

Leadership in Water Sustainability

by Eric Bonham, Kim A Stephens, and Tim Pringle

Sustainability on Vancouver Island is founded not only upon the wise use of our natural resources, but also on creative collaboration with the business sector, political decision makers, and administrators. The result is viable business opportunities and innovative partnerships that demonstrate the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The complementary roles of the Convening for Action on Vancouver Island (CAVI) initiative and the Vancouver Island Economic Alliance (VIEA) encourage such partnerships with the aim of facilitating effective and practical changes on the ground.

DISCOVERING THE BIG PICTURE

In looking at the big picture, CAVI and VIEA both suggest we should be looking at a 50-year vision for Vancouver Island. "Perhaps the most important objective," says VIEA President George Hanson, is bringing together settlement, ecology, and economy in balance.

"VIEA collaboration with CAVI created an opportunity for early success in moving forward, and the CAVI Forum within the 2011 Summit provided a springboard to Island-wide action," says VIEA Chair Dave Willie. "Together we can achieve much ... just imagine the strength of committed individuals all working towards a common focus."

MISSION POSSIBLE

The CAVI vision is based on a model of collaboration among business, industry, government, academia, and community sectors. The vision emerged from the challenging mantra "What do we want Vancouver Island to look like in 50 years?" as first articulated at the 2006 Water in the City conference and is founded upon the principle of water sustainability.

The CAVI program is being delivered under the umbrella of the Partnership for Water Sustainability in British Columbia, a not-for-profit society that is helping the Province implement the Living Water Smart and Green Communities initiatives. A guiding premise is that water sustainability will be achieved by designing with nature and implementing green infrastructure policies and practices. How we get there relies on a change in mindset.

INTER-REGIONAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE

The immediate CAVI process has been one of incremental steps taken through partnerships with the Capital Regional District, Cowichan Valley Regional District, Nanaimo Regional District, and Comox Valley Regional District. These districts account for approximately 90 per cent of the population of Vancouver Island. This top-down bottom-up model engages both the

decision-makers and communities as they work towards mutually attainable goals.

Vancouver Island is a hotbed of progressive ideas and provincially significant initiatives. Regional districts and their municipal partners are advancing watershed-based strategies and programs. Yet there is no formal mechanism for inter-regional collaboration.

To fill this gap, CAVI has brought together the four regional districts to align their efforts and implement the Vancouver Island Inter-Regional Education Initiative. The desired outcome is a common understanding of core concepts for designing with nature; and those involved in land use and/or water use will utilize those core concepts to reduce their water footprints, protect stream health, and adapt to a changing climate.



LOOKING AHEAD

Effective change will be the result of a new form of governance, one that recognizes the collaborative role of business, local government, and community and enables the creation of a healthy economy within a sustainable environment. Achieving a shared vision for Vancouver Island is mission possible!

As part of the program for the 2012 State of the Island Economic Summit on October 15 and 16, the CAVI team will present a two-and-a-half hour seminar reporting on business to date. For more Summit information, visit www.viea.ca.



CAVI AND VIEA CHAMPION A 50-YEAR VISION

An important step in this process of creating a 50-year vision for the island has been the development of the VIEA-CAVI partnership that embraces both economic viability and environmental sustainability.

Forming alliances that encourage both socially and ecologically responsible practices then leads to the new way of doing business as usual. This opens the door to both creative and diverse solutions towards long-term sustainability.

Launched in 2006 at the Water in the City Conference in Victoria, the Convening for Action on Vancouver Island (CAVI) initiative is about this long-term vision for balance. The vision is water-centric because water is a form maker: watersheds are defining landscapes that serve the needs of human settlements and provide natural habitats and their ecological systems.

Water features include coastlines, riverfronts, lakes, riparian areas, aquifers, and other elements that contribute to the values of land for habitat, agriculture,



recreation, and real estate. In numerous ways, the built environment has to adapt to watershed features and water movements to maintain viable settlements. This designing with nature approach is fundamental to achieving water sustainability and, therefore, life sustainability from any perspective.