

## REPORT TO REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY COMMISSION MEETING OF DECEMBER 17, 2025

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**SUBJECT**     2025 Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan – Final

### **ISSUE SUMMARY**

To present a summary of the First Nations consultation and feedback on the draft 2025 Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan and the updated 2025 Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan (Appendix A) for approval.

### **BACKGROUND**

At its February 21, 2024 meeting, the Regional Water Supply Commission (Commission) closed out the 2017 Strategic Plan and directed staff to update the Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan), with the further direction to return an updated draft to the Commission prior to initiating public, First Nations, and interest holder engagement.

Based on the February 21, 2024 direction from the Commission, staff developed a draft of the 2025 Strategic Plan. The draft built on the foundational commitments defined in the 2017 Strategic Plan and considered current operational context and external pressures and priorities anticipated in the next five-to-ten-year planning horizon. Staff incorporated best practices in water management and consulted with municipal partners to ensure the draft addressed both operational requirements and long-term strategic goals.

On July 17, 2024, staff presented the draft Strategic Plan and the proposed engagement plan to the Commission. The Commission provided feedback, which was incorporated into a revised draft. At the September 25, 2024 meeting, the Commission endorsed the revised draft Strategic Plan and directed staff to proceed with a two-phased engagement plan.

### **Public Engagement**

Phase 1 of engagement focused on informing the public about the three commitments that form the foundation of the Strategic plan and gathered initial input on how the public would like to be engaged in the subsequent phase. The feedback from this engagement was presented to the Commission on November 20, 2024 and was summarised in *Regional Water Supply 2025 Strategic Plan: Community Input (Phase 1) – What We Heard Report* (Appendix C).

Following this, Phase 2 was conducted from February to March 2025, during which substantive feedback was collected from the community. At the May 21, 2025 Commission meeting, staff presented the *Regional Water Supply 2025 Strategic Plan: Community Input (Phase 2) – What We Heard Report* (Appendix D), providing a comprehensive summary of public feedback received during the engagement period. The Commission reviewed this report and the engagement outcomes.

## First Nations Engagement

In parallel with public engagement, staff-initiated engagement with First Nations. On March 4, 2025, the Capital Regional District (CRD) sent letters of engagement to the following First Nations with traditional territories within the regional water supply area: BOKÉCEN (Pauquachin), Cowichan Tribes, Halalt, Lyackson, MÁLEXEL (Malahat), paaʔčiidʔatx (Pacheedaht), SʔÁUTW (Tsawout), Sc'ianew (Beecher Bay), Spune'luxutth (Penelakut), Stz'uminus, T'Sou-ke, Ts'uubaa-asatx, WJOLÉLP (Tsartlip), WSIKEM (Tseycum) and xʷsepsum (Kosapsum).

Each letter invited feedback on the draft 2025 Strategic Plan, specifically asking whether the proposed actions reflected the priorities of each Nation. The CRD expressed a strong interest in collaborating with each Nation on water supply management. While the draft Plan presented several potential actions, recipients were asked to consider how these actions aligned with their priorities and to suggest any additional initiatives for inclusion. Furthermore, CRD staff offered to meet individually with each First Nation to discuss the draft Strategic Plan in greater detail and to collect direct feedback.

To ensure a comprehensive and accurate summary of First Nations engagement, staff engaged Jemma Scoble & Associates Consulting Inc. (JSco). JSco was provided all formal and informal written feedback, as well as meeting summaries from First Nations that did not provide feedback in writing. JSco was tasked with reviewing this material and preparing an independent summary of key themes and perspectives, which is reflected in the *CRD Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan: First Nations Engagement – What We Heard Report* (Appendix E). The following themes were present in most of the discussions with First Nations and in written feedback received during the engagement period:

- Reconciliation as a Guiding Principle
- Governance and Representation
- Watershed Access
- Desire for Greater Collaboration on Watershed Stewardship and Protection
- Cultural and Spiritual Connection to Water
- Cumulative Impacts on Water Resources

## Updates to the Draft Strategic Plan

Public feedback from both phases of engagement, along with input from First Nation consultation, has been considered and changes based on that feedback have been incorporated in the final the 2025 Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan (Appendix A). The following summarizes the more significant changes that have been made to the draft 2025 Strategic Plan that was released with the Phase 2 – Public Engagement and First Nations consultation (Appendix B).

Based on feedback from the public, there is an opportunity to provide more insight into the municipal water bills and clarify confusion and ambiguity. As the CRD does not bill residents directly for Regional Water Supply, staff will need to coordinate with each of the water suppliers. Given this feedback, staff have added the following action:

### ***Commitment 2, Priority 2:***

***Long Term Action: Work with Municipal partners to provide added clarity on water bills.***

Based on the feedback from the First Nations consultation, staff have updated the Guiding Principles to add a principle titled “Advancing Reconciliation Through Shared Water Stewardship.” The Land Acknowledgment was also updated based on feedback from the First Nations. Several actions were also revised or added in response to feedback from the First Nations, including:

***Commitment 1, Priority 1:***

*Near Term Action: Expand opportunities for First Nations to access the watershed lands for cultural and ceremonial use, for purposes such as food and medicine harvesting.*

*Near Term Action: Explore additional opportunities for First Nation Guardian programs to conduct environmental monitoring in their territories.*

*Medium Term Action: Expand opportunities for First Nations involvement in stewardship of watershed lands.*

*Medium Term Action: Collaborate with First Nations on implementation and mitigation strategies for works that impact the watershed lands, waters and wildlife.*

***Commitment 1, Priority 2***

*Near Term Action: Refine the schedule and develop a delivery implementation strategy for infrastructure improvements identified in the 2022 Master Plan.*

*a. Undertake early engagement with First Nations and consultation as required*

***Commitment 1, Priority 3***

*Near Term Action: Explore options for enhanced First Nations participation in decision making within Regional Water Supply Service.*

***Commitment 3, Action 2***

*Cultivate strategic partnerships with skilled contractors and consultants, including First Nations, ensuring access to expertise and resources to meet operational and capital needs.*

***Commitment 3, Action 3***

*Foster partnerships with municipalities and First Nations to develop a robust integrated drinking water plan for emergency response and natural disasters in alignment with the evolving requirements of the Emergency and Disaster Mitigation Act.*

The addition of the actions listed above responds to the priorities raised by the First Nations that are within the scope and control of the service.

Finally, messages introducing the Strategic Plan from the Chair and the General Manager were also added.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

### *Alternative 1*

That the Regional Water Supply Commission:

1. Approve the 2025 Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan as presented and direct staff to move forward with the actions identified; and
2. Direct staff to forward the 2025 Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan to the Capital Regional District Board for information and make the Plan available for public distribution.

### *Alternative 2*

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

## **CONCLUSION**

At its February 21, 2024 meeting, the Regional Water Supply Commission directed staff to update the Strategic Plan. Staff developed a draft, conducted two phases of public engagement (Phase 1 in late 2024 and Phase 2 in early 2025), and held parallel First Nations engagement. Updates based on this feedback were incorporated into the final 2025 Strategic Plan. This report recommends approving the plan and directing staff to proceed with identified actions and forward the plan to the Capital Regional District Board for information and public distribution.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Regional Water Supply Commission:

1. Approve the 2025 Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan as presented and direct staff to move forward with the actions identified; and
2. Direct staff to forward the 2025 Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan to the Capital Regional District Board for information and make the Plan available for public distribution.

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## **ATTACHMENTS**

Appendix A: 2025 Strategic Plan - December 2025

Appendix B: Draft 2025 Strategic Plan - February 2025

Appendix C: What We Heard Report - Community Input (Phase 1)

Appendix D: What We Heard Report - Community Input (Phase 2)

Appendix E: What We Heard Report - First Nations Engagement