

Meeting of the Minds Workshop
Sept 15 & 16, 2005
Parksville BC

Summary Report

Introduction

The “Meeting of the Minds” workshop was held as a result of a Vancouver Island contact survey initiated by the BCWWA during the period 2003-2004. From individual interviews with leaders in the water and wastewater industry throughout the island, interest was expressed in holding a workshop that would provide an opportunity for the exchange of information and to explore the possibility of establishing a communications network for the Vancouver Island Region.

To ensure that a broad range of interests were represented at the workshop, invitations were sent to representatives from the provincial government, including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Community Services, federal government, regional districts, municipalities, elected officials, First Nations, NGO, Coastal Water Suppliers Association, consultants, business sector BCWWA and the EOCP. In total 35 participated in the workshop at the Quality Resort Bayside in Parksville September 15 - 16, 2005. A professional facilitator was appointed to guide the process.

Objective (expected outcome)

This objective was stated at the start of the workshop: “Build a communications network to address the issues facing the water and wastewater industry within the Vancouver Island region”.

Participant Expectations

When asked, “Why did you attend and what do you expect to get out of the Workshop?” individuals (not identified) stated:

- How to manage growth
- Discover who is available (who to ask for help)
- Raise the profile of the industry and build a network
- Identify solutions for problems, especially poorly built facilities
- Identify how things are funded
- Develop a solid foundation for a local network on Vancouver Island
- Establish a proactive network for Vancouver Island specific issues and find out how to connect to other networks (in BC and beyond)

Participant's Expectations (cont)

- Discover how a large facility with lots of resources can help smaller ones that do not have resources
- Listen (as the Government) to issues to find out how we can help
- Build a network so that it can bring us together to find solutions to problems
- Identify innovative ideas to meet challenges
- Get a clear understanding of the issues and identify impacts on the Regulations side
- Share some information on how to resolve issues
- Help improve the seamless relationship between EOCP and BCWWA
- I am deeply committed to sustainability and want to see how this can be done on Vancouver Island
- Learn more about what is going on on the Island and help the network grow
- I'm here to learn how to sustain the network (how to do it)
- See how the BCWWA can help represent the industry and facilitate networking
- Find out how to do things jointly and identify the "real" issues and solutions
- Find out what an NGO can do to help get solutions to problems
- Share ideas about how water engages in people's lives lead change, exchange ideas about how we use water
- Obtain contacts, identify how research can be used to develop Policy
- Reconnect with old friends and learn what the issues are; discover how resources and innovation can help others
- Talk about the Sustainability Association and offer innovative solutions
- I'm interested in how this mix of representatives can address issues; I'm curious about what we could come up with
- Share how ground water is part of the mix; get some ideas on how to sustain the network (work together); enter the network and see impact on Regulations; learn how water is viewed by society
- Find out how to balance issues and approach problems holistically; reveal intelligence and find out how to integrate it and share with all others in the industry
- Identify learning needs and how to address them
- Share how to address the sustainable use of water ideas
- Identify how elected Officials can help; identify how to accelerate change and implement new ideas
- Share information re source water; identify the role of Government in resolving issues
- Help understand the role of water in society; learn how to integrate all factions

Specific Issues

The group was asked to identify what issues, problems or concerns exist currently within the Vancouver Island region. It was agreed that Vancouver Island could be the focus since it has clearly defined geographical boundaries, every element of the industry represented (suppliers, operators, consultants, educators, interested Associations etc.) and advantageous proximity to the provincial Government.

Specific Issues (cont)

Five teams were established. Their reports included the following specific issues:

- Sustainable development
- Growth
- Impact of climate change
- Fragmentation
- Where to find the answer
- Inertia
- Politicians on side
- Money
- Public awareness
- Making time for networking/issues
- Not making good use of civil society
- Educate the public on issues
- Water and waste water are undervalued
- Taking a broad, global, view of urban re/development
- Keep issues at the forefront
- Designing sustainable systems that are carefree
- Lack of qualified operators
- Demographics of an aging population (lack of younger people)
- Attractiveness versus cost of Vancouver Island
- Funding for innovative systems
- Funding an appropriately large scale opportunity or site
- Need concrete research on innovative solutions
- Risk management for innovators and risk aversion
- Safe Drinking Water Act implementation
- Understanding legal issues
- Multiple political jurisdictions
- Cultural differences
- Privatization of services
- Regulations/oversight

Common Issues

After the group identified issues that prevail in the Vancouver Island region, they were asked to identify which were the most common throughout the region. Five issues were cited:

1. The need to **provide “full spectrum” education**:
 - based on understanding and adopting the value of the ecosystem
 - this was “all encompassing” and was cited to be integrated with all issues

Common Issues (cont)

- education involved both formal post secondary programs, specific operational and technical training courses and public school awareness (both elementary and secondary)
 - this also includes public awareness activities
2. The need to **ensure adequate and sustainable infrastructure**:
- must address all locations on Vancouver Island despite local differences (one size does not fit all)
 - must be planned
 - needs to address emergency disasters (replace or replan)
 - must include maintenance of existing structures plus plans for the future
 - must have a strategy for maintenance: rebuild as is, install upgrades, accommodate improvements (innovation)
3. The need to **support sustainability for growth**:
- must include all aspects of sustainability: ecology, economics, society
 - needs to ensure innovation is encouraged and supported
 - grounded in “the value of water” as perceived by society and various publics
 - must involve change process
 - requires continuous communication (networking)
 - requires continuous improvement (not build and leave)
 - must be both reactive and proactive (involve Planners)
4. The need to **identify appropriate funding**:
- based on establishing a schedule of rates
 - must involve all levels of Government
 - must be applied to the lowest level (local needs and requirements)
 - First Nations and private facilities must be included
 - must include all elements of the industry (suppliers, operators, consultants, educators, interested Associations etc.)
5. The need to **influence Governance, Law and Regulation**:
- based on basic principles of water use (“the value of water”)
 - must involve all levels of Government
 - includes strategies to influence at the level where there is the biggest opportunity for impact and results
 - includes developing protocols and tactics for influencing decisions

In a discussion about solutions at the end of the workshop, the group came to consensus that the first step to addressing these issues was to continue building and expanding the network just established (the participants of the workshop agreed that they were the network)

Common Solutions.

Having agreed to the common issues, the group was asked to identify solutions. In the interest of the sheer volume of specific issues and time constraints, the group was asked to identify solutions to the five common issues.

New teams were formed and the resulting reports indicated that actual solutions were not possible in the time available and that they needed further, detailed scrutiny. However, each team was able to address the issues with greater clarity and in some instances, identify further areas of investigation needed.

The following lists represent clusters of similar solutions identified by the teams (they were not asked to identify common solutions so these represent interpretations by the facilitator). These “common” solutions are sorted by the same Common Issues (short titles) cited earlier.

Education

- Should involve everyone (public to politicians) and include both proactive and reactive approaches
- Content must be geared to four distinct audiences, through different “venues” with different outcomes (specific to different audiences):
 - Public school (K-12) - add to existing curriculum (concept of the water bucket), use CRD/RDN model
 - Public community – vocational training/value technology
 - Specialized public (eg; water industry) – EOCP and BCWWA
 - Politicians/decision makers – financial, legal issues, performance standards (BCWWA)
 - Managers and Financial Administrators manage risk and educate to reduce the risk
 - Education delivered to children should be delivered through the schools with a focus on the value of water
 - Education delivered to consumers should be delivered through community facilities and institutions with a focus on operations and technology
 - Education delivered to politicians should be delivered through the UBCM with a focus on Law, Policy and Regulation
 - Education delivered to developers should be delivered through the Urban Development Institute and Real Estate Associations with a focus on planning, sustainability etc.
- Content should contain innovative and creative ideas along with historical knowledge (case studies), identify priorities so as to be strategic, and be presented in a way that allows participants to make informed decisions
- Education and training should only be delivered through those who have relevant skill sets and experience
- Partner with relevant stakeholders such as the BCWWA and kindred Associations in educating the decision makers and NGO’s to identify content and delivery education

Common Solutions (cont)

Infrastructure

- The present infrastructure is inefficient and poorly understood to handle the diverse needs which is clearly linked to funding
- Must include a wide variety of components and be “complete” (community, social, economic, environmental):
 - Emergency preparedness (share inventory information)
 - Maintenance
 - Innovative methods to upgrade or replace (technology)
 - Innovative “financing” programs to maintain/upgrade/replace infrastructure
 - Design with nature
 - Integration (services, structure, landscape)
 - Green infrastructure programs and partnership (Water Sustainability Action Plan MMCD’s for BC)
 - Toolkits/educational opportunities for politicians, administration etc.
 - Appropriate scale: support for appropriate technology; support smaller communities
 - Focus for small system operators should be on improving professionalism
- Challenge: influence decision makers to be “proactive” re “out-of-sight-out-of-mind”
- Need to address Operator Certification issues: delays; process inefficiencies etc.
- Need to create a “repository” of reports/data; requires a Secretariat function to identify/catalogue
- Must identify a “Champion”

Common Solutions (cont)

Sustainability

- Definition, identification, classification needs 4 treatments; what is a small/large sub-division terminology
- Solutions should comprehensively include:
 - Consideration of other jurisdictions' experience (eg: England), and the benefit of the most advanced knowledge available
 - Unsustainable land use leads to marine ecology food WCB's
 - Density versus integrated design (conservation sub-design)
 - Water conservation as a "factor" in development
 - Community rights
 - Growth including transportation; Growth does not outstrip resources
 - Carrying capacity of Vancouver Island (ecological footprint)
 - Archaic local solutions
 - Reduced ability to predict future supply
 - Maintenance of minimum flows for ecological reasons
 - Increasing demand for fisheries
 - Cyclical view of resources; Climate change (eg: changing hydrology, groundwater levels)
- Must address the wide range of social issues:
 - Population is disconnected with nature; need to design with nature and live with nature
 - Nobody in society has as a one degree role, the understanding of whole watersheds/catchments
 - Public under valuation of water
 - Infrastructure no longer seems to be a priority
 - Lack of long term thinking leads to ineffective decision making and poor public awareness
 - How to utilize innovation (how to implement, manage risk)
- Requires advanced planning:
 - How to manage impact
 - Clear checklists for sustainable developments (help advocacy)
 - Lack of coordination
 - Supply issues (SE Vancouver Island)
- Need to hold fold forums:
 - Target planners, engineers, economists, academic reps and NGOs
 - Promote advantages: conservation sub-division design (economic advantages to municipality and developer); environment - water quality, wildlife; social & recreational

Common Solutions (cont)

Funding

- Should be conditional; more available to small systems; must include infrastructure
- Need to explore alternative sources
- Solutions must include examination of cost versus value:
 - Full cost accounting water/wastewater rate structures
 - Universal metering
 - Water conservation: “double edged sword” (ie short term versus long term)
 - Inability to raise rates
 - Treating “wastewater treatment” as a utility tied to water use
- Need higher political profile (Provincial government); Make water and sewer more “visible”

Governance

- Need to encourage the development of long term Law & Policy:
 - Province is just beginning to adopt an integrated watershed management approach
 - Little planned and anticipated Regulatory change)
 - Rigid decision making versus adaptable and innovative; conservative versus innovative
 - Should be Multi-Agency
 - Should include aggressive enforcement
 - Currently ineffective (somewhat dependant on size); needs to involve management and end user
 - Must include effective communication to all stakeholders
- Solutions must be based on clearly identified role for the industry, priorities (squeaky wheel gets the grease) and directly linked to education
- Need to educate and involve decision makers on all the issues so they can make informed decisions for the long term:
 - Public is not confident in drinking water quality
 - New ideas about water quality have to be addressed
 - Combine water supply and wastewater solutions
 - Cheap water squashes innovation
 - Need to educate politicians (unskilled decision makers)
 - Lacks innovation (rainwater harvesting)
 - Cost of innovation is often high; need to facilitate transitions (make it happen but \$)
- Create a forum for evaluating competing interests for water supply

Where Do We Go From Here?

It was the consensus of those participating in the workshop that the Vancouver Island “Meeting of the Minds” exercise was a productive one and that the process should be continued. It was agreed that the group was the start of a “network” for Vancouver Island and that the overall process might be replicated in other regions throughout the Province. To help initiate the next step Fred MacDonald from Malaspina University College in Nanaimo offered the College as a venue for a subsequent meeting of the “network” to which additional members could be invited and continue dialogue regarding the common issues and their potential solutions. The group agreed that Malaspina College would be an excellent choice as a meeting place for the Vancouver Island “network” due to its mid-island location.

A planning group was self initiated to set up the next meeting and determine follow up required, based upon the findings of the Parksville workshop. The planning group includes:

Mac Fraser	Village of Cumberland
Graeme Bethell	Terasen
Robin Gear	Vancouver Island Health Authority
John Finnie	Nanaimo Regional District
Bernie Morris	Capital Regional District
Patrick Lucey	Aqua-Tex Scientific Consulting Ltd.
Del Haylock	BCWWA
Eric Bonham	BCWWA

It was suggested that the next meeting be held early 2006 subject to the discussions and decisions of the planning group.

The Summary Report was prepared on behalf of the BCWWA by the workshop facilitator, Kerry Elfstrom from Performance Solutions International. The content of the Summary Report reflects the interpretation of the discussions and observations noted by the participants in both the group and plenary sessions at the “Meeting of the Minds” workshop.