

Convening for Action on Vancouver Island  
Leadership in Water Sustainability



## The Comox Valley Learning Lunch Seminar Series is for Implementers

Reflecting the Perspectives of Those Tasked with Implementing Regional Outcomes



### The New Business As Usual: Visualize What We Want Vancouver Island to Look Like in 50 years

#### *The Mission is to Create a Legacy*

- 1. Influence choices by individuals and organizations*
- 2. Use the term "sustainability" as a lens for considering approaches that influence choices*

# 2009 Vancouver Island Learning Lunch Seminar Series

## Comox Valley is the Provincial Pilot for a Regional Team Approach

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Water Bucket Web Story #6 posted September 2009

## Preface

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A series of stories published on the Convening for Action community-of-interest on the Water Bucket progressively foreshadow and/or elaborate on the curriculum for the 2009 Comox Valley Learning Lunch Seminar Series. Briefly:

- **On July 14, 2009:** Story #1 titled *Comox Valley Regional District will host 2009 Learning Lunch Seminar Series* introduced the purpose of a 'regional team approach' as a springboard beyond the Comox Valley.
- **On July 28, 2009:** Story #2 titled *CAVI releases program details for 2009 Vancouver Island Learning Lunch Seminar Series* provided context for a paradigm-shift that will result in regional alignment around the concept of settlement in balance with ecology.
- **On August 24, 2009:** Story #3 titled *What Drives Settlement on the East Coast of Vancouver Island* initiated a conversation about "one market, from Cobble Hill to Campbell River".
- **On September 9, 2009:** This Story #4 titled *A Regional Perspective on Water Supply in the Comox Valley* provided a broad-brush picture of source identification, source quality and watershed protection, population-source capacity, infrastructure upgrading and implementation issues.
- **On September 9, 2009:** Story #5 titled *An Integrated Watershed Approach to Settlement Change* connected the dots between the Comox Valley Regional Conservation Strategy and the regional team approach.
- **On September 15, 2009:** Story #6 titled *The Comox Valley Learning Lunch Series is for Implementers* reflects the perspectives of municipal staffs which will be tasked with implementing regional outcomes.
- **On September 22, 2009:** Story #7 titled *Today's Expectations are Tomorrow's Standards* will elaborate on provincial expectations and programs that provide direction as to where the Province wants to go.

Additional stories will be published during the October through December 2009 period to summarize what was accomplished at each seminar.

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# 2009 Vancouver Island Learning Lunch Seminar Series

## Comox Valley is the Provincial Pilot for a Regional Team Approach

Water Bucket Web Story #6 posted September 2009

### 1. Context

This article is the sixth in a series of resource materials for the 2009 Learning Lunch Series. The organizing team is encouraging participating planners, engineers and other practitioners to take the time to read and reflect on these articles in preparation for the Town Hall sharing sessions.

#### Regional Team Approach

By sharing core concepts and key information in advance, the organizing team hopes this will inspire practitioners to think about collaboration and the roles they can play in implementing a 'regional team approach' as follows:

*"How we will simultaneously work together as staff within a municipality and as a region AND externally with the stewardship sector, developers and other private sector players, to ensure we implement sustainable approaches to development"*

The Comox Valley is the designated provincial pilot for a 'regional team approach' to implementing green infrastructure practices that in turn will lead to water sustainability, a process that involves key local government departments.

**Making Integration Real:** An early outcome of the 2009 Learning Lunch series is the vision for **An Integrated Watershed Approach to Settlement Change:**



#### Municipal Perspectives

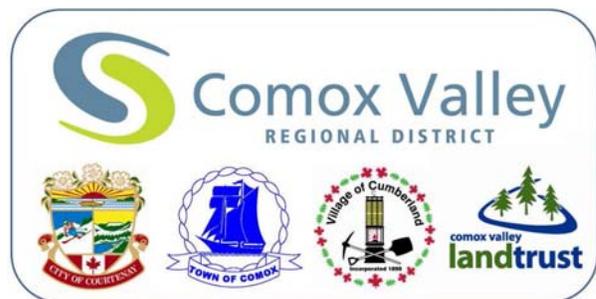
This article presents the perspectives of senior engineering and/or planning staff in the three municipalities that are collaborating with the Comox Valley Regional District to develop the curriculum for the 2009 Series, namely:

- Village of Cumberland
- Town of Comox
- City of Courtenay

To achieve the vision for an "integrated watershed approach", their shared mission is to integrate *community design* with desired outcomes at the provincial and regional scales AND individual actions at the site scale.

**Reflection Leads to Fresh Insights:** This article captures 'light-bulb moments' that occurred during individual interviews. Also, the article reflects the thinking of team members at that point in time.

The collaborative process commenced with a team meeting in April 2009. Hence, insights reported herein represent the evolution of viewpoints as a result of senior staff reflecting on ideas and concepts that are described in previous articles.



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## 2. What Integration Looks Like

There are a myriad of regional initiatives underway in the Comox Valley. Plan development processes involve many workshops on multiple themes, and in a short period of time. There is much for municipal staffs to absorb and digest about doing business differently, while at the same time keeping the wheels of government rolling to meet ongoing commitments. An inherent risk is information overload.

At the end of the day, all the plans will have to be integrated and delivered by the three municipalities. So, what does integration look like?

### The Key Word is Alignment

Kevin Lagan, Director of Operational Services for the City of Courtenay, provides this perspective: "Visioning workshops are great in terms of creating a



picture of the desired destination, BUT a critical question is what must we do starting NOW to make the vision a reality? The key word is **alignment**: *once we agree on what we want to collectively achieve, then we can focus on how we will work together to get there.*"

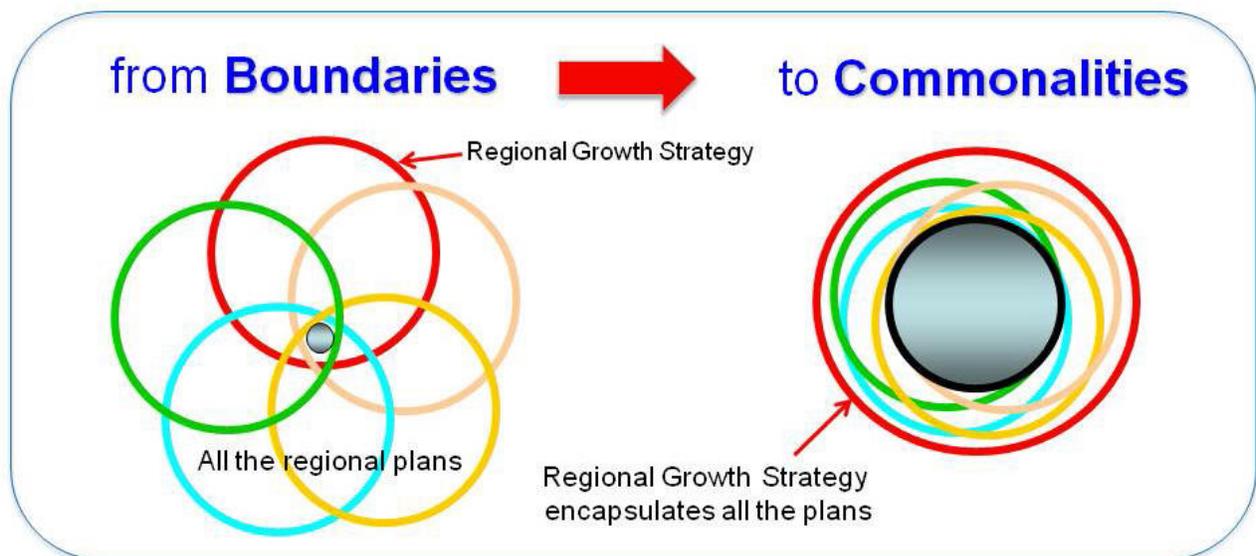
### Water is the Unifying Element

Local governments in the Comox Valley are convening for action around this paradigm: *Water is the finite resource; however, management of development is the control.*

"Truly understanding what is behind the **Water OUT = Water IN** equation holds the key to effective integration of all the regional plans," states Kevin Lagan. "The *Water OUT = Water IN* way-of-playing touches on all aspects of land development. Yet, while water is the unifying element, it is not the whole solution."

"The GOAL is what is most important. The goal is the **desired outcome** – that is, what we want this valley to look like in 50 years and beyond. A report about a plan is NOT the goal. This is why the organizing team has defined the goal as *An Integrated Watershed Approach to Settlement.*"

"Achieving the goal depends on understanding how to work with the planning elements of the *Water OUT = Water IN* equation under the umbrella of the Regional Growth Strategy. When done well, the value of an RGS is that it provides a way to encapsulate all the regional plans.....so that municipal implementers will have the mandate they need to ensure that '*consistent integration*' happens on the ground."



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### 3. Implementation of a Regional Team Approach

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A *regional team approach* is founded on partnerships and collaboration; and seeks to align actions at three scales – provincial, regional and local.

“We are NOT saying that every community must follow the same formula; what we are saying is that everyone needs to agree on expectations and how all the players....regulators, developers, designers, etc....will work together, and after that each community can reach its goals in its own way,” states **Eric Bonham, Chair** of the Highlands Stewardship Foundation and a founding member of the CAVI Leadership Team; and formerly a Director in the Ministry of Municipal Affairs.



#### The Key Word is Team

“The term ‘regional approach’ has been part our vocabulary for a generation or more, but it has never resonated the way ‘regional team approach’ has resonated this past year,” observes **Tim Pringle, Director of Special Programs** for the Real Estate Foundation, and also a founding member of the CAVI Leadership Team.



“It is revealing that inserting the word **team** could have such a profound impact on how practitioners view their world. Inclusion of the team word implies there is personal commitment – that is why the *regional team approach* is fundamentally different than a *regional approach*.”

“When we begin to think of ourselves as part of a team, it implies that we are playing the same game and that we all have roles to play within the team framework. It also suggests that there is both a game plan and a coachable context.”

#### From Boundaries to Areas of Commonality

“The challenge for Comox Valley practitioners is to work around and with boundaries,” states **Derek Richmond, Manager of Engineering** with the City of Courtenay. “Through the 2009 Series, we would like to shift the paradigm from *boundaries* to *areas of commonality*.”



“Getting there means we will have to break down boundaries. We can do that by proactively applying the 4Cs, that is: communicate, collaborate, cooperate and coordinate. First, we have to start the conversation. This is what the 2009 Series is doing for us....we are now having conversations.”

**Development Permit Areas:** “We have to come out of the third seminar functioning more as a team than we were going into the first seminar,” comments **Kevin Lagan**. “This is the objective for 2009; having a sense of team will provide the springboard for working together to achieve integration of current regional initiatives in 2010.”

“Yes, we need a strong commitment to work together; and most importantly, we must identify specific tasks that we can do collaboratively. This is why we have decided to make Development Permit Areas the focus of the town hall sharing session in Seminar #1,” continues **Derek Richmond**.

“We have to make it real. The DPA is a planning tool that we can integrate with engineering objectives. This combination will enable the Comox Valley to holistically address all dimensions of the *Water OUT = Water IN* equation, and support the vision for settlement in balance with ecology.”

“The DPA example is not abstract. The DPA is a way to connect values and uses. Also, it incorporates a design perspective that allows the players to collaborate and target a vision that is outcome-oriented,” observes **Tim Pringle**.

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#### 4. A Village of Cumberland Perspective

The historic Village of Cumberland (population 2762 as of the 2006 Census) has a rich and diverse coal mining history which is captured in its heritage buildings and main street. Cumberland has been described as being in a state of social, political, cultural and economic transformation.



#### Limited Resources

The Village has a relatively small work force and limited financial resources. The appeal of the regional team approach is that the sharing of experiences and tools can leverage the Village's limited resources, and hence their effectiveness.

"We do not have the luxury of waiting. The growth pressures in the Comox Valley are immediate," states **Judith Walker, Municipal Planner**. "The regional team approach offers a model for everything that we as local government do in the valley. Simply put, the four jurisdictions can easily work together on issues of common interest and/or concern, and there is no real reason why we cannot collaborate."



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#### Convening for Action

"As I see it, the power of the 2009 Learning Lunch Series results from the fact that it is internally driven by staff. As a result, the process of organizing the series and developing the curriculum is already enabling people in all four local governments to work together."

"Yes, the 2009 Series is time-intensive; and yes, there is more work for staff to do. But, in the big picture this is actually a positive because the learning outcomes will then last longer."

"At the end of the series, a clear benefit will be that we will all have the same story....no matter where you go in the valley."

#### Alignment with and/or of Regional Processes:

"Municipal planners are feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of meetings associated with regional processes. So, anything we can do to help by giving them the tools to implement changes in development practices will make a difference. Hence, the idea of building Seminar #1 around a common approach to DPAs is a good one."

"It is also helpful that the 2009 Learning Lunch Series is drawing attention to this basic question: *What does integration of regional plans really mean, and how will we achieve it in the Comox Valley?*"

"Because a Learning Lunch emphasis is on the practical aspects of the Regional Growth Strategy, the regional team approach will help everyone focus on what needs to come together in 2010. In the words of Kevin Lagan: *what all the plans will achieve.*"

"My final observation is that there is a disconnect between engineer-driven and planner-driven processes for infrastructure planning and land use planning, respectively. For that reason alone, the 2009 Series creates a timely opportunity to inform each other, build relationships and integrate perspectives."

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### 5. A Town of Comox Perspective

The seaside community of Comox is home to the Canadian Armed Forces Base CFB Comox, and has almost 13,300 residents. The town's urban footprint is substantially built-out, with Northeast Comox being the remaining greenfield area designated for urban development.



#### Watershed-based Land Use Planning

"The regional team approach is exciting because it will enable us to set a direction," states **Marvin Kamenz, Municipal Planner**. "We have the tools. We have the knowledge. Now we all need is the formal mandate to get on with watershed-based land use planning."



"There is an array of planning tools to select from, including the Development Permit Area. It is a matter of how to strategically apply the appropriate tool to achieve the desired outcome. So the key is being clear on what we wish to accomplish, and then explaining to the public why we are doing it."

**Water Bucket Website:** "Communication is vital. Use of the Water Bucket website to tell the story of the 2009 Series is proving especially effective. The storytelling is leading to understanding about why we need to do business differently; and this is promoting competition and a *race to the top*."

"The Water Bucket is the technical voice that is getting the technical story out in a consistent way. The Water Bucket is providing reasons to have the conversation about 'why change'. The resulting awareness of **need** will help us obtain the mandate to implement watershed-based land use planning."

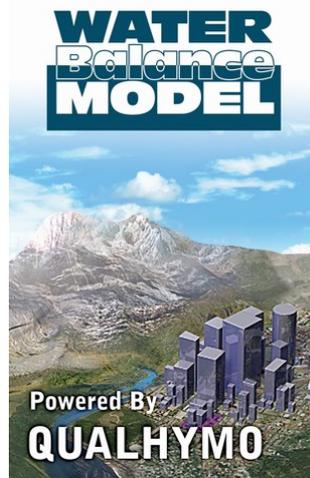
#### Rainwater Management & Green Infrastructure

"Watershed-based land use planning has real meaning on the ground for the Town of Comox," continues **Glenn Westendorp, Public Works Superintendent**. "Because we are downstream of future developments located within the regional district, we require a unified and consistent regional approach to rainwater / stormwater management and green infrastructure."



"The regional team approach will help us bring common awareness to the public that our approach to low impact development is in alignment with the philosophy that is being implemented in other regions of British Columbia, and especially elsewhere on Vancouver Island."

**Water Balance Model:** An early dividend for the Town of Comox is membership in the inter-governmental partnership that developed the Water Balance Model, a decision support tool that helps communities *design with nature*. The City of Courtenay was a founding member in 2003 when this web-based tool was launched.



"The Town of Comox has embraced the Water Balance Model because it will help us implement Low Impact Development practices that achieve rainwater capture performance objectives. The Water Balance Model gives the Town a tool to first analyze potential land development impacts, and then to evaluate the effectiveness of proposed alternative on-site solutions."

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## 6. A City of Courtenay Perspective

Courtenay is the largest of the three Comox Valley municipalities, and has a population of about 23,100. The City has experienced rapid population growth over the past two decades.



### What a 'Soft Boundary' Means

"Going forward, Comox Valley municipalities must work together to control the look-and-feel of proposed new developments," states **Kevin Lagan**. "We must NOT let development control us. We must be clear about our expectations when we say: *this is what we want our valley to look like.*"

"The Comox Valley has a unique opportunity to let our actions do the talking. We can all be part of the regional plan, and we can all run with the plan. We also need to understand that there limits on resources, in particular water, that will impact on our choices for land use."



"The Development Permit Area planning tool can provide us with a means to an end, that is: *we can achieve commonality as to how developments fit together at our boundaries.* By having common development objectives, the DPA effectively creates the opportunity for a 'soft boundary' so that there is a seamless transition from one jurisdiction to the next."

"We know Courtenay will grow because we are a destination municipality. Years from now, when people look back at what happened as an outcome of the 2009 Learning Lunch Series, our hope is that they will conclude that the foundation for the regional team approach was sound and we got it right. That will be our legacy."

### From Awareness to Action

"At Seminar #1, we will challenge our colleagues to move from a *sedentary place* to an *action place*," continues **Derek Richmond**. "The 2008 Series was educational in terms of desired outcome. The 2009 Series is designed to be transformational."

"By drawing attention to HOW we can integrate the DPA planning tool with engineering objectives, this will get everyone thinking about the parts of the machine. But we wish to go beyond just thinking....we will be seeking commitment by all the groups to build the machine."



"For this reason, we all need to identify appropriate examples that will inform the brainstorming at the September 25 town hall sharing session."

**Imagine:** One such example is recent work by the City along Anderton and Cliff Avenues in the Old Orchard area of northwest Courtenay. This project illustrates what "the new business as usual" can look like on the ground.

"In a nutshell, an infrastructure replacement project evolved into a neighbourhood rehabilitation program," states Derek Richmond. "We began with a traditional infrastructure project in our minds: replace a pipe with a pipe. And then something amazing happened – we lifted ourselves out of the traditional silo mentality and we began to function as an integrated, inter-departmental team."

"Through teamwork, a seemingly routine engineering project became the springboard for transforming the look-and-feel of an entire neighbourhood," summarizes Derek Richmond. "Because the project planning was an iterative process, I call it *planning with a little p.*"

"If we can do this internally, imagine what we could do regionally," ponders **Kevin Lagan**. "Integrated planning is all about teamwork. There is no limit to what we can do once we open our minds to the opportunities that can result from partnerships and collaboration."

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## 7. The Collaboration Challenge

The challenge statement introduced on page 1 frames the learning outcomes for local governments when convening for action before, at and after the 2009 Learning Lunch Series:

*“How we will simultaneously work together as staff within a municipality and as a region AND externally with the stewardship sector, developers and other private sector players, to ensure we implement sustainable approaches to development”*

### Rising to the Challenge

“In rising to the collaboration challenge for working together, the essence of the **regional team approach** is that all the players will set their sights on the *common good* and challenge the old barriers of jurisdictional interests,” emphasizes **Eric Bonham**.

According to Eric Bonham, achieving the *common good* ultimately requires bringing together all these players under the regional team umbrella:

- **Local government** - those who plan and regulate land use;
- **Developers** - those who build;
- **The stewardship sector** – those who advocate conservation of resources.
- **The Province** - those who provide the legislative framework; and
- **Universities and colleges** - those who provide research.

“The 2009 Learning Lunch Series is for implementers. Partnerships, collaboration, innovation and integration ....these are the ingredients that will enable the four Comox Valley local governments to make the best choices over time for living water smart and building greener communities,” concludes Eric Bonham.”

### Ten Cascading Objectives

According to Eric Bonham and Tim Pringle, the objectives (or outcomes) of the ‘regional team approach’ are cascading; and are synthesized from *high-level* to *ground-level* as follows to provide a framework for coordinated action:

1. Align local actions with policy goals in the Province’s **Living Water Smart, BC’s Water Plan** and **Green Communities Initiative**.
2. Integrate land and water resource management to balance settlement change and ecology, and to adapt to climate change.
3. Make green choices that are cumulative in creating liveable communities, reducing wasteful water use, and protecting stream health.
4. **Design with Nature** to influence the form and function of the human-altered environment.
5. Implement **Green Infrastructure** policies and practices that achieve **Water Sustainability** over time.
6. Establish consistent expectations as to what integrated green infrastructure solutions look like on the ground.
7. Move from pilot projects to a watersheds objectives approach to get to the big picture – that is, **what our region will look like in 50 years**.
8. Encourage **Green Value** development – that is, the right development in the right place at the right time.
9. Provide practitioners with the tools and experience to implement **An Integrated Watershed Approach to Settlement**.
10. Promote **Shared Responsibility** – all players work together more effectively, using law reform and/or other process changes as tools.