

# Understanding & Awareness.

Establishing a Baseline

BC Landscape & Nursery Association

Phase II – Research Report

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# Introduction

Phase I of this project involved the development of a research strategy to assess public and industry awareness of a number of garden, garden image and BCLNA related topics. The objective is to establish a baseline of awareness on these issues.

Research instruments were developed in order to canvas the general public, the gardening and horticulture industry, and municipal and other contacts associated with BC Communities in Bloom.

Phase II, the present document, presents the results and analysis of four focus groups and a statistically significant number of questionnaires derived from the focus group discussion outlines, a total of 71 respondents. Reporting is anecdotal and qualitative in nature, in keeping with the design of the survey instruments. Results from each target group have been related to the others as appropriate, and some suggested follow-up actions and observations outlined.

The Steering Committee for this project will provide input on Phase II, with respect to logistics and likelihood of success for suggestions made, prior to beginning Phase III.

Phase III will present 'go forward' strategies for each of:

- BC's Garden Image
- Communities in Bloom
- General industry
- BCLNA

# Research Results, Analysis, Commentary

## 1. General Public

### **Methodology**

Discussion groups were convened at the BCLNA offices, and in Vancouver, and moderated by NK. Participants included active home gardeners and non-gardeners.

Group 1	July 26	Surrey market	10 participants
Group 3	August 9	Langley market	12 participants
Group 4	August 21	Vancouver market	11 participants

Total 33 focus group participants from the general public.

Additionally, a questionnaire version of the discussion outline was emailed to 30+ individuals throughout the lower mainland and 10 were returned, by fax, email and post.

Total general public respondent group – 43.

### **Results**

#### **Perceptions of BC's Current Garden Image**

- **What comes to mind when you hear the term 'garden image'? What does it mean to say a city or province has a 'garden image'?**

Almost everyone responded: trees and in particular big trees, flowers in yards and along the street, boulevard, cloverleaf and roundabout plantings, plantings even on the way to the airport and outside government buildings, hanging baskets everywhere.

Other comments included floral painted fences and garbage cans, lots of corner stores selling plants and flowers, lots of nurseries, well tended parks, prevalence of gardens such as Butchart, Minter, Queen Elizabeth and VanDusen. Several respondents mentioned seeing unusual plants and flowers, roof gardens were mentioned, and seeing people out in their yards was another response.

Planted 'Welcome' signs upon entering a town, or driving in from the airport was a signal of garden image, and one person mentioned that an area signaling its Communities in Bloom program was another indication.

- **What areas, anywhere in the world or close to home, do you believe have a garden image?**

- **What gives you that impression?**

Victoria and New Westminster for hanging baskets, London and Ireland plus rest of UK for public gardens, Holland for bulbs, Brooklyn, New Jersey the 'Garden State', Mexico, Italy for lavender, LaConner, Hawaii for exotic plants, SaltSpring, Santa Barbara, France, Spain.

Various roundabouts and traffic bulges on the west side of Vancouver were singled out and Saskatoon was mentioned as a 'city of parks'.

- **What are the benefits of an area having a strong garden image?**

- **Are there benefits other than attractiveness?**

Air is cleaner in particular with lots of trees, it's nice to be there – welcoming, looks clean, attracts bees, birds and butterflies, tourists visit and spend money in the area, feels natural as opposed to asphalt and cement.

It was mentioned that if people care about the area in which they live, by extension they also care about each other. Many mentions that a strong garden image, and an area with lots of 'plant people', is indicative of an appreciation and valuing of the environment.

There are health benefits as well, not only the clean air, but more people are outside gardening and enjoying their natural surroundings.

- **Do you think BC has a strong garden image? Why, why not?**

Overwhelming consensus that it does. One respondent said BC has more of a wild and natural image, rather than garden and another echoed this sentiment saying that it does have this image, but by virtue of being naturally endowed as opposed to any specific effort having been made to make it so.

There were a number of mentions that the lower mainland has a strong garden image, but not Osoyoos as one example – the interior and Okanagan being more into growing food than flowers. There seems to be this distinction made between ornamental and food gardens.

Several respondents mentioned that while BC does have a strong garden image, it was not far reaching, probably going no further than Washington State. SuperNatural BC was mentioned, the thought being that gardens have something to do with the draw of tourism.

- **What areas in particular do?**

Victoria, Sunshine Coast, Nelson, Kelowna, Whistler in summer

- **Does your community in particular have a strong garden image?**

Most respondents said yes and Vancouver, Victoria, Murrayville, Langley, Morgan Creek, Point Grey, Yaletown were mentioned specifically.

Lots of qualifiers – Kitsilano is getting denser all the time although basically a garden area, Vancouver a definite 2<sup>nd</sup> to Victoria. It doesn't take that much to create a garden image – a few window boxes will do the trick.

Several mentions of the fact that some newer Canadians prefer to have a basketball court or big garage rather than gardens, making some of the homes stand out on the street as unkempt.

Richmond was singled out as not having a garden image by one person (rather it has an image of farmland), as was White Rock by another and one person said this of Kitsilano (this individual lives in a high-rise).

- **What does a community need to do to have a strong garden image?**

Put in trees and park benches, have competitions, share plant knowledge (and plants) between households, get kids involved with their own gardens, make sure the parks are maintained, encourage neighbourhood beautification programs and competitions - mentioned most frequently.

One respondent suggested that municipalities have programs to help residents who either can't afford, or physically can't do their own garden. Community gardens were mentioned a few times – not just vegetables, but flowers also.

Companies could get involved in supporting garden activity and government should dedicate more park land.

- **Should taxpayer dollars be used for community beautification projects such as public garden planting, baskets, planters in public areas etc?**

Overwhelmingly answered 'yes'. Some qualifiers – homeowners should commit to upkeep on their own properties and communities should agree to help out with the labour side of it, and once started, keep it maintained. Sometimes the city will plant the boulevards, poorly but attractively, and then never go back. Several mentions that if municipalities didn't do it, no one would. It's good for everyone if communities are kept up – healthy environment, mental health, tourism, more liveable cities.

One comment that if the public areas are nicely maintained, it discourages criminal activity in that area. If the hedges are trimmed and parks cleaned out, the homeless will move on. Volunteers can help maintain public spaces and 'adopt a street' programs can work.

One respondent felt that healthcare should take priority over community beautification as there are lots of other ways to get funding for the latter – garden centres could donate and be recognized for it, BIA's could raise money.

- **Should homeowners be expected to take responsibility for maintaining their own yards and gardens attractively?**

Yes, all respondents, to be fair to neighbours who do maintain their yards.

Several qualifiers in that that you can't legislate tidiness, or force beautification, but you should be able to mandate that lawns be cut, debris be removed and properties be kept safe. Homeowners should take responsibility, absentee or not, empty house or not. Renters should be required to cut the grass and do at least a minimum amount of upkeep. Tree bylaws should be rigidly enforced, that is, bylaws against cutting them down. People should also take care of the city property in front of their houses – cut the grass, water the trees etc.

Several mentioned that this should not be a law, and there shouldn't be punishment, but there needs to be a way of encouraging it, even if by guilt. Some recognition that 'attractive' is subjective, hence the mention of the basics of cutting the lawn and removing debris.

One respondent said that Christmas lights should be taken down after the season.

## **Summary**

*What defines a community as having a 'garden image' is almost exclusively the visible evidence provided by well-maintained and attractively planted parks and public gardens, private yards that are obviously tended, commercial areas dressed up with hanging baskets and planters, community gardens, colourful 'welcome' gardens, a CiB program and lots of nursery and garden centres. This is supported by the selection of areas seen as having such an image: Victoria, elsewhere on Vancouver Island, New Westminster, Sunshine Coast, LaConner, SaltSpring, Portland and Whistler close-by; European countries France, Spain Italy, England and Holland, and other areas such as Hawaii, and Mexico.*

*There is also a broad and reasonably complete understanding of the benefits that come along with a garden image, tangibly from both economic and health-related points of view, as well as the simple 'pleasant and restful to be there' emotional aspects that also came through.*

*BC is seen as having a garden image by the general public, although this perception is largely confined to the southern regions of the province. People understand clearly the difference between a food growing garden image, and an ornamental one.*

*However much BC is seen as having a garden image by its own residents, and a good understanding of the value of a strong garden image for purposes of attracting visitors, it is not felt that this image is known much further way than Washington State.*

*There is a good and almost unanimous understanding of what a community needs to do to create a garden image for itself and this has a lot to do with community involvement, participation, residents pitching in. There is also a feeling that government should contribute to this for the community good – by designating park land, and financially supporting initiatives. And also that BIAs, and other businesses who stand to benefit from more attractive streetscapes ought to be prepared to at least fund, if not provide some labour, in this regard.*

*There is overwhelming support for taxpayer dollars being put towards community landscape projects, with a secondary objective of setting the example for homeowners.*

*On the other hand, it is clear that municipalities and parks staff do not all have the knowledge required to design and install landscapes with the right type of plant material and the right depth and mix of soil, and neither do they necessarily have the will and/or budget to maintain them longer term. The lack of follow-up maintenance is perceived as a waster of taxpayer money.*

*There appears to be a sentiment that homeowners 'owe' it to their neighbours and the community at large to do their part in maintaining their own properties; when they do not, it can create friction on the block. That said, there is also an appreciation that there are costs and physical capability issues in some cases.*

### **Observations & Suggestions**

- 1. We have a strong platform for future communications and marketing initiatives designed to not only strengthen, but also to promote BC's 'Garden Image' with the general public. There will be a high degree of understanding and acceptance as to the economic, lifestyle and other benefits that result from it. There should also be good acceptance and participation in any sort of extraordinary community upgrading initiatives that might be undertaken with, or on behalf of, CiB.*
- 2. We are also now in a strong position to approach Tourism BC officials with regard to a joint initiative designed to at least include 'gardens' as one more reason for a visitor to come to BC. There are a number of 'easy ins' here, such as getting mentions in brochures for 2009 (2008 is already underway). Any major initiatives or discussions may need to be postponed until after 2010, from a practicality point of view.*
- 3. Finally, it is clear that the general public notices when municipalities are not using sustainable landscape practices, even if they can't articulate it in that way.*

### **b. Perceptions of 'Communities in Bloom'**

- **Have you heard of a program/event called 'Communities in Bloom'?**
  - **If so, can you explain what it's all about?**
  - **Now that you know\* what 'Communities in Bloom' is, do you think it's a good idea?**

Most Langley respondents had heard of it – Langley has been an active participant. Many others had heard of it but had little notion of what it is. The few who did have a good understanding were connected to industry in some way and were able to talk about the judging process. Most however believed that CiB is a contest, homeowner against homeowner, and there was very little understanding that it was a municipal/community competition with a larger vision.

After hearing an explanation of what CiB is, there was positive response to the idea of it, but even then there was confusion as to what it was. One respondent hoped that it would not

encourage the use of artificial fertilizers and disposable plants. Another said it would be great for spring, but what about other times of year?

Quite a few indicated that a program like this promotes volunteerism, community spirit and 'guilts out' people who don't maintain their yards. Some felt that maybe some homeowners would not be able to afford to participate – there was a great deal of confusion over the truly individual garden competitions that exist, and CiB.

People thought it was a good idea but wondered why they'd never heard about it.

*\* Participants were advised that Communities in Bloom is an annual competitive event whereby communities undertake beautification and other projects to enhance the look and livability of their area.*

○ **Has your community ever participated in Communities in Bloom?**

Mixed responses. Some felt their communities had, but they have the concept of CiB wrong. Others didn't know. Some were sure their community had not. Some Langley residents were sure their community had, and that it had won. Similar certainty from Surrey and White Rock. There some mentions about 'signing up your home' to be in the competition. One respondent said they would like to know more.

**Do you feel it was a positive experience for your community? Can you elaborate?**

All those whose communities had participated, or thought they had, felt it was a positive experience, going on to say that anything that involves plants and flowers is a good thing.

One response said that the program should help city parks and maintenance people learn what constitutes good landscaping and they would like to see a serious upgrade in this area – this person is from White Rock.

**Would you like to see your community become involved if it hasn't been? Or stay involved if it has?** Positive response here. A few wanted to know how individuals can participate, that is, enter their own yards and gardens.

**What could your community do, in your view, to participate in the program?**

Clean up debris and garbage in parks and around towns. Put overhead phone and other wires underground. Put some teeth into littering laws. Have home and garden tours so people can get ideas about what to do with their own gardens. Plant boulevards, roundabouts, hang baskets in town, get everyone to clean up their own garden. Get the whole town involved. Planters along streets.

**Would you like to see your community win?**

Overwhelming yes, although there was one 'don't care'. Makes the town a good tourist attraction. Another said winning was secondary to participating.

○ **What kinds of projects do you think communities could undertake as part of its participation, other than beautiful plantings in parks and public areas?**

Start up community gardens. Maintain and beautify the 'Welcome to Surrey' and similar installations. Communities should advertise extensively to get volunteers, and get everyone in town involved. Anything that gets rid of wasteland between maintained private properties is a good thing. Whole streets or parks could be sponsored by groups of 4-5 families. Put in more riparian and aquatic parks (this from someone who knows botany).

Programs of community outreach were mentioned, as were school programs that tie in somehow. One suggestion of a festival in support of their community's involvement would be good. Beautiful Block and Up Front Garden competitions were mentioned.

Teach people how to compost.

Competitions between firehalls to fix up and beautify – these buildings and properties could use some help. Other public buildings like hospitals should get involved – helpful for the patients to look out on a park-like scene. City Halls, community centres and other public buildings should all have nice garden areas, planters etc.

Graffiti clean-up programs.

Gardening clinics and kits for new homeowners.

- **Do you feel that cities and municipalities have a responsibility to attractively maintain public parks and gardens, beyond just cutting the grass?**

Yes from almost all. Makes it restful and calming. Some took the question literally and said that baskets and planters were nice in addition to just grass. There was some concern expressed that the munis need to pick the right kind of plants, and couldn't the taxpayers have a say in what is planted?

Definite feeling that the munis should set the example and standard.

Cover cement walls, and plant up highway interchanges.

- **What do you perceive to be the benefits to a community of participating in Communities in Bloom?**

Real estate values increase with improved curb-appeal – this was mentioned frequently in all groups and on most questionnaires. Health benefits of fresher air when there are lots of trees. Charming little communities like Fort Langley and Cloverdale attract movie filming. People interact more when they're out in their gardens – happier, exchanging ideas, plants. Makes communities stronger when this kind of thing happens.

Many people mentioned the tourism benefit and the fact that it's nicer to go shopping on a pretty street with flowers and plantings. Even some gas stations pay attention to this.

Good counterpoint to noisy cars and buses, traffic and unkind people. Encourages people to be nice to one another – civil society is fostered. Better place to live.

## **Summary**

*There is a serious lack of understanding and awareness of what CiB is, what it stands for and how it operates, other than among those few among the general public who have been directly involved. The general 'off the top' assumption is that CiB is a 'homeowner vs homeowner' competition.*

*That said, once it is explained, there is a great deal of enthusiasm for the concept, for getting one's own community involved, and for volunteering. There is additionally a good appreciation of the benefits the program could potentially bring to a community on all the key levels of economic, health, spirit etc.*

*The appetite for involvement includes practical aspects such as general community clean-up and de-littering, removing graffiti and an understanding that perhaps such a program would be of value to municipalities in providing education for parks personnel.*

## **Observations & Suggestions**

1. *A full Communities in Bloom enhancement strategy should be developed, as part of the 'Garden Image' initiative, but involving first and foremost, of course, those closest to the event. The enthusiastic reaction to the program, whether respondents already knew about it or just heard about it for the first time by means of the research, is a goldmine of opportunity and potential and should not be squandered.*
2. *The strategy for this 'good news' program should, at least, involve the following:*
  - *public and media relations*
  - *political lobbying – municipal and provincial level*
  - *celebrity endorsement*
  - *more vigorous (and bigger) sponsor solicitation*
  - *initiatives to keep CiB active in one way or another, 12 months of the year*
  - *partnerships, including media*
  - *bigger more robust selling effort*
3. *Consideration might be given to a means of keeping CiB going in some form, 12 months of the year.*

*It is appreciated that not only the preparation of a strategy, but execution of the strategy itself will require funding that is not currently in place, and human resources which do not exist other than Catherine Kennedy's able efforts, and the volunteer board, judges etc.*

## **c. Perceptions of BC's Landscape & Nursery Industry**

- **What general impressions are out there, or do you have, of BC's garden, nursery and landscaping industry?**
  - **Do you know what all it encompasses?**

Garden design and maintenance, propagation of plants, retail stores, any kind of green initiative, installation of landscapes, nurseries that grow plants, landscape architects, companies that build greenhouses, trucking companies that deliver plants to Safeway, fertilizer companies, seed companies, hydroponics equipment makers, companies like Black & Decker who make weed eaters and lawnmowers, irrigation equipment, grass (turf) farms, pest management companies, companies who manufacture patio stones etc, companies that deliver soil and mulch, arborists.

Most of the components of the industry got mentioned, but few of the respondents had a really good general picture. A couple of respondents just answered 'yes' to this question, with no elaboration.

- **Do you believe it's a big contributor to the BC economy?**

Most people said yes, a few because they knew, but most based on their own expenditures at the garden centre, the amount of activity and hiring of gardeners they see around them and other anecdotal input. A couple were not sure, and one said outright 'no'. One said cannabis and other agriculture was bigger!

- **Are you surprised that there are more than 20,000 people employed in the industry?**

Overwhelmingly no. Some went on to say that more were needed, and one added that much of the work was seasonal. Just one 'yes'.

- **Do you believe it operates in most areas of BC?**

The majority of respondents said yes, and there were a couple of qualifiers about 'more in the south', and again the seasonality came up. One person said 'no'.

- **Would you be surprised to learn that ornamental horticulture is the #1 agricultural sector in BC?**  
Majority were quite surprised. The few who were not surprised would likely have a reason to know more than the average person.
- **Would you be surprised to learn that the total value of the industry in BC exceeds \$1.6 billion?**  
Equal split between surprised and not surprised.
- **Would you be surprised to learn that BC exports >\$80 million in plants to the US?**  
Equal split surprised and not surprised. One thought it would be more.
- **Would you be surprised to learn that BC exports >\$70 million in plants to other Canadian provinces?**  
Very little surprise here.
- **Do you feel that BC's garden, nursery and landscape professionals are considered leaders in North America? In Canada?**  
Majority did not know, feeling that they had insufficient information to decide. Six said yes, and one said 'why not go for the world!'
- **Considering your own home and garden:**
  - **Would you consider yourself to be a -**
    - **Knowledgeable dedicated gardener**
    - **Someone who likes gardens and gardening but doesn't know that much about it**
    - **Someone who likes to have a nice garden but hires outside help to manage it**
    - **Someone who doesn't know a dandelion from a begonia**

More than half of the respondents in both the groups, and who submitted questionnaires classify themselves as liking gardening, but not knowledgeable. There were three very knowledgeable knowledgeable, and three who had absolutely no experience, but enjoy gardens.
  - **Do you consciously seek out plants marked as grown in BC or Canada for your own garden? Why/why not?**  
Mixed response here. About 1/3 look for BC-grown material, the reason being they think local plant material is liable to perform better. There were complaints about the tags, that you can't tell where a plant is from sometimes. A few respondents understood the notion that if it's grown here it doesn't have to travel far, and there were a couple of 'support BC' comments.

Other comments included:

- wouldn't know the difference
- if label was clear would buy Canadian
- I look for colour first
- I try to buy BC veggies, but don't care about the flowers and plants
- BC has better quality
- I thought that everything was grown at the garden centre where you buy it
- I just buy plants that I'm familiar with, not concerned about where they come from
- I assumed that everything was grown in BC

- **Do you feel that plants grown in BC, or elsewhere in Canada, are better quality, or represent better value than plants grown in other provinces, or in the US? Why/why not?**

Good understanding demonstrated in both groups and questionnaires of the likelihood that a plant grown in BC is likely to do better because it's acclimatized. About 40% of respondents mentioned this in one way or another. One also assumed that a BC plant would be less costly because it didn't have to travel as far. Seems to be an assumed similarity between Washington state and BC – both are more or less local. One of the groups had several comments about plant quality in recent years being poor, or at least poorer than before.

- **Have you ever started up a garden/yard from scratch, or done a major re-do?** Surprising number of respondents from all areas had done so, with only four stating 'no' and one 'I helped'.

- **Did you hire a professional landscape designer? Why/why not?**

Several said yes – to avoid mistakes, to help with design and to find hardiest plants, to get a good 'flow' to the garden. Those who said 'no' had husband do it, felt it was too expensive to hire a pro, borrowed ideas from other homeowners and magazines, took a course on their own or read books. A few said they just enjoyed doing this sort of work themselves, for the satisfaction, although there were instances where advice was sought from expert friends. Another had a very small space and just didn't feel the need.

- **Did you hire a professional landscape installation company? Why/why not?**

Many respondents had hired professionals for hardscape features such as stonework, water features, lighting and also for underground irrigation. There seems to be an impression that anyone can do the garden installation, although a few recognized that mistakes could be made with DIY. Most of those who did not go professional indicated cost as the main reason. Another said that hiring anyone to do this sort of thing meant that you end up with a look that is someone else's, not your own. This person would not hire an interior designer either. Quite a few had drawings done, but then put the garden in themselves. Only a few recognized the value of hiring professional. One *is* a professional.

- **If you hire help for your garden maintenance do you seek out professionals? Why/ why not**

Most respondents do not because they like to be outside, like to do it themselves, see gardening as a stress release, like to see the 'children' grow up, don't see a reason to get someone else to do what they can do themselves. Feel small gardens don't require it - it's manageable.

One respondent singled out trees as something he does hire out for – if you have to have a diseased tree removed it costs money. Has an environmental concern that there should be more trees, so wants to take care of them. One hires out tree sculpting.

A few don't like to garden particularly, but like the results, so hire out. Others would hire out for a really big job.

Another mentioned Nutrilawn – used to come regularly but now aren't allowed to use herbicides.

- **When you hear ‘It’s important to manage pests in the garden in a responsible manner’, what do you think is meant by ‘pests’?**

Few respondents mentioned anything other than critter pests – slugs, whiteflies, aphids, gophers, other rodents, weevils, rabbits, cut worms, tent caterpillars, snails, cats, ants. There were a couple of mentions of ‘diseases’, weeds and fungi.

- **When it comes to managing pests in your garden, and understanding now that this includes diseases, bugs and weeds, do you seek out trained professionals to assess your situation and implement a solution? Why/why not?**

Varied responses here – little consensus:

- Visit the garden centre and ask them; get different answers from different garden centres
- Feel I have enough experience now to handle it myself
- People should try and find the info they need, otherwise hire out
- Depends on the severity of the problem
- Have been trying to get rid of ‘gout weed’ for 7 years
- Do own research online
- City of Surrey came and took care of tent caterpillar
- City of Vancouver does not support using professionals and will only let people use corn gluten

There was definitely no general feeling that it was necessary to call in the professionals, right off the bat.

- **For your own yard and garden, do you have an interest in seeking out and hiring gardening, landscape and pest management companies that promote environmentally responsible gardening practices? Why/why not?**

General consensus is that environmental responsibility is key in this particular area. Some concern also that if you use IPM (many people knew the term) then it has to work. If not, you bring in the products, although indiscriminate spraying is not the way to go. Some concern that certain pesticides are restricted.

There is great concern for the environment, and the feeling that everyone can do a little bit for it. There were also a number of DIYers in this response, who try to do it responsibly, feeling that there is enough information out there that people can do it themselves, organically.

No sympathy for wasps – chemicals needed!

- **Do you know what educational institutions in BC offer professional horticulture programs?**

Most educational institutions in BC were named, whether or not they have horticulture programs. BCIT, Langara, Fraser Valley College, Camosun, Kwantlen, Douglas, Aggasiz, UBC, ‘most community colleges’.

There were two ‘no’ answers, and two ‘yes’ answers with no examples.

There was definitely low awareness of those schools that do actually offer the programs.

- **If the services of a trained or certified horticulture professional cost a bit more than those of an untrained individual, do you feel the extra expense is worth it?**

Overwhelming yes, on the basis that you are buying knowledge, and you get what you pay for. There were a couple of answer involving having to determine what the size of the job or problem is, and another about knowing what would be lost of the investment he has in his garden if he did nothing. But clear understanding and acceptance of the notion of buying expertise in this area.

- **Do you know what kinds of jobs there are in horticulture?**  
Study of plants, pests, and people who create new types of plants. People who manage nurseries, landscapers. Tractor driving, tree farming, landscape architects, construction for the decks and patios and walkways in a garden. Fruit tree farmers. People who look after golf courses and commercial properties. People who work for cities and maintain the parks. Hiring a gardener is for wealthy people.

There was general understanding that it's a diverse industry, but the full range did not come out in the discussions, or in the questionnaires.

## **Summary**

*There is a reasonably thorough collective understanding of what 'ornamental horticulture' comprises – the kinds of companies that are part of it, the kinds of jobs that people within it have. People are aware generally that it is a big contributor to the economy but not that it is the number one agricultural sector and there was mixed awareness of the size of the export component – more surprise around the size of the US export business and less for the Canadian, probably not unexpectedly. There was certainly a level of enthusiasm and pride coming through when it came to BC's position in North America, and the world.*

*The public understands the concept that a locally grown plant is most likely to thrive because a) it was grown in this climate and b) it has not traveled far. There is enough 'support BC' sentiment that we can have confidence that communication programs designed to promote the industry and its benefits will succeed – there is no downside to ornamental horticulture, it's 'apple pie'.*

*The attitude that garden design, installation, maintenance and pest management can be done almost as well, or well enough, by homeowners is prevalent. While we see some level of 'you get what you pay for', it seems the public is more likely to hire out irrigation and hardscape, things they perhaps don't understand or classify as hard labour, than they are the garden component itself.*

*This DIY attitude does not apply to quite the same extent in the area of pest management – there was more willingness to call in the pros, and pay the price, however this is often after having had a go on their own.*

*On the brighter side, and good news for nurseries and retailers, the general public still likes to garden, seeing it as a healthy and immediately satisfying leisure activity.*

*There is also an overwhelming agreement on the fact that the environment needs to be sustained, and that everyone should do their part when it comes to gardening activity.*

*Generally the public understands that the services of a trained horticulturist do, and should, cost more than an untrained individual.*

*Awareness of which educational institutions offer horticulture programs is low. Only a very few were aware even of Kwantlen. This is the subject of an HEBC initiative currently underway.*

## **Observations & Suggestions**

1. An 'ornamental horticulture awareness' initiative would be of great benefit to all aspects of industry – labour recruitment and retention, garden image, any sort of 'buy local' domestic retail program, and the how and why of hiring professional landscape and pest management services.
2. While 'labour recruitment and retention', pest management accreditation and garden image initiatives are in the works, there would be great value in a separate 'buy domestic' program

*targeting the BC public, and incorporating much of the learning from the Export Marketing Strategy just completed.*

3. *Marketing strategies to get more people gardening are likely to succeed ('Get Gardening!', 'Go Gardeners' etc), and there would be any number of partnering opportunities to be had, even within just the BCLNA membership.*
4. *Environmental and sustainability messaging should be woven in to all communications.*
5. *An idea from this group – signs on lawns “Professional Horticulturist at Work”, as house painters do.*

#### **d. Perceptions of the BCLNA – Services, Activities, Publications**

- **Have you heard of the BCLNA? (used acronym)**  
Yes 26 (4 or 5 of the respondents are in a position to know – have a friend who works there, or in two cases, is a member)  
  
No 17
- **Have you heard of the BC Landscape & Nursery Association? (used full name)**  
Two or three knew it once the full name had been used – difficult with the questionnaires to fully assess the difference, but in the groups eyes lit up with the full name.
- **Where did you hear about the BCLNA?**
  - See an ad? 3
  - Read an article? 2
  - At a home or garden show? 6
  - Other? Driving by the building, works for government, works in industry, member of a garden related organization, member of BCLNA (2); there were several unspecified 'others'.
- **What would you think an association called the BC Landscape & Nursery Association does?**  
Responses were many and varied:
  - controls nursery quality – 2 mentions
  - ensures professionalism in the industry
  - promotes the landscape industry – 4 mentions
  - puts on the Home & Garden Show
  - goes to international trade shows
  - recommends landscapers to homeowners – 5 mentions
  - answers questions from the public - 4 mentions
  - is a resource to people in the business
  - encourages people to garden
  - promotes the businesses of people in the industry
  - advocates for members with government – 5 mentions
  - teach, professional development – 3 mentions
  - marketing, promotion of horticulture generally – 4 mentions
  - city planning
  - handles certification programs, licensing – 2 mentions
  - does research
  - community outreach
  - tries to get people to not DIY

Much of the input was correct, some partially right and other inputs demonstrates the lack of awareness of what the BCLNA is.

- **What kinds of issues or causes do you think the BCLNA gets involved with?**
  - Environmental/sustainability related 100%
  - Invasive plant 100%
  - Organic gardening 100%
  - Professional horticulture practice 93%
  - Safe pest management practice, for bugs, weeds and plant disease 79%
  - Horticulture education programs in the schools 72%
  - Post-secondary hort education 72%
  - Government/regulatory issues 47%
  - Selling plants 14%
  - Operating nurseries .5%

Additional mentions that BCLNA gets involved with monitoring nursery trends, finding locations for new ones and assisting with their marketing. For post-secondary information, BCLNA is seen as a 'source of info' by one respondent as opposed to getting involved.

Also, BCLNA directs the public to experts who can answer questions, functions like an industry better business bureau for the public, staff are available to answer the public's questions, and they probably have a very informative website.

- **Would you consider the BCLNA an authority on:**
  - Best gardening practices 100%
  - How to find a landscaper 100%
  - Horticulture education 100%
  - Lawn care 93%
  - Plant propagation/breeding 91%
  - Best ways to handle garden pests, plant disease, weeds 91%
  - How to select the right plant 70%
  - How to grow healthy plants 46%
  - Best gardening products (fertilizer, pesticides, tools, soil) 42%

Additional comments include helping find grants and scholarships, invasives, anything the public wants to call and ask about. One comment that information on gardening products would be better/more accurate and helpful at a garden centre.

- **Who belongs to the BCLNA?**  
Only the groups were asked this question – answers included nurseries, landscape architects, guys with trucks, companies, individuals interested in gardening, horticulture professionals who have the education, colleges, retailers.

- **Have you noticed the BCLNA logo? Where?**
  - magazines – 2 mentions,
  - garden shows – 2 mentions,
  - at nursery locations
  - on the front door 2 mentions,
  - back of trucks – 1 mention
  - on quotes from landscape companies
  - brochures at trade shows

In the Vancouver group, only 1 of 11 knew the logo and that was a member. In Langley, just 4 had seen it, and one said it was familiar, but couldn't place it.

- **When you see the BCLNA logo in a store, on a truck bumper, in a magazine etc what, if anything, can you assume about the company displaying it?**  
Two questionnaire respondents skipped this question and one group, Langley, did not go into detail other than to comment that the logo indicated credibility, possibly Better Business Bureau-type approval. Generally positive.
  - **Does it signify that the company has had to reach some level of competency in their particular business?**  
Seventeen answered yes – 50% of responses received.
  - **Does it mean that the company is ‘approved’ by the BCLNA? 23**  
23 said yes, 74% of those responding.
  - **Does it signify that the company is reputable, can be trusted? 19**  
19 yes, 61% of those responding.
  - **Does it mean that the company is ‘professional’? 20 seeking to be prof,**  
20 yes, 65% of those responding.
  - **Does it signify that the owner and employees of the company have a professional training in horticulture practices? 18**  
18 yes, 58% of those responding.
  - **Do you assume that you would get a better result hiring a company or visiting a garden store displaying the BCLNA logo, than from a company without? 9**  
Nine responding, 29% of those responding.
- **Other impressions?**
  - don't what criteria apply so not sure, doesn't have much weight
  - fees are paid
  - logo does not have an authoritative look
  - would hire a member over a non-member but don't know what the standards are, has no reputation yet
  - low key organization
  - signifies that the company displaying it is committed to quality and wants the world to see that, belongs to an organization to help make that point
- **What sort of publications do you expect the BCLNA puts out?**
  - flyers inserted in the paper
  - brochures – a rack of ‘how to’ pieces for homeowners they can come in and pick up
  - magazines for home gardeners
  - Beautiful BC magazine
  - material that promotes the members
  - research reports; affiliated with the universities
  - website
  - have never seen a mention of BCLNA in Gardens West
  - pamphlets at trade shows

Most respondents assumed that trade magazines, consumer magazines and technical reports of one type or another form the basis of what the BCLNA puts out.

## **Summary**

*Discounting respondents who would be in a unique position to know about the BCLNA, about half of respondents had heard of the organization by its acronym, and a further few once the full name had been articulated. Most had seen BCLNA's booth at a garden show and there were a few ad and article mentions.*

*The BCLNA is perceived as being an active participant in most aspects of the garden industry, including a few activities that it is not in fact involved with. While respondents generally understood that BCLNA advocates for industry and its members, it is also seen as providing gardening information for the public calling in, publishing general interest 'how to' gardening brochures, doing primary research, teaching and providing a referral service for homeowners looking for landscape services. In essence, the Association is viewed as a clearing house for all things gardening-related which, whether strictly accurate or not, is not a bad image to have.*

*The public largely understands that the BCLNA is not in the business of selling plants or operating nurseries and 100% perceive that it is involved with environmental issues including invasives and organic gardening. There is also a strong perception that the BCLNA puts on school programs and works in post-secondary horticulture education. Likely there is some confusion as to the roles of BCLNA and HEBC, if HEBC is even known to be an entity itself.*

*The notion of BCLNA functioning as a sort of 'Better Business Bureau' for landscape service providers is interesting – certainly the notion of the Association being concerned with quality, at all levels, is common.*

*The BCLNA logo has an extremely low level of awareness. However, likely having just been through a discussion about what the Association does, all of which is positive, there was a very clear opinion that a company displaying the logo must have the BCLNA seal of approval, provide better service, be more knowledgeable and trustworthy, creditable.*

*The public connects the BCLNA with all manner of gardening publications and printed advice material. Most interesting were the notions that it publishes plant research in conjunction with the universities, produces Beautiful BC Magazine and provides gardening advice brochures for the public. Again, while most of this is not true, it is not damaging, and does not require a 'fix'.*

## **Observations & Suggestions**

- 1. Considering how long the BCLNA has been in operation, its level of general awareness is quite low compared to organizations like the Law Society and the Real Estate Board, with similar missions in their respective fields.*
- 2. A public awareness program for the BCLNA, with a secondary objective of soliciting new members (potential members are part of the general public also), would have in its favour a very solid platform of understanding and acceptance going in.*
- 3. In that there are areas the general public accepts BCLNA as involved with, a future strategy for the Association might possibly consider one day expanding its mandate, in particular, to the preparation and distribution of gardening information to the public.*
- 4. The logo perceptions should be put in the bank – they are golden! The fact that a logo is understood to be an indication of quality and professionalism on the part of the member displaying it could not be better. A public awareness campaign connecting the logo on a truck or window, with quality, knowledge, professionalism etc should be explored as it would be very likely to succeed, creating a strong selling point for members.*

## 2. Industry

### **Methodology**

A discussion group consisting of active and inactive BCLNA members was convened at the BCLNA offices, and moderated by NK. Discussion involved only the section on BC's garden image.

Group 2            August 8            Industry            10 participant companies

Additionally, a questionnaire was emailed to a number of additional BCLNA industry members, and 5 were returned.

### **Results**

#### **Perceptions of BC's Current Garden Image**

- **What comes to mind when you hear the term 'garden image'? What does it mean to say a city or province has a 'garden image'?**  
Well cared for gardens, community pride in green spaces that get used, concern for environment. In the focus group, hanging baskets, manicured lawns, planting throughout the community were all named, and several communities specifically mentioned – Coquitlam, Fort Langley and Victoria.
- **What areas, anywhere in the world or close to home, do you believe have a garden image? What gives you that impression?**  
Kelowna and various Okanagan locales mentioned for the vineyards and orchards. Niagara Falls, Jasper, England, China, window boxes in Switzerland, La Conner, Holland, Seattle and Portland. Britain and Italy mentioned as old cultures with centuries old traditions of valuing horticulture – Chelsea Flower Show. Germany and New Zealand. Victoria for the hanging moss baskets.
- **What are the benefits of an area having a strong garden image? Are there benefits other than attractiveness?**
  - property values increase; people drawn to re-locate
  - vandalism decreases; community feels more secure
  - encourages a healthy outdoor lifestyle
  - pride of ownership
  - encourages homeowners to keep up their gardens, lawns, take pride; it's contagious
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> generation newcomers usually more interested than 1<sup>st</sup>
  - social and spiritual benefits of just doing it, regardless of what the result actually looks like
  - tourist draw

Good general understanding that there are benefits beyond the visual.
- **Do you think BC has a strong garden image?**
  - **Why/why not?**
  - **What areas in particular do?**
  - **What areas do not?**

Responses here were mixed, with most people feeling BC does not have a particular garden image. Several felt that certain areas of the province do – Kelowna, Manning Park, wine country, part of the Island. One mention that BC has a strong garden image because of the growing climate.

The interior was named by one person as specifically *not* having a garden image, and Parksville, west side of Vancouver Island and Victoria by another. And misunderstanding the question, one person added that Washington, DC and Hawaii have strong garden images.

- **Does your community in particular have a strong garden image?**
  - **If so, is living in an attractively planted, garden-oriented community a source of pride for you, as an industry insider?**

Some specific communities were mentioned. Fort Langley with its focus on waterwise gardening is generating some notice. Abbotsford is trying, but there are too many cedars and not enough colour. If more municipalities did this it would spread. Kitsilano and Vancouver East side have some great gardens, small and larger. PoCo has an amazing downtown core. You know a community has a good image when people are out on the street chatting, and feel pride, enjoying the parks and relaxing. Nanaimo is improving.

Members of the industry have often donated plants to do just this – give an area a garden image for the public to enjoy – there is pride in association with a community that values quality of life.

In a community that is garden-oriented, clients want more, and that's good for business.

- **What does a community need to do to have a strong garden image?**

Lots of participation here:

  - municipalities should take the lead and encourage homeowners
  - hang baskets on main streets, prepare floral welcome signs, have a contest and provide maps so public can drive around and visit the nice gardens (like Christmas light displays), Whistler does this
  - garden clubs can coordinate tours in their specific area – rose tours, rhodo tours etc
  - cities should set some minimum standards and challenge homeowners to develop their own garden plans
  - elementary schools could use some budget for this
  - cities should invest in projects that increase the number and quality of landscapes, create 'horticultural happiness'
  - you need something right outside a town so when someone drives in, they get the idea
  - cities should have public seminars and courses, more parks and green spaces
- **Should taxpayer dollars be used for community beautification projects such as public garden planting, baskets, planters in public areas etc?**

Overwhelming yes; in commercial areas people thought businesses should contribute also. Need programs in place to educate about gardening, and to implement garden projects. There should be emphasis on longer term sustainable landscape projects, not just garden projects that look good for a few months.

Communities need champions who can get the ball rolling; have garden initiatives in the schools; plant up the interchanges like in California. Gibsons does a good job of planting up small areas for people to enjoy.

Funds could go to the garden clubs and groups and they could do the actual work. There can be union problems when the public starts to work on public areas and that can be frustrating if you're just trying to help.

- **Should homeowners be expected to take responsibility for maintaining their own yards and gardens attractively?**

If the public sees that the municipality values landscapes then they will too. Too many munis lack the will or knowledge to ensure that what is put in, will last. There are bylaws to ensure

that certain numbers of trees are planted in new developments but no criteria as to future size, and often these fail.

In Blaine there are fines if lawns are uncut. Same with Morgan Creek and Elgin Park – there are outlines as to what is acceptable maintenance. Have to find a happy medium between ‘forcing’ and ‘encouraging’ homeowners to maintain their yards.

General consensus is yes. A few mentioned the distinction between ‘tidiness’ and ‘attractive’, the latter of which can be subjective.

- **What do you think about BC’s garden image as one of the reasons for tourists to visit?**
  - **Do you think the Province currently uses ‘garden image’ as a reason to visit?**  
Most respondents did not feel BC uses this currently; but Victoria does. BC needs to do a better job, with Olympics coming so people will come back. Promote the green roof at the new convention centre. Peace Arch border is nice. Dart’s Hill mentioned.
  - **What particular features/areas/attractions should tourists see?**  
Should be encouraged to get out and about the Province. See the Interior desert, not just Vancouver and Stanley Park. Parks, private garden tours.
  - **If you don’t think BC’s garden image is a viable reason for visiting BC, what should we do to earn a reputation as a strong garden-oriented area?**
    - big blast of budget for a huge summer floral display of annuals
    - get more political commitment, and capital, and fund big projects like an interior botanical garden, or one in Langley Township where there is already a green space mandate; and other public spaces with horticultural heritage
    - more advertising

(many did not answer this particular question)
- **What role, if any, should the horticulture/garden industry play in furthering BC’s garden image?**
  - Lobby for more marketing dollars. Linking key stakeholders and trying to influence from the ground up.
  - Offer to do tours, workshops, present garden project ideas to tourism people
  - All industry should be involved in this – retail has the closest ties with the public
  - Require developers to hire garden planning consultants
  - Need rules for homeowners also, so they know what to plant and how to plant it
  - One comment that Vancouver inspectors are lenient
  - Sponsoring competitions
- **What role, if any, should the BCLNA/industry play in furthering BC’s garden image?**
  - Advise cities on the kind of plantings that will work for the long term; educate city parks workers in this
  - Check on developments to see what has been planted; developers usually just put in the bare minimum
  - Another supporter for more marketing dollars
  - Encourage that standards continue to be developed and enforced
  - One respondent felt BCLNA should not be involved at all in this
  - Continue promoting flower and food gardens and gardens that encourage wildlife to be present.
- **If you believe BCLNA does not have a role, elaborate.**  
No response to this question – most felt BCLNA does have a role.

- **Would a strong garden image in BC benefit your business directly? Explain.**
  - People would be more likely to hire landscapers.
  - More business for garden designers.
  - Members encourage people to improve their gardens by buying the right plants in our garden centres.
  - More work, more ideas, better understanding of quality and design; more interest in professionalism means more work. Should be preceded by some new bylaws.
  - One respondent does not sell in BC so is not personally affected.

## **Summary**

*As would be expected, this knowledgeable group has a good appreciation of what constitutes a garden image and where in the world it is to be found, paralleling input from the general public.*

*They demonstrated a good understanding of the benefits of an area having a strong garden image in terms of their own businesses and the greater social and health-related good, but had mixed responses as to whether BC in fact has one. The interior it is felt does not have a garden image, while Vancouver Island, Fort Langley, Kitsilano, PoCo and Nanaimo do. Strong understanding that when a community is oriented to gardening, sales increase for all commodity groups because of the pride of association that is created, the desire to 'keep up'.*

*The industry group suggested a number of things that communities can do – garden tours, homeowner challenges, municipal support for schools wishing to develop their landscapes. They are in favour of more seminars being made available to the public, and generally more designated park space. There is frustration that so many landscape projects and installations fall into disrepair, or outright fail, after a short time, due to a lack of knowledge, lack of care, lack of funds on the part of developers and municipalities. Suggestions around garden clubs getting involved – fund them and they can do some work.*

*Strong agreement that leadership needs to come from the municipalities – setting the example first and foremost, and finding a way to encourage rather than force homeowners to do their part, while teaching municipalities how to do theirs. More marketing dollars are required.*

*The group did not feel that BC leverages what garden image it has for promoting tourism, currently, but agreed that there was much that could be promoted now, and more that could be developed and promoted in future.*

## **Observations & Suggestions**

*There seems to be a great deal of appetite on the part of industry to get involved in building up BC's garden image, and the knowledge that goes with it.*

*There is a willingness to do tours and seminars, an understanding that homeowners need some education, and recognition that the retail group is probably the first point of contact for most of the general public. Industry has often donated plants to community landscape projects as a goodwill gesture.*

*Municipalities also need educating and need to put in some bylaws with teeth – there seems to be willingness on the part of industry to participate in this. This would go hand-in-hand with a requirement for developers to engage horticulture consultants.*

*As for a role for BCLNA, most respondents did not feel there is a specific role for the Association – suspect this really means active role. It is suggested that BCLNA create a framework within which a select group of industry representatives could work. Possibly this would entail creating a new committee – Community Outreach, Community Liaison, Community Education or similar as the issues deemed important fall entirely within the Mission and Vision of the BCLNA.*

### 3. Civic Municipal Officials, BCRPA

#### **Methodology**

Survey was emailed to approximately 50 civic, municipal contacts, plus individuals involved closely with CiB. Several questions were altered slightly in order to serve some specific needs of CiB. 13 questionnaires were returned, and analyzed by NK. Questionnaire involved only the section on CiB.

#### **Results**

##### **Perceptions of 'Communities in Bloom'**

- **Have you heard of a program/event called 'Communities in Bloom'?** <sup>1</sup>  
Unanimous yes, as expected.
- **Does the name 'Communities in Bloom' make sense to you, given what the program is?**  
Seven answered yes. Three qualified 'yes', and three 'no' with comments including: people think it's just flower baskets and gardens, does not adequately describe the program, should say something about quality of life.
- **Has your community ever participated in Communities in Bloom? Yes/no**  
100% yes.
- **If so, did you or your department get personally involved? Yes/no**  
12 'yes' and one 'no'. The 'yesses' included parks, public works, admin, leisure, culture, tourism, the CiB committee itself including the chair, and economic development.
- **Do you feel it was a positive experience for your community? Can you elaborate?**  
12 of 13 said 'yes'. One said 'yes and no', stating that the community didn't really get involved. Another mixed response stated that it was hard for staff to take on the workload.  
  
'Yes' comments:
  - everyone was proud of our community - the committee, garden contest entrants and BIAs and were proud to show it to the judges and have it seen by tourists
  - enjoy living in a community that cares how it looks
  - great response from volunteers and street businesses
  - volunteers helped with tidying up public and private properties
  - was impetus for many new community projects, and allows us to inventory past ones
  - fosters pride, participation
  - economic impact of a beautiful town that tourists want to visit (Summerland)
  - increases safety in the town for residents and visitors
  - community pride, and gives everyone something to work for
  - allows communities to see what others do and stimulates further activity
  - just finished a non-judging year and are already planning for next year; we got great encouragement
  - city council and staff took judges suggestions to heart
- **What kind of activities would it make sense to include in Communities in Bloom, in addition to the competition?**
  - commemorative tree program
  - tree inventory
  - interpretive gardens
  - outdoor art
  - heritage projects

- Aboriginal projects
- community and neighbourhood challenges and contests
- add a non-judging category that would still include the workshops
- the competition is work enough!

One respondent suggested a PowerPoint CD presentation to encourage other communities to get involved.

- **Do you think there is value in your community participating?**  
100% yes.
- **Should there be more value added benefits such as horticulture education, tourism or economic development promotion to help each participating community? Which?**  
Suggestions included:
  - online forum for communities to discuss CiB related issues so as not to be struggling with things that another community might have already solved
  - consulting assistance for participating communities
  - any kind of help or training
  - provincial government recognition of winners for tourism promotion
  - more promotion of communities that win for economic development/awareness
  - partner with the BCLNA, Real Estate Board, BC Society of Landscape Architects
  - education for the general public, for their own yards
- **Would you like to see your community become involved if it hasn't been? Or stay involved if it has? Yes/no**  
All have been involved; all want to continue, a couple saying that as long as there's city support and help, they should do it.
- **What could your community do, in your view, to participate in the program?**
  - keep reviewing the criteria, and plan ahead
  - more involvement from Council for policy change assistance (this was not explained)
  - more education and more promotion
  - need more awareness of CiB
  - need more recognition for those involved
  - local government needs to be more involved to improve playing fields etc.
  - city needs to supply funds
  - get adequate support and volunteers, a good committee
  - build on past success
- **Would you like to see your community win? What would be the immediate benefit of a win?**  
Mixed responses here. Some unqualified yeses, but others felt that participating and getting some community spirit going is more important. Wide understanding of the economic and tourism benefits of having won.

Another benefit – the impetus to keep on improving – the competition is the catalyst and post-win a legacy committee could keep the momentum going.

One comment that the benefits are not in fact immediate, that it takes years to get somewhere.

- **What kinds of projects do you think communities could undertake as part of their participation, other than beautiful plantings in parks and public areas?**
  - environmental sustainability and conservation projects are critical
  - energy efficiency ideas, water conservation
  - new approaches to park maintenance and planning

- educational seminars for homeowners, the hort trade and businesses
  - assembly of documentation on best practices
  - product trials – like corn gluten for weed control, testing ground covers as turf replacement, testing low-mow grasses
  - litter clean-up, including abandoned vehicles
  - tree planting
  - somehow showcase the wine region along with CiB
  - shoring up creek banks
  - walks for seniors
  - BIA improvement contests
  - homeowner garden contests
- **Apart from your work life, would you personally be inclined to be involved, either as a volunteer for your community's submission, or simply in beautifying your own garden at home? Comment**

A couple of respondents did not answer this one, but those who did said yes on both counts.

There were a few comments about the joy of working in the garden, and the privilege of even having one. One suggestion that people would rather be out doing the project than meeting about it. Acknowledgement that CiB would not happen without volunteers.

- **To what extent do homeowners have a responsibility to maintain their own gardens/yards?**  
All but one said homeowners have a total responsibility, and that leading by example is better than pressuring them. Some people can't afford it, or aren't able to cut the lawn and garden. The CiB program is great for providing an example that can be copied by homeowners.
- **Do you feel that cities and municipalities have a responsibility to attractively maintain public parks and gardens, beyond just cutting the grass? Yes/no**  
100% yes, with the comment that this needs to be part of an effective municipal parks planning program because there are so many different aspects, from aging trees, to park usage.
- **What do you perceive to be the benefits to a community of participating in Communities in Bloom? Are there 'pay-offs' related to the beautification of a community?**  
Most respondents, not unexpectedly, make the connection between a beautiful well-maintained community and economic incentive and other benefits such as safety, community pride, community strength. Focuses bureaucrats on something positive; helps achieve municipal buy-in. Hard to quantify said one, just that communities do better when they look good. Citizens understand that the city officials can't do it all, and that they need to pitch in.
- Another good result is the cooperation required between different participating community departments, agencies etc.
- One respondent probably not understanding the question seemed to question why a number of run-down buildings in the town were still there.
- **Should the mayor and council designate one person to be on the local CiB committee?**  
Most said yes – caveat, it has to be someone who wants the job. It does mean more work for the committee if there is no civic rep in the group, or a rep who has been 'assigned'.
- **Should funds be available for community projects and to allow committee members to travel to workshops and awards ceremony?**  
Most said 'yes', one 'no'. No explanation.

- **Should council supply additional staffing from other departments such as Parks, Recreation or Tourism?**  
Three definitive 'nos', and the rest yes. Feeling here is that if it's affordable, fine, but there are more important things at the end of the day than CiB in the life of a town, and those things should get staff first.
- **Do you know of any other programs in BC that promote the idea of community development?**  
Mentions included:
  - Community Futures
  - Columbia Basin Trust
  - BC Hydro Regreening

No knowledge about evaluation reports. Most knew of no other programs.

## **Summary**

*This group was very CiB savvy and active – current and former committee members, municipal administrators from various participating communities, and their input is invaluable.*

*There is a common recurring theme throughout – that the general public is not aware:*

- *of Communities in Bloom*
- *of the full depth and scope of Communities in Bloom.*

*These are related, but different communications issues of course.*

*CiB is overwhelmingly seen as having a positive influence on participating communities from the intangible aspects of community pride and spirit, to the more concrete potential economic benefit. It is a 'win win' for all involved – it has no downside whatsoever. That said, it does take a great deal of work to coordinate in each community, and without solid support from the municipality, including manpower and funding, it is almost impossible to execute to maximum potential.*

*Any number of complementary programs can be woven into a CiB program, from art exhibits to community tree inventories to Aboriginal projects to guided walks for seniors to litter and graffiti clean-up. Anything concerned with the heritage and culture and beautification of a community, plant related or not, is in full harmony with the vision of CiB and goes well with the landscape aspect.*

*There is a need to elevate the visibility of the CiB program, with the general public of course, but also within government ranks at all levels. This is seen as potentially smoothing the way to increased funding, but it is also seen as a benefit to the Province in particular, for tourism promotion.*

*Respondents are keen to see other communities get involved, and see the value in communities having the ability to share experiences. There is also an appetite to develop an educational component for the program – this dovetails with comments above from industry.*

## **Observations & Suggestions**

*BC Communities in Bloom as it is now known is clearly in need of continuous operating income in order to allow for lobbying, awareness programs, initiatives designed to add cohesion to the various participating communities. The program is extremely well-managed, on a shoe-string, with BCLNA assistance.*

*As the new BC Communities in Bloom website evolves, the following may already be in consideration:*

- *email links to participating communities in a given year*

- *'testimonials' from past participants and winners*
- *expanded FAQ section*
- *chat function for participants – can ask questions and get responses*
- *video promoting participation, also in the form of a CD for mailing purposes*

*Additional considerations:*

- *provision of poster and ad templates to each community – ensure BCCiB branding is consistent; avoid duplicated effort and expense on the part of entrants; downloadable*
- *enhanced partnership strategy targeting horticulture industry; other than the BCLNA there are no traditional industry partners/sponsors such as the larger nurseries and retailers, the horticulture schools, environmental organizations, suppliers to industry (cognizant of potential conflict with the national group); support can be in the form of cash, endorsement and visibility in new venues such as on third-party websites; in-kind such as printing services, comp media space*
- *enhanced fund development strategy*
- *enhanced PR strategy*