

**REPORT TO ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JULY 15, 2026**

SUBJECT **Bowker Creek Blueprint | 2026 Update: A 100-Year Action Plan to Restore the Bowker Creek Watershed**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To present the Bowker Creek Blueprint | 2026 Update: A 100-Year Action Plan to Restore the Bowker Creek Watershed¹ (the 2026 Blueprint Update) for information and demonstrate the value of collaborative urban watershed management in the capital region.

BACKGROUND

Bowker Creek is a 9.3 km urban creek (3.5 km of open channels and 5.8 km enclosed in pipes and culverts) that runs through the District of Saanich (Saanich), City of Victoria (Victoria), and the District of Oak Bay (Oak Bay). The Bowker Creek Watershed Management Plan (BCWMP) was completed in 2003 to protect and improve the overall health of the creek and its watershed.

Since 2004, the Capital Regional District (CRD) has coordinated the Bowker Creek Initiative (BCI), a unique multi-jurisdictional collaborative that brings together citizens, community organizations, local and regional government, and educational institutions to improve watershed management and stewardship, guide the implementation of BCWMP and protect and enhance the ecological, social, and hydrological health of the Bowker Creek and its watershed. The BCI coordinator position, held by the CRD, is cost-shared by the participating municipalities.

In 2010, the BCI developed the Bowker Creek Blueprint: A 100-Year Action Plan to Restore the Bowker Creek Watershed² (the Blueprint) which was endorsed by Victoria (2011), Saanich (2011), Oak Bay (2012) and School District 61 (2018). It provides governments, land stewards, and community groups with information and guidance to manage and restore the watershed and creek corridor. Recommended actions were identified as short and medium term, other actions were to occur opportunistically or through long-term efforts. The time horizon of the Blueprint recognizes the time required for significant change in an urban environment.

Considerable progress on the Blueprint implementation has been achieved, including restoration of Bowker Creek through Oak Bay High School (2015), completion of a Daylighting Feasibility Study (2020), installation of demonstration rain gardens in each municipality, and acquisition of the Kings Road Community Nature Green Space. New studies and plans have enhanced understanding of the watershed. Significant and complex climate change and social pressures continue to challenge the Bowker Creek watershed; however, they also offer unique opportunities for innovation and collaboration.

Driven by these pressures and accomplishments, the BCI partners collaborated to update the Blueprint. Municipal staff will present the 2026 Blueprint Update to their respective councils this summer. Implementation of the 2026 Blueprint Update will improve climate resiliency, mitigate

¹ <https://www.crd.ca/media/file/bowker-creek-blueprint-2026-update>

² <https://www.crd.ca/media/file/bowker-creek-blueprint-2011pdf>

flooding, extend greenways, daylight and restore the creek. Bowker Creek is important to the community and the BCI is a model of collaborative urban watershed management in the region.

IMPLICATIONS

Environmental and Climate Implications

Flooding, water quality, and habitat loss are significant concerns for Bowker Creek. Home to more than 33,000 people, the watershed is highly urbanized with residential, commercial and institutional land uses; about 62% of the creek is enclosed in pipes and an estimated 45% of the 1,016-ha watershed is covered with impervious surfaces. Despite its degradation, Bowker Creek offers connections with the natural environment, affords opportunities to daylight and restore the creek, provides a greenway corridor and has the potential to create more vibrant neighbourhoods.

Climate change and its impacts are already a reality for Bowker Creek and its watershed. Hotter summers, extended droughts, and wetter winters are becoming the new normal. Compounded by urban development and the loss of pervious area, these shifting conditions increase the risk of flash flooding, erosion, declining water quality, and biodiversity loss.

The 2026 Blueprint Update defines a plan to daylight the creek, identifies opportunities for stormwater management facilities, and outlines proactive measures to protect the creek and its watershed from the impacts of climate change and development. It will continue to guide the municipalities and community land stewards to manage and restore the Bowker Creek and its watershed. Implementation will safeguard local ecosystem health and biodiversity, protect water quality, mitigate flooding and maintain important green spaces and recreational areas.

Intergovernmental and First Nations Implications

Bowker Creek, known as Thaywun by the local Coast Salish Nations, was once a healthy source of fresh water, food and medicine, and an important transportation route. Today, significant cultural and archeological sites remain. The 2026 Blueprint Update includes an action to “complete an archaeological overview assessment of Bowker Creek in partnership with interested First Nations”. This assessment will help to identify areas with archaeological potential along the proposed daylighting route in advance of land altering projects. Individual projects may require additional archaeological assessment when land altering occurs. Staff from Songhees First Nations reviewed the 2026 Blueprint Update and gave their support for the goals.

Local governments face complex social challenges with constrained resources. The push for new housing, driven by provincial mandates, can place added strain on creeks, tree canopies, and natural areas. Equitable access to urban greenspace is a growing public health issue, especially as climate change accelerates. These pressures highlight the need to incorporate innovative rainwater management techniques into new developments and local streets, including measures that reduce peak stormwater flows, enhance groundwater recharge and treat contaminants in stormwater runoff. Equally important is the need to protect and enhance greenspace as the watershed develops, which will support both public health and climate resiliency goals.

The BCI partners established the 2026 Blueprint Update Working Group, made up of municipal engineering, planning and parks staff and community association representatives, to guide the update and ensure the 2026 Blueprint Update actions reflects the needs, constraints, and

aspirations of their organizations, while working towards the shared goals and vision for Bowker Creek. Municipal staff will present the 2026 Blueprint Update to their respective municipal councils in the coming months.

Social Implications

Considerable public engagement was conducted during the development of the Blueprint in 2009-2010. In 2025, extensive public consultation was conducted to gauge support for the Blueprint, guide prioritization of actions, understand how the community interacts with the watershed and creek, and collect feedback. Engagement was carried out through an online survey, an in-person open house, an online presentation and community walks. Information was also shared by BCI steering committee partners, news media ads, posters, postcards, community email lists and newsletters, the project website, and social media.

Consultation indicated strong public desire to daylight Bowker Creek and restore habitat, mitigate flooding and create a connected greenway. All 2026 Blueprint Update goals are well supported with enhanced livability and resilience to climate change as valued co-benefits by the public. The What We Heard Engagement Report (August 2025) is attached as Appendix A.

Financial Implications

The BCI coordinator position (~1 day/week) is held by the CRD and cost-shared by the participating municipalities. Municipal partners will review the role of the BCI coordinator and determine if the current level of staffing continues to be sufficient.

Implementation of key short-term actions in the 2026 Blueprint Update will require future funding. Working at a watershed scale, the partners may want to consider collaborative funding models because installation of flood mitigation infrastructure in one part of the watershed may provide the most significant benefits to the downstream municipality. For example, the 2026 Blueprint Update envisions large stormwater management facilities within Saanich to reduce the downstream flooding that occurs in Oak Bay. BCI partners will develop creative funding and financing options, that may include adaptation or infrastructure grant opportunities, operational and capital funds, collaborative partnerships, and potentially long-term financing options at a watershed scale.

CONCLUSION

The Bowker Creek Blueprint | 2026 Update: A 100-Year Action Plan to Restore the Bowker Creek Watershed, which defines a daylighting route for the creek, has been updated to identify potential locations for large stormwater management facilities and provide watershed-wide and reach-specific actions to protect the watershed and creek. Implementation will improve climate resiliency, mitigate flooding, and improve livability as the creek is daylighted and restored and greenways are extended bringing wildlife corridors and biodiversity into the community.

Bowker Creek Initiative (BCI) is a model of collaborative urban watershed management in the region and ongoing collaboration among the BCI partners will be required to capitalize on re-development opportunities and create watershed-scale funding mechanisms. The Bowker Creek Blueprint | 2026 Update: A 100-Year Action Plan to Restore the Bowker Creek Watershed is presented to the CRD Board for information and will be presented to the District of Saanich, the City of Victoria, and the District of Oak Bay councils for consideration this summer.

RECOMMENDATION

There is no recommendation. This report is for information only.

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Concurrence:	Ted Robbins, B. Sc., C. Tech., Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT

Appendix A: What We Heard Report - Bowker Creek Blueprint Update (August 2025)