



STAFF REPORT TO COMMITTEE

DATE OF REPORT September 20, 2024
MEETING TYPE & DATE Committee of the Whole of October 9, 2024
FROM: General Manager
Land Use Services Department
SUBJECT: Regional Growth Strategy
FILE: 3270-80 Regional Planning

PURPOSE/INTRODUCTION

The Committee is asked to consider draft terms of reference for a Regional Growth Strategy and RGS Steering Committee, and budget for a Regional Growth Strategy and service feasibility study in 2025.

RECOMMENDED RESOLUTION

That it be recommended to the Board on October 9, 2024:

1. That the Staff Report to Committee of Whole of October 9, 2024, on the topic of Regional Growth Strategy be referred to the City of Duncan, Municipality of North Cowichan, Town of Ladysmith, and Town of Lake Cowichan and that the municipalities be asked to:
 - a. Appoint a representative to the Regional Growth Strategy Steering Committee;
 - b. Consider potential additional matters in the development of a Regional Growth Strategy, including but not limited to:
 - i. Potential municipal incorporation and boundary changes to accommodate future growth and servicing objectives;
 - ii. The future of the Island Rail Corridor and its connectivity with adjacent regional districts; and
 - iii. Cooperation with the Regional District of Nanaimo on future growth of lands in the vicinity of the Nanaimo Airport and Cassidy Aquifer.
2. That staff resources for a Regional Growth Strategy project be funded by requisition through the Function 100 (General Government) budget, with equivalent reduction in the Function 325 (Electoral Area Planning) budget, beginning in 2025.
3. That the 2025 budget for Function 100 – General Government include \$50,000 to conduct a Regional Planning Service Feasibility Study, funded by requisition.

BACKGROUND

Staff last reported to the Committee of the Whole on June 12, 2024. The Board on June 12, 2024, resolved:

1. *That staff develop a draft Request for Proposals for Consulting Services to develop a Regional Growth Strategy for the Cowichan Valley Regional District, through a partnering agreement, for Board consideration in Q3 2024;*
2. *That CVRD Communications staff prepare a news release acknowledging the receipt of Provincial funding to support the development of a Regional Growth Strategy, and develop content for publication on the PlanYourCowichan site;*
3. *That a letter be sent to all local First Nations Chiefs and Councils inviting input on the topic of regional planning and growth management;*
4. *That Action 2.1 of the CVRD Corporate Strategic Plan be revised to read: “Work collaboratively with member municipalities and First Nations towards the development of a Regional Growth Strategy; and*
5. *That a regional planning service feasibility study be undertaken to determine:*
 - a. *The purpose of the proposed service;*
 - b. *The scope of the service;*
 - c. *Funding mechanisms and arrangements;*
 - d. *Service delivery; and*
 - e. *Service governance*

following discussion on the Regional Growth Strategy.

The RGS would set a high-level policy framework for regional growth, and Official Community Plans would be amended to include a Regional Context Statement and for alignment with the RGS. The municipalities and CVRD would continue to deal with land use applications for their respective jurisdictions and would only engage the Regional Board if land use applications or other proposed OCP amendments would also require amendments to the RGS.

The Province of BC [“Regional Growth Strategies Explanatory Guide”](#) is a companion to the RGS legislation and provides details regarding the development of an RGS, regional context statements and implementation agreements.

ANALYSIS

Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) Initiation

The Board is required to follow specific steps to initiate an RGS, as outlined in Part 13 of the *Local Government Act (LGA)*:

- The preparation of a regional growth strategy must be initiated by resolution of the Board.
- If a regional growth strategy is to apply to less than the entire regional district or is to be prepared jointly with another regional district, this must be authorized by the minister.
- If, at the time of initiation, the Board proposes to deal with an additional regional matter under section 429 (3), the initiating resolution must identify the matter.
- The Board must give written notice of an initiation under this section to affected local governments and to the minister.

Unless requested by the Board, the RGS would apply to all electoral areas and municipalities. First Nations Reserves and lands within the Islands Trust Area would not be subject to the RGS as they are governed under other senior government legislation.

The RGS would apply to the specific matters noted in the *LGA* relating to housing, transportation, regional district services, parks and natural areas, economic development, and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Potential additional matters that have been identified through dialogue with CVRD and municipal staff include:

- Potential municipal incorporation and boundary changes to accommodate future growth and servicing objectives;
- The future of the Island Rail Corridor and its connectivity with adjacent regional districts;
- Interregional cooperation with the Regional District of Nanaimo on future growth of lands in the vicinity of the Nanaimo Airport and Cassidy Aquifer.

Member municipalities may wish to consider these and other additional matters, and may do so through Board referral of this report to municipal councils.

RGS Draft Terms of Reference

Staff have prepared draft terms of reference for a Request for Proposals (RFP) for consulting services to undertake an RGS (Attachment A). The terms of reference address legislative requirements and acknowledge that considerable work has previously been completed by the CVRD and member municipalities in the development of local Official Community Plans (OCPs) and also through Cowichan 2050. The RGS should attempt to integrate the respective goals and objectives of the respective OCPs while developing a regional vision and strategy for growth, for the benefit of the region as a whole.

A critical component of the work would be to establish a regional strategy to efficiently service growth. This would require an analysis of existing infrastructure (roads, sewer, water, drainage, etc.), identification of gaps, development of a comprehensive servicing strategy and mechanisms to effectively finance the infrastructure needed to support desired growth. This work would be cross-jurisdictional, requiring cooperation with municipalities and provincial agencies (i.e. MOTI), and would also involve engaging local First Nations to understand their interests and opportunities for collaboration.

Draft terms of reference for the RGS are attached (Attachment A) for the purpose of eliciting proposals from qualified consulting teams. The terms of reference may be refined following input from member municipalities and through discussion of the RGS Steering Committee.

It has been determined that a partnering agreement for an RGS is not necessary, provided the CVRD Board confirms budget under Function 100 – General Government through its annual budget process, commencing in 2025. More details are provided under the ‘Financial Considerations’ section of this report.

Steering Committee & Intergovernmental Advisory Committee

It is recommended that the project be guided by a Steering Committee of CVRD and municipal planning staff. The Steering Committee would be tasked with reviewing the RGS Terms of Reference and RFP processes, annual budget and workplan, and would work cooperatively to ensure success and accountability of the RGS project to the CVRD and member municipalities.

Representatives of the Steering Committee would be relied upon to liaise with the CVRD Board and municipal councils to ensure clear communication of respective interests, issues, opportunities, and RGS progress.

The Steering Committee should be formed at this early stage and should anticipate meeting at least bimonthly for the purpose of reviewing and refining Request for Proposals for contracted RGS work.

Upon initiation of an RGS, the Board is required to establish an Intergovernmental Advisory Committee (IAC) generally comprised of CVRD and municipal planning staff (which may be the same or different as members of the Steering Committee), and senior representatives of the Provincial government. While not a legislative requirement, it is recommended that local First Nations also be invited to participate in this committee. The Intergovernmental Advisory Committee serves a critical role providing a forum for technical staff to work together in partnership toward the development and implementation of the RGS.

The Steering Committee and Intergovernmental Advisory Committee may remain in place after the adoption of an RGS bylaw for the purpose of advising on RGS monitoring and reporting, annual RGS work program and budget development, and to guide RGS reviews (required at least every 5 years).

Draft Committee Terms of Reference are attached (see Attachment B).

Regional Planning Service

The Board may direct staff to budget for consulting services to undertake a Regional Planning Service feasibility study in 2025, under (regional) Function 100 – General Government. This work should be considered separate and distinct from the development of an RGS; RGS is simply one aspect of regional planning. A broader regional planning function could engage in activities such as regional housing, regional agriculture, regional active transportation, etc. (under the framework of a service establishment bylaw). The service feasibility study could also look at existing regional services with the intent to avoid duplication of services and potentially to achieve greater efficiencies in service delivery.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

\$500,000 has been allocated to the RGS through grants, with \$250,000 from the Province of BC and \$250,000 from CVRD Board (Growing Communities Fund).

RGS development will require external consultants (planning, engineering, GIS) and internal staff resources are expected to include 1.0 FTE RGS Manager and 0.50 FTE Administrative Support. External consultants would be funded primarily through the \$500,000 (grants). Total expenses for the RGS project are expected to exceed \$500,000 over the three-year period primarily due to the considerable technical work required in relation to engineering consulting in relation to water, sewer and drainage infrastructure planning.

Anticipated expenses for a three-year project, excluding staffing, are as follows:

Expense	Year 1 – 2025	Year 2 – 2026	Year 3 - 2027	Total
RGS Staff Coordination				Included
Planning/Engineering	\$200,000	\$100,000	\$200,000	\$500,000
GIS	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$150,000
Communications	\$50,000	\$100,000	\$50,000	\$200,000
	\$300,000	\$250,000	\$300,000	\$850,000

Year 1 figures correspond to activities expected to be completed in Phases 1 and 2 (see Attachment A – RGS Terms of Reference). Phase 2 requires significant technical/engineering assessments in relation to water/sewer/road/drainage infrastructure, and early engagement with local First Nations to understand their development interests and needs; it is critical to complete this work prior to engaging with the public and exploring growth scenarios.

Year 2 figures correspond to Phase 3 and the first half of Phase 4, focused on public engagement development/exploration of growth scenarios, and the beginning of strategy development.

Year 3 figures correspond to the second half of Phase 4, focused on RGS development and statutory bylaw process.

As the work would benefit the region, internal staff resources would be paid for regionally – by electoral areas and municipalities. For simplicity, staff recommend reducing staff budget in Function 325 – Community Planning and adding the equivalent staff budget in Function 100 (to cover funding for electoral areas and municipalities).

Upon adoption of an RGS bylaw, the CVRD Board would be required to provide an annual budget for RGS implementation and monitoring (with recommendations coming from the steering committee) and budget every 5 years (at least) for a review of the RGS.

COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS

Board direction has previously been given to issue a news release and develop content for PlanYourCowichan, and also to send letters to local First Nations Chiefs and Councils. Communications has indicated they will proceed with website and social media content delivery upon formal resolution of the Board to initiate an RGS.

STRATEGIC/BUSINESS PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

Action 2.1 Work collaboratively with member municipalities and First Nations towards the development of a Regional Growth Strategy.

Action 2.2 Explore options for re-establishment of a Regional Planning function.

Referred to (upon completion):

- Community Services (Cowichan Community Centre, Cowichan Lake Recreation, South Cowichan Recreation, Arts & Culture, Facilities & Transit)
- Corporate Services (Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Legislative Services)
- Operations (Utilities, Parks & Trails, Recycling & Waste Management)
- Land Use Services (Community Planning, Strategic Initiatives, Development Services, Building Inspection & Bylaw Enforcement)

- Strategic Services (*Communications & Engagement, Economic Development, Emergency Management, Environmental Services*)

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Reviewed for form and content and approved for submission to the Committee:

Resolution:

Corporate Officer

Financial Considerations:

Chief Financial Officer

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – RGS Terms of Reference (Draft)

Attachment B – RGS Steering Committee Terms of Reference (Draft)