

Coping with the city's continued growth

Forum to examine how innovation will shape urban design

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Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Phillip Abrary, President & CEO, Ostara Nutrient Recovery Technologies Inc.

Photograph by: Vancouver Sun, PNG Merlin Archive

Phillip Abrary and Gordon Skene are making money from the waste you flush down the toilet.

And unlike urban planners and politicians who worry about the steady migration of people to urban environments, they're happy because it only means their waste-recovery inventions are needed that much more.

Abrary's company, Ostara Nutrient Recovery Technologies Inc., and Skene's Paradigm Environmental Technologies Inc., will be at this week's Cities Summit, a City of Vancouver-sponsored forum looking into ways cities can cope with the growth anticipated over the next four decades.

Ostara and Paradigm have complementary technologies that are taking a bite out of the waste produced in municipal waste water treatment facilities.

Ostara sifts out nutrients from waste sludge, producing high-value, slow-release phosphorus for fertilizer. Paradigm produces biomass energy from the same sludge, reducing the amount that has to be trucked away for disposal. Both are based in Vancouver.

"Cities are huge sinks for nutrients," Abrary said. "All the nutrients, all the food we generate are

consumed in these cities and it is a great central location to recover those nutrients."

The summit is the brainchild of Mayor Gregor Robertson, who tasked his Vancouver Economic Commission with organizing an international conference looking at how city-building will be influenced by, and can influence, emerging technology.

More than 3.5 billion people live in urban centres around the world, and by 2030 that number will rise by another two billion, according to the United Nations. The world's cities aren't really capable of supporting that now, Robertson said.

"The future of our planet depends upon a very innovative approach to building cities," he said.

"We're seeing massive urbanization across the world and in building infrastructure there has to be a new generation of clean, efficient and smart technologies in order for us to prosper. We are at the dawn of a whole new era of people living in cities and having to reduce their impact on the planet."

At first blush, the conference may look like a smaller version of the massive GLOBE conference that comes to Vancouver every other year. In March, GLOBE, billed by its organizers as "one of the world's largest and longest-running events dedicated to business and the environment" will be back in town with 10,000 delegates and more than 400 companies.

But Robertson said his Cities Summit, which is drawing about 400 delegates, is targeted toward how local governments deal with the looming migration of people to their cities.

"Cities and entrepreneurs often work in bubbles and don't often have the time or bandwidth to see what is happening next door or across the ocean," he said. "We're drilling down on cities and infrastructure and technology that is emerging at a city scale."

Lee Malleau, the chief executive officer of the economic commission, says the conference is already "well in the black" and will likely be an annual affair. The estimated \$250,000 cost is being covered from sponsorships and ticket sales. Taxpayers won't be responsible for any cost, she said.

Speakers include Kansas City Mayor Sly James, Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi, representatives from tech giants IBM and Google, venture capital companies, Simon Fraser University Chancellor Carole Taylor and local academics.

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