maureen Connelly in 2006, she taught at BCIT's Centre for Architectural Ecology and remembers the profile it once had.

In the 2000s, the **Centre for Architectural Ecology** at BCIT attracted a diversity of students, professionals, industry partners and others. It was an important hub for the North American green infrastructure



“Under Maureen Connelly's leadership, and supported by a great team, BCIT became an important hub for green roof research, education, and policy development, as the movement grew and evolved across North America.”

Christine Thuring has embraced the “green roof baton” passed on to her from Maureen Connelly. In 2023, Christine engaged colleagues and co-established GRIN as a means of continuing delivery of the first credited green roof course in Canada.

"In 2022, my colleagues and I felt motivated to fill the void from BCIT suspending the Centre for Architectural Ecology.

We decided to establish GRIN to advocate for green roofs in particular, and green infrastructure in general. This became my pivot. GRIN is one of my passion projects."



Out of the ashes came GRIN, the Green Roof Infrastructure Network

"Part of the vision for GRIN is the N for network. There are so many silos out there. Everyone is saying different things and yet we are in a climate emergency and biodiversity crisis. Even the term Green Infrastructure is not all encompassing anymore."

Being multi-functional with numerous co-benefits, green roofs can address many issues simultaneously. Implemented at scale, green roofs can help restore the hydrological cycle, while bolstering public health, food and energy security, supporting biodiversity, cleaning air and water, etc.

– Christine Thuring

"Green roofs' intersectionality cuts through silos, which could help foster a united movement around water protection, the climate emergency, and the biodiversity crisis.

We have the tools. We just need political will, and critical mass."

Christine Thuring



"Part of the vision for GRIN was to use green roofs to break down silos. If we truly acknowledged the climate emergency, biodiversity crisis and loneliness epidemic, there would be green roofs everywhere."



Editor's Perspective by Kim A Stephens

BCIT's green roof programming was an early victim of an ebbing tide

The Partnership celebrates the work of the group of green infrastructure champions who are the driving force behind GRIN. Their “story behind the story” as told by Christine Thuring is a great story in that it links past to present and future and where GRIN wants to take a re-energized green roof movement.



In addition to Christine Thuring's enthusiasm and passion for green roofs, what resonated with me during my interview for this story is the focus of GRIN on “the network”. This aligns with the Partnership mission because we both view “the network” as the means to achieve outcomes.

Kim Stephens, Executive Director
Partnership for Water Sustainability



In the mid-2000s, the green roof movement was a sidebar for the Partnership. We had included a green roof module in the *Water Balance Model 1.0* online tool. Then Maureen Connelly and her team reached out to us. It was a Win-Win opportunity to populate the module with their performance data over time.

A vision with a task is the hope of the world (1786 quote)

The Partnership sees volunteers and groups such as GRIN stepping up in response to a need. They are helping to bridge a knowledge gap. That certainly is the essence of the Partnership's story. Policy frameworks have not changed. It is effective and consistent execution and implementation that are lacking.

In the world of local government, we observe deep knowledge being ignored or dismissed at an alarming rate. This is playing out as an ebbing political tide. Storytelling is needed more than ever. Solutions to the issues of our time lie in WHAT stories we tell and HOW we tell those stories.

The Partnership is showcasing GRIN because that helps to advance the vision for network collaboration within a constellation of networks. In these busy times, there is tremendous value in networks that help solve problems together.

Fast forward to the present day

With my mid-2000s memories as my context, it came as a surprise to learn from Christine that the BCIT Green Roof Research Facility was no more. How could this have happened, I asked? Not that long ago, I recalled, the green roof movement was a hot topic in this region. It offered such promise.

The GRIN story is an important one. Christine Thuring and her fellow champions are battling back to fill the void left after BCIT suspended the Centre of Architectural Ecology.



The "story behind the story" is that Christine Thuring and her GRIN colleagues are committed to putting green roofs back on municipal radar screens. They have a vision, they have a plan, and they are doing outreach. It takes passion, hard work, and perseverance to have mission impact.

In February 2026, GRIN delivered the first green roof course since BCIT suspended the green roof program in 2022.

The course was held at VanDusen Gardens where the visitors centre has a massive 1,800 m² living green roof.



STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

BCIT's green roof program was an early victim of an ebbing tide - a conversation with Dr. Christine Thuring

Under Maureen Connelly's leadership, BCIT founded the *Centre for Architectural Ecology* to address the lack of performance data for green roofs in the Pacific Northwest.



BCIT green roof history under the leadership of Maureen Connelly is the context for GRIN

"I came to British Columbia in 2006, on Maureen Connelly's invitation, and joined the team at the BCIT Centre for Advancement of Green Roof Technology, as it was then known. It was a fabulous time to be in Vancouver!", Christine recalls.

"My background is environmental science and biology, and I worked several years in applied plant ecology and restoration. When I came across green roofs. I was hooked. After a green roof internship in Germany, I got a scholarship and in 2005 earned the first green roof-focused Master's degree in North America, at the Penn State Centre for Green Roof Research," Christine Thuring explains.



"It was fun working with Maureen Connelly and Karen Liu at the Centre, as the research was rigorous yet thoroughly applied. I went to the University of Sheffield to do my PhD on green roof ecology, and returned to BCIT/ Maureen, in 2018."

Synopsis of BCIT green roof programming history

“The first facility dedicated to green roof research in Canada was at the National Research Council of Canada (2000), with a second soon to follow in BC,” continues Christine Thuring.

“The Centre for Architectural Ecology was a stand-alone at BCIT. This was both a blessing and a curse.”

“The blessing was its independence and intersectionality, for it attracted a diversity of students, professionals, industry partners, etc.”

This same quality of intersectionality was its curse, as this meant the Centre was an easy first “cut” when BCIT clocked its deficit. The Centre was low hanging fruit, in this regard.”

“It fell through the cracks, with no program to hold it up.” – Christine Thuring

“After a 2004 Vancouver workshop about green roofs on the West Coast, Dr. Maureen Connelly took the role of local leadership and built the BCIT Green Roof Research Facility in the (then brownfield) of the Great Northern Way campus (now Emily Carr).”



“Maureen recruited a team of engineers, architects, and researchers to establish a world-class research facility. She recruited Dr. Karen Liu from NRCA in Ottawa, who led the GRRF instrumentation in 2005-2006 and co-created the first green roof course in Canada.”

“I joined the GRRF team in 2006 as project coordinator around World Urban Forum, to ensure experiential education for the thousands of people who visited the Centre during the associated Festival.”

“Under Maureen's leadership, and supported by a great team, BCIT became an important hub for green roof research, education, and policy development, as the movement grew and evolved across North America.”

“The centre closed after two significant events. Maureen took early retirement, and then COVID-19 arrived. The courses did not do well online.”

Budget cuts and axing of a successful centre

"In 2023, I co-founded GRIN, the Green Roof Infrastructure Network of BC. GRIN is a non-profit organization that basically fills the void left when BCIT suspended its Centre for Architectural Ecology in 2022."



"The Centre for Architectural Ecology was never integrated within a program. It was really an independent entity. Maureen Connelly was conducting world class research within the context of a polytechnic that was focused on logging and mining."

"When Maureen took early retirement, I was still there on faculty and thought surely they won't cancel the centre. And then it was the first thing to go (with budget cuts)."

Out of the ashes

"Many of my industry colleagues and I had organized tours and taught courses about green roofs. When BCIT suspended the centre, we concluded that if BCIT is not giving a voice to green roofs anymore, then that means nobody is talking about green roofs in this province."

"We decided that somebody has to do something and that is what led to GRIN. It was my pivot. GRIN is my passion project."

"Part of the vision for GRIN and why we have the audacity to found a non-profit is that there are so many silos out there. Everyone is saying different things AND we are in a climate emergency and biodiversity crisis."



"GRIN is an interdisciplinary network of green roof champions.

GRIN strives to bring together leading thinkers from policy-making, non-profit, academic, industry, and community organizations."

Christine Thuring is flanked by GRIN Co-Chairs Kathy Dunster and Josh Stewart

The need for political will

"Green roofs are so intersectional. It is the richness of that intersectionality that I really love. Because it cuts through silos. It could help foster a united movement around water protection, the climate emergency, and the biodiversity crisis."



"We have the tools.
We need good strategic directions.
Most of all we need political will,
and critical mass."

Trajectories of GRIN and the Partnership for Water Sustainability intersected at 2024 BC Land Summit

"GRIN was at the 2024 BC Land Summit and attended the Partnership session. And I realized that we are so aligned. One thing about GRIN is the N for network. We live in such a fragmented world now and lots of people are saying the same thing but with their own spin."

"GRIN envisions a future where BC's land- and roofover are covered by regenerative ecosystems, plants and soils that create conditions that promote reconciliation, food security, and that allow all living beings to thrive."



"That is why I just wanted to find out what the Partnership is all about and what are you doing, and what can we do together. The Partnership has been in this game a long time as well. It would help GRIN if the Partnership foresees something that this nimble, young non-profit could do."

"As GRIN executive director, I want to use our weaknesses to be our strengths. For example, nobody is talking about how to use green roofs to suppress fire and extinguish embers which is why we are working with FireSmart BC to put together some content that they can get behind and completely legitimize green roofs across the province which will then open up other questions."



GRIN embraces a top-down and bottom-up approach and strives to cultivate green roof champions

“In 2018 City of Vancouver Council unanimously approved the exploration of a mandatory green roof policy (vote #03245 pt.15).”

“In 2024, and then again in January 2026, the City updated its Rainwater Management requirements, emphasizing the role that green roofs can play in meeting stormwater management targets onsite.”

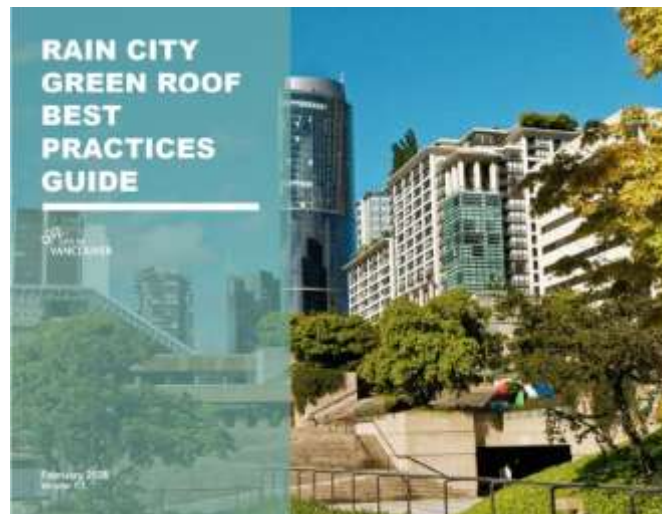
“Green roofs are clearly recognized as useful or effective tools to keeping Vancouver healthy, liveable, and resilient. So: where is the mandate? When can we hope to see this emerge?”

– Christine Thuring

“Despite the Metro Vancouver region’s early promise, the green roofs movement has definitely not grown in the way anyone expected it to. Looking back, there were signs of trouble. Political will was waning compared to most parts of the world that had been part of the green roofs revolution.”

Ebbing political tide

“The high-water mark for the region was in 2018 when Vancouver City Council passed a motion to create a policy requiring green roofs on new buildings and providing maximum opportunity to have them retrofitted in existing ones. The motion died quietly, reportedly because it was not a political priority.”



“The City of Vancouver just published its *Best Practices Guide for Green Roofs*.

It is a great resource, but it is not a mandate.”

What matters is top-down and bottom-up

“When we began our GRIN green roof tours in 2023, they involved much advocacy. We reached out to mayors and councillors, going to their offices, giving our presentations and saying:

“We would always invite mayors and councillors to come along on our tours. We called it Cultivating Green Roof Champions. You need the right people in the right place, people who will hold that baton and have the confidence to debunk myths coming at them.”

"If you want to talk about climate resilience in the built environment, you need to talk about green roofs. And if you want to know more, we will come and talk to you."



"Is it top-down or bottom-up? Or do you need both? That is what we are playing around with. We started high up, meeting with mayors and councils and taking them on tours. But it is the turnover on councils that kills momentum. And with 2026 being an election year, it is a dead zone until the next cycle."

Onwards and upwards

"We are in a lull with our municipal outreach. But it has been great to connect with citizens from lots of different interest groups. If we can at least grow the literacy of the population, who can then confidently demand certain things from their councils, that is bottom-up and very organic."



"It felt like we tapped a nerve with the course. We observed that people want to do the right thing. We are also set up to deliver K-12 in schools."

A call for action

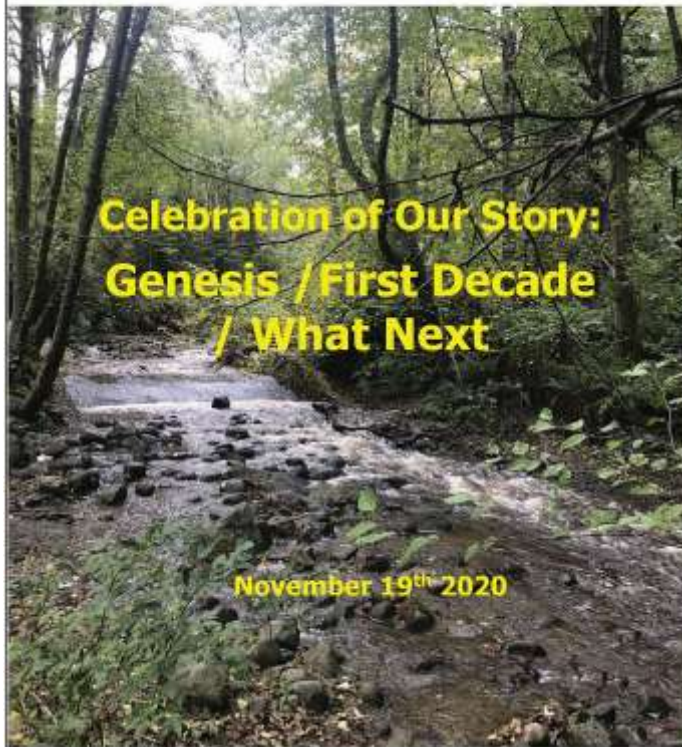
"GRIN remains committed to cultivating *Green Roof Champions* at all levels of society, and there are many ways to get involved," Christine affirms. "A good place to start is by joining the [GRIN Mailing List](#). We welcome new volunteers and we are receptive to anyone who wants to get involved and lend a hand."

"We are using the upcoming tour for World Green Roof Day as a way to test where Vancouver civic political parties stand on green roofs."





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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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