



POLIS Project on Ecological Governance

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Water Conservation Planning Workshop

Final Report - Project No. 7-APR09

Written for Affordability and Choice Today Federation of Canadian Municipalities

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Introduction:

The POLIS Project on Ecological Governance at the University of Victoria (POLIS) with the University of Waterloo's Blue Builders Project (UW) developed and delivered a Water Efficiency Workshop for municipal staff in the Comox Valley Regional District, British Columbia. The Workshop was built on current initiatives at POLIS and UW to enhance water practitioner engagement and capacity in sustainable urban water management. By integrating applied learning with practical experience and extensive research, the Workshop focused on equipping participants with skills needed to address the complex factors that influence municipal water efficiency and conservation policy and practice on Vancouver Island.

The Blue Builders Project (undertaken Sept. 2007 – Sept. 2009) identified three key regulatory barriers for the residential building community in implementing water efficient technologies: plumbing codes, development charges, and permit processes. The Workshop aimed to help the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) overcome these and other significant regulatory barriers to water conservation by providing a series of interactive sessions on water conservation planning and implementation tools to support participants in developing long-term integrated water conservation programs.

Using POLIS' Water Conservation Toolbox (a suite of practical tools to support communities plan for water efficiency and conservation) coupled with an understanding of barriers faced by the building community, the Workshop sessions helped CVRD staff develop a water efficiency plan that incorporated all stakeholders.

The Rationale:

Most water conservation programs are viewed as short-term efforts to buy time until the next water source can be found and developed. An effective long-term integrated water conservation program can result in water savings of 20% up to 50%, enabling communities that are increasingly overwhelmed by water infrastructure costs to potentially defer or avoid increased capital costs, rather than transferring costs to the private sector in the form of development charges or complex development application processes. In the context of housing needs, municipal water conservation and efficiency planning that is grounded in sound data and financial management can leverage more affordability for the building community and choice for the consumer. By building capacity for municipalities and breaking down barriers for builders (such as plumbing codes, development charges, and permit processes), local governments can provide affordable choices to homeowners while incorporating more efficient building options.



The Workshop:

The Workshop was held on August 28th at the Comox Valley Regional District office and was an intimate and interactive one-day workshop with 5 sessions running between an hour to an hour and a half in length. There were 15 municipal and community water and sustainability managers and staff from the Comox Valley Regional District in attendance (see Appendix A for participant list). The Workshop equipped participants with the capacity to recognize the barriers to water efficiency as identified by the residential building industry, and to begin to overcome these barriers through a bundle of water efficiency and conservation planning and implementation tools. The goal of the Workshop was to support participants and communities to develop "home-grown" locally relevant water efficiency and conservation programs. Each session allowed time for significant discussion and a question and answer period afterwards.

The Workshop included the following sessions (see appendix B for session power points):

Session One: Where to Start with Water Conservation Planning?

This session examined the critical water context, including the importance of understanding water efficiency versus conservation, creating a community vision, and a strong conservation plan versus an excellent conservation plan.

Session Two: Tools for Setting Water Use Targets

This session reviewed different types of targets, the importance of setting targets and determining the important factors for setting targets. A hands-on tutorial was run using the POLIS WaterSmart Scenario Builder, a calculator that allows users to explore the potential for water and greenhouse gas emissions savings through the application of water efficiency and conservation measures.

Session Three: Tools in Action – The Technological Fix

Tools in Action – The Technological Fix reviewed specific technologies and approaches to implementing those technologies in the community to reduce water use both inside and outside the household. The participants were also provided with success stories or “Proof of Possibilities” and “Factors of Success”.

Session Four: Tools in Action – Carrots and Sticks

Session Five examined the tools to implementing water efficiency measures such as development charges, by-laws, regulation, and city plans. Participants reviewed the importance of engaging with and working with the residential building industry. The



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participants were also provided with success stories or “Proof of Possibilities” and “Factors of Success”.

Session Five: Developing an Effective Implementation Plan

In this final session participants reviewed the important factors to include in an implementation plan such as budget requirements, human resources, and adequate timelines as well as key resources and networks available for water conservation planning.

Locally relevant speaker:

Glen Brown, Executive Director, Local Government Infrastructure and Finance
Ministry of Community & Rural Development, Province of British Columbia.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Having reflected on the questions and discussion that arose during the workshop there is a clear need for capacity development in the area of housing and water efficiency and conservation planning. There is demand for workshops and a desire to learn more about how to move communities and the housing industry to a more environmental and water efficient place.

Discussions where local case study examples were highlighted held more interest for the participants. The living examples from outside of the province or country seemed to hold less sway for the participants. This reaction reiterated the importance of local research being completed on water efficiency and innovation. There is a need for local examples of “proof of possibility” and investment in creating exciting and innovative projects regionally will help pave the way.

There continues to be little or contradicting research on the full cost of investing in water infrastructure and delivery to communities. Also missing is how green infrastructure impacts housing and the affordable housing industry. Further research guiding the understanding of the importance of green infrastructure on affordability and water sustainability is needed.

While there are benefits for hosting a workshop for just one community (in this case the CVRD), with solutions and discussions specific to the area, an invitation to a wider geographic region allows for greater diversity in discussion and increases knowledge transfer opportunities between Canadian municipalities.

Investment in the creation of an online tool, run through FCM -ACT, allowing people to follow up with other workshop participants would strengthen the opportunity for participants to both build on what they have learned and learn about and from other ACT workshops.



Appendix A: Participants

	Last Name	First Name	Job Title	Organization
1	Andestad	Gail		Town of Comox
2			Manager of Strategic and Long Range Planning	
	Garbutt	Geoff		CVRD
3				
	Westendorp	Glenn		City of Comox
4			<i>Director of Operational Services, Operational Services Department</i>	
	Lagan	Kevin		City of Courtney
5			General Management Public Affairs and info management	
	Carter	Leigh		Comox Valley Regional District
6				Comox Valley Regional District
	Oakman	Debra	Chief Admin Officer	
7			Senior Manager of Engineering Services	
	Rutten	Mark		CVRD
8			General Manager of Building Services (water services; wastewater)	
	Lorrett	Kevin		CVRD
9			Manager of Building Services; Comox Valley Regional District	
	McPherson	Doug		CVRD
10			Manager of Wastewater Services	
	Elliot	Jim		CVRD
11	Leontowich	kent	Planner	CVRD
12	Gurak	Koreen	Communications	CVRD
13				Ministry of Community and Rural Development
	Brown	Glen	Manager	
14	Mike Zbarsky		Engineering Analyst	CVRD
15	Liz Hendriks			University of Waterloo
16	Susanne Porter Bopp			POLIS Project