



Shaping Our Future

THE REGIONAL DISTRICT OF NANAIMO
GROWTH STRATEGY REVIEW

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Regional Growth Strategy Review 2007-2008

A Discussion Paper on Implementation of the Regional Growth Strategy

Table of Contents

Preamble 1

Implementation..... 2

Community Input..... 3

Board Direction 4

Options for changes to the RGS 4

More Guidance on Implementation 4

Coordination of Sustainability Initiatives..... 5

Next Steps..... 6

Preamble

The RDN initiated a comprehensive review of the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) in 2007¹. As part of the review, discussion papers were to be prepared at two different points in the review process. The first discussion paper, released in Spring 2008, was intended to get community feedback on those sustainability challenges that could be addressed in a revised regional growth strategy. In conjunction with the release of the discussion paper, two public workshops were held and an online survey was made available. Feedback from the community was received on the important issues to be addressed in the review and on sustainability challenges to be included in a revised RGS.

During the first round of consultation for the RGS Review, many comments were provided on a wide range of sustainability issues. In terms of improvements to the RGS, these comments generally fell into four broad areas: implementation, sustainability principles, improving existing policies, and expanding the content of the RGS to address a broader range of sustainability challenges.

Implementation

Many participants commented that the RGS is only effective if it is implemented. Many people felt that there has not been enough done to implement the policies in the RGS and also that not enough has been done to explain that the RGS is only a policy document and that it must be implemented by using other tools such as zoning. The RGS should be more explicit about how it will be implemented.

Sustainability principles

With the Board direction being that the RGS should be the cornerstone of the movement to a more sustainable region, many participants commented that the RGS should be based on sustainability principles. Currently, the RGS does not have a basis in sustainability principles and is generally focused on land use and development.

Broadening Sustainability

There is a need to expand the range of sustainability challenges that are in the regional growth strategy. For it to be the key document that guides the actions to becoming a more sustainable

¹ Please see www.shapingourfuture.ca for additional information on the RGS Review.

region it needs to cover a broader range of sustainability challenges. In particular, those related to social and economic sustainability.

Updating Existing Policies

Several participants commented that some of the existing RGS policies need to be improved and updated. With the RGS having a broader scope based on sustainability, there is a need to refine and possibly add to some of the policies that are already in the RGS so that they reflect the new priorities related to sustainability.

Therefore, based on the feedback received to date, a second set of four discussion papers is being prepared to address the main themes that came out of the first round of public consultation. As well, two discussion papers will deal with new provincial legislation related to regional growth strategies. The topics for the six discussion papers are:

- Implementation;
- Sustainability Principles;
- Strengthening Existing RGS Policies;
- Expanded Sustainability Policies;
- Greenhouse Gas Targets; and,
- Amending the RGS.

Each discussion paper will include: an introduction to the topic, a summary of public input; direction provided by the RDN Board; background on the topic; and, possible options for including goals/statements/policy in a revised RGS.

As stated in the first discussion paper released in Spring 2008, the challenge is to strike a balance between keeping decisions at the local level as much as possible and the need for consistent actions to achieve a liveable and sustainable region. After this phase of consultation is completed and the results of the input are compiled, a draft of a revised RGS will be developed.

Implementation

The RDN is recognised as a leader in promoting sustainability in the region and a significant amount of resources have been put into developing plans and strategies that identify how the region can be more sustainable. So far, limited resources have been used for developing policy

and there has been less emphasis on implementation. One of the roles of the RGS is to coordinate all community plans and operational plans by directing policies that will help achieve shared regional sustainability goals. The background documents to the RGS review and the conclusions of the State of Sustainability Project suggest that the RDN could do a better job at implementing the policies and actions identified in these documents.

Community Input

One of the prominent themes from both public workshops held in the spring was that RDN plans have not been adequately implemented. Many of the workshop participants showed support for the existing RGS policies, but identified a gap between these policies and action in terms of regulations or incentives. Some participants even suggested that the workshop discussions should be on existing policies rather than creating new ones.

Implementation was also emphasized by the participants in the online survey and in correspondence received from the public. The comments received regarding implementation supported the direction established in the original RGS, though emphasizing that not enough has been done to realise the RGS goals. The comments suggested that “implementation is the biggest challenge” of the RGS review process, as “we have all of the technical solutions, we just need to get them implemented.” If the RGS is to address these concerns it will need to provide more guidance to the Regional Board for the implementation of its policies.

The implications of not acting on the policies of the RGS are continued growth outside of the urban containment boundary and the proliferation of low density residential uses that cannot support improved community services. The community feedback reflects this trend, as identified in one comment “planners need to pay as much attention to zoning regulations in rural areas as they do in urban areas.” Community feedback also suggests that the realisation of these growth management policies would realise all other RGS sustainability policies of greenhouse gas emissions, preservation of rural areas, protection of environmentally sensitive areas and improving mobility options such as transit or cycling.

Board Direction

One of the goals related to creating sustainable communities identified in the RDN Board Strategic Plan is to continue the implementation of the RGS. The Strategic Plan is the guiding document for all RDN decisions and plans, including the RGS. The actions in the Strategic Plan for implementation include amending official community plans to focus growth into village centres within the urban containment boundary. The direction provided by the Board Strategic Plan is for the necessary changes to be made to official community plans followed up by changes to zoning and other land use regulations together with the establishment of incentives and disincentives.

Options for changes to the RGS**More Guidance on Implementation**

The existing policies in the RGS are intended to be implemented through zoning amendments and local government actions, but no schedule is in place for when these policies will be implemented or the responsibility of each jurisdiction. The original Regional Growth Management Plan included guidelines to suggest methods and tools to implement the policies of the plan. The method was only suggestive, allowing municipalities and electoral areas to determine the most appropriate actions to realise the regional sustainability goals in their own local official community plans. This guidance recognised the role of the RGS as the guiding document to coordinate official community plans while preserving local autonomy.

How may the RGS provide more direction for implementation?

The RGS could require that the RDN and member municipalities include in regional context statements an explanation of how RGS policies will be implemented. To assist with this requirement the RGS could include examples for the implementation of each RGS policy. The examples would list the actions that member municipalities, the RDN and the province may undertake to realise the goals of the RGS. Much like the original Growth Management Plan, the examples could identify the tools that are available for implementation and examples of how the RGS goals may be realised. The guidelines would only provide suggestions of content that may be included in local planning documents. These guidelines

could suggest changes to zoning or subdivision regulations that may be considered during the regular review of official community plans.

How can the RGS identify responsibility for implementing the RGS goals?

The RGS could include an implementation matrix identifying the timeline for the implementation of the RGS and the responsibilities of the RDN, the province and each member municipality. The matrix would be similar to the implementation actions table included in the original Growth Management Plan as it could provide direction for the timing of regional initiatives and guidance for local planning. A statement may clarify where actions included in the matrix are only suggestive of possible changes to local bylaws that may be considered during the review of municipal or electoral area official community plans.

How can the RGS assist with ensuring that policies are implemented?

The RGS could include a section on monitoring that would require reporting on the progress in moving toward the goals. For each goal, a set of indicators could be identified. The indicators would be updated on a regular basis and would be made available to the public. Some examples would be transit ridership, densities of the different urban areas, amount of land being actively farmed, length of trails and pathways, and rates of growth in urban and rural areas. The key is to use indicators that are linked to the goals and for which data is readily available.

Coordination of Sustainability Initiatives

The RGS currently functions as the guiding document for all RDN and member municipality official community plans. However, a broader role for the RGS that coordinates the more complete range of sustainability initiatives underway in the region has been identified in the Board Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan recognizes that “changes may be made to the Regional Growth Strategy to emphasize the Regional District’s goals, policies and actions regarding sustainability”. The Strategic Plan also recognizes the relationship between sustainability and growth management: “Growth management is widely acknowledged to be one of the most important aspects of building more sustainable communities”.

This role for the RGS appears to have support from the community. Participants in the survey and public workshops indicated that “there was no real master plan between areas” and

acknowledged a need for “better coordination of OCP plans.” The comments received reflect the need to define the role of the RGS as the coordinating document for all plans that address sustainability in the region.

How can the relationship between different sustainability initiatives be clarified through the RGS?

The RGS could include a section at the beginning of the document to explain the interrelationships and interconnections between the RGS and other plans, strategies and policy documents. The section could identify how the different documents work together to achieve the region’s commitment to sustainability. The section could also explain the relationship between the RGS and local government official community plans and the importance of regional context statements. The intent of this section would be to provide all stakeholders involved in regional growth management with the context for the RGS and how it is only part of a great number of initiatives that must be coordinated to realise the region’s sustainability goals.

How can the RGS ensure that the direction set out in the RGS will be followed?

The RGS could include a general statement that a regional growth strategy is an agreement between the RDN and member municipalities to work together to achieve regional goals. Successful implementation of the RGS also requires clear statements on the roles and responsibilities of all agencies responsible for implementation. As well, the RGS could provide direction for the content of regional context statements with respect to how policies will be implemented and how targets will be achieved.

Next Steps

This discussion paper is intended to initiate discussion on how the regional growth strategy can be improved so that it better addresses a wider range of sustainability challenges. The options presented here are not a final product. They are intended to initiate a dialogue on the content for a new and revised regional growth strategy based on sustainability principles.

After this phase of consultation is completed and the results of the input are compiled, a first draft of a new regional growth strategy will be developed. Community input on the draft will be sought.