

Report

Date February 19, 2025

File:

Subject Cowichan Valley Regional District Electoral Areas Draft Official Community Plan Referral

PURPOSE

To provide the Cowichan Valley Regional District draft Electoral Areas Official Community Plan to Council with an assessment of consistency with North Cowichan's policy context and current projects and provide formal comment to the CVRD in response.

BACKGROUND

At its regular meeting of January 15, 2025, Council received the referral of the Cowichan Valley Regional District's (CVRD) draft electoral areas Official Community Plan (EAOCP), with an invitation to provide comments back to the CVRD by February 21, 2025.

DISCUSSION

The draft EAOCP is a single consolidated official community plan for all areas of the CVRD that are not part of a member municipality or First Nations reserve. The EAOCP is the overarching vision for the area, including its evolution, future growth, character, and servicing requirements. It contains growth projections for each of the CVRD's nine electoral areas. It goes on to articulate a policy vision for each and incorporate statutory content such as sand & gravel deposit locations, road networks and maps/policies regarding different land uses. It makes scant mention of the CVRD's member municipalities and is focused on the local issues relevant to each electoral area. The prospect of a future Regional Growth Strategy is mentioned only once (Policy DCO.1).

The staff review of the document was not intended to provide a comprehensive critique of the effectiveness or desirability of policies therein except to identify where conflicts with North Cowichan's Official Community Plan (OCP) or interests might exist. No significant conflicts were identified; however, some observations may be of value. While all sections of the EAOCP were reviewed, some (such as agriculture) are in sufficient alignment with North Cowichan's policies and goals, and no specific comment has been identified as necessary. Some other sections, described below, prompt observations that staff recommend are communicated back to the CVRD:

Growth/Land Use Planning

The growth projections for the various areas have been created using the same provincial Interim Housing Needs Report (IHNR) methodology as North Cowichan did for its own IHNR. This results in an average annual growth rate of 2.2% to 2046,¹ which has been extrapolated to 2050. Like all local governments, the CVRD does not have discretion over this methodology. However, this is a highly significant growth rate for a regional district and certain parts (e.g. Area D), even historically, have outpaced past growth rates within Duncan and North Cowichan. This highlights the need for a Regional

¹ note the EAOCP section 1.4 page 7 references the year "2026" here, which is assumed to be an error.

Growth Strategy to coordinate such growth and ensure it is appropriately focused on urban areas and avoiding sprawl.

It should be understood that “growth area” in the EAOCP is a contextual label that is not comparable to the growth areas within North Cowichan’s OCP, which seek much higher densities of development. Arriving at a common understanding of how EAOCP growth and land use policies mesh with those of the member municipalities’ OCPs will be a key consideration during the development of a Regional Growth Strategy.

Servicing Implications

Sanitary treatment for electoral areas D and E is via the Joint Utility Board (JUB) Sewage Treatment Plant, although the EAOCP does not note this. The EAOCP’s population and housing growth projections for these areas were assessed in terms of servicing capacity. Growth in these areas is modest and does not present any concern, although Area D may need additional JUB units since the projections show that the area potentially exceeds its unit capacity in 2050 prior to the JUB lease expiry in 2060. The service agreements between each of the users of the JUB, which include areas D & E, have provision for the transfer of JUB units between jurisdictions should a jurisdiction need additional capacity. In addition, when the JUB Sewage Treatment Plant is expanded from time to time, new capacity is apportioned to the users to help keep up with growth pressure.

Environmental Implications

In its Natural Assets section, the EAOCP identifies a number of partnerships, including natural asset protection (policy NA.4) and an update to the Cowichan Estuary Management Plan (NA.22). Curiously, it does not identify local governments or North Cowichan as a potential partner in either of these endeavours. Policy NA.15 refers to the protection of migratory routes of large mammals, which is also an objective that would require regional coordination and partnership with other jurisdictions. Therefore, Council may wish to request that these policies contain greater recognition of partnership with other local governments.

Regional Prosperity

While this section (pages 88-94) contains a number of policies and references certain sectors, there is no specific mention of forestry and milling as a significant regional employer and contributor to the tax base. Council may wish to see more explicit support for this important sector within the policies.

OPTIONS

1. (Recommended Option)

THAT Council directs staff to provide a response to the Cowichan Valley Regional District on behalf of Council containing the following comments on the draft Electoral Areas Official Community Plan:

1. The growth rate projections are significant for a regional district and demonstrate the need for a Regional Growth Strategy to coordinate growth and focus it on urban areas. The process of developing a Regional Growth Strategy will provide an ideal forum to review this issue and ensure that the various jurisdictions are appropriately aligned.
2. Growth discussions for Areas D & E should reference sanitary servicing through the Joint Utility Board (JUB) and acknowledge that growth past 2050 may depend on the availability and purchase of additional JUB units.

3. A number of natural asset policies require partnerships with other local governments to be effective. Recognition of this should be added to policies NA.4 and NA.15, and North Cowichan should be explicitly mentioned in policy NA.22.
 4. Explicit recognition of and support for the forestry and milling sector should be added to the Regional Prosperity section.
 5. The legend on Map E1.3 in Schedule E should be amended from "Chemainus Volunteer Fire Department" to "North Cowichan Fire Department (Chemainus Station)"
 6. *[... additional comments to be identified by Council]*
 - This option allows Council to adopt the responses supplied by staff in this report.
2. THAT Council directs staff to provide a response to the Cowichan Valley Regional District that incorporates the following comments:
 1. *... [comments to be identified by Council]*
 - Council may make alternative comments to the staff-suggested ones.
 3. THAT Council directs staff to:
 1. request an extension to the deadline of February 21, 2025, in order for Council to consider the matter further at a future meeting;
 2. re-examine the Electoral Areas Official Community Plan and provide Council draft feedback pertaining to ... *[area(s) of concern to be identified by Council]*
 - Notwithstanding staff's assessment, if Council identifies any areas of concern, staff can re-examine the EAOCP and provide draft feedback for Council's consideration that reflects those concerns.
 4. THAT Council directs staff not to provide a formal response.
 - There is no obligation on Council to issue a response to the draft document.

IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct implications associated with receiving this document or providing comments to the CVRD. If the EAOCP is adopted substantially as drafted, staff has not identified any significant implications for North Cowichan, although the scale of projected growth of 8,160 new households over 25 years in our surrounding rural areas is concerning. Staff recommends that a response is provided to the CVRD containing the feedback proposed within the recommended option.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council directs staff to provide a response to the Cowichan Valley Regional District on behalf of Council containing the following comments on the draft Electoral Areas Official Community Plan:

1. The growth rate projections are significant for a regional district and demonstrate the need for a Regional Growth Strategy to coordinate growth and focus it on urban areas. The process of

developing a Regional Growth Strategy will provide an ideal forum to review this issue and ensure that the various jurisdictions are appropriately aligned.

2. Growth discussions for Areas D & E should reference sanitary servicing through the Joint Utility Board (JUB) and acknowledge that growth past 2050 may depend on the availability and purchase of additional JUB units.
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5. The legend on Map E1.3 in Schedule E should be amended from "Chemainus Volunteer Fire Department" to "North Cowichan Fire Department (Chemainus Station)"
6. *[... additional comments to be identified by Council]*

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Approved to be forwarded to Council:



Ted Swabey
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments:

- (1) Referral Response Form with links
- (2) Referral letter