

How Does the New April 8, 2011 Draft RGS Respond to Your Concerns?

We listened to your concerns about future growth and your comments on sustainability and have responded by incorporating this input into the Draft Regional Growth Strategy (RGS).

This list below contains the most frequently expressed concerns and issues recorded during community engagement on the RGS that took place between February and May 2009 (see *Regional Growth Strategy Survey Results, June 2009*). Immediately following each concern is an explanation of how it has been addressed in the April 8th 2011 draft RGS.

1. The RGS focuses too much on accommodating growth, the emphasis needs to be on sustainability.

The content of the draft RGS has been expanded to address more sustainability challenges and the 11 goals reflect environmental, social and economic sustainability priorities for the region. Growth Management and Sustainability Goals are closely interrelated in the draft RGS. For example, Growth Containment Boundaries (GCBs) are used as a tool to direct growth into designated areas in order to reduce urban sprawl and create communities that are more compact and make better use of resources. Tackling growth management is essential to addressing sustainability goals such as reducing Green House Gas emissions, improving energy efficiency, preserving wildlife habitat, supporting local food production or protecting water based ecosystems and drinking water.

2. The RGS needs to include policies for local governments to work with senior levels of government and other agencies.

Each section of the draft RGS contains policies directing the RDN to work with senior levels of government and/other agencies to address areas of shared concern identified within the public consultation. Examples include:

- Ecosystem protection – Policies 4.2.1 and 4.2.10 direct the RDN to work collaboratively with provincial and federal agencies to collect information and taking actions to protect sensitive ecosystems.
- Natural hazard mitigation – Policy 4.2.14 directs the RDN to work collaboratively with provincial and federal agencies to mitigate natural hazards.
- Transportation planning – Policies 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 identify projects to undertake with provincial and federal authorities to undertake studies and plans to improve transportation options and monitor transportation related GHG emissions.
- Food processing and marketing – Policies 4.8.11 and 4.8.12 provide direction to work with the provincial government and other agencies to improve access to markets for agricultural products and enhance the economic viability of farms.

3. Not enough has been done to stop the amount of growth occurring outside of the urban areas. The policies of the RGS must be implemented.

The policies of the draft RGS continue to prevent the designation of increased development outside of the Growth Containment Boundaries (Policy 5.3). The RGS recommends a number of actions to implement growth management policies including a study of existing Rural Village Centres to assess which ones have the potential to become viable centres with a mix of land uses (housing, shops, services etc.). Identifying the most viable rural village centres will allow the RDN to focus efforts to support their development.

The successful implementation of RGS policies is also contingent on the collaboration of all RDN members. To this end the RGS contains Policy 4.11.1 that commits the RDN members to implement the RGS.

“Every municipality and electoral area in the region will make provision in their official community plan and all necessary land use and other regulations to fully implement the Regional Growth Strategy”.

The RGS also contains a policy to *“establish a Corporate Implementation Strategy within one year of adoption of the RGS that demonstrates how all the RDN’s bylaws, services, and spending are consistent with the adopted RGS”.*

4. The RGS needs to include more provisions for education and public engagement for implementation.

To address this concern the draft RGS contains a new section (5) dedicated to “Accountability – Education, Awareness and Implementation”. This section includes

policies to “ensure that decision-making is transparent and clearly communicated to the public” and to “establish a communications and outreach strategy”.

The draft RGS also identifies establishing a monitoring program to measure how well the RGS is being implemented. This is a high priority action item that would involve annual reports on implementation and progress made towards the goals of the RGS.

5. Protect the forest lands as carbon sinks and for biodiversity.

Goals 1 (Climate Change) and 2 (Protecting the Environment) in the draft RGS support the role of forest lands as carbon sinks and for biodiversity. Specifically, Policy 4.1.3 provides direction to work with other organizations “to investigate ways to recognize and support the role of forest lands and urban forests play in: storing carbon; protecting watersheds; and, supporting healthy ecosystems”.

6. Empower people to make sustainable decisions

Each section of the draft RGS contains policies that involve educating the public about a variety of concerns including sensitive ecosystems, transportation alternatives and food production. Education and awareness of these issues will assist people in making more sustainable decisions. Examples of these include:

- Policies 4.2.8 and 4.2.12 provide direction to raise public awareness of coastal areas and other sensitive ecosystems;
- Policy 4.3.5 supports public education on the alternatives to automobile travel; and
- Policy 4.8.8 supports education and programs that increase awareness of food production and urban agriculture.

The draft RGS also recognises the role of education in improving government decision making. The draft RGS provides direction for the preparation of a communication and outreach strategy aimed at increasing public involvement in monitoring and implementation the RGS.

7. Transparency and accountability in decision making

Transparency and accountability is one of the sustainability principles that provide the basis for the content the draft RGS: “We are accountable for our decisions and actions”. This means that decisions in relation to every goal and policy must be consistent with this principle.

The draft RGS requires a formal bylaw amendment process which includes public consultation for major changes to the RGS. This provides for a consistent process that is transparent and open to public scrutiny for all RGS amendments.

8. More protection of drinking water and the biodiversity of ecosystems

The new draft RGS provides more direction than the current RGS for the RDN and member municipalities and electoral areas to use available tools and pursue partnerships that will protect fresh water (surface and ground) and seawater (Policies 4.2.1 to 4.2.3,).

Water conservation is an important part of this approach (Policy 4.10.5). Furthermore, some of the policies on wastewater treatment also support the protection of ground and surface water quality (Policy 4.10.2).

Policies to protect biodiversity include gathering better information, requiring environmental reviews for projects with the potential to damage ESA's and improving environmental protection across jurisdictions (Policies 4.2.9-4.2.15). The protection of ecosystems is also supported by several policies aimed at protecting drinking water.

New policies on the protection of drinking water and ecosystems also provide more guidance for the content of official community plans and parks plans.

9. The RGS needs to advocate for farmers to remove barriers to local food production.

The new draft RGS encourages the RDN and its member municipalities to take steps to support sustainable local food production. The draft provides specific direction for improving planning documents to support farming by ensuring that barriers to local food production are minimized. This includes removing barriers to local food production by supporting the retention of agricultural land for agricultural uses, reducing conflicts with other land uses, supporting the provision of processing facilities, allowing farmers markets in more locations (Policies 4.8.5 to 4.8.7) and support for the provision of resources and infrastructure necessary for local food production to be viable (Policies 4.8.9-4.8.14).

10. The RGS should include provisions for community gardens and farmers markets

The new draft RGS includes a policy to encourage urban agriculture initiatives (4.8.8) and support agricultural activity on lands that are not within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). These policies are both supportive of community gardens.

In relation to farmers markets, the new draft RGS provides specific guidance for the RDN and its member governments to consider amending Official Community Plans to allow “farmers markets and other outlets that sell local produce to locate in all parts of the community” (Policy 4.8.7). The draft RGS also provides direction for local governments to work with other agencies and senior levels of government to improve farmer’s access to markets for their products (Policy 4.8.11) and to support the production, processing, distribution and sale of locally grown produce (Policy 4.8.14).

11. The RGS needs policies for housing affordability

The new draft RGS addresses the issue of Affordable Housing by including a specific section that addresses access to housing that is “*appropriate, adequate, affordable, attainable and adaptable*”. Goal 6 – Facilitate Affordable Housing includes policies that outline ways that the RDN and its members can increase Affordable Housing within the region. The policies include:

- Undertaking a region wide Affordable Housing strategy
- Making changes to official community plans or zoning bylaws to increase the range of housing options and provide incentives for the construction of affordable, adaptable housing
- Exploring opportunities to improve the energy efficiency and affordability of existing housing stock

12. Need to work with senior levels of government on affordable housing initiatives

The new draft RGS recognises that the involvement of and collaboration with senior levels of government, housing support agencies and community groups is necessary to meet the housing needs of the community.

13. The RGS designates too many village centres that are very unlikely to accommodate new growth because of a lack of water and sewer servicing.

The new draft RGS continues to recognise designated areas within rural electoral areas as Rural Village Centres intended to accommodate a portion of the region's population growth. The ability of these areas to accommodate new growth is highly dependent on having adequate services (sewer, water, transit) to support new growth. The draft RGS now includes direction to conduct a region wide study to determine which Rural Village Centres have the most potential to accommodate new growth. Those that are not able to accommodate new growth may be redesignated to 'local service centres' with a limited amount of new development.

14. Maintain existing agricultural land and land within the Agricultural Land Reserve.

Consistent with the existing RGS, the new draft RGS continues to support keeping agricultural lands for agricultural use. The draft includes the following policy direction:

- To discourage the subdivision of agricultural lands (Policy 4.8.2);
- To have Official Community Plans that will prevent the designation of additional Rural Residential Land (Policy 4.5.12) in order to limit the conversion of agricultural lands to residential uses;
- Support for the Agricultural Land Commission to manage and maintain land in Agricultural Land Reserve for agricultural uses (Policies 4.7.14, 4.8.1 and 4.8.4); and,
- Support for agricultural activity on lands not in the Agricultural Land Reserve (Policy 4.7.14).

15. New rules need to be in place to prevent expansions to the Urban [Growth] Containment Boundary.

Previously, there was no consistent process for making changes to the RGS including the Growth Containment Boundary. The new draft RGS now includes a clear process for making any changes to the RGS. This includes establishing one process for changes considered to be 'minor' and another for those that are considered to 'major' due to having more significant impacts. Proposed changes to the Growth Containment Boundary would be considered to be 'major' and as such would be subject to a more rigorous amendment process which includes public consultation and acceptance by all members of the RDN prior to approval.

16. The housing in urban and village centres should reflect a diversity of needs of residents

The new draft RGS supports the development of a housing strategy that increases housing options to meet a diversity of needs (Policy 4.6.1) including seniors, youth, those with special needs, those with moderate and low incomes, and the homeless. The RGS also supports the location of a “broad range of housing types and unit sizes” within the Growth Containment Boundaries (Policy 4.4.4.). Policy 4.6.2 also encourages the adoption of *“official community plans and zoning bylaws that increase the range of housing options available especially in mixed-use centres that are well served by transit.”*

17. The RGS should make connection between density and efficient transportation.

The new draft RGS recognises the close connection between land use patterns, density and sustainable transportation choices. Goal 3 (Coordinate Land Use and Mobility) and Goal 4 (Concentrate Housing and Jobs in Growth Centres) clearly link concentrating housing, jobs, and services within the Growth Containment Boundary (GCB) with the ability to have a variety of transportation choices that reduce energy needed for transportation and the use of privately owned cars.

Urban Centres within the Growth Containment Boundary of a Municipality are identified in the new draft RGS as the “primary locations for accommodation of growth and development in the region”. This is in recognition of their ability to more efficiently support the needs of a higher density of population with a range services including transportation. In rural Electoral Areas, Rural Village Centres are intended to accommodate a smaller portion of the region’s population. The draft RGS recommends that the number and location of these Centres be reviewed to ensure that they can be adequately serviced in order to support sufficient densities.

These Goals 3 and 4 also support Goal 1 (Prepare for Climate Change and Reduce Energy Consumption) by helping lower Green House Gas emissions.

18. The RGS should continue to contain growth and direct it into existing urban areas

The draft RGS has renamed the Urban Containment Boundaries as Growth Containment Boundaries (GCBs), though they function the same way. The draft RGS continues to direct future growth to urban and rural village areas within GCB’s. The RGS also includes an amendment process that requires all proposed changes to the GCB include a process that allows for public input.