

DATE: May 5, 2021

FILE: 3010-01

TO: Chair and Members
Electoral Areas Services Committee

FROM: Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

Supported by Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

R. Dyson

RE: Comox Valley Agricultural Plan Update

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on agricultural planning and request authorization to make application for grant funding to the Investment Agriculture Foundation’s Local Government Partnership Program.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

THAT the Comox Valley Regional District Board approve submitting an application to the Investment Agriculture Foundation’s Local Government Partnership Program for the purposes of updating the Comox Valley Agricultural Plan.

Executive Summary

- Over the next year an Agricultural Coordinator will begin assessing the Comox Valley Agricultural Plan (CVAP) and engaging with the agricultural sector to evaluate the expectations and opportunities for updating the CVAP.
- Investment Agriculture Foundation’s Local Government Partnership Program provides grant funding (matching funds) for certain activities involving agricultural plans.
- The Agricultural Coordinator will work on pre-planning activities in 2021 with the intent of updating the CVAP in 2022-23.

Prepared by:

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Planner

Concurrence:

T. Trieu

Ton Trieu, RPP, MCIP
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Concurrence:

A. Mullaly

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General Manager of Planning
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Government Partners and Stakeholder Distribution (Upon Agenda Publication)

Comox Valley Farmers Institute	✓
Mid Island Farmers Institute	✓

Background/Current Situation

At its meeting of February 11, 2020, the Committee of the Whole received a staff report (Appendix A) regarding the CVAP and adopted the following resolution:

“THAT the regional agricultural plan report be deferred to a future Committee of the Whole meeting with a more detailed plan that considers funding applications to write a plan that includes implementation elements.”

Since that meeting, the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) Board adopted the 2021 budget which included funds for a coordinator to work with the CVRD and the agricultural community to provide direction for updating and modernizing the CVAP. Over the next year, this coordinator will be retained to begin pre-planning activities, focusing on evaluating the implementation of the existing CVAP and engaging with the agricultural sector to evaluate the expectations and opportunities for updating the CVAP. Staff and an advisory committee will oversee and review the work of the coordinator with the objective of ensuring sufficient engagement and analysis has been conducted to allow for a thoughtful, specific and practical update of the CVAP to occur in 2022-23.

The Investment Agriculture Foundation (IAF) has announced a new round of funding under its Local Government Partnership Program (LGPP) to help regional districts and municipalities develop, update and implement agricultural planning tools. The LGPP will provide up to \$40,000 in matching funding for eligible activities. CVRD staff consulted with IAF staff regarding eligibility. While certain pre-planning activities are eligible, the program does not provide funding for on-going operational costs or wages. As the coordinator position is to be by contract, the CVRD may make an application to the IAF for cost-sharing of these pre-planning activities. Under this round, the LGPP is accepting applications until May 19, and if not fully subscribed, re-opened in fall 2021.

Policy Analysis

It is a policy, adopted in the Regional Growth Strategy, Bylaw No. 120, being the “Comox Valley Regional District Regional Growth Strategy Bylaw No. 120, 2010”, to “Update the Comox Valley Agricultural Action Plan on a regular basis (every five years) so that it responds to and makes policy directions based on the current agricultural context.” The measures explained in this report will help implement this policy.

Options

The board may opt to make an application for a grant from the IAF’s Local Government Partnership Program.

Financial Factors

The Agricultural Coordinator position is being funded with \$30,000 from the Electoral Areas Services Planning function. If successful, a grant from the IAF’s Local Government Partnership Program may provide matching funds.

Legal Factors

Section 474 of the *Local Government Act* (RSBC, 2015, c. 1) (LGA) allows local governments to implement policies that respect the maintenance and enhancement of farming through the Official Community Plan, though the CVRD is not authorized to implement farming area bylaws as described in Section 552 of the LGA. The agricultural plan helps identify these measures and highlight priorities.

Regional Growth Strategy Implications

The CVAP provided a basis for several policies that were adopted within the Regional Growth Strategy, including the need for farm land protection measures, encouragement of Environmental Farm Plans, and seeking to improve irrigation practices.

Policy 2C-7 of the Regional Growth Strategy states “As part of the Comox Valley Agricultural Plan update (see 6E-3), explore incentives for conservation on agricultural lands.” See Policy Analysis section above for Policy 6E-3.

Intergovernmental Factors

Agricultural plans are written in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Foods and Fisheries.

Interdepartmental Involvement

Other CVRD departments will be involved in updating the CVAP. The CVRD Engineering Department will continue to work with the Tsolum River Agricultural Watershed Plan which is one of the implementation measures from the original CVAP.

Citizen/Public Relations

An advisory committee will be formed for the purpose of informing and reviewing the update to the CVAP. Pre-planning activities include preparation of a communication plan.

Attachments: Appendix A – “Staff report dated February 7, 2020”



Staff Report

DATE: February 7, 2020

TO: Chair and Directors
Committee of the Whole

FROM: Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

RE: Regional Agriculture Plan

FILE: 1700-02/2020/512

Supported by Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

R. Dyson

Purpose

To provide information on an agricultural plan implementation option for the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) Board in its consideration of whether to direct staff to undertake an agricultural plan.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

This report is provided for information.

Executive Summary

- At its January 14, 2020 meeting, following a delegation from the Food Policy Council, the Committee of the Whole instructed staff to report back with options for the preparation of an agriculture plan.
- Directors remarked that the last agricultural plan was undertaken within the Comox Valley in 2002. Staff note, however, that as part of the 2014 rural Official Community Plan (OCP) review extensive engagement with the local agricultural community and Ministry of Agriculture was undertaken and resulted in clear rural OCP policy support for producers and their operations as well as the creation of an agriculture buffer development permit area intended to protect agriculture from encroachment by non-agricultural uses.
- The agricultural community in the Comox Valley is diverse, very engaged and has extensive expertise in production, marketing, policy development and regulatory frameworks. The agricultural community is best positioned to advise what its needs are and, specifically, what is needed from the CVRD.
- A regional strategy focussed on implementing existing policies beginning with confirmation of the agricultural community's needs relative to the role of the CVRD, could serve as an important next step in working towards Goal 6 of Bylaw No. 120, being the "Comox Valley Regional District Regional Growth Strategy Bylaw No. 120, 2010" (RGS): "*Support and enhance the agricultural and aquaculture sectors and increase local food security*".
- An agricultural coordinator model, similar to the models used in the Alberni-Clayoquot and East Kootenay Regional Districts, could be considered as a way to work with the agricultural community to assess needs, priorities, and action items as well as establish a direct contact for the industry to the CVRD. Staff has prepared a multi-year, high level, project plan, focused primarily on implementation (versus the development of new policy), for the board's consideration (Appendix A).
- Staff note that the RGS review will serve as a good vehicle to identify any policy and indicator gaps that exist relative to supporting agricultural production within a contemporary context (e.g. climate change adaptation, food security, and agricultural land reserve regulations). An agricultural implementation strategy could follow.

- Staff identifies the following options:
 1. Direct staff to initiate implementation work in 2021 (e.g. project plan in Appendix A) and pursue grant funding for implementation through the Investment Agriculture Foundation if eligible (i.e. program currently under review); or
 2. Revise 2020 work plan and direct staff to initiate implementation work in 2020 (or development of new plan); or
 3. Direct staff to report back on timing/implementation options following the RGS review.

Prepared by:

A. Mullaly

Alana Mullaly, RPP, MCIP
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and Development Services Branch

Stakeholder Distribution (Upon Agenda Publication)

Comox Valley Food Policy Council	✓
CVRD Agriculture Advisory Planning Commission	✓
Comox Valley Farmers' Institute	✓
Mid-Island Farmers' Institute	✓
Jill Hatfield, Regional Agrologist, Ministry of Agriculture	✓

Attachments: Appendix A – “Regional Agriculture Implementation Plan”

CVRD Regional Growth Strategy Service Project Plan

Project: Regional Agriculture Plan Implementation

Completed in 2002, the Comox Valley Agricultural Plan laid the groundwork for agriculture-supportive Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) policy as well as the Rural Official Community Plan. The Plan identified issues and opportunities and included a number of action items/strategies. Over the years, the Plan provided leverage for a range of programs and services initiated by other agricultural organizations, including the Comox Valley Growers' guide. A contemporary plan, built on the 2002 plan, focused as an implementation strategy, could help to tackle some of the complex issues faced by agricultural producers and further advance RGS Goal 6: "Support and enhance the agricultural and aquaculture sectors and increase local food security".

Objective:

Long-term: To work towards implementing Goal 3 of the RGS: "Achieve a sustainable, resilient and dynamic local economy that supports businesses and the region's entrepreneurial spirit" and Goal 6: "*Support and enhance the agricultural and aquaculture sectors and increase local food security*".

Medium-term: To prepare an agriculture plan implementation strategy, including the coordination of an agricultural outreach/support function for the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD).

Short-term: To ask agricultural stakeholders how the regional district can support agriculture and producers. To identify the tools that the CVRD could use to address the complex issues that agricultural producers face.

Year 1 Budget: \$30,000

Projected Start Date: TBD (relative to board's direction on other projects)

Projected Completion Date: Ongoing

Year	Task	Budget
1	Pursue funding opportunity. Hire an agricultural coordinator. Establish an agriculture plan implementation steering committee (e.g. producers, Ministry of Agriculture staff, Farmers' Institute(s) representatives, Agricultural Advisory Planning Commission, CVRD staff, etc.). Agricultural stakeholder targeted engagement – "what role can the CVRD play in supporting agricultural producers?". Convene stakeholders to understand range of agriculture initiatives (e.g. programs and services) currently underway.	\$30,000* (to engage a coordinator)
2	Broad public engagement and policy review through RGS review	\$30,000*
3	Develop an agriculture outreach program with core funding. Develop implementation/action plan by jurisdiction/mandate.	\$50,000*

*Estimates to be confirmed through financial planning processes.

Next Steps: Develop a scope of work for an agriculture plan implementation coordinator. Issue a request for proposals. Hire an agriculture plan implementation coordinator. Develop a terms of reference for the steering committee.

Background: CVRD Committee of the Whole recommendation (January 14, 2020):

“THAT staff report back to the Committee of the Whole regarding the request for funding from the Comox Valley Food Policy Council to complete a Comox Valley Agricultural Plan.”

Connection to Board’s Strategic Drivers:

Community Partnerships: regional initiative with opportunities to work with member municipalities, K’ómoks First Nation, Farmers’ Institutes (2), Ministry of Agriculture, Agricultural Advisory Planning Commission, Island Health, School District No. 71, non-profit service providers (e.g. Young Agrarians, Lush Valley, Comox Valley Economic Development Society).

Climate Crisis and Environmental Stewardship and Protection: Project presents an opportunity to infuse the RGS with regional climate change mitigation and adaptation planning for agriculture and local food security.

Indigenous Relations: opportunity to engage K’ómoks First Nation in the design of the project relative to K’ómoks First Nation’s economic development, food security and community health objectives.

Fiscal Responsibility: proposal to undertake the work under existing RGS service; phase the work over three budget years and seek opportunities for grant funding as they arise.

Project Lead: Planning services lead with support from CVRD communications, emergency management services and member municipalities.