

Intranet News: An Interview with Jerry – Part 2

Staff were invited to submit questions for our CAO, Jerry Dobrovolsky, to mark his first six months with Metro Vancouver; Internal Communications then interviewed Jerry for Intranet News. You can [view Part 1 here](#), and below, please find Part 2...



Above: Jerry's office... nice, albeit a little lonely. It hardly ever sees him...

1. *What do you see lies ahead for Metro Vancouver for the next 3-5 years, once we're on the other side of our immediate response to COVID-19?*

Metro Vancouver has done an excellent job on its long range planning. Strategic plan, financial plan, five year plan... I'm interested in understanding the implications to those plans as a result of COVID-19, and any opportunities that COVID-19 presents us in further advancing those plans. We need to think about what COVID-19 has meant for the region, as the impacts are considerable, and the numbers are sobering. 89% of BC's job losses, related to COVID-19, were within our region. These are primarily related to tourism, entertainment jobs, restaurant industry... There are many challenges with COVID-19, and there are also opportunities. What we're doing right now is looking at how we're going to address those challenges, and capture opportunities as well. We've scheduled a Board workshop for June 5th, to discuss that exact question... we need to think about what are the lasting impacts of COVID-19 for the organization, including what's changed for the region, once on the other side. There are both challenges and opportunities within the pandemic, and we really want to capture and address both.

We need to continue to deliver on our Board [Strategic Plan](#), and make significant inroads on affordable housing and climate change. I see us demonstrating environmental stewardship in everything we do. I want us to truly lead the pack in this realm.

2. Q. When you joined Metro Vancouver, I'm sure you had some clear ideas and visions for our organization – what impacts or changes (if any) do you see for these ideas and visions given the COVID-19 pandemic?

I think it's about looking at priorities, and being really clear about priorities in the short term and long term as well. It's clear what we are working with in terms of the financial realities, and we will need to keep this in the forefront as we move forward. And either I'm woefully in denial, or just very optimistic, but I don't think that the COVID-19 pandemic really changes my overall vision for the organization; it *does* change the route and the pace for how we get there. I do think this could present a really unique opportunity, not only for the organization, but globally, for us to reset and pivot a bit more quickly. I recognize that the pandemic could also mean, when it comes to pursuing our vision, that some things are delayed because of the fiscal realities of the economy. For me, it doesn't change the destination, it just changes the course, about whether we are moving faster or slower. The route might be different and timelines might be different.

The other piece is around innovation... we have an opportunity to continue to really explore this... how can we make ourselves more efficient, more effective, and a world leader in all that we do? And given the fiscal realities of what we're dealing with, not just as an organization but globally, we will have to use innovation, synergy and leveraging of our talents to achieve our work in the most effective way.

3. Can you tell us a little bit about why you were interested in coming to lead MV?

The work at Metro Vancouver fascinates me, in terms of the portfolio. I've mentioned before that I feel that Metro Vancouver could be four organizations in one. And so the work is really compelling, but even more than that, it's so meaningful to the region. The 2.6 million people that live here – we don't just touch their lives, we are *fundamental* to their lives, each and every day. From the moment they wake up and turn on the tap to brush their teeth, to the time they go to bed... and through the course of their day, they will have been touched by multiple areas of our organization and our services.

The fact that Metro Vancouver is responsible for providing stewardship to over half of the province's population is incredible. Our watersheds, our parks, our air quality, our housing, our water and wastewater, our solid waste services... we have the ability to make a real difference to this region; this region that we love. People care deeply about the region and their neighbourhoods, their communities, and the region as a whole. There are so many special places around the region, and so many of these special places, we are the stewards of. My other interest was that even with the incredible work that we do, the Board's clear interest in wanting to make this even better. Not only to continue to provide our core services to continue to make our quality of life as high as it is, but the desire to do even more about climate change, and to do more for those that are struggling by acknowledging the housing crisis and by doubling down on our housing strategy and being a big part of the housing crisis solution. This organization and the work we do is fundamental to all of those things... It's fundamental to all of our lives here in the region. The work is fascinating *and* it is so meaningful to our region. I wanted to be part of that team. I wanted to contribute to that work, to be part of all of that with you.

4. Jerry, what site or area of our organization do you feel that you know the least about right now? What are you most curious about staff working in that area?

Probably my office because I spend no time there, but I know this conference room really well! And some of the meeting rooms, committee rooms, board room. *(Editor's note – he's either really, really tidy, or it's true that he's never in his office. Never seen a cleaner one!).*

But in all seriousness, I'm really interested in the work in our field, and getting out there more. It's my goal to get out soon. I spent 10 years working in operations, and I would really like to spend more time there, and see that side of Metro Vancouver. I had plans to get out to visit our sites and as many of our staff as possible, and that has changed as a result of COVID-19. I hope that as restrictions gradually lift, I can do so and already have a plan drawn up for me to do so.

Recently, I went to the 14th floor for a meeting with our O&M team in Liquid Waste Services. The Director, Sean Smyth, told me that, "We've never had a CAO come to our floor for a meeting before; thank you for that." That really meant something to me – there's no excuse for me, as a CAO, not to get out and about, particularly when it just involves an elevator ride. I hope to see many more of you, at your respective sites, soon. Invite me!!!

5. What's our biggest opportunity here at MV?

I think the biggest opportunity is capturing synergy amongst our departments. We have such a broad organization with so much work going on; there is an opportunity for tremendous synergy. For example, when we look at liquid waste as a renewable energy, and how that relates to environmental habitats... and what partnerships we can make with others to drive a housing agenda. How can we put a climate and resiliency lens to all of our work, without treating it as a separate stream of work?

And, we have an opportunity to both capture and leverage the synergies and opportunities between our various departments, despite, and because, of us having the many different functions. Examples include leveraging technology, contract efficiencies, water effluent/wetlands supporting parks, and more.

6. What type of working culture is important to you? How do you see fostering that culture at MV?

Having fun is important to me. That's probably not the first thing, but it is important. Maybe for working culture, it's around a sense of team, and that everybody understands how their role contributes to the success of the organization. It entails having a really clear path and common understanding as to how their work contributes to the organization's success. At my previous workplace, for example, our summer students came on board and worked as traffic counters, where they literally sat in a lawn chair in the heat of the summer, with exhaust fumes all day, counting cars, counting bikes, counting pedestrians. I'm sure that at times it seemed like such a mind-numbing, dreary job. But we always did a big presentation for them, and showed them their data, and how what they gave us helps complete this big picture; their data showed how much sometimes controversial initiatives, such as bike lanes, were working. In the presentation, we also included a clip of me being grilled by city council on bike lanes, around whether or not they were effective. And through the data they collected, we were able to see the specific increases for overall cycling. We could put a gender lens on it and see how dramatically cycling increased for women and girls. We could put an age lens on it and see that both children and seniors were cycling more. All of that data went to

council and saved the day on that initiative, and it came directly from those students collecting that data. The numbers they provided really, really mattered; their work really mattered. And I think that's important – that they knew that their work mattered, and it supported the mission of the organization. That the culture was aligned around a common purpose.

It's also really important to me that in addition to knowing and understanding how they contribute to the organization's success, that people 'enjoy the doing'. I want staff to have fun, to treat each other well, and have a balance in their lives, so they can do their best at work, because they have fulfilled lives. Every day when I wake up, I am honestly excited about coming to work, coming to work at Metro Vancouver and to do what we do. If I wasn't excited, I wouldn't be doing it. That's not to say that there aren't hard times, and there have been hard time at different points throughout my career. I'm exhausted at the end of the day each day, but that's good too – it means I put myself into the work. I want everybody in the organization to be excited about the work they do. Life is way too short to spend your work week doing something you don't enjoy; feeling like it's a drudgery. The greatest gift you can have is to enjoy your work. My dad was an immigrant, and when he first came to Canada, he spent some time working in a sawmill. He worked on a green chain line. His entire job was picking up a board and putting it down, then picking up another one and putting it down. He did that for 8 hours a day, 40 hours a week, for years. He said there was a clock above the sawmill floor, and that he would watch the clock, all day long, just wishing the hands to turn. And he's sworn to me that sometimes the hands were going backward. He drilled into me that the most important thing is that you enjoy your work, that it's enjoyable. And, what I've learned, and what I would add on to that, is that the work is meaningful. And that's a big part of me coming to Metro. I can make the work enjoyable. But meaningful is what the organization does.

Our work is meaningful. Maybe we, as the executive team, can create a culture that people 'enjoy the doing.' We can create a culture, and staff can also create the culture. And the gift is that the work is already meaningful, because of all we do, serve, and provide.

7. You've been a CFL football player, City Councillor, City Engineer, CAO. What has been the most fun, and why?

It's all been really fun. I don't know if this is too cliché, but I think it's kind of what you make it. I guess that relates to the 'enjoy the doing.' All of those jobs, each one, have had times when they were incredibly stressful, and I felt immense pressure. And I think what I realized is that you have to bring a positive mindset to it so you have fun. I had a moment of epiphany about this, during my CFL days.

In the CFL, I was fortunate to be in the first draft overall, straight out of university. I went to Calgary to play for the Stampeders; there was a huge pressure as I was supposed to be one of the saviors. We were meant to bring home the Grey Cup. And I went straight from studying for college to the CFL. I put myself under so much pressure.

Fast forward, well we didn't win the Grey Cup. And to no surprise, I got traded after 2 years, to Montreal. When I went to Montreal, after my experiences in Calgary, I didn't know how long I would be there for. In football, you only get paid one week at a time. (How's that for job security!) I was already married to my wife Lindsay, and I said to her, that I'm going to make sure that if I get cut tomorrow, we've seen the city and enjoyed our time here. We got out and about and acted like

tourists in the city and I relieved myself of some of the pressure I had placed myself under. And I ended up playing more in Montreal for the Alouettes than I played in Calgary. I also enjoyed the game more and I had a better balance.

It was the same thing as a City Councillor for New West. I found that I was using my mind too much with every report, every decision. I kept thinking about the impact of my votes. “If I vote yes on that, the youth will be happy, but the seniors won’t”. Or, “If I vote yes on that, the people who live in the ‘rich’ neighbourhoods will be happy, but others won’t”. I was crushing myself with the consequences of all of the decisions. My head was going to explode. So I finally decided to read the reports, consider the decisions that had to be made, and to do what I thought was right, and then I would explain what I was doing, and why. When I took this approach, a huge weight lifted off my shoulders. I could make my decision, cast my vote, provide transparency as to why, and move on. What I ended up finding was that when I did, I got tons of good feedback. I ended up, strangely enough, becoming more accepted for trying to do what I thought was right, and explaining it each step of the way. A common piece of feedback I would get is, “I don’t agree with you on that, but I respect your explanation as to why and so I will vote for you.”

It was the same thing as a City Engineer. I often had to do something for the organization where I would carry a lot of responsibility as being responsible for the safety of our infrastructure. I had several times in my career where I had to say that “this is what I think is right,” and this is what I believe in, and why. Council could agree or disagree, and they had the right to do so and could vote as they chose, but my recommendation didn’t change. And that’s what we, as staff, get paid for, is to give good advice. I know that there is a cliché about “speak truth to power,” but this is really critical and it can also be really hard. But if you believe in this, as I do, it also keeps things really, really, simple. Not doing that sends you into a spiral that’s hard to recover from. And not doing it you lose your integrity. And so that’s what I try to bring to Metro Vancouver. I say and do what I think is right and explain why I think it’s right. I probably haven’t answered the question. But in doing what I think is right, and by being transparent about it, it gives me the freedom to enjoy all of my roles.

Thank you Jerry!