

CRD DIRECTOR'S REPORT

REPORT TO CRD ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY MARCH 25, 2020

"The truth about a city's aspirations isn't found in its vision. It's found in its budget."
- Brent Toderian

Recommendation

That staff be directed to report back with options for accelerating the Capital Regional District's (CRD) response to the climate emergency, including consideration of additional investments through the 2021 budget process and options for increasing regional collaboration to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG).

Background

In February 2019, the Capital Regional District Board declared a climate emergency. The climate emergency motion included three items of relevance to this report:

1. That the Capital Regional District Board declare a Climate Emergency
2. That the CRD take a leadership role to work towards the achieving carbon neutrality in the region by 2030
3. That the Board Chair write to all local governments in the region requesting that they also declare climate emergencies and commit to working towards climate neutrality by 2030

All other local governments in the CRD have followed suit and also passed climate emergency declarations.

Since passing this motion, the CRD Board incorporated addressing the climate emergency into its four-year strategic plan. CRD staff have begun to use a climate lens on some issues, for example, consideration of the approach to power generation at the Hartland Landfill. And staff have also begun to report out quarterly on climate-related actions taken.

Yet despite the climate emergency declaration, in the 2020 budget process, staff did not bring forward – nor did the board request – substantial new investments to address the climate emergency and to accelerate GHG emissions reduction across the region.

The February 19th Environmental Services Committee service planning report (see Appendix A to Item 6.2) notes that declaring a climate emergency and taking a leadership role to pursue carbon neutrality and working with local governments to further reduce emissions from buildings, transportation and solid waste have no budget impact and can be absorbed into the core service. We don't feel that this is adequate.

Some local governments within the CRD have responded to their climate emergency declarations with significantly accelerated actions. These include multi-million dollar budget requests, as well as significantly more ambitious GHG reduction targets.

Investments made in mitigation and adaptation measures now save money in the future. In his landmark report, published in October 2006, economist Nicholas Stern warned that the cost of inaction would be far greater for future generations than the costs of actions taken today. In a 2016 article in the Guardian, he is quoted as saying, "With hindsight, I now realize that I underestimated the risks. I should have been much stronger in what I said in the report about the costs of inaction. I underplayed the dangers."

Considering the CRD Board has declared climate change to be an emergency, we feel that it is only appropriate for more to be done by the CRD to address climate change. The CRD has taken some solid steps forward in this regard, however there have not been substantial new accelerated actions or budget requests. Declaring an emergency on a singular issue is very significant, and should justify significant new budget investments and accelerated actions to address that issue.

Every municipality within the CRD has also declared a climate emergency. This presents an exciting opportunity for regional collaboration and coordination to reduce GHG emissions. Although the CRD has limited authority with respect to other local government practices, all local governments in the region have the same main sources of emissions: buildings, transportation and waste.

Buildings, for example, are between 40-50% of emissions in our communities. A massive home and building retrofit program is required to substantially reduce emissions through retrofits to existing buildings. What role, for example, could the CRD play in developing a program or service that could be accessed by all local governments and/or residents and businesses across the region to support the acceleration of building retrofits? This is just one example; there are others. We would like staff to turn their minds to creative approaches to accelerating emissions reductions and the potential budgetary impacts of so doing as part of the 2021 budget process.

Conclusion

In February, 2019, the CRD Board declared a climate emergency. Shortly after, every single municipality in the CRD declared a climate emergency, as well. This lays the foundation for an exciting opportunity for the region to work together as a whole to collectively reduce GHG emissions and to become truly sustainable communities into the future.

Although the CRD has taken some new action to address climate change since declaring it an emergency, there have not been any substantial new budget allocations or accelerated actions to address this issue. A declaration that an issue is an "emergency" is a significant first step, and should propel significant additional action. This motion simply requests staff to consider this, and report back with options.

Recommendation

That staff be directed to report back with options for accelerating the CRD's response to the climate emergency, including consideration of additional investments through the 2021 budget process and options for increasing regional collaboration to reduce GHGs.

Respectfully Submitted,

Director Helps

Director Taylor