

Webinar #1: Introduction to Vancouver's Circular Economy

Success and Opportunity in Vancouver's Circular Economy

Questions and Answers
from the October 1st Session



Q&A: Success and Opportunity in Vancouver's Circular Economy

On October 1, Vancity and the Vancouver Economic Commission (VEC) launched their three-part circular economy webinar series. The first session introduced the circular economy in Vancouver, outlining different areas of practice and growth in the local landscape by Rosemary Cooper of [Share, Reuse, Repair Initiative](#). Three businesses also presented their circular journey and successes in the local economy, Marc Wandler from [Susgrainable](#), Carolyn Baily from [Quadrogen](#) and Adam Corneil from [Unbuilders](#).

The first webinar in the series generated some lively discussion on the circular economy, with attendees posing a range of questions during the Q&A period. We put together some select excerpts of the most interesting ones.

Question 1: What are your thoughts on whether high levels of circularity can be achieved if the economics that underpin the economy remain linear? Does a transition to the circular economy also require re-imagining the current economic model?

“From my point of view, yes. This is what you are seeing with small businesses like Susgrainable. We are adding some form of circularity to an already linear model. The circular economy is really based on being more resource efficient. Our current linear model is based on being time/capital efficient. When policy begins to support this circular economy model, that’s when we’ll really see an enormous amount of traction. In my opinion, parts of Europe are leading the way in this regard (think Holland/Amsterdam) while in North America, Vancouver is definitely a great place to be to tap into the circular economy model, as was evidenced by the session on October 1.” – Marc Wandler, [Susgrainable](#)

“A Circular Economy is important but not sufficient to achieving shared and lasting prosperity within planetary boundaries. We need to see circular practices as part of a broader transition to a new economic system such as that framed by Kate Raworth in her Doughnut Economic model. Kate states that the only way to achieve an economy that doesn’t exceed planetary boundaries and meets basic social needs is to change our focus to one that advances sustainable well-being for all regardless of whether the economy is growing, staying the same or shrinking (in other words, moving away from our single-minded obsession with GDP growth).

“This is why Vancity’s Lighter Living program is so important and why we at the Share Reuse Repair Initiative focus on both supporting the growth of circular goods and services while also cultivating the cultural demand for consuming less and differently.” – Rosemary Cooper of [Share, Reuse, Repair Initiative](#)
“Yes, it requires restructuring the current economic system. It also requires reprogramming how we value cost in a product or service. Just valuing the cost of goods and services in monetary sense, and virgin materials remaining cheaper than recycled/upcycled ones means the system will continue to perpetuate a linear economy. However, if we start evaluating the cost of goods and services by 3 categories: financial, environmental, and social cost, then we will see a circular economy emerge (especially if there are subsidies for circular businesses).” – Adam Corneil, [Unbuilders](#)

Question 2: Two forms of societal change are necessary: behaviour change and perception change. How are you using behavioural design to influence public perceptions of circular products and activities?

“What I think you are getting at is trying to understand behavioral psychology. How I like to break it down simply for myself is that the human brain is primarily motivated by two things: fear or faith. Each person is unique and

motivated at a different level by both of these. When positioning this thinking towards marketing for the fight against climate change and for the circular economy, you can think of fear being messaging or statistics that address the *problem*, and faith being messaging and statistics about the *solution* you are proposing. The important thing is to strike the right balance. Too much messaging around fear without a believable solution leads to apathy and the feeling of hopelessness. On the solution side, if it isn't the right problem being addressed in the right way, you'll have people think it's unrealistic.

"One last note to consider: Unlearning habits is way harder than learning new ones. Creating confusion and curiosity is the best way to change habits. And then start building the path forward." – Marc Wandler, [Susgrainable](#)

"Consistent messaging and educating the general public on circularity is crucial for systems change. You cannot resolve a problem until it is identified, exposed and examined." – Adam Corneil, [Unbuilders](#)

Question 3: Can you share a little more about the Share, Reuse, Repair Initiative's "Green and Just Economic Recovery" program?

"SRRI's Green and Just Economic Recovery program is a new initiative begun in response to COVID-19, which has so starkly revealed the precarious, unsustainable and inequitable nature of our current linear economic system. We know that the transition to a circular economy could be very labour intensive in the next 10-20 years in particular and that reuse and repair innovations hold some of the greatest potential to create inclusive jobs and livelihoods for all skill and income levels.

"In the first phase of this program we are conducting research and engaging with key stakeholders and marginalized communities in order to develop a strategy brief that highlights the opportunity that reuse and repair hold for a just and green economic recovery.

"You may contact SRRI directly to learn more or to participate in the research." – Rosemary Cooper, [Share, Reuse, Repair Initiative](#)

Question 4: What are the key barriers to scaling more Quadrogen projects in Metro Vancouver and BC? How do you address the 'lock-in' effect associated with the development of waste to energy facilities? Do you build adaptability into your facilities?

"One of the key barriers to actively scaling additional hex-generation waste to energy projects within Metro Vancouver and BC would be the ability of the partner to efficiently transport the renewable fuels to where it will be dispensed. With regards to using natural gas pipelines, discussions would have to take place with FortisBC prior to moving on with such projects. Some partners are willing to bypass the constraints of transmission lines by directly using virtual pipelines, which are specialized heavy-duty trucks that can reliably transport compressed natural gas for delivery to desired locations including rural areas. Currently there are BC-based companies in the midst of commercializing hybrid hydrogen-diesel heavy duty trucks that would further reduce GHG emissions." – Carolyn Baily, [Quadrogen](#)

"Quadrogen's integrated gas clean-up and up-grading solutions are modular and be customized based on the customer's requirements. For instance, we have completed projects where we provided one portion of our systems – for example, only the pressure swing absorption system – to a much larger project involving several engineering firms. Our systems can be adapted to meet the requirements of the particular facility, thereby [reducing] the "lock-in" effect of any waste-to-energy projects we take on." – Carolyn Baily, [Quadrogen](#)

Question 5: What drives the cost of old growth lumber to 4X more in cost?

"Cost of acquisition, labour cost to get it ready for resale and then its rarity. It takes a lot of work to get a single piece ready to go into manufacturing." – Adam Corneil, [Unbuilders](#)

Question 6: If you could drive design changes so that buildings were circular from the start, what changes would you like to see with residential construction?

“Full circular design - Prefabrication. Panelized wall, floor, and ceiling systems. Each panel is further broken down into components that can be removed and changed. Finish layers – both inside and out – that are removable as they are in place with fastening systems that can be accessed while together. Essentially each component of the building can be manipulated and changed without any damage.” – Adam Corneil, [Unbuilders](#)

To learn more about the circular economy webinar series this was a part of, [refer to this page](#).