

To: Regional and Corporate Services Committee

Date: 2020-03-10

From: Robin Beukens, Planner II

File No: 6430-51-2011-01

Subject: Regional Growth Strategy Update

INTENT

This report is intended to advise the Committee of information pertaining to an update of the Fraser Valley Regional District Regional Growth Strategy. Staff is not looking for a recommendation and has forwarded this information should members want more clarification to discuss the item further.

STRATEGIC AREA(S) OF FOCUS

Support Environmental Stewardship

Foster a Strong & Diverse Economy

Support Healthy & Sustainable Community

Provide Responsive & Effective Public Services

BACKGROUND

The Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) is a strategic, high-level policy document for coordinating planning in the Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD) and for informing provincial priorities. An RGS is a framework for planning and coordinating the activities of local governments, the provincial government, and other agencies to ensure that the region as a whole is working toward a common future. The RGS considers issues that spill across the boundaries between neighbouring municipalities and regional districts. It also provides a framework for Official Community Plans in Fraser Valley municipalities and directs development in unincorporated areas. It considers issues that impact all of us, such as transit, housing, parks, the environment, air quality and economic development from a regional perspective. In recent years, building relationships with Indigenous communities have taken on a much more important role in the FVRD, and the updated RGS will reflect this change.

The first draft of the RGS update was presented to the Board for review in July 2014 and was sent out for referral to affected local governments, federal and provincial agencies; Indigenous communities and agencies; and other interested parties. Feedback from Indigenous communities and agencies took some time, and major Official Community Plan updates in Abbotsford, Mission and the District of Hope

and other priorities resulted in a decision to delay the second draft of the plan until municipal processes were completed. With other local government planning processes completed and strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities, the FVRD is restarting the RGS update process with a target of having a final version completed by the end of 2020, allowing the bylaw to move forward in early 2021.

DISCUSSION

The Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) is a strategic plan enabled by the Local Government Act (LGA) that provides an overarching planning framework for coordinating the activities of local governments and the provincial government. It considers transit, housing, parks, economic development and environmental issues from a regional perspective with the goal of creating healthy, sustainable communities. As a long-range vision with a 20 to 30-year scope, it aims to ensure the region as a whole is working toward a common future.

Regional growth strategies support the management of issues that affect more than one jurisdiction and can perform the following functions (among others):

- Promote coordination among municipalities and regional districts on issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries;
- Promote coordination among municipalities, regional districts and Indigenous communities as a means of establishing and maintaining meaningful and collaborative relationships;
- Strengthen links between regional districts and the provincial ministries and agencies whose resources are needed to carry out projects and programs; and,
- Communicate the region's strengths to potential investors while demonstrating that local governments, Indigenous communities and stakeholders are proactively addressing the key issues affecting the region's future.

Legislation

Part 13 of the LGA sets out the legal requirements for regional growth strategies in British Columbia. The purpose of regional growth strategies "is to promote human settlement that is socially, economically and environmentally healthy, and that makes an efficient use of public facilities and services, land and other resources."

The minimum requirements for a regional growth strategy include:

- A 20-year minimum time frame
- Regional vision statements
- Population and employment projections
- Regional actions for key areas such as housing, transportation, regional district services, parks and natural areas, and economic development
- Targets, policies and actions for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the regional district

- Consideration of the most recent housing needs reports and the housing information on which such reports are based.

As housing needs reports are a new requirement and will not be mandatory until April 2022, the RGS update will not include housing needs report content but will refer to future requirements.

Regional growth strategies are required to work towards, but not be limited to, the following:

- avoiding urban sprawl and ensuring that development takes place where adequate facilities exist or can be provided in a timely, economical and efficient manner;
- settlement patterns that minimize the use of automobiles and encourage walking, bicycling and the efficient use of public transit;
- the efficient movement of goods and people while making effective use of transportation and utility corridors;
- protecting environmentally sensitive areas;
- maintaining the integrity of a secure and productive resource base, including the agricultural land reserve;
- economic development that supports the unique character of communities;
- reducing and preventing air, land and water pollution;
- adequate, affordable and appropriate housing;
- adequate inventories of suitable land and resources for future settlement;
- protecting the quality and quantity of groundwater and surface water;
- settlement patterns that minimize the risks associated with natural hazards;
- preserving, creating and linking urban and rural open space, including parks and recreation areas;
- planning for energy supply and promoting efficient use, conservation and alternative forms of energy; and
- good stewardship of land, sites and structures with cultural heritage value.

The RGS update was initiated by a resolution of the regional district Board of Directors. After the initiation, the Intergovernmental Advisory Committee (IAC) was formed consisting of senior staff from local governments, the Province, other agencies and, in the case of the FVRD, Indigenous community/agency representatives. The role of the IAC is to advise the regional district on the development of the RGS. The IAC was formed early in the process, but because of turn-over, over time, membership of the IAC will be updated. Consultation is required with regional district citizens; affected local governments; First Nations; boards of education, greater boards and improvement districts; and provincial and federal governments and their agencies and others as necessary.

Regional growth strategies do not require provincial approval, but formal "Acceptance" is required from "affected local governments," which consist of member municipalities and adjacent regional districts. Acceptance is by resolution of each local government. Once an RGS or major update is formally

adopted, member municipalities must update their official community plans (OCP) within two years with "regional context statements" (RCS). This is to ensure OCPs and the RGS are consistent.

The LGA also now allows minor amendment processes to be incorporated into an RGS. This facilitates changes without having to undergo the major amendment process as set out in the Act. The updated RGS will include a minor amendment process that will facilitate minor changes without triggering a more onerous major amendment process.

Regional districts are required to establish a monitoring program after an RGS has been adopted. The "Snap Shot" series of reports and, more recently, the RGS Monitoring Report (2019) are products of this program.

Local governments also have the option to enter into implementation agreements with other local governments, different levels of government (including the Province), and agencies to implement the actions and policies of a regional growth strategy. To date, few, if any, regional districts use this tool to implement their plans.

2004 Regional Growth Strategy

The FVRD's current Regional Growth Strategy, "Choices for Our Future," was adopted on October 26, 2004. The strategy was the result of an extensive collaborative and consultative process and was prepared in accordance with the Local Government Act.

Through the original RGS process, the region gained a better understanding of how valley communities were coping with the pressures of growth and change over the past twenty years. It was also a timely initiative given that the region had been newly amalgamated, and a regional vision and framework for managing growth was needed.

With its burgeoning population, expected to be approaching 500,000 by 2051, the region is experiencing new challenges in terms of increasingly complex growth management issues relating to air quality, transportation and transit, housing affordability, economic growth, healthy communities, greenhouse gas monitoring, Indigenous relations and others. Furthermore, new legislative requirements and funding arrangements from the provincial and federal governments are adding pressure on the region. It was timely to review and amend the FVRD's RGS to address these evolving challenges.

Although the FVRD remains remarkably independent from the rest of the lower mainland, the region will increasingly face external pressures as a result of growth occurring within Metro Vancouver. By 2050, current trends indicate that the lower mainland's population could be approaching a population of 4 million, up from about 2.9 million today. The RGS update will be taking such growth into consideration.

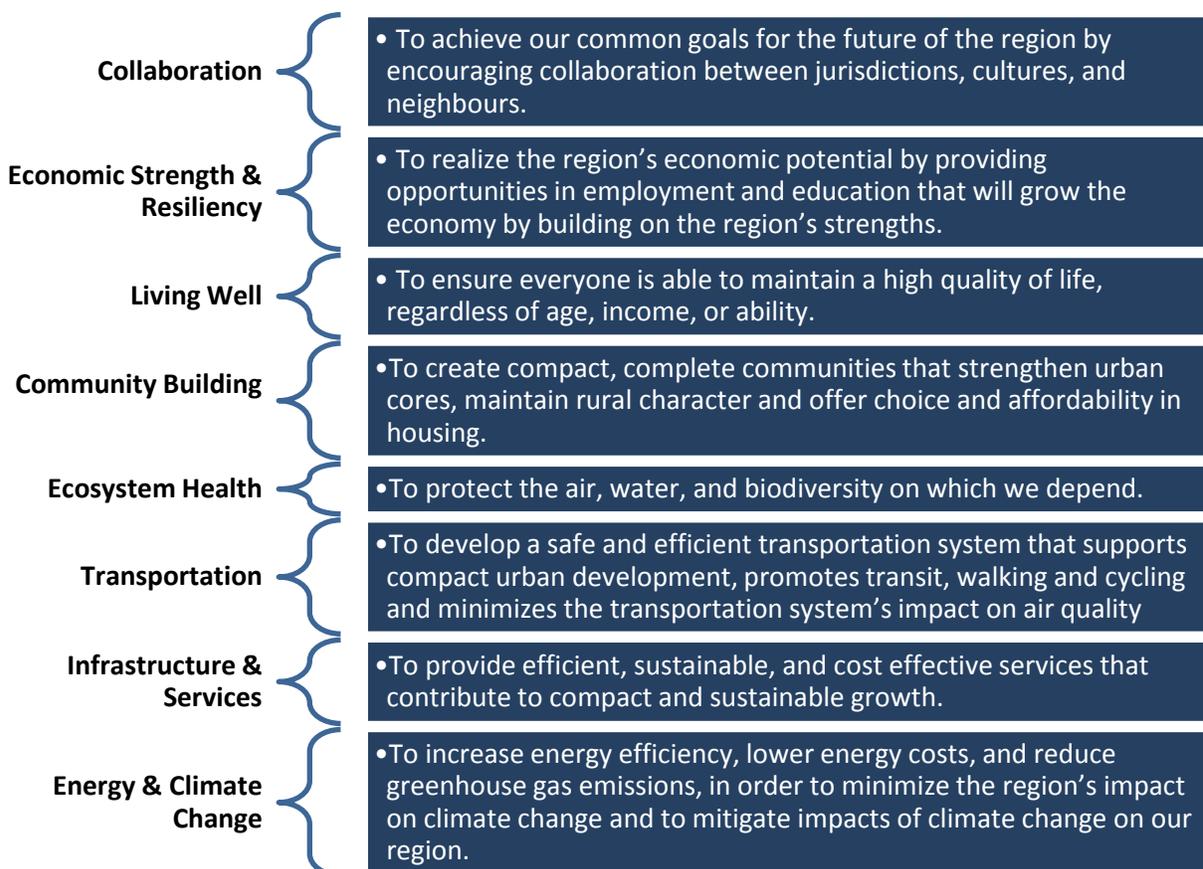
Regional Growth Strategy Update

The RGS update formally began in 2011. An IAC was formed, and meetings held between 2011 and 2014. These meetings covered a range of topics, including developing the IAC terms of reference, reviewing work plans, discussing engagement strategies, garnering input from local governments, Indigenous communities and IAC member agencies, and reviewing drafts.

Presentations were made to municipal councils, and a workshop was held with the FVRD Board in July 2014. There was also outreach to Indigenous communities and agencies to provide opportunities for meetings and/or presentations. Staff met with several Band councils and/or staff, the FVRD held a community-to-community forum with Soowahlie First Nation which included discussion of the RGS, and the team met with S'ólh Téméxw Stewardship Alliance (STSA) leadership to discuss the first draft.

Public engagement also took place to gather input from residents in rural and urban parts of the region. Eight open house events were held throughout the region and referrals were sent out to local governments, Indigenous communities, government agencies and stakeholders. The first draft was shared with member municipalities, neighbouring regional districts and other IAC participants, People of the River Referral Office (PRRO) and forty-four individual Indigenous communities who have an interest in the FVRD.

The draft RGS includes eight goals:



Since 2014, the RGS update process has been complicated by several major OCP updates undertaken by the City of Abbotsford, District of Mission, and District of Hope; the need for more Indigenous engagement; and shifting regional priorities. Over this time, Indigenous consultation and relationship building activities have been undertaken in support of the RGS, and other FVRD initiatives and the Strategic Planning team has been tasked with other initiatives that help implement and/or monitor the existing RGS and provide input to the RGS update. Work has included:

- Fraser Valley Express and Hope transit service implementations (2015 and 2017) and other transit-related planning initiatives;
- Fraser Valley Trip Diary report (2014);
- Collaboration with BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative (CAI) - Fraser Valley Agricultural Climate Adaption Strategy (2015);
- Freshet Flooding & Fraser Valley Agriculture: Evaluating Impacts & Options for Resilience (2016) – collaboration with CAI;
- Homeless surveys and social housing inventories (2017 and 2020);
- Outdoor Recreation workshop (2017) and supporting the outdoor recreation and tourism economic analysis and management plan (2019-20);
- Clean Economy study and GLOBE Fraser Valley Focus event (2019-20);
- Updated agricultural “Snap Shot” report (2018) and the RGS monitoring report (2019).

2020 Schedule

A schedule of RGS update activities is included in Appendix 1. Staff are currently working through a round of revisions to prepare a second draft of the RGS. This includes finalizing updated Transportation Priorities; updating the Indigenous peoples’ content; updating the population and employment projections to 2050 to better align with Metro Vancouver’s RGS update and TransLink’s 2050 Transportation Plan. Staff will also be meeting with provincial officials to discuss the RGS update and provincial expectations.

Provincial input

Staff will be meeting with Municipal Affairs and Housing (MAH) officials shortly to discuss the RGS update and determine provincial expectations in relation to provincial legislation, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) commitments and initiatives recently announced in the provincial budget. MAH will assist in identifying appropriate provincial staff to represent relevant ministries or agencies on the IAC.

Intergovernmental Advisory Committee (IAC)

As part of the RGS update, an Intergovernmental Advisory Committee (IAC) was formed early in the process with a mandate to advise on developing the updated RGS. The IAC will be reinstated in the spring of 2020. The FVRD will be asking for staff from affected local governments, Indigenous communities/agencies and other organizations to be appointed to the IAC. A list of IAC member organizations is included as Appendix 2, although additional members may be added as needed.

The FVRD's IAC consists of a "Core" group with local government and Indigenous community membership and a broader advisory group (IAC terms of reference - Appendix 2).

Indigenous engagement

More extensive engagement with Indigenous communities is needed to ensure that the RGS builds a strong framework for collaboration and further strengthens relationships in the FVRD. Although valuable feedback was received in the first draft, and the second draft reflects that input, it is important to acknowledge that more engagement is required to reflect changing relationships, the shifting legal landscape and provincial UNDRIP commitments.

Over the past few years, efforts have been made by the FVRD to build stronger relationships with indigenous communities and to better understand the challenges these communities face. Broader FVRD engagement has included a staff visit to Stl'alt'imc First Nations north of Harrison Lake, developing transit and other servicing agreements, community to community forums, engagement on outdoor recreation and tourism analysis and plans and more. While reserves are outside the jurisdiction of the RGS, Indigenous communities will be affected by anticipated population growth in the FVRD and the lower mainland as a whole. FVRD staff will be reaching out to Indigenous communities in the FVRD to determine how they will prefer to be engaged. The intent is to build on existing relationships and to build relationships where none are currently in place.

Public engagement

More general public engagement will take place over the spring and summer. A public engagement strategy has not yet been finalized but will likely include a series of open houses and opportunity to comment on the draft plan online.

Discussions with the Province and Indigenous communities/agencies will assist in finalizing the work plan going forward. As the process moves forward, staff will keep the Board informed of the process, and a more detailed timeline will be provided.

Once a final draft is completed and undergone Board, IAC and legal review, the amendment bylaw will go forward to the FVRD Board. As required by the Act, before 3rd Reading, the bylaw will be formally referred to member municipalities and adjacent regional districts ("affected local governments") for formal acceptance by resolution. Once accepted, the bylaw can be adopted by the Board. Should an RGS update not be accepted and parties cannot come to an agreement, the LGA sets out an arbitration process to resolve any outstanding issues. The goal is to move the bylaw forward into the formal approval process in January 2021.

COST

N/A

CONCLUSION

A draft of the FVRD Regional Growth Strategy is being prepared and undergoing revisions. Staff will be re-instituting the Intergovernmental Advisory Committee, engaging with affected local governments, Indigenous communities and agencies, provincial and federal ministries and agencies, the public and stakeholders, as we move towards a final draft. A more detailed timeline will be provided to the Board to reflect upcoming discussions with the Province, Indigenous communities and agencies.

COMMENTS BY:

Alison Stewart, Manager of Strategic Planning: Reviewed and supported.

Stacey Barker, Director of Regional Services: Reviewed and supported.

Mike Veenbaas, Director of Financial Services: No further financial comment.

Jennifer Kinneman, Acting Chief Administrative Officer: Reviewed and supported.