

**REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2021**

SUBJECT **Regional Parks – Strategic Plan Update**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To present an update on the renewal of the 2012-2021 Regional Parks Strategic Plan.

BACKGROUND

The development of the Regional Parks Strategic Plan 2012-2021 (Strategic Plan) was initiated in 2009 to replace the Capital Regional District (CRD) Parks Master Plan that had been in effect since 2000. The Strategic Plan expires at the end of 2021 and needs to be updated. The development of the Strategic Plan was staff supported but was primarily led by a volunteer Citizens Advisory Panel and included extensive engagement with stakeholders, the public, government, First Nations and other park agencies.

The Strategic Plan continues to be a well-used guidance document, providing ongoing direction and remaining useful as a “roadmap” for the Regional Parks Division. The vision, mission and goals outlined in the Strategic Plan considered many of the trends, challenges and protected area values that are still relevant today. With respect to plan implementation since 2012, six strategic priorities and 26 associated actions were identified. Of the 26 strategic actions outlined in the document, 22 actions are ongoing, three have been completed, and one has yet to be initiated (Appendix A).

At its February 24, 2021 meeting, the Regional Parks Committee addressed the update of the Strategic Plan with the following motion:

That staff report back on a plan to review and update the Regional Parks Strategic Plan.

Staff have completed an internal assessment of the Strategic Plan and consider the framework of the plan to still be relevant, including the mission of regional parks to establish a diverse and connected system of regional parks that protect the region’s biodiversity and landscapes; to expand the regional trails system to connect communities and provide transportation options; and to provide a range of compatible and accessible non-motorized outdoor visitor experiences and activities for people of all ages and abilities that foster enjoyment, appreciation and respect for the region’s natural environment.

At the same time, many things have changed in the region since the plan was approved in 2012. For example, the CRD is now part of a national movement toward Reconciliation with Canada’s Indigenous peoples, and envisions strong relationships with First Nations across the region based on trust and mutual respect, partnerships and working together on shared goals. The Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) was adopted by the Board in 2018, setting parameters for managing and balancing growth in the region. The CRD declared a climate emergency in 2019 and applies this lens to service-delivery decisions to take meaningful action on climate change. Park acquisitions have added over 300 hectares to the system since 2012, and many more acquisitions are anticipated over the next decade through the Land Acquisition Fund.

Current park management challenges include pressures of increased visitation, environmental protection and striving for sustainable service delivery. Large capital-intensive critical assets, such as bridges, trestles and dams require ongoing inspections and maintenance and, in some cases, extensive rebuilds. The regional trail system continues to expand, with the fourth of the five phases of the E&N Rail Trail to be completed in 2022 and work on the Mayne Island Regional Trail also starting in 2022.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the Board extend the 2012-2021 Regional Parks Strategic Plan's term for eight months and that staff bring back an updated Strategic Plan for Board approval in July 2022.

Alternative 2

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the Board extend the 2012-2021 Regional Parks Strategic Plan's term for 20 months and that staff bring back an updated Strategic Plan for Board approval in July 2023.

IMPLICATIONS

Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities

Board Priorities, approved plans, Corporate Priorities and established service mandates drive our work. Initiative 6a-1 in the 2019-2022 Corporate Plan directs staff to "Ensure appropriate funding for parks & trails infrastructure, improvements & maintenance by updating the Regional Parks Strategy with consideration to ecological, recreation & reconciliation principles, land acquisition capacity, & expanded partnerships with First Nations & parks user groups." While the financial planning and operating resources necessary to advance this Board priority have been addressed in the approved provisional financial plan, and the hiring of staff to advance this work is underway, confirmation of mission, values, goals and the proposed strategies and actions to manage and develop regional parks and trails will be identified and approved as part of the planning process.

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

An updated Strategic Plan will reflect outcomes from current CRD plans, reports and strategies, such as the Regional Growth Strategy, Climate Action Strategy, the Regional Transportation Plan, the First Nations Task Force Report, the Land Acquisition Strategy, Regional Trails Management Plan and other completed regional parks management plans. Work is underway to assemble this information in a way that can inform the planning process and be incorporated into the new public engagement platform.

Environmental & Climate Implications

The Strategic Plan is the guiding document for Regional Parks, which forms more than half of the capital region's formally protected areas and regional trails. This parks system is key in helping to achieve the region's climate action, natural resource protection and active transportation goals. These goals will be considered during the plan update. An updated plan will also provide better direction on navigating the balance and potential competing interests between conservation and

recreation, in light of increasing visitation and the public and user group input to be received as part of the planning process.

Service Delivery Implications

Because the Strategic Plan framework continues to provide strong guidance and can be updated to reflect current strategic priorities and challenges, staff propose Alternative 1 to undertake a focused review and refresh of the Strategic Plan over the next eight months. Engagement would be conducted in spring 2022 to determine the level of support for and relevance of the overarching mission, goals and priority actions in the Strategic Plan. Engagement would consist of a focused on-line opportunity for public input using a social media platform. Following public engagement, an updated plan would be developed and presented to the Regional Parks Committee in June 2022 with a recommendation to the CRD Board for approval. This approach would require an extension of the current Strategic Plan through July 2022.

With the addition of a new park planner in January 2022, staff time has been allocated to update the Strategic Plan. Staff will undertake background research and engagement with key information providers and the public to refresh the plan. In this way, the Strategic Plan can be updated at minimal cost and with the least amount of delay between expiration of the existing plan and adoption of an updated plan. This approach is an efficient use of existing resources given that the current Strategic Plan is still largely relevant.

The second alternative would be for staff to update the Strategic Plan using a more in-depth public engagement process. Under this scenario, staff would provide an initial public engagement opportunity to help inform the Strategic Plan update. Following the initial public engagement, staff would prepare a draft strategic plan and seek CRD Board approval to release it for public comment. The draft strategic plan would go through a second round of public engagement to confirm its direction before being finalized and presented for Board approval in July 2023. This alternative would require an extension of the current Strategic Plan through July 2023.

Regardless of the preferred approach, the updated Strategic Plan will address a number of issues, including conservation, recreation, revenue generation, First Nations reconciliation, climate change, accessibility, sustainability, land acquisition and active transportation.

Financial Implications

Costs associated with this Strategic Plan refresh will be covered by the Regional Parks 2022 core budget for Alternative 1, and by the Regional Parks 2022-2023 core budget for Alternative 2.

CONCLUSION

The 2012-2021 Regional Parks Strategic Plan sets the strategic direction for the regional parks service; however, its term ends in 2021. Because much of the current Strategic Plan still remains relevant, staff recommend commencing a Strategic Plan review and update project in December 2021 and submitting an updated plan to the CRD Board for consideration in July 2022.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That the Board extend the 2012-2021 Regional Parks Strategic Plan's term for eight months and that staff bring back an updated Strategic Plan for Board approval in July 2022.

Submitted by:	Jeff Leahy, RPF, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
Concurrence:	Larisa Hutcheson, P.Eng., General Manager, Parks & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT

Appendix A: 2012-2021 Regional Parks Strategic Plan – Status of Strategic Priorities