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TO: Chair and Directors
Committee of the Whole

FROM: Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

Supported by Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

R. Dyson

RE: Regional Growth Strategy, Comox Valley Sustainability Strategy and Board's Strategic Priorities

Purpose

This report provides background information on the Comox Valley Sustainability Strategy (CVSS) and the Comox Valley Regional District Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) and is intended to support the board's upcoming strategic planning session.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

This report is provided for information.

Executive Summary

- The CVSS was a joint regional planning initiative that promoted sustainability as a lens to inform core service decision-making within the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD).
- The board's endorsement of sustainability as a key "strategic driver" affirms the intent of the CVSS nine years after its publication and its receipt by all four CVRD local governments.
- The CVSS was a foundational document for the RGS: this is reflected in the goals and targets within the RGS.
- Adopted by bylaw in 2011, the CVRD's RGS articulates a vision of the region's future over a 20-year time frame and commits the CVRD and the member municipalities to a course of action to meet social, environmental and economic objectives (i.e. sustainability objectives).
- RGS legislation is intended to provide a legal framework for coordinated regional planning and action to better manage and deliver core services.
- If resourced, the RGS service could be used as the umbrella service to enable the development of action plans to achieve the board's sustainability goals, including an airshed protection plan and an affordable housing strategy.

Prepared by:

Concurrence:

A. Mullaly

Alana Mullaly, MCIP, RPP
Senior Manager of Sustainability
and RGS Planning

Scott Smith, MCIP, RPP
General Manager of Planning and
Development Services Branch

Stakeholder Distribution (Upon Agenda Publication)

Village of Cumberland	✓
Town of Comox	✓
City of Courtenay	✓

Background/Current Situation

Comox Valley Sustainability Strategy (CVSS)

The CVSS was a regional planning initiative undertaken by the CVRD and its member municipalities. The intent was to chart a collective future, based on the principle of sustainability, following the re-organization of the Comox-Strathcona Regional District in 2008. Consultants prepared background research and coordinated stakeholder working groups to focus on issue identification, goal setting, action planning, and performance target establishment in eight key policy areas:

1. Land use and complete communities
2. Transportation
3. Green buildings and development
4. Parks and ecosystem health
5. Innovative infrastructure systems
6. Sustainable local food systems
7. Social health
8. Economic prosperity

The CVSS is action-oriented; establishing goals and targets to 2050. The document was received for information by all four local governments in 2010: it was not adopted as a bylaw or approved as policy. In the years since its preparation, however, a range of stakeholders within the community, as well as local government, have been working to advance the goals and objectives of the CVSS (e.g. enabling higher density in core settlement areas, establishing the homelessness and supports service, updating sensitive ecosystem inventory mapping, supporting renewable energy demonstration projects). Importantly, the CVSS was a foundational document for the preparation of the CVRD’s RGS. The eight key policy areas identified above are mirrored in the RGS as are the targets to the year 2030.

Integral to the CVSS was a vision that sustainability become a lens to inform policy and decision-making within the CVRD regarding the delivery of the core services of the municipalities and the electoral areas. The board’s recent endorsement of sustainability as a “strategic driver” further affirms that vision.

Regional Growth Strategy (RGS)

The purpose of an RGS is to promote human settlement that is socially, economically and environmentally healthy and that makes efficient use of public facilities and services, land and other resources. This is wholly consistent with the principle of sustainability. Established by the Province in 1992, RGS legislation is intended to provide a mechanism for coordinated planning and action to better manage and deliver core services. RGS legislation provides a framework to enable electoral area/municipal collaboration on a breadth of topics including: shifting to multi-modal transportation; protecting environmentally sensitive areas; reducing and preventing pollution (land, air and water); protecting ground water; minimizing risks associated with natural hazards; promoting alternative forms of energy; providing appropriate and affordable housing; enriching quality of life and promoting local economic development. The RGS focus on regional collaboration is the local government equivalent of the Brundtland Commission’s efforts, thirty years ago, to improve multilateral relationships in order to achieve a global paradigm shift toward sustainable development (i.e. 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future).

The CVRD’s RGS was adopted by bylaw in March 2011. CVRD staff administer the RGS service on behalf of its participants and work with a Technical Advisory Committee and Steering Committee to make recommendations on proposed amendments, including any need to undertake a five year review of the plan. Implementation of the RGS has occurred in the intervening years, notably the

CVRD aligned zoning of the Settlement Expansion Areas to preserve these areas as future growth areas for the municipalities (minimum 4ha subdivision); supported the regional context statements of each member municipality; initiated infrastructure assessments in the rural settlement nodes; and made investments in regional infrastructure to better serve core settlement areas.

Given the breadth of RGS legislation and the participation of all four local governments, the RGS service has the potential to further guide collaborative decision-making in order to achieve collective goals. For example, through this service the CVRD could lead the collection and analysis of regional data to inform all of the CVRD’s core services and be used to inform electoral area and municipality-specific initiatives.

Strategic Priorities and the RGS

The RGS is the core service most directly linked to regional planning and regional thinking: RGS legislation was created to encourage and facilitate regional collaboration. It follows that the RGS service could be used to facilitate progress on a number of the board’s strategic priorities given their “regional planning” scope. Options to advance these priorities are shown in Appendix A. Note that staff is bringing separate, detailed reports to the board for consideration on transportation and transit, air quality, and regional housing. The board’s direction to develop a “regular scorecard” on the CVSS is discussed below.

Staff understands the concept of a “sustainability scorecard” to be:

1. Use the principle of sustainability as a lens through which to assess decision-making (e.g. how does each decision point relate to sustainability objectives?).
2. Provide a checklist to inform decision-making on corporate actions and track progress relative to sustainability measures.
3. Provide a checklist to assess and inform decision-making on third party proposals relative to sustainability measures.

As noted previously, the board has recently endorsed sustainability as a strategic driver (July 28, 2019 resolution) thereby setting the stage to establish a series of sustainability measures for each core service against which to assess decision points. Staff suggests that this requires investment in data collection (and its coordination) and the development of measures in order to monitor and evaluate progress on sustainability objectives. Data collection, monitoring and evaluation of the RGS’ goals and action items relative to its established targets can achieve the above.

At present, multiple departments within the CVRD collect data and use it for specific functions or service area requirements, such as reporting to senior government or in the case of the RGS, preparing an annual report. There is no central repository for this data meaning that multiple departments may be expending time collecting the same data and analysing data sets in isolation. Further, very little of the data that we collect is readily available to the public. This approach to data collection is not conducive to analysis of regional trends or collaborative policy setting that is based on evidence. It is also difficult to share data within the community potentially impacting program development and delivery. In the case of RGS monitoring, and in respect to some RGS objectives, there is a mismatch between available data, the measures identified in the plan and policy meaning that it is very difficult to create a meaningful evaluation of progress. Staff suggest that in order to develop a meaningful scorecard, investment will need to be made in identifying measures (i.e. defining the right questions) that are linked to policy and finding appropriate data sources and developing a widely accessible database.

Following review of their RGS policy and measures, Metro Vancouver developed an RGS performance monitoring “dashboard” (now one of three dashboards that Metro Vancouver has developed):

1. RGS performance dashboard
2. Corporate performance dashboard; and
3. Growth centre performance dashboard

Each is intended to be a repository for data and provide a clear picture on implementation status relative to clear targets that reflect Metro Vancouver’s goals and objectives (as articulated in Metro’s RGS). Metro states that the corporate performance dashboard “provides a centralized view of the performance indicators of each of our services, offering a year-over-year indication of performance in relation to objectives set or industry benchmarks, if available”. The dashboards live on Metro’s website, making data and related analysis accessible to whomever seeks it. The data is analysed by staff to report on status and make recommendations about policy and related budgeting. Further, Metro planning staff use the RGS performance dashboard to fulfill annual provincial RGS monitoring requirements.

The CVRD’s RGS service is a core service that can be used more fully to collect and provide data to the service participants and the public. Staff suggests that progress on the development of a sustainability scorecard can be made through the RGS service and the development of a dashboard(s) similar to those used by Metro Vancouver. Further, the utility of the dashboard concept extends beyond this strategic priority to fulfill a wide range of monitoring and reporting needs for both the electoral areas and the member municipalities (e.g. annual corporate reports, regular core service monitoring, grant funding applications, gap analysis exercises, etc.).

The above is just one example of how the RGS service could be more fully used, if resourced, to achieve the board’s current strategic priorities and establish a culture of regional collaboration in order to address regionally significant issues.

Policy Analysis

An RGS is a regional vision that commits regional districts and municipalities to a course of action to meet social, environmental and economic objectives. The legislation is broad enough to address “any regional matter”, but at a minimum must include five policy areas: housing, transportation, regional district services, parks and natural areas, and economic development. As noted above, the CVRD’s RGS adds food systems, public health and safety and climate change. An RGS must cover a planning period of at least twenty years and must include population and employment projections. It must also work towards key provincial goals. Otherwise, there is flexibility in designing an RGS to meet local future planning needs. Following adoption of an RGS, all regional district bylaws, works and services must be consistent with the RGS.

Municipal Context Statements: RGS legislation requires that participant municipalities prepare a “Regional Context Statement” as part of municipal Official Community Plans to identify how the municipality proposes to implement the RGS within its boundaries. Each of the member municipalities, as part of their Official Community Plan reviews, has prepared a Regional Context Statement.

Implementation Agreements: RGS legislation also enables implementation agreements: partnership agreements between a regional district and other levels of government, including their agencies, or any other body (e.g. member municipality) that establish how specific aspects of an RGS will be carried out. As a general example, an implementation agreement could relate to taking action on achieving targets within an RGS or relate to the construction and funding of new infrastructure. In respect to the performance monitoring dashboard (“scorecard”) example above, an implementation

agreement could relate to funding regional data collection to meet both participant municipal data needs and those of the regional district.

Options

This report is intended to provide background material for the board’s upcoming Strategic Planning session and to demonstrate the potential of the RGS service. There are no recommendations, however following the strategic planning session, staff will report on the design and costs associated with responding to key priorities in particular to the RGS service provision of data collection, analysis and performance monitoring

Financial Factors

A relatively significant injection to the RGS service was made in the 2019 budget: this followed years of operating the service on reserve funds. At present, we are in a re-building phase to enable the RGS to be a more financially sustainable service and serve the community to its full capacity. The majority of the 2019 approved budget increase (total budget is \$212,142) is allocated for legal fees. Should the board identify an interest in using the RGS service to a more fulsome capacity, staff will report back with financial details in the 2020-2024 proposed budget phase. An increase could support, for example, the development of a robust regional data collection strategy and a performance monitoring and evaluation dashboard. Metro Vancouver’s performance and evaluation dashboard offers a year over year indication of performance relative to set objectives and/or industry benchmarks. The dashboard provides significant value to decision makers and service providers in the community and is also used by that regional district in their budgeting process. If supported, staff would pursue an estimate to design a dashboard concept for the CVRD.

Legal Factors

The *Local Government Act* (RSBC, 2015, c. 1) (LGA) establishes process to prepare and amend an RGS. The RGS can be used in tandem with other planning tools enabled by the LGA and *Community Charter* to achieve a range of objectives. For example, in respect to airshed protection planning, a community could use its RGS to establish the enabling policy framework for the preparation of a regional airshed protection plan. An implementation agreement with its partners could then be developed to outline how specific objectives of the airshed plan would be achieved drawing on other regulatory legislative abilities and financial tools. This example is the subject of a separate report on airshed management and promotion of better air quality.

The LGA requires that at least once every five years a regional district must consider whether or not to undertake a review of its RGS. In 2017, the CVRD Board opted not to undertake a review, but directed staff to report back with a list of possible changes to the RGS. CVRD staff, working with the RGS Technical Advisory Committee and Steering Committee will be reporting back during the upcoming budget season.

Regional Growth Strategy Implications

Regional growth strategy implications are discussed throughout this report.

Intergovernmental Factors

In order for the electoral areas and member municipalities to benefit from the full potential of the RGS service regional thinking and collaboration is required. The RGS Steering Committee (Chief Administrative Officers of each jurisdiction) and the RGS Technical Advisory Committee (planning representatives of each jurisdiction) could be used more fully to serve as staff representatives for regional planning initiatives and generally to advance the objectives of the RGS across all four organizations.

As noted in the policy section of this report, implementation agreements can be used to flesh out how interjurisdictional cooperation will occur on specific aspects of an RGS, including participation of provincial ministries.

Interdepartmental Involvement

The RGS provides a policy basis for a number of core services and actions delivered by the CVRD. Planning staff has prepared this report in collaboration with legislative services staff.

Citizen/Public Relations

Community engagement on the RGS is identified as a strategic priority. Significant community engagement was undertaken through the development of the CVSS and RGS. Most recently, through an application to amend the RGS, significant public engagement occurred in summer 2018. Staff seeks to build on this momentum through 2020 as lead up to the board’s consideration of whether or not to undertake a five year review of the RGS in 2021.

Attachments: Appendix A – “Strategic Priorities Implementation Options”

Appendix A

Strategic Priority	RGS Connection	Implementation
<p>Transportation:</p> <p>“Now” priority: consider regional multi-modal transportation planning and the role of the Integrated Regional Transportation Select Committee (IRTSC).</p> <p>“Ongoing” priority: Regional Growth Strategy engagement.</p> <p>“Operational” strategy: Consider regional multi-modal transportation with IRTSC refresh and partner commitment (fall 2019).</p>	<p>Goal 4: Develop an accessible, efficient and affordable multi-modal transportation network that connects core settlement areas (i.e. municipalities, rural settlement nodes, settlement expansion areas) and designated town centres and links the Comox Valley to neighbouring communities and regions.</p> <p>Goal 7: Support a high quality of life through the protection and enhancement of community health, safety and well-being.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Undertake a review of all existing transportation plans and approved transportation investments in order to understand regional transportation gaps and opportunities.
<p>Air Quality:</p> <p>“Now” priority: consider an air quality council – determine feasibility with stakeholders to assess, report and recommend Comox Valley initiatives.</p> <p>“Advocacy/Partnership” priority: Air Quality: UBCM resolution.</p>	<p>Goal 7: Support a high quality of life through the protection and enhancement of community health, safety and well-being.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Based on the recommendations of the air quality working group, establish a framework for addressing air quality that includes a leadership group, round table and coordinator roles. ● Develop a regional airshed protection plan that implements Goal 7 of the RGS: linking population health and air quality. ● Use an implementation agreement among CVRD, member municipalities, Ministry of the Environment and Vancouver Island Health Authority to outline specific monitoring and enforcement objectives and funding model. ● Use Official Community Plans to identify specific actions for each jurisdiction. ● Identify options to enact regulatory bylaws to be enforced within municipalities and rural areas.

<p>Sustainability Strategy:</p> <p>“Now” priority: Review CVSS, complete report on progress and develop a regular scorecard.</p> <p>“Operational strategy”: Review CVSS, complete progress report, develop a regular scorecard (fall 2019).</p>	<p>Three regional strategies informed development of the RGS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional Water Supply Strategy - Regional Sewer Strategy - <u>Sustainability Strategy</u> <p>The LGA requires local governments to establish a program to monitor RGS implementation and the progress made to achieve its objectives. An annual report on implementation and progress is also required. At least once every five years a regional district must consider whether the RGS must be reviewed for possible amendment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endorse “sustainability” as a “strategic driver” or lens through which all decision points are assessed. • Devote staff resources and budget to a review of the RGS (versus the CVSS document). • Develop and fund a performance monitoring and evaluation dashboard to set targets and monitor progress: the dashboard would be a living scorecard. • Invest in data analysis through the RGS service to collect important data in order to make data-based decisions.
<p>Regional Housing:</p> <p>“Now” priority: Review needs assessment terms of reference, propose a regional approach to municipalities.</p> <p>“Ongoing”: RGS engagement.</p> <p>“Advocacy/Partnerships”: Employee Housing (Comox Valley Economic Developments (CVEDS) or private sector).</p>	<p>Goal 1: Ensure a diversity of affordable housing options to meet evolving regional demographics and needs.</p> <p>Supporting Policy 1B-4: Consider the development of a “Regional Affordable Housing Strategy” to be used as a common resource and strategic plan by the CVRD and the three municipalities. The strategy could review and coordinate housing policies while allowing each jurisdiction to address their unique affordability issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board and Councils endorsed preparation of a regional housing needs assessment – key stakeholders are CV Coalition to End Homelessness, CVEDS and Community Health Network. • Joint funding application made through UBCM: awarded \$105,000. • Regional district staff leading project with RGS Technical Advisory Committee. • Upon completion, RGS and Official Community Plans can be updated and opportunity to develop a regional affordable housing strategy that implements RGS Goal 1 can be considered. • Housing data can be input in proposed “performance monitoring and evaluation dashboard”.

<p>Agriculture – Food Strategy:</p> <p>“Now” priority: Review agriculture study from CVEDS, provide input and guidance.</p> <p>“Advocacy/Partnerships”: Food Security Council: LUSH Valley proposal.</p>	<p>Goal 6: Support and enhance the agricultural and aquaculture sectors and increase local food security.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings of CVEDS work may be used to inform RGS review/update of food policies. • Board endorsed the formation of the Comox Valley Food Policy Council (CVFPC) and directed staff to identify opportunities for collaboration with the CVFPC, once established, in support of CVRD services and strategic priorities and provide in-kind assistance as requested by the CVFPC (i.e. provision of meeting space).
<p>Regional Growth Strategy Engagement</p>	<p>The RGS is a partnership between the CVRD and the member municipalities. Its purpose is to build consensus among these parties on regional matters. Ongoing public education is key to building and sustaining relationships required to use the RGS to its full capacity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify RGS as a core service and reinforce its role as the key service to undertake regional planning and collaborative decision-making.