

Nomination for the PWABC Distinguished Service Award

Cheryl Nelms

Deputy General Manager
Engineering Services

Submitted by Jerry Dobrovolny
General Manager, Engineering Services
City of Vancouver





Cheryl Nelms, Deputy General Manager, Engineering Services

Nominating Cheryl

It is my honour to nominate Cheryl Nelms for the 2019 PWABC Dedicated Service Award.

Cheryl is a role model, a committed leader in public works, and an inspiration to both young and seasoned women in our industry. Over her 20-year career, she has consistently taken on significant leadership roles at all levels of government, delivering innovative public works projects of great complexity, and driving the practice of high-quality infrastructure delivery. Throughout all her work, Cheryl deeply values the contributions of those who operate, design and build public infrastructure.

At the same time, she has made it a lifelong priority to lift up women and immigrants, championing their strengths and providing real pathways for them to level up and increase their involvement in delivering public works. As a female leader in a male-dominated field, Cheryl is a true trailblazer, demonstrating every day with her dedicated work that women are leaders and can truly accomplish great things.

City of Vancouver accomplishments

Cheryl is a professional engineer who is currently the Deputy General Manager, Engineering Services at the City of Vancouver—a department of over 2,100 employees that oversees \$800 million in annual budgets, and is responsible for about 70% of the City's \$25 billion worth of assets. Previously, she held senior executive roles in the federal department of Public Works Government Services Canada (PWGSC), and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

In her current position, Cheryl has continually driven improvement of public works delivery for the City of Vancouver. She successfully led the largest change initiative in Engineering Services through formalizing a project management framework and creating a Project Management Office (PMO). The PMO has modernized project and quality management practices allowing significant improvements in the ability to leverage the competencies of design and operational staff. As well, under her leadership, I am proud to report



Under Cheryl's leadership, the City was the first municipality in British Columbia to have achieved Organization Quality Management certification for its Engineering Services department by the Engineers and Geoscientists British Columbia (EGBC).

that the City of Vancouver's Engineering Services department was also the first municipality in British Columbia to have achieved Organization Quality Management certification by the Engineers and Geoscientists British Columbia (EGBC).

These achievements cannot be understated. Implementation of quality standards within a project management framework keeps City projects on schedule and within scope, and created standard processes where the City can consistently integrate the expertise from operations staff on constructability and feasibility of projects.

At present, Cheryl is putting her expertise to work

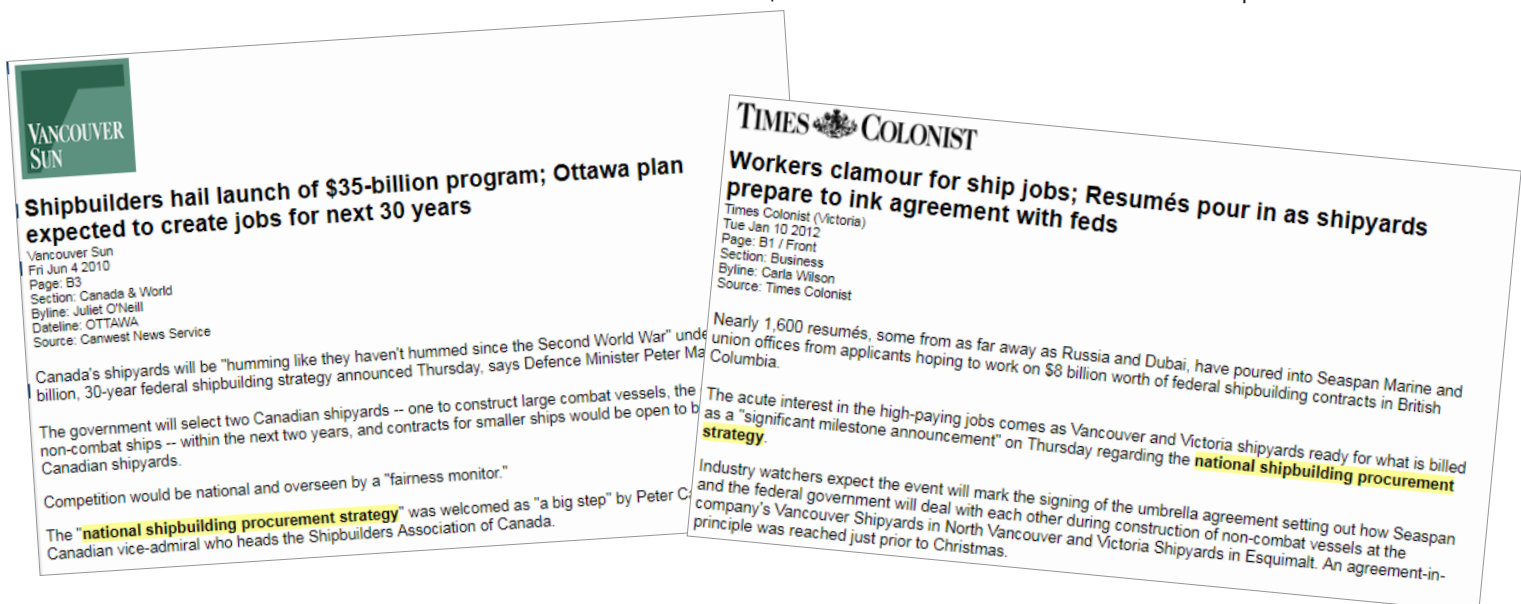
leading the City of Vancouver's engineering team on two major projects. The first is the \$2.8 billion Broadway Subway, where Cheryl plays a central role as a technical advisor to the procurement in a major city changing infrastructure project, balancing multiple stakeholder needs while maximizing the benefits for those in the City. The subway is a significant build through a densely populated urban area that will support continued growth in Vancouver's second largest employment centre and result in mobility improvements along the corridor.

In addition, she is also a key leader in the project to redevelop the Northeast False Creek, Vancouver's last waterfront destination area, which is slated to deliver \$1.7 billion in public benefits. This project has significant complex issues including coordinating interests of five land owners, demolishing the viaducts in downtown Vancouver, and replacing the viaducts with an at-grade street network. The final plan will include 32 acres of new and renewed parks and open space, and thousands of new homes for Vancouver residents, including 1,800 units of social housing.

Beyond Vancouver

Before coming to the City, Cheryl's last major project for the federal government included renovation of the parliament buildings in Ottawa and developing a district energy system connecting over 100 buildings across the city of Ottawa.

She was also instrumental in developing the \$966-million RCMP E Division headquarters in



On the PWGSC Shipbuilding project, Cheryl developed a procurement strategy aligning to fair and transparent processes for the largest acquisition project in federal government history. The project developed a continuous build strategy to rejuvenate the shipbuilding industry in Canada, and Cheryl worked to balance intense security requirements while ensuring that value for money was delivered, with enormous economic benefit for the regions.

Surrey, and in the \$35-billion PWGSC Shipbuilding Procurement, a national shipbuilding strategy that was the largest acquisition project in federal government history.

Throughout her full time professional career as an engineer, Cheryl has also continually engaged in intensive academic work to improve her work in the field. She studied part-time in Civil Engineering first to acquire her masters on the application of sustainable technologies in buildings, then achieved a PhD in 2012 on the study of managing risk in major infrastructure projects.

Fostering diversity in public works

Finally, Cheryl is passionate about diversity and inclusion in public works, and seeks out real ways to assist women and immigrants to enter and lead in the infrastructure profession whenever possible.

Her impact at the City of Vancouver is enormous. Cheryl made it a key priority to improve the number of women hired in Engineering Services, culminating in the launch of the first departmental diversity and inclusion action plan in May 2019. Her efforts have seen a 46% increase in the number of women

employees in the department between 2016 and 2019.

In 2016, Cheryl also reinstated an Engineering mentorship program in both design and operations to support retention and development of staff. In a report back, 95% of mentees said that guidance from their mentor specifically helped them make progress towards their career goals.

And most recently Cheryl successfully spearheaded the Women Deliver Legacy project in 2019—an unprecedented proposal securing a City site for a women's housing and services project, plus over a quarter-million dollars in City funding for programming to raise awareness of gender equity issues.

Created to amplify the outcomes of the 2019 Women Deliver conference in Vancouver—the world's largest conference on gender equity issues—the housing project will support a significant unmet need for affordable housing with supportive services in Vancouver geared towards Indigenous women, and construction of the project itself will be led by female public works staff and tradespeople.

The gender equity programming, implemented in June 2019 in parallel to the Women Deliver conference, included four days of free public



Photos from the Women Deliver Satellite Sessions spearheaded by Cheryl. This free four-day public conference featured more than 20 sessions on gender equity with over 60 speakers, and ran in parallel with the global Women Deliver conference in Vancouver.

workshops and panel discussions to raise awareness of issues related to the importance of women's roles in infrastructure, disaster and resiliency planning, and a City showcase of women in trades to inspire young girls into the profession. Over 5,000 people attended the events.

Beyond her immediate workplace, Cheryl also dedicates significant time to diversity efforts in her profession and community, including:

- » Serving as Director on the board of MOSAIC, a major Vancouver non-profit that helps immigrants and refugees integrate into Canadian society;
- » Supporting the successful proposal funded by West Coast Women in Engineering Science and Technology to help pre-landed Women Engineers through an Online Pre-Arrival Services program;
- » Sponsoring a pilot project 'Innovating for Employment Success' to provide internationally trained professionals an opportunity to apply new skills on an employer-identified real world challenge; and
- » Initiating a partnership opportunity between MOSAIC and the Society for Canadian Women in Science and Technology to support skilled immigrants.
- » Founding steering committee member for the BC Chapter of the Women's Infrastructure Network, a national networking organization for women working in infrastructure,
- » Active in her profession on the EGBC Standing Award Committee—providing a much-needed female voice on awards selection and working on initiatives to increase the attraction and retention of women to the engineering profession.

Cheryl has also spent 10 years teaching graduate and undergraduate students at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and is an adjunct professor, where she has fostered growth in her profession by actively teaching and engaging with students, and by advising on the curriculum for engineering and project management programs – particularly for the new Masters in Urban Leadership at UBC – a joint program with the UBC Sauder School of Business.

She draws on her diverse network and purposefully invites female guest lecturers for both development opportunities to emerging leaders,



Students from UBC's Let's Talk Science summer program talk with female engineers about public works. The day-long visit was organized with Cheryl's support.

and exposing students to Canada's top female infrastructure leaders to broaden perspective in a male-dominated sector.

Personal notes

Cheryl is not only an accomplished engineer and leader—she is thoughtful, cheerful, and genuinely great to be around. She inspires others through her actions, is approachable and kind, and is incredibly generous with her time to students, colleagues, and social causes.

It is also worth highlighting that Cheryl is also a hands-on mother of three children under 10, and her lived experience continually demonstrates to the department that women with families can lead at work while balancing the demands of home life.

Taken together, Cheryl's body of work clearly demonstrates her passion and dedication to high-quality public works delivery. For over 19 years, it is clear she has committed her significant talents to improving public works to the best of her ability, in both delivering projects and encouraging a broader cross section of society to join the profession.

Cheryl is a role model and an outstanding professional in public works, and in my view, she is highly deserving of the 2019 Dedicated Service Award.

Thank you for your time and consideration.