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REPORT TO PLANNING AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2024

SUBJECT Requirements for Consideration of Regional Growth Strategy Updates

ISSUE SUMMARY

To report on key inputs and studies required prior to Capital Regional District (CRD) Board considering the need for an update of the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) in 2026.

BACKGROUND

The RGS is a vision for the future of the capital region, developed in partnership with the region's 13 local governments and the Juan de Fuca (JdF) Electoral Area. The RGS guides decision making in support of the long-term livability of the region. The CRD Board adopted the RGS in 2018 and amended the RGS with updated population projections in 2021.

On November 8, 2023 the CRD Board carried the following motion:

"That staff report back on the timing and implications of the work required to consider an update to the Regional Growth Strategy in 2026."

Local Government Act Requirements

Section 429 of the *Local Government Act* specifies the required content for an RGS. An RGS must have a 20-year planning horizon and include population and employment projections. The RGS must include actions related to housing, transportation, regional district services, parks and natural areas and economic development, as well as greenhouse gas reduction targets. Additional regional matters may be included, subject to agreement of all participants.

Section 436 requires that all 13 local governments subject to the RGS accept the RGS before the CRD Board can adopt it as a bylaw.

Section 452(2) of the *Local Government Act* requires the CRD Board to consider the need for an RGS amendment once every five years. The CRD Board will make this consideration in 2026.

Matters to Consider

There are three key questions the CRD Board will need to consider when deciding whether to initiate an update of the RGS in 2026:

1. Can the RGS accommodate 95% of projected population growth within its urban containment boundary?
2. Do RGS policies provide sufficient guidance to the CRD and local governments on how to accommodate projected growth?
3. Do the CRD and local governments have the tools they need to successfully implement the RGS?

Trends and Inputs

The CRD Board will need to consider these matters against growth management trends and inputs. Current trends affecting growth management include new housing and planning legislation and revised projections signaling higher than anticipated population growth. The key task for CRD staff is to identify the policy implications of these changes to the RGS regional growth management framework.

CRD staff advise that four planning studies are needed to gather data, undertake analysis, and validate RGS policy direction. Table 1: RGS Studies lists the studies that will inform consideration of the need for an RGS update.

Table 1: RGS Studies

Study	RGS Input
1. Demographic research	20-year population, dwelling unit and employment projections
2. Industrial and employment lands survey	Spatial analysis to inform consideration of RGS mapping and policy updates related to economic development objectives
3. Collaborative planning with First Nations	Foundation for a collaborative planning process and guidance for how to better reflect First Nations communities in the RGS

In addition, a growth and mobility study is currently underway and will provide a spatial analysis to inform consideration of RGS mapping and policy updates.

CRD Board direction is needed to confirm that these studies will inform consideration of the need to update the RGS in 2026. Study results could also be considered against existing CRD plans and strategies to validate the policy direction in those foundational documents.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Planning and Protective Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

That CRD staff be directed to undertake the studies listed in Table 1: RGS Studies, identify whether additional policy direction is needed, and report back to the Planning and Protective Services Committee with these findings.

Alternative 2

That this report be referred back to staff for additional information.

IMPLICATIONS

Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities

CRD Corporate Plan Initiative 8a-2 is to assess the need for an update to the RGS and accompanying monitoring program. Additionally, the CRD Corporate Plan identifies that the RGS covers the breadth of regional service delivery. The proposed studies connect to other Corporate Plan initiatives and will deliver the co-benefit of advancing the RGS and corporate priorities.

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

To implement the vision expressed in the RGS, the CRD has developed a range of plans that set policy to guide regional investment and policy. These include:

- Regional Housing Affordability Strategy (2018)
- Regional Transportation Plan (2014)
- Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan (2022 – 2032)
- Regional Trails Management Plan (2016)
- Solid Waste Management Plan (2021)

- Regional Water Supply Master Plan (2022)
- Climate Action Strategy (2021)
- Liquid Waste management Plans (various dates)

In considering of the need for an RGS update, CRD staff will review plans and strategies developed post-2018 for new policy direction that could be integrated into the RGS. For plans that have not been updated in the last five years, CRD staff will confirm whether new policy direction is needed and align timing as needed.

Climate Action

RGS Objective 7 is focused on Climate Action. In considering the need for an RGS update, CRD staff will review the CRD's targets and policies related to climate action. This will be informed by the CRD Climate Action Strategy, and research completed since its inception.

Environmental

RGS Objective 2 is focused on environment and infrastructure, with the goal of protecting, conserving, and managing ecosystem health. The Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 provides direction to undertake conservation research within the regional parks system. CRD staff will review results in consideration for the need for an RGS update.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

Demographic data provided in the Census will be considered when the population and dwelling unit and employment projections are updated. While not forming part of the RGS, demographic data will be reviewed against RGS objectives and policies to support an equity lens analysis.

Financial Implications

Costs for studies listed in Table 1: RGS Studies will be identified through the 2025 service and financial planning processes. The regional growth strategy operating reserve would provide one-time funding for these studies. The Growth and Mobility Study is already funded through a Union of BC Municipalities Complete Communities grant. Costs to update CRD plans and strategies to seek additional policy direction would be identified, as needed, once the proposed RGS studies are complete.

First Nations Reconciliation

Currently, First Nations within the CRD are not partners in the RGS. This means that RGS objectives and policies do not apply to First Nations lands. In recent years, some First Nations have indicated an interest in seeing their communities reflected in the RGS. To better understand if and how the nations would want to be brought into the RGS framework, additional engagement is needed. A collaborative planning study undertaken in partnership with interested First Nations, would help identify the potential benefits, challenges, and risks of joining the RGS framework.

Intergovernmental Implications

RGS approval requires unanimous acceptance from all 13 local governments. Developing the RGS requires collaborative planning and decision making across the region. The proposed studies will be scoped to include technical input from the 13 local governments, JDF, province and First Nations. The Development Planning Advisory Committee, comprised of Planning Directors or their designates from the 13 local governments and the JDF, will be used to facilitate collaborative planning.

Regional Growth Strategy Implications

The proposed studies will advance work on the RGS according to the following principles:

1. **Values-based:** The RGS must be aligned with core CRD values as set out in the CRD mission statement.
2. **Data-informed:** The RGS must rely on data that can be validated, analyzed, and interpreted to develop robust policy responses to growth pressure.
3. **Partner-centered:** The RGS must respect local government and regional district authorities related to land use and service delivery, broadly defined.

These principles will support a working partnership approach among the CRD, 13 local governments and JDF, to ensure that the proposed studies meet partner needs.

The RGS represents how local Official Community Plans fit together in a regional context, showing planned land use and mobility patterns across the region. The studies proposed in Table 1: RGS Studies will support spatial analysis related to housing, transportation, climate action and industrial land availability. This analysis will promote shared regional understanding of the cumulative impacts of growth on communities. Study results are inputs to the RGS maps, including the Growth Management Concept Plan and the Settlement Concept. Based on study results, additional policy direction may be needed from an update to the Regional Housing Affordability Strategy and confirmation of the Regional Multi-modal Network as set out in the Regional Transportation Plan.

Service Delivery Implications

The existing work plan can accommodate the proposed studies.

Social Implications

The RGS vision is for residents to enjoy a healthy and rewarding quality of life, with a vital economy and livable communities. The proposed studies will help confirm alignment of this vision with RGS objectives and policies, to be considered when determining the need for an RGS update.

CONCLUSION

The RGS is a vision for the future of the capital region, with objectives and policies to guide shared regional decision-making. The CRD Board is required to consider the need for an RGS update by 2026. CRD staff propose to undertake studies to develop the inputs needed for the Board to make an informed decision about whether to update the RGS.

RECOMMENDATION

The Planning and Protective Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

That CRD staff be directed to undertake the studies listed in Table 1: RGS Studies, identify whether additional policy direction is needed, and report back to the Planning and Protective Services Committee with these findings.

Submitted by:	Emily Sinclair, MCIP, RPP, Senior Manager, Regional and Strategic Planning
Concurrence:	Kevin Lorette, P. Eng., MBA, General Manager, Planning & Protective Services
Concurrence:	Ted Robbins, B. Sc., C. Tech., Chief Administrative Officer