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REPORT TO PLANNING AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2026

SUBJECT Regional Growth Strategy Update

ISSUE SUMMARY

To report back on growth analysis and seek direction on whether to initiate an update of the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS).

BACKGROUND

The RGS is a long-term framework developed by the Capital Regional District (CRD) and local municipalities to guide how the region grows and to coordinate land use, infrastructure, and services.

The current RGS was adopted in 2018 and amended in 2021. It establishes shared policy direction and informs municipal Official Community Plans (OCPs) through Regional Context Statements (RCS), aligning local planning with regional objectives.

The current RGS planning horizon only extends to 2038. As regional planning, infrastructure investment, and provincial policy continue to evolve beyond this timeframe, the RGS is becoming less effective as a long-term framework.

Legislative and Governance Context

Part 13 of the *Local Government Act* establishes the statutory framework for the RGS:

- An RGS must include a minimum 20-year planning horizon;
- include population and employment projections, and coordinated policy direction related to growth;
- must be periodically reviewed; and
- requires acceptance by all affected local governments prior to adoption.

The RGS does not regulate land use. Municipalities retain authority through OCPs and zoning, with alignment achieved through RCSs.

Prior Board Direction and Scoping Work

On April 10, 2024, the CRD Board directed staff to undertake analysis to support a future decision on whether to update the RGS. Since that time, staff have undertaken the following work:

- Growth and Mobility Study (Appendix A)
- Population, housing, and employment analysis (Appendix B)
- Legislative and municipal policy review (Appendix C)
- Industrial land analysis – *ongoing (expected completion Q3 2026)*
- Initial engagement and discussion with First Nations

This report concludes that scoping phase and presents the opportunity to consider an update.

Consideration for an Update

Since the RGS was adopted in 2018, the regional planning context has changed significantly. While the RGS remains a strong foundation, legislative, demographic, and economic changes are increasing misalignment between municipal planning, regional infrastructure and services, and provincial policy direction.

Together, these changes suggest it is timely for the Board to consider initiating an update to ensure the RGS reflects current conditions, policy direction, and regional priorities.

1. Provincial Legislative and Policy Change

Recent provincial legislation, particularly Bill 43 (provincial housing target orders), Bill 44 (Small Scale Multi-Unit Housing), and Bill 47 (Transit-Oriented Areas), have significantly changed how local governments plan for housing, density, and infrastructure. These changes affect growth patterns, transportation demand, and servicing requirements not anticipated in the current RGS. See Appendix C for a list of relevant legislative and policy change since 2018.

An update would support regional alignment with provincial direction, municipal planning, and infrastructure and service delivery

2. Population and Growth Trends

The region has grown by approximately 50,000 since 2018 (12% growth), with uneven growth across communities. The CRD is now about a decade ahead of the population projected in the 2018 RGS and is expected to surpass 500,000 residents by the mid-2030s. Higher growth, particularly in the West Shore, has implications for transportation, infrastructure demand, and service delivery.

Community	2018	2025	% Change
Langford	41,639	59,664	43.29%
Colwood	18,339	22,794	24.29%
Sooke	14,485	17,248	19.07%
View Royal	11,327	12,795	12.96%
Highlands	2,468	2,753	11.55%
Victoria	93,668	103,888	10.91%
North Saanich	11,860	12,986	9.49%
Sidney	12,354	13,445	8.83%
Juan de Fuca	5,086	5,439	6.94%
Esquimalt	18,606	19,512	4.87%
Saanich	120,312	126,011	4.74%
Central Saanich	17,832	18,184	1.97%
Oak Bay	18,405	18,626	1.20%
Metchosin	5,196	5,207	0.21%
Total	391,577	438,552	12.0%

Table 1: Population change by local government after 2018 RGS update.

Updated population, housing, and employment projections are underway and will extend the planning horizon beyond 2038. This work will validate regional projections and develop local-level forecasts based on OCP policies and economic analysis, supporting a potential extension of the planning horizon to 2055 (see Appendix B).

Current growth levels and distribution provide a clear rationale for an RGS update, while ongoing analysis will inform potential adjustments to the growth framework and policies.

3. Local Government Growth Directions and OCP Updates

Local governments are updating their OCPs in response to provincial requirements, housing needs, and local priorities, on varying timelines and reflecting local contexts.

The RGS provides a shared regional framework within which these plans align. An update would:

- Reconfirm regional growth objectives and structure.
- Revisit key tools such as the Urban Containment Boundary (UCB) and rural protection policies.
- Maintain consistency across municipal plans through the RCS process.
- Better align regional and local planning horizons.

Without an update, municipal planning will continue while regional policy becomes less clear and increasingly outdated. RCS processes risk becoming administrative rather than strategic, and opportunities to align land use with transportation and infrastructure investment may be missed.

4. Transportation and Land Use Integration

Regional transportation planning has advanced since the previous RGS, including the ongoing update to the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), which informs this report.

Early RTP findings confirm that transportation outcomes are shaped by long-term growth patterns, particularly the location and form of development in key corridors and centres. Emerging initiatives, such as the Reconciliation Corridor Initiative, further highlight how strategic transportation investments may influence regional growth and land use.

An RGS update would:

- Align growth management policy with the evolving regional transportation network, including priority corridors and centres.
- Support growth patterns and land use that enable transit investment and multi-modal mobility.
- Provide a consistent framework for transit-supportive development and infrastructure planning.

Without an update, land use and transportation planning risk proceeding in parallel rather than as an integrated system.

5. Alignment with CRD Services and Infrastructure Planning

CRD services including water, wastewater, transportation, parks, and climate initiatives are planned and delivered based on shared assumptions about growth patterns.

As the RGS planning horizon becomes increasingly outdated, the risk of misalignment between service planning and infrastructure investment assumptions and actual growth patterns increases. Updating the RGS would support continued coordination across services and help maintain a consistent long-term planning framework.

Process Considerations

Initiating an update authorizes a multi-year, region-wide process to review and update regional policy through engagement. It does not pre-determine growth patterns or commit governments to specific outcomes.

If approved, the update would include:

- Review of policy areas and growth management approach.
- Alignment with provincial legislation and CRD strategies.
- Reflect updated municipal OCPs.
- Integrate with transportation planning, including ongoing RTP work.
- Update population, dwelling, and employment projections beyond 2038.
- Review of the RCS process and RGS amendment procedures.

Updating the RGS is a collaborative, governance-led process requiring acceptance by participating local governments. It involves early and sustained engagement with local governments and First Nations, grounding changes in existing Board-approved CRD strategies and plans, using municipal OCPs where policy direction is established, and allowing time for issue resolution and consensus-building.

Timeline and Phasing

Subject to Board direction, a detailed work plan, timelines, engagement processes, and resource requirements would be developed. Indicative high-level phases are outlined below:

- *Phase 1 – Project Initiation and Scoping (Q1–Q2 2027)*
Confirm scope, governance, risk assessment, work plan, and engagement strategy.
- *Phase 2 – Policy Review and Issue Identification (Q2 - Q4 2027)*
Review existing RGS policies and identify areas requiring an update.
- *Phase 3 – Policy Development (Q1–Q3 2028)*
Develop draft policy directions through engagement with interest holders.
- *Phase 4 – Draft RGS and Regional Engagement (Q3–Q4 2028)*
Prepare draft RGS and undertake regional and public engagement.
- *Phase 5 – Finalization, Adoption and Preliminary Implementation (Q1–Q4 2029)*
Refine draft, complete legislative processes, and adopt updated RGS.

Monitoring and initial implementation (2030 onward) would include updating indicators, managing Regional Context Statements, and supporting early implementation. The phases above are indicative and intended to show sequencing, with timelines refined during project initiation and adjusted as needed based on Board direction and engagement outcomes.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

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

That the Capital Regional District Board direct staff to initiate an update of the Regional Growth Strategy starting in Q1 2027, informed by the analysis summarized in this report.

Alternative 2

That this report be referred back to staff for additional information based on Planning and Protective Services Committee direction.

IMPLICATIONS

Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities

Initiating an RGS update aligns with CRD priorities for coordinated regional growth management, infrastructure planning, climate action, and service integration. The RGS provides a governance framework for consistent, long-term decision-making across CRD services and initiatives and updating it ensures the framework remains current and aligned with evolving regional priorities.

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

Initiating an RGS update would strengthen alignment across CRD plans and strategies, including the RTP, Regional Transportation Service priorities, Climate Action Strategy, Regional Parks Strategic Plan, and Integrated Water Services planning.

It would also maintain alignment with municipal OCPs through Regional Context Statements and incorporate recent provincial legislation into a coordinated regional framework.

Climate & Environmental Implications

The RGS is a key regional tool for climate mitigation and adaptation, supporting coordinated land use, transportation, natural area protection, and efficient infrastructure planning. Updating the RGS strengthens alignment with current climate targets, greenhouse gas reduction goals, and environmental priorities without predetermining specific outcomes.

Financial Implications

Funding to initiate the RGS update has been identified within existing operating reserves. An Initiative Business Case (IBC) outlines required staff and resources, subject to Board approval. No additional requisition is required at this time.

Initiating the update does not commit the Board to future capital or operating costs but supports improved long-term financial planning through clearer growth and service coordination.

First Nations Implications

Initiating an RGS update creates an opportunity for early and meaningful engagement with First Nations to determine how they wish to be involved in, and reflected within, the regional growth planning framework. There is growing recognition of the importance of incorporating Indigenous perspectives, governance relationships, and land use interests into regional planning, and an update would support this through ongoing dialogue and relationship-building.

While the nature and extent of participation will be defined collaboratively, initiating an update enables this work to proceed proactively. Preliminary discussions have begun, and there is interest in continuing dialogue should the Board choose to proceed, including exploring shared priorities such as land use, transportation, housing, and environmental stewardship.

Intergovernmental Implications

The RGS is a shared policy framework among the CRD, its member municipalities, electoral areas, and the Province. Initiating an update supports continued intergovernmental coordination on growth management, housing, transportation, and infrastructure planning, and helps ensure ongoing alignment with provincial legislation and policy direction. Updates to the RGS require unanimous approval from all participating municipalities.

Service Delivery Implications

An updated RGS would support more effective coordination of CRD service planning and delivery by aligning long-term growth expectations with infrastructure investment, transportation services, parks and environmental services, and regional utilities. Initiation of the update does not result in immediate service level changes.

CONCLUSION

This report responds to prior Board direction and summarizes growth-related analysis completed since 2024. Given the scale of change in population growth, housing policy, transportation, and infrastructure coordination, initiating an update to the Regional Growth Strategy is recommended to maintain an effective and coordinated regional planning framework.

RECOMMENDATION

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

That the Capital Regional District Board direct staff to initiate an update of the Regional Growth Strategy starting in Q1 2027, informed by the analysis summarized in this report.

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ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A: Growth and Mobility Study
- Appendix B: Population Projection Analysis
- Appendix C: Legislative and Municipal Policy Summary