

**REPORT TO REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY COMMISSION
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2024**

SUBJECT **Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan - Community Input (Phase 1) Engagement Summary**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To provide a summary of the feedback received from the Community Input (Phase 1) Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) engagement process, which sought to gain feedback from the public on the Strategic Plan's commitments and how the public would prefer to be engaged on the Strategic Plan moving forward.

BACKGROUND

At the July 17, 2024 Regional Water Supply Commission meeting, staff proposed to undertake a two-stage public engagement process for the Strategic Plan. The public engagement process would consist of two phases with information available on the Capital Regional District's (CRD) public engagement platform (GetInvolved.crd.bc.ca). The first phase would run from August to September 2024 and focus on informing the public about the planning framework, understanding community priorities, and asking for feedback on preferred ways to participate (in person or virtual). Starting in November 2024, the second phase would focus on seeking feedback from interested parties regarding the proposed Commitments, Priorities and Actions in a draft strategy.

Staff proceeded with Community Input (Phase 1) in the summer of 2024. An online survey was made available for public input from August 29 to September 30, 2024. The survey was designed to understand public interest in the Strategic Plan's commitments and how people prefer to participate in future engagement. The survey consisted of nine questions asking about age and location demographics, support levels for the commitments, how people want to stay informed and how people want to provide feedback about the Strategic Plan.

Survey Feedback

Overall, the commitments resonated with most respondents, with 94% of respondents indicating the commitments were Very Important or Important to them.

Responses from the Community Input (Phase 1) Strategic Plan engagement indicate Community Feedback (Phase 2) engagement for the Strategic Plan should use digital tools to share information or collect feedback. This includes but is not limited to providing online surveys, virtual information sessions/open houses, social media and an email address where people can ask questions.

Education and learning about the water supply were common themes amongst the survey comments. A number of respondents noted a lack of understanding of how the water system works, where their water comes from, how the watershed is managed and how all the pieces connect to one another. This input will be used to inform Phase 2 engagement materials and aligns with proposed actions in the Strategic Plan under commitment #2 - Enhance public connection and confidence of the water supply and value of water.

The survey also revealed less uptake from younger age categories. This could be due to lack of awareness as well as various day-to-day realities of competing for time and attention.

Community Feedback (Phase 2) Engagement Plan

Staff plan to use digital tools for Phase 2 engagement, supplemented by advertising and in-person outreach based on the feedback received from Phase 1.

An advertising plan will be prepared prior to launching Phase 2 engagement. The advertising plan will focus on reaching a broad range of age groups primarily through digital channels, with some TV, radio and newspaper advertising. Engagement will also focus on leveraging email subscription tools on the Get Involved platform to keep people informed about the Strategic Plan as well as in-person pop-up events in community locations to share information about the Strategic Plan and how to provide feedback. An online survey will be used to collect feedback, with print versions available at the Integrated Water Services office or by phone, as an alternative if needed.

To reach a broad range of participants, particularly younger demographics, Phase 2 engagement activities will include digital advertising on social channels as well as displays or information booths at community locations such as recreation centres or libraries.

Next Steps

Concurrent to Phase 1, staff updated the draft 2025 Strategic Plan outline based on feedback provided by the Commission at its July 17, 2024 meeting. At its September 25, 2024 meeting, the Regional Water Supply Commission approved the revised Strategic Plan outline and directed staff to proceed with the engagement plan for the draft 2025 Strategic Plan.

Feedback from Phase 1 engagement indicated that overall, the commitments resonated with the majority of respondents, with 94% of respondents indicating the commitments were Very Important or Important to them. Given this feedback, staff are not recommending any changes to the commitments as approved by the Regional Water Supply Commission on September 25, 2024.

The engagement plan for Community Feedback (Phase 2) has been refined based on the recommendations outlined above. The start of Phase 2 of engagement has been moved from November 2024 to January 2025 to avoid overlap with additional Regional Water Supply Development Cost Charges program public engagement activities and the holiday season.

Starting in January 2025, the second phase of public engagement will focus on sharing the draft Strategic Plan, informing the public about what it means for their future water needs, and collecting feedback on the proposed Commitments, Priorities and Actions in the draft strategy. The online survey will be launched in January with a response period of 45 days.

CONCLUSION

Staff have concluded Phase 1 of the community engagement for the Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan. Feedback from this engagement indicated that the Commitments resonated with the majority of respondents and a preference for the use of digital tools to share information or

collect feedback during Community Feedback (Phase 2) engagement. The engagement plan for Community Feedback (Phase 2) has been refined based on the feedback from the Phase 1.

Starting in January 2025, Phase 2 of the public engagement will focus on sharing the draft Strategic Plan, informing the public about what it means for their future water needs, and collecting feedback on the proposed Commitments, Priorities and Actions in the draft Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION

There is no recommendation. This report is for information only.

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| Submitted by: | Alicia Fraser, P. Eng., General Manager, Integrated Water Services |
| Concurrence: | Ted Robbins, B. Sc., C. Tech., Chief Administrative Officer |

ATTACHMENT(S)

Appendix A: RWS 2025 Strategic Plan: Community Input (Phase 1) – What We Heard Report