From left to right: Ron Mattiussi, Leanne Bilodeau, Mayor Sharon Shepherd and Jackie Podger

MOVING FROM RESEARCH TO COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

"It's about creating an opportunity to bridge the gap between the knowledge we generate and share to help our communities become more sustainable."

Whether it's research, student projects or staff initiatives, sustainability is a thread that weaves throughout UBC's Okanagan campus. And creating liveable, vibrant communities is a cornerstone for Kelowna Mayor Sharon Shepherd.

So when the two agreed to work together on a new sustainability pilot initiative, it was a perfect match.

"Partnering with the City makes perfect sense," says Jackie Podger, UBC's Okanagan campus AVP Administration and Finance. "We are a part of our city and the contributions we make to advancing sustainability on and off campus can serve to advance our collective sustainability goals."

The new pilot grant program aimed at sustainable community development projects in Kelowna was spearheaded by the Provost and Vice-Principal of UBC's Okanagan campus in collaboration with Mayor Sharon Shepherd, City Manager Ron Mattiussi, Podger and Leanne Bilodeau, Director, Sustainability Operations at UBC's Okanagan campus.

"UBC's Okanagan campus is aspiring to become the most sustainable campus in the country. And Kelowna is striving to become one of Canada's leading cities when it comes to sustainability. We share that mutual interest and, by working together, we can achieve great feats for our community," says Provost and Vice-Principal, Dr. Alaa Abd-El-Aziz. "The University was keen to provide seed funding, through the UBC Sustainable Development Internal Grant program, to foster opportunities for collaboration between our researchers and community members. This funding will support the development of innovative projects, with mutual benefits to both partners."

A meeting was held with key contacts from UBC's Okanagan campus, the City of Kelowna, community groups and other agencies to brainstorm research project ideas. As a result, faculty submitted applications and of those, three projects that met the program criteria were awarded a grant. These three research projects will examine ways to reduce water use in public parks, explore new public transportation options and bring together neighbourhoods through performance events and potluck dinners.

"We're grateful to UBC's Okanagan campus for their commitment to sustainability and for the potential benefits we can capture from the research," says Mayor Shepherd.

Bilodeau says the grant program is a win-win for both the University and the City.

"It's about creating an opportunity to bridge the gap between the knowledge we generate and share to help our communities become more sustainable. Bringing together our faculty, staff and students with the community and key City staff in this way is a unique approach to the development of practical, local sustainability solutions," she says.

The three funded projects are:

REDUCING WATER USAGE IN CIVIC PARKS USING ADAPTIVE IRRIGATION

Ramon Lawrence, Associate Professor of Computer Science, PhD candidate Scott Fazackerley, undergraduate student Ryan Trenholm and Neal Klassen, coordinator of the City of Kelowna's Water Smart program, are looking at reducing water use in civic parks using adaptive irrigation. The goal is to customize and install an adaptive irrigation system in a portion of a civic park alongside a conventional system. The expected result is substantial – up to 50 percent savings in water use.

SUSTAINABLE GLENMORE TRANSPORTATION COMPASS PILOT PROJECT

Gordon Lovegrove, Assistant Professor of Engineering, is working with Bernard Momer, Associate Professor of Geography, on a sustainable transportation pilot project that will explore the Sustainable Glenmore Community Universal Transportation Pass System (ComPASS). The goal is to develop an integrated, sustainable transportation system that competes with, and cuts down the use of, single-occupancy vehicles. Users will be entitled to privileges at various stores, gyms, coffee shops and the like to encourage them to hop on the bus, bike and/or sidewalk.

SOCIAL POTLUCK

Gabriel Newman will create a project combining theatre, storytelling, community-building, community art and community food action as part of a Master's in Fine Arts thesis supervised by Neil Cadger, Associate Professor in the Performance program. The project's first of two acts involves Gabriel hosting five free dinners – with food from local suppliers – in exchange for stories from those who attend. The second act involves Gabriel presenting a performance, based on the stories collected, at a community potluck dinner. ●