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REPORT TO PLANNING AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MAY 28, 2025

SUBJECT Regional Context Statement Alignment Review – District of Highlands

ISSUE SUMMARY

To review the District of Highlands Regional Context Statement (RCS) in relation to the Capital Regional District's (CRD) Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) Bylaw (Bylaw No. 4017).

BACKGROUND

The RGS is a vision for the future of the capital region, guiding decisions on regional issues such as transportation, population growth and settlement patterns. The RGS promotes the long-term livability of the region with policy intended to enhance social, economic and environmental performance. The current RGS was adopted by the CRD Board on March 14, 2018 (Bylaw No. 4017). On April 14, 2021 the CRD Board amended the RGS with updated population projections (Bylaw No. 4328).

An RCS, adopted within a local government's Official Community Plan (OCP), sets out the relationship between the RGS and OCP and how they will be made compatible over time. Per section 446 of the *Local Government Act* (the *Act*), an OCP in a local government to which an RGS applies must include an accepted RCS. The *Act* stipulates that upon receipt of a proposed RCS, the CRD Board must respond by resolution within 120 days to the municipal council to indicate whether or not it accepts the RCS. The Board is deemed to have accepted the RCS if it does not respond within the 120-day period.

On April 11, 2018, the CRD Board approved a framework to guide the evaluation of regional context statements.

On February 28, 2025, the District of Highlands submitted an updated RCS for Board acceptance (see Appendix A). The RCS was prepared to reflect the content of an OCP update to approve the South Highlands Local Area Plan (Bylaw No. 450, 2025) and the adoption of an updated Housing Needs Report. The CRD Board previously approved the District of Highlands RCS on March 11, 2020.

Regional Planning staff have evaluated the updated RCS in accordance with the Board-approved Regional Context Statement Framework. This framework identifies three criteria against which staff should evaluate an RCS:

- 1) **All relevant content is included:** The RCS addresses all RGS content relevant to the OCP. Content that is not applicable in the context of the OCP should be identified as "not applicable".
- 2) **Clearly articulates relevant content:** The RCS provides a sufficient level of detail to convey how the specific OCP content relates to the RGS.
- 3) **Plan to be consistent over time:** The RCS identifies how the OCP will become consistent with the RGS over time, if content is not immediately consistent.

Appendix B presents a summary of the evaluation.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

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

That the District of Highlands Regional Context Statement be considered in relation to the 2018 Regional Growth Strategy (Bylaw No. 4017) and be accepted in accordance with the requirements of section 448 of the *Local Government Act*.

Alternative 2

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

That the District of Highlands Regional Context Statement be considered in relation to the 2018 Regional Growth Strategy (Bylaw No. 4017) and not be accepted in accordance with the requirements of section 448 of the *Local Government Act*.

Alternative 3

That the District of Highlands Regional Context Statement report be referred back to staff for additional information based on Planning and Protective Services Committee direction.

IMPLICATIONS

Intergovernmental Implications

Board acceptance of the RCS is a key RGS implementation tool as the context statement relates a local government's OCP to the RGS. The OCP provides policies that guide decisions related to land use, infrastructure, mobility, housing, parks and other content under the authority of a local government. The District of Highlands has submitted a proposed RCS to fulfill its statutory obligation to have an accepted RCS that demonstrates the relationship of its new OCP to the RGS. An accepted RCS is necessary in order for the adoption of an updated OCP.

Regional Growth Strategy Implications

The District of Highlands' proposed RCS demonstrates a strong relationship to the RGS that supports the RGS vision and objectives, based on staff's analysis against the RCS evaluation criteria. The RCS fully captures all relevant OCP content (*criteria #1*) and identifies how the OCP relates to the RGS (*criteria #2*). The RCS notes policy areas where the OCP will become consistent with the RGS over time as additional planning work is undertaken (*criteria #3*).

As outlined in Appendix B, the RCS is aligned with the vision and objectives for growth management, environment and infrastructure, housing and community, transportation, economic development, food systems and climate action. The District of Highlands supports slow growth and maintaining the rural character of the community, which is aligned with RGS goals for lands outside of the Urban Containment Policy Area (UCPA). Limited employment and economic land uses are supported in the areas of the District that are within the UCPA. The proposed OCP provides detailed policy for these lands as the update is focused on the approval of the South Highlands Local Area Plan.

Environmental & Climate Implications

The CRD Climate Action Strategy identifies sustainable land use, planning and preparedness as an important goal area to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. RGS implementation, including the approval of RCSs that will help reduce community-based GHG emissions, is a key action.

As shown in Appendix B, the District of Highlands RCS continues to support limited development in the District that is in keeping with its rural character. The RCS references OCP policy that support the ongoing protection of rural lands and natural areas, policies to identify, protect, enhance, and restore healthy ecosystems, and policies regarding Environmentally Sensitive Areas, and ongoing support for the protection of regional parks.

Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities

Reviewing RCSs for consistency addresses the Planning Community Need from the 2023-2026 CRD Corporate Plan goal 8a for managed growth. The RCS review is an on-going initiative, which is part of Regional Planning's core service delivery.

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The District of Highlands' RCS is aligned with existing CRD plans and strategies that detail and enact the seven primary objectives of the RGS.

CONCLUSION

Provincial legislation requires that a municipal OCP contain an accepted RCS. Board acceptance of the RCS is a key tool for RGS implementation. Staff have reviewed the District of Highlands proposed RCS in accordance with the Board-approved evaluation framework. The RCS demonstrates a strong relationship to the RGS and will work toward achieving RGS vision and objectives.

RECOMMENDATION

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

That the District of Highlands regional context statement be considered in relation to the 2018 Regional Growth Strategy (Bylaw No. 4017) and be accepted in accordance with the requirements of section 448 of the *Local Government Act*.

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ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A: District of Highlands Regional Context Statement Referral
- Appendix B: Regional Context Statement Evaluation
- Appendix C: District of Highlands Draft Regional Context Statement