

# Metro Vancouver Reference Panel raises questions about ISMP process and outcomes to date

Are plans affordable and effective, and do they protect watershed health?

*"Based on what we have seen to date, the unfunded drainage liability inherent in the current ISMP process could potentially match or exceed the \$1.4 billion cost for sewage treatment plants."*

*Report to the Waste Management Committee  
by the LWMP Reference Panel  
on July 9, 2008*

In April 2008, Metro Vancouver appointed a 9-person Reference Panel to provide comments and advice on the region's strategy for updating its Liquid Waste Management Plan (LWMP). The Reference Panel reported back to the Waste Management Committee on July 9th. Kim Stephens (Water Sustainability Action Plan for BC) and Christianne Wilhelmson (Georgia Strait Alliance) co-presented on behalf of the Reference Panel.

To date, the LWMP spotlight has been on sewage treatment because it is a \$1.4 billion cost item. Affordability has emerged as a dominant issue because Metro Vancouver is faced with an ever-increasing total cost to provide regional services for sewage, water, garbage and transit: from \$4.7 billion in 2008 to \$12.4 billion in 2030.

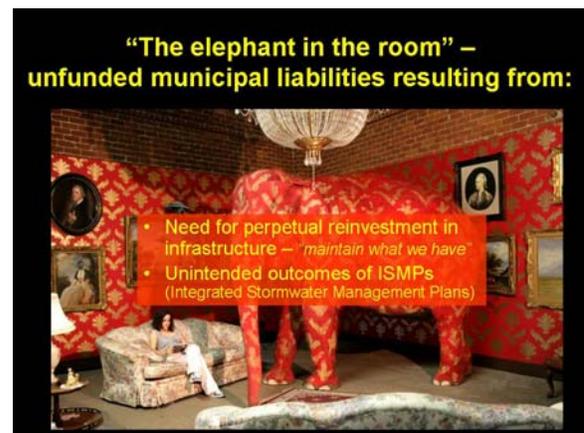
## The Elephant in the Room

Although the process for developing Integrated Stormwater Management Plans (ISMPs) is a municipal responsibility, the Reference Panel has identified the need to consider their aggregate cost in a regional context.

"The ISMP process is a sleeper issue because there are 130 watersheds in Metro Vancouver," **Kim Stephens** informed the Waste Management Committee. "The total capital cost



flowing from ISMPs could easily equal the \$1.4 billion cost of sewage treatment, yet there has been little discussion about guiding philosophy or cost implications. While \$1.4 billion is a big number, the long-term costs associated with a continuation of the old-business-as-usual are believed to be even greater. This is the elephant in the room today."



## Metro Vancouver Reference Panel raises questions about ISMP process and outcomes to date

---

### Intended versus Unintended Outcomes

So far the ISMP process has been unable to achieve its intended objective of integrating land-use and transportation planning with municipal rainwater/stormwater management services to more effectively and affordably protect urban stream health. When the current LWMP was adopted by Metro Vancouver in 2001, this strategy was key to addressing the concerns of the Ministry of Environment and Fisheries and Oceans Canada about rainwater runoff impacting urban and urbanizing watersheds.

In drawing attention to the ISMP process, the Reference Panel summarized the concern about ISMPs in this phrase: **integration is lacking**. "In general, we believe that the plans that are being produced reflect a cookie-cutter approach," continued Stephens. "The ISMP process has for the most part resulted in drainage planning that applies traditional design criteria and then adds in environmental requirements. This *Old Business As Usual* approach has the result of increasing unfunded budget items/liabilities without resulting in a benefit."

**Change the Question, Get a Different Answer:** Because the ISMP process has had unintended outcomes versus what was intended when the current LWMP was adopted by Metro Vancouver in 2001, Kim Stephens introduced three questions that the Reference Panel believes Metro Vancouver municipalities should be asking themselves:

1. Is the current range of capital costs per ISMP acceptable when those costs reflect the Old Business As Usual?
2. Can the accumulation of estimated costs continue with the preparation of each and every additional ISMP that is based on the Old Business As Usual?
3. Should the Metro Vancouver region be embracing the New Business As Usual for asset management, cost control, and greening of the built environment?

**Market Shift to Green Development:** The *intended consequence* of an ISMP process is to achieve integration with other land and transportation planning at the watershed scale, identify the vision and watershed targets, and then use green infrastructure solutions (on-site rainwater management) as the means to integrate the site to the ISMP targets. In commenting on the present situation, Stephens touched on the reality that many municipalities have yet to develop "**integrated ISMPs**" complete with implementation of green infrastructure solutions critical to keeping the costs of ISMPs down.

Although ISMPs completed to date may in general not be fulfilling expectations, Stephens emphasized that green development is moving quickly from market-niche to market-share. He elaborated on this observation by drawing attention to recent research findings for Vancouver Island which provide an indication of how quickly the market is changing in British Columbia. "Based on the dollar value of residential building permits as the metric, the shift is from 10% in 2006 and 2007 to 60% going forward," he reported. "Analysis of available data may well confirm similar statistics for Metro Vancouver."



## Metro Vancouver Reference Panel raises questions about ISMP process and outcomes to date

### Fergus Creek – Pilot for Doing Business Differently

Stephens then singled out the City of Surrey for the approach that it is taking and the leadership that it is demonstrating. “If you change the question, you will get a different answer. This is what the Surrey experience tells us,” observed Stephens. “Experience led the City of Surrey to adopt a new approach when developing the Fergus Creek ISMP. The outcome is a plan that provides benefits without the excessive costs typical of other ISMPs.”

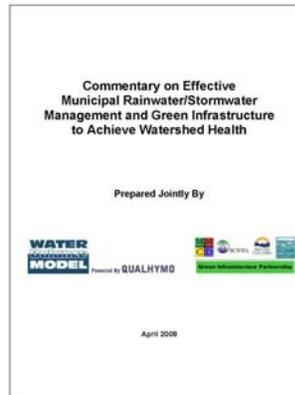


“The Fergus Creek precedent has resulted in a greenway-based strategy rather than a traditional storage pond plan,” Stephens added. “Also, the Fergus plan is the pilot for a provincial initiative to advance the **New Business As Usual**.”

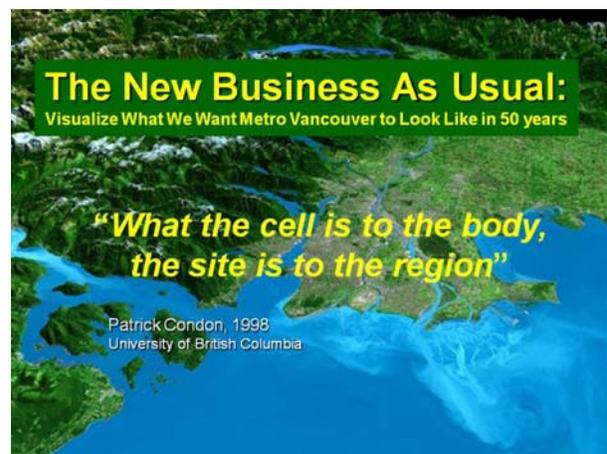
The Fergus Creek experience shows that costs can be reduced if drainage engineering is truly integrated with land use planning. “Success in developing an ISMP that is actually integrated ultimately depends on an inter-departmental process that is inclusive and collaborative, and builds organizational support for doing business differently,” concluded Stephens. “And as the Vancouver Island Learning Lunch Seminars pilot program is already demonstrating, thinking and acting like a region helps to develop a common understanding and ensure consistent messaging regarding on-the-ground expectations in each municipality.”

### Create Liveable Communities & Protect Stream Health

The Green Infrastructure Partnership has prepared a Commentary to assist the LWMP Review Team in moving forward with the Rainwater/Stormwater Component of the updated LWMP. The Commentary portrays the progress that has been made in the Metro Vancouver region since 2001. It also reflects green infrastructure expectations and emerging senior government policy direction.



The Commentary identifies specific actions and commitments for greening the built environment and protecting watershed health by means of affordable and effective performance targets.



Posted July 2008