

**DATE:** July 3, 2020**FILE:** 1700-02/2020Renewal**TO:** Chair and Directors  
Regional District BoardSupported by Russell Dyson  
Chief Administrative Officer**FROM:** Russell Dyson  
Chief Administrative Officer*R. Dyson***RE: COVID-19 Response and Renewal – Regional Growth Strategy**

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**Purpose**

To provide the Comox Valley Regional District Board with a COVID-19 Response and Renewal report for the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) as a core service.

**Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:**

THAT the COVID-19 Response and Renewal plan for the Regional Growth Strategy core service, as included with the staff report dated July 3, 2020, be approved.

**Regional Growth Strategy Renewal Plan**

As part of the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) Board's COVID-19 Response and Renewal Framework, an assessment of the CVRD's Core Services is being conducted and is based on five principles:

- Maintaining core services at an affordable cost
- Sustaining stable services in support of the local economy
- Adapting to changing community priorities
- Realigning resources to support community renewal initiatives
- Communicating clearly about actions.

This report considers the various tasks for the RGS as a core service and identifies certain changes that could be implemented, supporting the five principles above.

COVID-19 has sharpened the community's focus on a number of priority areas identified within the 2020-2021 work plan, including: air quality, affordable housing, poverty reduction, food security and multi-modal transportation. The pandemic has contributed to a sense of urgency among some residents that more needs to be done on these complex issues and that actions need to be accelerated. It is clear that the most vulnerable residents have experienced the global pandemic much differently than residents who are not typically facing social and/or economic inequity and that COVID-19 is likely a harbinger of things to come in respect to states of prolonged disruption (including climate change). The RGS work plan reflects highly relevant projects and staff is working to deliver each of them.

**Operational and Capital Work Plan Modifications**

The CVRD's COVID-19 Renewal Framework includes evaluating CVRD services for fiscal efficiencies and assessing tasks and work plans. The following table lists the necessary and critical tasks, which are those that must continue to be provided to the community in order that water supply, sewer treatment, parks and waste management (as examples) are delivered. The functional

tasks include actions that may be paused, deferred or cancelled outright. Finally, the renewal actions describe tangible and/or systemic changes to deliver renewed public services.

Although the majority of projects within the RGS service fall within the “functional” task categories (i.e. given the long-term, future-oriented nature of RGS planning), a number of the projects rely on grant funding and project deadlines have been imposed by funders. Staff suggests that the matter of grant funding elevates the priority for these projects. This is described in the chart below.

<p><b>Critical Tasks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships with K’ómoks First Nation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Chief and Council have identified an interest in partnering on the poverty reduction strategy project.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Functional Task</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Regional Housing Needs Assessment (Board Strategic Priority) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Final reports to be delivered to all councils and Board by July 15, 2020. Community Forum re-scheduled (date to be confirmed). Project to be complete in September 2020 per grant funding requirement. Project is on-track. Findings will be used in poverty reduction strategy work. No changes recommended.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Air Quality Strategy (Board Strategic Priority) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Project has two main elements: the Airshed Advisory and the Wood Smoke Reduction Program.</li> <li>○ Airshed Advisory: 3 year contract awarded to Pinna Sustainability per Board approved Air Quality Strategy framework. Leadership team convened and planning for establishment of the broader public Roundtable is underway. Comox staff have identified an inability to actively participate in the project due to limited staff resources. CVRD staff will keep Comox staff informed.</li> <li>○ Wood Smoke Reduction Program: coordinator is in place. Grant funding for wood burning appliance exchange rebates has been obtained as well as additional “hotspot” location rebates. Additional grant funding application has been made to Island Health (i.e. for additional rebate dollars). Focus is on education (e.g. smart burning, air quality and health impacts of wood smoke). Grant funding to be spent in 2020.</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Poverty Reduction Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Grant funding has been received. Project scoping with project partners and community partners underway. Municipal partners have identified limited capacity to actively participate in project: CVRD staff will adapt accordingly. Community partners (CV Social Planning Society, CV Community Health Network and CV Coalition to End Homelessness) are keen to proceed.</li> <li>○ Pandemic has cast an important light on the extra challenges that residents facing social and economic inequality face during a major disruption such as Covid-19. Pandemic learnings will provide a critical lens for project. Engagement will be designed to meet the community where it is.</li> <li>○ Next steps include request for proposals for consultant assistance and establishment of poverty reduction advisory committee. Grant funding requires project completion by June 2021.</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Active Transportation Network Plan (Board Strategic Priority) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Awaiting decision on grant funding application. At a minimum a regional active transportation gap analysis is included within the 2020 approved financial plan. Active transportation is closely related to mitigating poverty and poor air quality: all are linked to the social determinants of health and therefore, active</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

transportation planning work should continue to be considered an important element of the CVRD’s renewal efforts.

- Next steps include project scoping and request for proposals.
- 5. RGS Education and Outreach (Board Strategic Priority)
  - Online outreach program to launch in July. All in-person engagements shifted to virtual platform.
- 6. RGS Monitoring and Evaluation
  - The importance of accurate and reliable data has been critical throughout the response phase of the pandemic and is an essential learning for our renewal. Through the development of a digital dashboard ideally with open source data, staff are striving to make data-driven decision making easier. This project has been slightly delayed.

#### Continue with Adjusted Timelines

- 7. RGS Five Year Review
  - Provincial legislation requires that, at least once, every five years, the Board consider whether to undertake a five year review. The Board last considered this in 2017 and opted not to. Although the Board has not initiated a five year review of the RGS, CVRD staff and municipal staff have indicated that undertaking a review in 2021 and 2022 will be difficult due to resource constraints. It is also questionable whether the public will be able to fully engage in a five year review. Staff suggest that focus be on completion of key projects (named above) that will provide a solid base for a review beginning in late 2022/early 2023.
- 8. Community Carbon Granting Program
  - Staff have issued an expression of interest and are exploring ways to address this Board direction. Report to follow in fall 2020.
- 9. Building Energy Efficiency Hot Spot Pilot Project
  - Board direction (2018 carbon offset non-CARIP dollars). This project has the potential to link improved energy efficiency with air quality improvement in “hotspot” areas (i.e. West Courtenay and Cumberland). Initiation of this project is on hold until in-person engagements can resume.
- 10. Transition 2050 – Residential Retrofit Acceleration Project (RRAP)
  - Project end date formerly December 2020, has been extended to March 2021 (by the Province). Will continue to work with City Green/member municipalities virtually on the retrofit strategy.

#### Evaluate Concept

- 11. Electric Vehicle Strategy
  - Using 2018 carbon offset funds Board identified \$9,000 for development of an electric vehicle strategy. Relatedly, staff is continuing to work with the BC Community Energy Association on the mid-Island electric vehicle charging station project (grant announcement expected in July 2020) and there may be an opportunity to undertake strategy development following announcement. Staff has learned that each member municipality has already made grant funding applications for electric vehicle charging stations. Staff would like to reach out to municipal staff to see if there is interest in making the electric vehicle strategy a regional plan (e.g. coordination of charging station locations). There is an opportunity to create a coordinated plan that aligns with multi-modal transportation planning work.

#### **Renewal Actions**

- 1. Immediate and tangible change: the 2021 RGS financial plan contemplates a contribution to reserve funds. This was a strategic decision to begin re-investment in the service after

several years of operating using reserve funds in order to keep the requisition low. Through the 2021 budget planning process, the Board could revisit this decision.

**Summary**

- The RGS is a lean service with many of the projects deriving funding from grants. Staff will continue to apply a COVID-19 lens to work plan items, including the fact that this disruption has highlighted a key role for local government in responding to the social and economic inequalities that impact the community's resilience during a prolonged state of disruption.

**Citizen/Public Relations**

All engagement has been shifted to online opportunities, including development of a Connect CVRD page with links to individual project pages. Through the Connect CVRD page residents can pose questions and receive information about any of the projects within the RGS work plan. For each project, staff is assessing the degree to which the public and specific community partners will be able to support RGS projects via their engagement levels.

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