

To: Regional and Corporate Services Committee
From: Theresa Alexander, Planner 1

Date: 2021-11-12
File No: 6430-51-2011-01

Subject: RGS Update: Phase 2 Public Engagement Preliminary Results

INTENT

This report is intended to advise the Fraser Valley Regional District Board of information pertaining to Phase 2 public engagement for the updated Fraser Valley Regional District Regional Growth Strategy, *Fraser Valley Future 2050*. Staff is not looking for a recommendation and has forwarded this information should members want more clarification or to discuss the item further.

BACKGROUND

Earlier this year, the Board was presented with, and approved, an updated Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) consultation plan that incorporated new legislation and COVID-19 engagement protocols. Extensive engagement was conducted in earlier stages of the RGS update, which included, but was not limited to:

- Open houses throughout the FVRD (Boston Bar, Hope, Agassiz, Mission, Chilliwack, Abbotsford, and University of the Fraser Valley (UFV)) and a public opinion survey;
- Intergovernmental Advisory Committee (IAC) meetings and a workshop;
- Meetings with FVRD member municipalities;
- Council of Councils workshop;
- Indigenous membership on the IAC; and
- Outreach to Indigenous communities and agencies.

With COVID-19 limiting traditional public engagement methods, this phase of public engagement **utilized the FVRD's** new digital engagement site *Have Your Say FVRD* in addition to direct input received from residents in the form of letters and emails.

During the public engagement period of **August 3, 2021 to October 8, 2021**, visitors to the “Shape the Regional Growth Strategy” project engaged and became informed about the RGS Update by downloading a document, visiting the FAQ page, submitting questions, and by reading written contributions by members of the public. Visitors engaged further by completing the RGS survey, sharing their story, contributing to discussion forums, and by commenting on **or ‘liking’** other contributor’s ideas or comments.

This report provides preliminary results of the engagement findings, as a more detailed analysis of the considerable amount of engagement data is still underway. A more detailed summary document will be provided to the Board in November.

DISCUSSION

Public feedback has been encouraged throughout the RGS update process and also during related initiatives that have informed the RGS. In restarting the RGS update process it was important to reintroduce the RGS to the public and to obtain feedback on whether the plan and its policies are taking the region in a positive direction.

During this Phase 2 of public engagement, members of the public were invited to participate in the **review of the Fraser Valley Regional District's updated Regional Growth Strategy, Fraser Valley Future 2050** by visiting **the FVRD's new** engagement site *Have Your Say FVRD*. "Shape the Regional Growth Strategy" was the first project launched on the engagement platform, helping to build awareness of the engagement site, in the form of nearly 2,000 site visits, as many as 192 visits in a single day, and 400+ registered participants.

A variety of public outreach methods were conducted, including, but not limited to:

- FVRD website
- *Have Your Say FVRD*
- Social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
- Social media ads
- local Facebook group posts
- Media releases
- Newspaper articles
- Newspaper advertisements (2 advertisements, 5 papers)
- 40+ direct emails (community groups, ratepayers associations)
- Inclusion in community newsletters
- Posters distributed within Electoral Areas at central locations
- Posters in FVRD and Municipal offices
- Presentation to UFV Planning Students
- Deroche Digital Sign

Almost 1,500 members of the public visited the project page to learn more, 952 participants became more informed by clicking on something, and 347 participants contributed to at least one engagement tool¹. Visitors and participants learned about the RGS Update and the role of the FVRD by downloading one of 25 documents linked to the site **or by visiting the project's FAQ page. There were** a total of 300 downloads performed by 201 visitors, including 180 downloads of the draft RGS Update.

¹ Bang the Table HQ Engagement metrics, <https://helpdesk.bangthetable.com/en/articles/402959-what-does-aware-informed-and-engaged-mean>

1,482 Aware Participants		952 Informed Participants		347 Engaged Participants	
ACTIONS PERFORMED					
Visited at least one page	1,482	Downloaded a document	201	Contributed on Forums	36
		Visited an FAQ list Page	39	Participated in the Survey	326
		Visited Multiple Project Pages	569	Contributed to Stories	20
		Contributed to a tool (engaged)	346	Asked a Question	4
		Total Actions Performed	1,156	Total Actions Performed	386

92% of “Shape the Regional Growth Strategy” participants lived within the region, with representation from each member municipality and electoral area. Of those living in the region, 60% had lived in the region for more than 15 years, while 18% had called the region home for less than 5 years. The following table reflects the distribution of participants by geographic location.

WHERE PARTICIPANTS LIVE	PARTICIPANTS	% OF TOTAL
Abbotsford	73	17%
Chilliwack	117	27%
Mission	68	16%
Hope	26	6%
Kent	26	6%
Harrison	7	2%
Electoral Areas	86	20%
Metro Vancouver	30	7%
Outside of Lower Mainland	3	1%
Within FVRD	403	92%
Outside the FVRD	33	8%
Total Participants	436	100%

Includes participants who registered but did not engage with an engagement tool.
Based on postal codes provided by participants at registration.

What We Heard (preliminary findings)

This report provides only the preliminary findings of the engagement data collected from August 3, 2021 to October 8, 2021. A more detailed summary document based on *Have Your Say FVRD* engagement and other public input we received will be provided to the Board in November. Members of the public can continue to learn about the project by visiting *Have Your Say FVRD* and are encouraged to continue submitting comments and ideas related to the RGS Update to the Strategic Planning team.

Housing

Housing costs are a challenge in the region, so it is no surprise that a range of negative impacts were cited by those both directly and indirectly impacted by current housing conditions. Despite most participants owning a home, the top concern related to housing was the affordability of both renting and owning a home. Many respondents shared concerns about the housing challenges experienced by their adult children or aging family members.

Housing conditions were both a reason respondents lived in the FVRD as well as the reason they may end up leaving. **Due to high rents, even those with 'good jobs'** were unable to save enough to buy a home. Some reported moving to a different city to **find more 'affordable'** housing.

Concerns about the supply of suitable housing types was frequently cited, including the need for smaller homes for seniors and single adults, as well as larger homes for growing families. Many expressed a desire for increased density, smaller sized homes, and multi-generational housing options. While others expressed a distaste for further densification and urbanization in general.

Transportation

Despite minimal reported use of public transportation, there was significant support for the prioritization and investment in local and inter-regional public transit systems for both environmental reasons and to improve the flow of traffic on busy roads and highways. Many expressed the sentiment that the expansion of Highway 1 was greatly needed and long over-due, while others felt that expanding the highway only promoted the reliance on cars.

Many respondents felt that the operating hours and frequency of both local and regional bus systems needed to be increased. Some noted having no bus services in their area, which contributed to isolation and reduced access to amenities and health services, especially for seniors. Smaller buses and shuttles were suggested for areas with lower ridership, as a way to reduce carbon emissions, improve services in more rural areas, and ease traffic congestion to Cultus Lake during the summer months.

There was an overwhelming desire for rapid transit (SkyTrain or light rail) for the purpose of connecting communities and regions, helping to shorten and improve work commutes, as well as for less frequent inter-regional trips such as traveling to the airport. Some felt that rapid transit was the only way to get people out of their cars as it would provide a better option to driving. Those wanting rapid transit cited environmental reasons (reduced carbon emissions) and as a way to improve the flow of highway traffic.

There was considerable interest in electric vehicles and demand for more charging stations. Of survey respondents who reported driving, 15% said they currently own or lease an electric vehicle. However, 53% of all survey respondents indicated that they were very likely, likely, or somewhat likely to own or lease an electric vehicle in the next 5 years. A desire for more charging stations in multi-unit housing developments, remote areas, and building new homes with electric vehicles in mind.

Economic Development

The overall sentiment about economic development and employment in the FVRD was good. Based on survey responses, it is easier to find work, than find employees in the FVRD. Increased use of technology was reported by many and the need to continuously adapt to changes were cited as important in planning for the future. Many respondents also noted participating in remote work, some or most of the time.

About two thirds of survey respondents felt that finding trained, qualified and experienced staff was difficult. Less than 30% of survey respondents felt that they were unable to find suitable employment in the region. More than half of survey respondents indicated that good paying skilled jobs were available in region and that it was not difficult to find work in their field, industry, or profession. However, about half indicated that difficulties accessing child care made working in their field, profession or industry difficult.

Quality of Life

The top two reasons survey respondents said they lived in the FVRD was to access outdoor recreation and natural areas, as well as for quality of life, lifestyle and work/life balance. Many considered access to natural areas, parks and trails in the region to be good or very good, while access to mental health services needed to be improved. More than two thirds of survey respondents felt a connection to their community and to the region. However, many felt their communities were not inclusive or safe.

Environment

Respondents felt strongly about environmental protection and sustainability, to the protection of waterways, forests, and wildlife and fish habitats. Extreme weather events, forest fires, and emergency management planning were topics of significant importance due to the impact to humans and the environment. Many had concerns about the water they drink and the quality of the air they breathe. Climate change, waste management and recycling, options for alternative energy, and improved management of sewage systems were all equally important issues.

Many respondents indicated that their outlook on the future was negatively impacted by their concerns about the environment and/or climate change. A need for more trees and green spaces in urban areas and improved residential tree management was also commonly expressed. Education, environmental stewardship and improved development practices were noted as important components of managing some of the issues highlighted.

Rural Character

A strong appreciation for the character and lifestyle associated with rural areas was noted both in the *Have Your Say FVRD* engagement and through direct correspondence expressing a strong desire to protect and/or preserve the character and lifestyle associated with living in rural communities. This identifies a need to ensure the **updated RGS clearly communicates the plan's intention** to restrict urban development and higher densities to areas within the designated Regional Growth Boundaries

and not electoral areas. There was clear concern that growth within the Lower Mainland has and will continue to impact rural communities in **the region's electoral areas**.

COST

The costs of RGS consultation are incorporated in the *601 Regional Strategic Planning and Initiatives* budget.

CONCLUSION

The public engagement process has provided **a window into the thoughts and ideas of the region's** residents regarding the issues that the RGS aims to address.

The public engagement efforts aimed to provide information to the public and gauge the support and relevancy of current policy directives, topics, and the overarching goals of the RGS. The process has deepened our understanding of how individuals and communities are impacted by the very real challenges that the RGS aims to address. A more fulsome summary report of the public engagement results will be presented to the Board at its November meeting.

COMMENTS BY:

Alison Stewart, Manager of Strategic Planning: Reviewed and supported

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

Kelly Lownsborough, Director of Corporate Services/CFO: Reviewed and supported.

Jennifer Kinneman, Chief Administrative Officer: Reviewed and supported.