

Executive Summary

The Cowichan 2050 Regional Collaboration Framework (the Framework) was initiated by the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) in September 2017. In part, the project grew out of the CVRD's 2016 Corporate Strategic Plan, which identified a need for a regional planning strategy or framework to support more "sustainable and coordinated growth and development in the region."¹

The Framework also grew out of the realization that by 2050, the Cowichan region will be a very different place. While the coming changes are uncertain, over the next 30 years we can expect our population to grow by at least 30%, potentially straining services and increasing development pressures across the region. It is also clear that the impacts of climate change—many of which are already being felt—will pose more serious challenges in the future, with a warmer, drier climate and more extreme weather events impacting everything from our water supply to our region's local economy. Climate change is also driving sea level rise, which will hit low-lying coastal areas particularly hard (by 2050, ocean levels are projected to rise 50 cm, or 1.5 feet). Other anticipated changes include an evolving local governance context as First Nations expand their land management authorities, capacities and opportunities; significant demographic shifts; and, a rising cost of living (see Textbox on page page 7).

Developed against this backdrop of change, and within a context of increasing interdependence and complexity, the Framework offers a way forward for local governments in the Cowichan region to:

- Build more collaborative regional working relationships;
- Improve communications and information sharing;

- Support more coordinated planning on critical, region-wide issues; and
- Establish clear and measurable indicators of progress around regional livability, sustainability, and resilience.

As both a process and a commitment, the Cowichan 2050 Framework provides a statement of recognition that cross-cutting challenges such as those associated with climate change adaptation and population growth (e.g., sprawl, service delivery) cannot be effectively addressed in isolation by any one local government or organization. Moreover, it presents a clear opportunity for the communities of the Cowichan region to take hold of the future by beginning the process of creating a more proactive, collaborative and collective impact approach to regional planning. A new approach will enable the Cowichan region to more effectively address current issues, plan for emerging challenges, and achieve significant and positive collective impacts.

The Framework currently includes the following three core components; it will be expanded upon and further developed as the process moves forward:

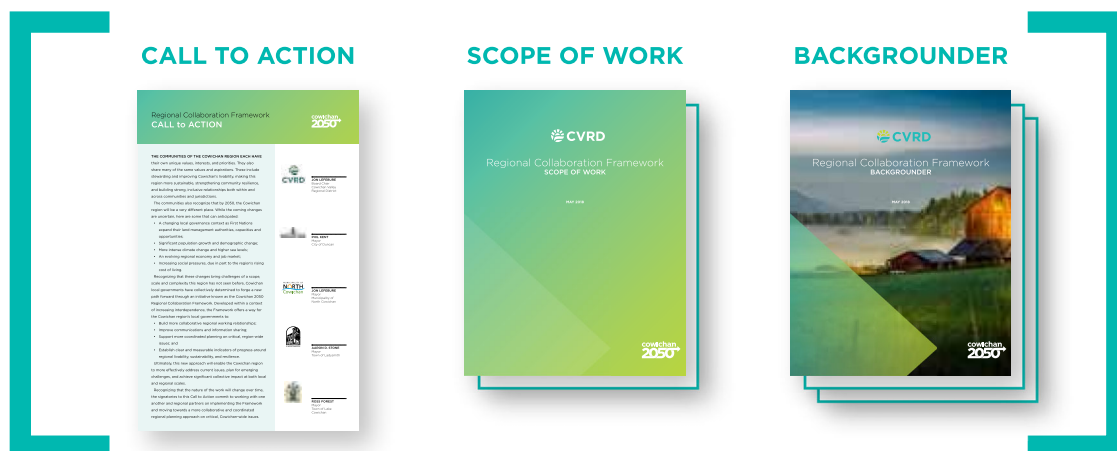
- **Cowichan 2050 – Call to Action:** A statement of commitment to regional collaboration that grounds the Framework and informs the collective and independent action necessary to protect and steward the Cowichan region going forward to 2050.

¹ Under the strategic focus area of "Excellence in Regional Land Use Planning."



- **Cowichan 2050 – Regional Working Group**
Scope of Work: A scoping document that provides some structure around how regional collaboration will take place moving forward².
- **Cowichan 2050 – Backgrounder** (this document): A regional “primer” that:
 - Identifies shared regional aspirations (sustainability, livability, resilience, relationships and reconciliation);
 - Characterizes Cowichan region issues and challenges;
- Pulls together common policy themes from CVRD, local government Official Community Plans (OCPs), and regional organizations; and
- Outlines opportunities for more proactive, collaborative action across different regional planning areas (e.g., Housing, Growth Management, Ecosystems and Biodiversity, Transportation, First Nations Relations and Reconciliation, Climate Change Adaptation).

FIGURE: Cowichan 2050 Regional Collaboration Framework - components



² Local government staff are core members of the Regional Working Group, but will be joined by First Nations, region-serving community organizations and other agencies and levels of government who have an interest in the Cowichan region and are a necessary part of any collective, collaborative action

While the CVRD, local municipalities and other regional players are already collaborating in many ways, there are also areas where collaboration and coordination has been limited at both the political and staff levels. Importantly, the two areas where regional collaboration is currently most limited are also the areas where coming changes are expected to be most significant:

- **Growth Management:** Effective growth management demands a regional perspective and lens. Currently, all municipal OCPs state their support for a regional growth strategy, while several of the Electoral Area OCPs include statements about how the impacts of growth are experienced on a regional scale. Growth management is clearly tied to several planning areas, notably ecosystems and biodiversity, transportation, services and infrastructure, and climate adaptation.
- **Climate Adaptation:** Given provincial legislation that emphasizes greenhouse gas (GHG) mitigation (i.e., reducing GHG emissions in communities and corporately), the past decade has seen less of a focus on adaptation than on mitigation at the local government level. However, as climate

change impacts become more apparent and hazards and risks from sea level rise and coastal flooding increase, there is a critical and pressing need to re-focus efforts on regional adaptation, to build on and increase the scope of adaptation work that is currently underway. Some possible next steps include undertaking a collaborative, region-wide climate vulnerability and risk assessment to better understand and link climate hazards across the region, and developing a coastal flood management strategy around sea level rise.

Other areas where there are unmet regional planning challenges and opportunities for additional collaboration include:

- **Ecosystem Stewardship and Biodiversity Conservation:** As one of the most biologically rich areas in Canada, the Cowichan is well known for the diversity and natural beauty of its ecosystems. Due to the interconnected challenges related to population growth, urban development, and climate change, these natural assets are currently under significant pressure, and more must be done at both local and regional scales to protect them. Opportunities include developing a

A “NEW REGIONALISM” APPROACH

Emerging and contemporary planning and governance challenges are often best addressed through the creation of cross-sectoral coalitions that can facilitate coordinated planning and action at multiple scales (neighbourhood, local, regional, etc.). Importantly, this work requires both interjurisdictional collaboration and the engagement of stakeholders from outside the local government realm, which in turn places new demands on local governments to develop the capacities necessary for successful collaborative governance.

The Regional Collaboration Framework recognizes these considerations. Its development was informed by an emerging approach to regional planning sometimes referred to in planning literature as “new regionalism.” Common elements of this approach include:

- *Focusing on governance, not government (i.e., establishing goals and setting policies to achieve them);*
- *Focusing on process instead of (organizational) structure (e.g., strategic planning, building consensus);*
- *Building cross-sectoral coalitions that vary with the issue being addressed*
- *Emphasizing collaboration and voluntary agreement; and*
- *Building trust as a binding element in relations among regional interests.*

Collectively, such a “new regionalism” approach will help develop a culture of collaboration at the staff and political level, and support the Cowichan region in better planning for and accommodating change and future challenges.