

# Report

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Date	November 16, 2022	File:
Subject	UBCM Asset Management Planning Grant Application – Ecological Accounting Process Partnership	

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## PURPOSE

To seek Council's endorsement on a joint application submitted to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) Asset Management Planning Grant program in support of a partnership between three municipalities, the Partnership for Water Sustainability and the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute, to embed ecological accounting expertise within Vancouver Island University.

## BACKGROUND

The Ecological Accounting Process (EAP) is a methodology and set of metrics that help local governments make the business case to operationalize the maintenance and management of natural assets, such as stream corridors. EAP aligns with and is an outcome of the Asset Management for Sustainable Service Delivery: A BC Framework developed by Asset Management BC.

Stream systems are considered a natural commons asset in that they provide a range of uses or ecological services to the community. EAP informs communities about the condition of their natural commons, the investment that has been made, and the value of the land underlying these spaces.

This analysis takes the view that landowners adjacent to the stream corridor and setback zone (30 metres on both sides of the stream) and the community share responsibility for the stream's condition and the financial value of the land it occupies. From an asset management point of view, the stream has value as a land use. Depending on its functioning and condition, it may enhance or degrade the social and financial values of land uses along its course.

The EAP was created by the Partnership for Water Sustainability in British Columbia (PWSBC) over the last couple of decades. Over the past six years, EAP has been piloted through nine trials with municipal partners (including the Regional District of Nanaimo and the City for the Millstone River) and is currently at a point where it has proven itself to be an effective and efficient measure for monetizing commitments to supporting riparian areas for ongoing maintenance and management. The Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute (MABRRI), a Vancouver Island University (VIU) entity, has supported the last six pilot studies that the PWSBC has undertaken. The PWSBC has identified the need to embed the EAP process into a British Columbian University to ensure that knowledge of EAP is perpetuated and the next generations of planners and municipal staff are trained.

To this end, the Partnership and MABRRI/VIU established relationships with three local governments in the mid Island: Regional District of Nanaimo, Municipality of North Cowichan and the City of Nanaimo. This collaboration will help ensure that training and expertise are retained within the university and can be continually developed. It also supports local governments with internal capacity rather than exporting knowledge to consultants.

VIU students across disciplines, including Master of Community Planning, Master of Geographic Information Systems, Advanced Diploma in GIS, Biology, and Geography, will be involved in future EAP

studies advancing knowledge and understanding of the EAP and bringing these skill sets into the local communities (often with local municipalities) through applied experiential learning and training. The plan is to work with three municipal partners over the next three years, completing three studies each for a total of nine EAP studies. During this time, the PWSBC will directly support MABRRI to ensure all knowledge is passed over and the studies adhere to past studies' standards through rigorous methodology training. The end of the three years and nine EAP studies will result in MABRRI being fully trained to execute EAP studies across BC in the future and students graduating from VIU will have experience supporting EAP studies.

## DISCUSSION

The proposal is a three-year commitment to the EAP Partnership, with the City of Nanaimo (and each of the other partners) providing annual funding of \$30,000 and staff time to prioritize individual creek systems for analysis, develop research questions and support data generation. It is anticipated the Municipality of North Cowichan will apply for a \$15,000 grant each year of the partnership from UBCM's Asset Management Planning Grant program. MABRRI proposes to use the funding received for a 0.33 FTE/yr GIS Technician salary, a 0.75 FTE/yr Project Coordinator salary, student interns as needed, and travel and other research-related costs.

The UBCM offers grant support through its Asset Management Planning Program. The intent of the program is to assist local governments (municipalities and regional districts) in delivering sustainable services by extending and deepening asset management practices within their organizations. The 2022 program deadline for applications was September 30, 2022. Staff made an application with the proviso that it would be subject to future Council's endorsement. UBCM acknowledged this process.

Staff seek Council's endorsement to commit to the EAP Partnership. The commitment would see \$30,000 annually for three years, which would be reduced to \$15,000 per year with each successful grant application. Staff recommend that the costs come from the Engineering Department's "studies" budget.

The Regional District of Nanaimo and the City of Nanaimo have endorsed the project and committed funding.

## OPTIONS

### 1. (Recommended Option) THAT Council:

- (1) Endorse the joint application with the Regional District of Nanaimo, City of Nanaimo, the Partnership for Water Sustainability and the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute to the Union of British Columbia's Asset Management Planning Grant program for a project to embed ecological accounting expertise within Vancouver Island University;
  - (2) Direct staff to provide overall grant management; and,
  - (3) Add a project to the 2022 – 2026 Financial Plan for \$30,000 in 2023, 2024 and 2025, funded from the Engineering studies budget.
- The recommended option supports Council's strategic plan to integrate natural assets into the overall asset management program.
    - Strengthening environmental policy and recognition of natural assets in stormwater

- management
- Collaboration with other local and regional governments
- Training the future workforce through Vancouver Island University

## IMPLICATIONS

### Financial Implications:

The Engineering Department budgets for studies each year is based on the expectation that they will be identified during the year. In this instance the allocation can be shown for this specific project over the next three years without impacting the overall budget amount.

### Personnel Implications:

This project aligns with the work that staff expect to carry out related to integrating natural assets into the overall asset management plan.

## RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council:

- (1) Endorse the joint application with the Regional District of Nanaimo, City of Nanaimo, the Partnership for Water Sustainability and the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute to the Union of British Columbia's Asset Management Planning Grant program for a project to embed ecological accounting expertise within Vancouver Island University;
- (2) Direct staff to provide overall grant management; and,
- (3) Add a project to the 2022 – 2026 Financial Plan for \$30,000 in 2023, 2024 and 2025, funded from the Engineering studies budget.

Report prepared by:



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### Approved to be forwarded to Council:



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