

Meeting of the Minds Workshop
May 25, 2006
Parksville, BC

Summary Report

Introduction

A second “Meeting of the Minds” workshop was held as a follow up to the initial one held Sept 15 & 16, 2005. The participants at the initial workshop strongly felt that the “network” that had been established should continue and a planning group was formed to investigate what and how to follow up. It is important to note that the consensus at that meeting was that the purpose of the network was to continue to find opportunities for the participants to exchange information and to explore the possibility of maintaining a communications network for the Vancouver Island Region.

Context Setting

To set the context for the day’s activities, the facilitator announced a title for the workshop, a purpose/outcome and major principle.

The title of the meeting announced to the participants was, “Convening For Action”. It was explained that the intention of the session was more than dialogue. Rather, it was dialogue that leads to action.

The purpose of the meeting stated at the start of the workshop was, “How do we entrench the network to continue the communication?” This was then positioned as the outcome for the day and would be the focal point of the discussion in the afternoon.

A major principle, agreed to by the organizing committee, was announced to frame the presentations and discussions for the day, “Sustainability needs to be addressed in a holistic manner. As the participants in the initial workshop had agreed, the issue that everyone was struggling with is that water management is systemic even though there are 5 major touch points: Education, Infrastructure, Funding, Growth and Governance.”

Presentations

Four presentations were delivered (Growth & Governance sessions were cancelled). At the start and end of each one, introductory and summary statements were delivered by the facilitator. *Note:* The following are not direct quotes. These were delivered to provide a context for each topic and to attempt to provoke the participants to tie the topics together.

Keynote Address

Introductory Statement: “This presentation will set the context for the rest of the presentations and deals with the broadest picture while the others will deal with 3 of the 5 touch points. It’s important for you to recognize that if you want to initiate action, you need to speak a different language and think outside the box.”

Summary Statement: “This presentation has challenged you to think in an entirely different way. If you want to get people to pay attention, use information framed in messages they can understand and put your issue (water) at the front of the equation, not the end. In addition, you need to present the big picture and show how all the pieces relate to each other in a holistic or integrated way.”

Education

Introductory Statement: “Now let’s move from the general to the specific. As you hear the next set of presentations, always keep the big picture in mind. As someone said, ‘If we define the bigger picture simply, then the small parts make sense’. The first of the small parts you’ll be considering today, that you voiced a consensus of interest in at the Sept meeting, is education. In fact, education is at the heart of sustainability. The keynote address emphasized that what needs to happen is getting the public to care about and ‘value’ water”.

Summary Statement: “This presentation has begun to connect some dots. Education was mentioned in the keynote address and now you’ve heard that if you want to influence individuals or groups, you need to provide information that leads people to action. In other words, simply telling people information that you think is important does not necessarily motivate people to take action. They have to care about the information, and that reinforces what was said in the keynote address about finding information and relaying it in a way that affects people’s beliefs.”

Infrastructure

Introductory Statement: “Part of the education you need to provide to the people you want to influence involves appropriate descriptions about infrastructure. In this presentation you’ll hear about some of the issues associated with trying to be innovative with infrastructure.”

Summary Statement: “This presentation has connected a few more dots. You just heard that sustainability requires understanding which comes from education. It also needs appropriate and innovative infrastructure. It’s important to be complete and accurate when defining your infrastructure needs.”

Funding

Cont Introductory ext Statement: “At the last workshop, one of the most frustrating topics discussed was access to, and the most effective use of, funding. Obviously, infrastructure requires appropriate funding.”

Summary Statement: “Funding is one more dot to connect in the water management picture. This presentation has illustrated that there are funding sources available but you need to reposition some of your issues so that it meets the criteria for selection.”

Discussion

The group was split into two teams and asked to discuss the information they had received from the presentations in the morning. There were two topics or questions to discuss:

- what the key messages were or what they learned.
- how to get the message out in an integrated manner.

What Was Learned/ Key Messages

Following are the results of the discussion made by the teams about this topic:

- Cost is meaningless, value is priceless
- Move from cost based to value based accounting
- Finance is not a consequence, it is an enabler
- The water level is rising worldwide
- What is our “23 foot line”?
- Where is the imperative?:
 - cost of water?
 - Bulk water & bottled water (willingness to pay)
- There is no understanding of the value of water by any sector; so there is a need to build demand for proper management
- What are the crises facing us?:
 - Growth
 - Walkerton and Hurricane issues
 - Death, illness
 - Reporting issues
 - Barriers to water management:
 - Bureaucracy lag
 - Demand vs supply
 - 25 years – funding required to prevent flooding – need better information
 - GHG’s – air quality – global dimming
 - Oil crisis – how do we develop infrastructure without oil?
 - Demand management

- What are the key issues for Vancouver Island residents?:
 - Infrastructure inventory is essential for good asset management
 - Funding – need to properly fund with and without infrastructure at the Municipal level
 - Often don't fund the right priorities – need to revise the tax structure
 - Need proper management of irrigation systems
 - 3 kinds of water:
 - o Drinking water – Wastewater
 - o Rainwater – Stormwater
 - Reduce demand or increase supply
 - Fir-for-purpose approach
 - Water not seen as an issue:
 - o Quality of life and affordability – how this is influenced by water?
 - o Need a behaviour modification program
 - o We don't value water – the message is not being communicated to decision makers
 - o We don't have a full appreciation of the value of water and sewer infrastructure
 - How can we address this effectively?:
 - o Lead by example
 - o Develop a clear sense of identify
 - o Implement small scale sustainable community examples
 - o Water is symptomatic of sustainability examples – water can be shown as an integrating example
 - o Play to the egos – eg: saving a small town
 - o Acknowledge leadership - spotlight successes
 - Need representation from small NGOs
 - 2 new large WW treatment plants CRD

- Beliefs:
 - “Some things are too important to be left to experts”
 - Growth – water as a proxy
 - Focus on the do-able
 - Get stories out – successful examples
 - Big meetings don't work
 - Vancouver Island has a wide range of communities – choose 3 demonstratable options
 - Paint the big picture, leadership, practical tools eg: Oliver +
 - BC Water Strategy – Jim Maddison (HDP)
 - Neighbourhoods – site level is the key

- What is sustainable water?:
 - o Need small gains while pondering the big picture
 - o 1 hour per Council – traveling road show:
 - Show why it makes sense
 - Show popularity with the public
 - What we would do to effect change
 - Demonstrate the DCC effect
 - Liability insurance (cost of) is a concern
- We need to review the whole communication process for politicians, public, business etc.
- Target communications to sector audiences
- Document and assess successes with and without sustainability
- We need to engage entire communities rather than individuals, businesses etc.
- Working examples on the ground
- Communicate effectively to politicians
- We need an integration of education, policy and incentives
- It's a process to change behaviour – it has taken 100 years to get to where we are today so we need to be patient
- No reward for risk
- Self-fulfilling prophecy
- Require 1 foot soil on all new lots
- Landscaping should be done with native plants
- Re-energize periodically eg: SST
- Management turning over quickly
- Embed commitments at the top level
- Be strategic about targets
- Move to where the energy

Getting the Message Out

As a context for this discussion, the facilitator announced that the Premier of BC had directed the Ministry of the Environment to develop a new approach to water management for the entire province (unofficial statement). It was noted that the term “sustainability” was not included. So the group was encouraged to discuss this directive as a way to think about getting the message out about how to take an integrated approach to sustainable water management.

Following are the results of the discussion made by the teams about this topic:

- Still need to address the fundamental priority criteria for water management to politicians (eg: water meters)
- How do we get from short term thinking to long term planning/action?
- Need larger Regional planning
- Key messages need to come from the communities
- Go beyond “why” to “how”
- Create competition:
 - Use Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats approach
 - Create 2 scenarios: one that shows what happens when sustainability is ignored and the opposite - include demand, supply, options and impact
 - Must engage people
 - Use funding programs as incentives
 - List local examples
 - Create site visits and field trips
 - Reach the Development community
 - Develop working models on the ground
 - New development will pay to change the status quo
- Different communities have different needs
- Develop practices with those who will use them
- Different presentations for different audiences
 - Developers
 - Financiers
 - Quantity surveyors
 - Politicians
 - staff
 - NGOs
- Opportunities will present themselves

- What are our measures?:
 - 3 demo projects widely visited
 - 12 local governments adopting practices
 - water sustainability embedded in policy and practice

Results

Consolidation

A discussion was then held to consolidate the day's information and discussion. The facilitator asked the question, "What's the problem that you'd like addressed/solved?". After much discussion the group identified the following key responses:

- There is no network
- There are issues of supply and security within the industry
- People are not aware of the problem
- Quality/Risk issues exist
- There is no emphasis on value and benefits of behaving in a way to support sustainability
- Options for choice (behaviours) are not seen to be affordable or reliable
- There is little appreciation of the impact of water on the quality of life (taken for granted/ignored)
- Water is not seen as a top priority by the public

Focus

In an attempt to determine what the next steps are or what the participants thought they should be doing as a group, the facilitator asked the question, "Where are you going/How would you like to continue?" To address this question, the group struggled with the idea of creating a vision or outcome that they'd like to achieve and then attempted to craft a Vision Statement. Suggestions included:

- Maintain a strong networking program:
 - Access to information, tools etc.
 - Distribution of information (Water Bucket.ca)
- Develop a sustainable Vancouver Island:
 - List projects
 - Share examples/contacts

- Vancouver Island is a water sustainable culture by 2010

There seemed to be two streams of thought about how to go forward and the group seemed to reach an impasse. After some discussion, it was agreed that another meeting was needed to resolve it.

Name

In the context of determining the purpose of the group, several participants, initiated by comments from the planning group, seemed to conclude that the original purpose of having a network to share/exchange information and gain access to tools and examples that they could take back to their places of employment was a good rationale for continuing.

The group was then asked to determine the format for what happens next. The consensus was that it should replicate this meeting: morning presentations of key points of information, especially the two that were dropped from the agenda, followed by facilitated general discussion.

Following that consensus, a question was raised about whether or not the network should have a name. A suggestion was floated, “Vancouver Island Sustainability Information Exchange Network” (VISIEN). The group agreed to let this and the agenda and timing on the next meeting to be left to the organizing committee.

Facilitator’s assessment of the impasse.

The next meeting should attempt to address the issue of the two divergent thoughts about the form of the group. The principle of “form follows function” should govern that thought – that the purpose and function of the network should be confirmed first and that the question of what form it should take can follow more easily .

Therefore, the purpose or function of the network needs to be resolved. It depends on how the group views itself. There seems to be two functions that the group is undecided about:

1. The network is a “community of interest”, meeting to exchange information that will permit them, acting within their individual disciplines, to influence decision makers (their employers)
2. The network is a “formal entity” (such as a Not-for-Profit society) meeting to develop strategies that the group as a whole can implement to change public opinion, hence behaviour.

Going Forward

A wrap up session followed the discussion in which the initial planning group was asked if they wished to continue acting in an ad hoc manner to which all replied positively. The group consists of:

Mac Fraser	Village of Cumberland
John Finnie	Nanaimo Regional District
Patrick Lucey	Aqua-Tex Scientific Consulting Ltd.
Eric Bonham	BCWWA

It was suggested that the next meeting be held in Sept or Oct, 2006 subject to the discussions and decisions of the planning group.

Note: This Summary Report was prepared on behalf of the planning group by the workshop facilitator, Kerry Elfstrom of Progressive Media Management Inc.. The content of this Summary Report reflects his interpretation of the discussions and observations noted by the participants in the “Meeting of the Minds” workshop.