MEETING SUMMARY

for the Wednesday, March 30, 2005

REGIONAL GROWTH MONITORING ADVISORY COMMITTEE /
MALASPINA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE GEOGRAPHY CLASS MEETING

May 12, 2005
Executive Summary
The RGMAC meet with geography students attending Malaspina where they are studying urban land use issues. The meeting was structured to give students an opportunity to make suggestions about issues they feel are important to or support sustainability and it would give the committee an opportunity to assess the opinion of a group that has been studying land use as well as a perspective of youth, and then an opportunity for discussion.

The majority of discussion dealt with the practical or infrastructural aspects of land use issues, along with the social impacts of past or proposed changes as well as existing social issues facing the RDN. Naturally, the priority issues facing students are things that most directly impact upon them. Like the general public, when dealing with government, there often appears to be either a perception that funding is either available for implementation or a lack of specifics as to how change and or sustainability will be funded, except from development, which ultimately is passed along the consumer, so is market dependant.

Interestingly the majority of the issues raised bear a direct correlation to issues generally identified, with minor subtle variances.

Introduction
A meeting was held on March 30, 2005 with 16 students of the Malaspina University College Geography Class and members of the Regional Growth Monitoring Advisory Committee and Regional District of Nanaimo Staff.

The meeting was held to get student input into sustainability issues facing the RDN and suggested solutions. The meeting was initiated by RDN staff for several reasons:
- the students would have some expertise in urban design that might provide information or other perspectives to the RGMAC,
- they represent a voice for youth, which has been lacking at prior workshops and public samplings, and
- there may be some new solutions or smart growth options suggested that could be including within the growth management strategy.

Meeting Proceedings
Meeting: Welcome
Director Holdom, Chair of the RGMAC, welcomed participants to the meeting and thanked participants for their efforts in attending, putting forward ideas and being open to discussing smart growth and or sustainability issues.

Director Holdom provided a context for the present Growth Management Sustainability project, which is a result of the RDN’s Growth Management Plan. He presented several sustainability definitions to provide a context. He provided a review of the process to date, the public input and the work on indicators.
Ross Peterson, Committee Member, welcomed the participants and provided a context to the group about the work to date, from the committee member’s perspective. This related to the work undertaken and the frustrations noted with limitations.

Meeting: Sustainability – Smart Growth Issues and Solutions

Students were each given an opportunity to present a specific smart growth issue, with comments, possible suggestions and ideas for the RDN.

- Additional park land is needed, based upon the existing land base which represents less than 1.5% of the regional district. The population will continue to expand, which will increase demand and although park liability issues may increase, along with fire and vandalism risks, the availability for public access will continue to diminish. The obvious social benefits will be augmented by recreation usage, which will have a tourism / economy benefit. Perhaps we could create an acquisition fund via a 1% tax.

- Safety is a concern. Community Policing Urban Design programs can be used to decrease crime and we need to exceed these standards. People are attracted to safe communities, along with their families. The increase in numbers will spur nodal development and reduce social costs.

- Public transportation is an issue. We need to focus on development to facilitate transportation usage. We could introduce a youth pass system to support transit and reduce dependence upon university parking.

- Rental housing is needed downtown. The vacancy rate is approaching zero, so there is a need. Is progress in planning for residential downtown actually happening?

- We need more non-vehicular movement. We need to expand cycle trails, which have to be treated equal to cars. We also need to develop safer standards (for use and engineering).

- We need to expand the downtown revitalization beyond just the downtown to include Harewood. This would address safety and crime issues. We could provide incentives which would help with clean up.

- We need to conserve water by generating awareness. This could be promoted in the schools, with information being taken home.

- We need more awareness of the Growth Management Strategy, as little is know. We can expand the program and include more issues such as those raised tonight.

- Rapid transit needs to be improved as the only terminals are downtown. We need more density along corridors and expand pedestrian corridors along highways.

- Public transportation needs to be improved. It should be limited to the UCB as this would encourage living within the UCB and discourage urban sprawl.

- More representation is needed from First Nations as they do not appear to be part of the process.

- We need easier accessibility to social services especially for people with disabilities. There isn’t enough cohesive information presented to the public so that they are aware of what is available. More information would assist youth and reduce crime.
• We need to class or label communities to encourage more mixed social development. This would assist with revitalization of existing areas and would reduce the class distinction, especially in newer developed areas.
• Suburbs need to be more sustainable as there is a need to create mixed housing, by creating recreational spaces and develop a sense of community.

These ideas were reviewed to identify key issues for detailed discussion. These were:
• Revitalization – downtown and beyond – for vibrancy & safety
• Public Transit
• More Sustainable Suburbs – mixed use, rental and single family

Solutions – Group Presentations

Revitalization – downtown and beyond – for vibrancy & safety
The group highlighted the Harewood area, due to their knowledge of the area and its proximity to downtown. The major concerns were: litter, lack of community pride, lack of concern, 7 – 11 may be a contributor, higher renter mentality and absentee landlords. Suggestions were:
• There needs to be a clean up campaign, perhaps an adopt a street program.
• Harewood School could be converted to a community center.
• Introduce a neighborhood watch program.
• Someone needs to take a leadership role to get the spirit moving.
• More open spaces would encourage user friendliness.
• Integrated designs would help build a sense of community, but that has to start in the neighborhoods.
• The RDN needs to be more readily identifiable, as not enough is know about its role and what is or has been accomplished.

Impacts:
• There would be a general trend toward improvements.
• Property taxes would increase as property values went up.
• Crime rates would reduce as the neighborhood/s became more integrated and cohesive.
• There would be greater use of parks and more people walking.
• Schools and public spaces would get more usage as well.

Public Transit
The solution to transit is measurability and sustainability as it is supported by increased population which dives improved transit. Suggestions were:
• A more cut throat approach should be adopted as sustainable transit needs to be contained in the urban areas i.e. Brazil model – buses are on main tracks with feeder busses supplying the main tracks.
• We need to look at the lifestyles or students, seniors and rider ship to create routes for their needs.
• There is a need for a university pass where the fee is incorporated within the student union fees, and routes could be design to meet their needs, as this would improve rider ship.
• Raising parking fees would encourage more transit usage.
• Malaspina has one bus stop for 7,000 students, where more are needed, especially considering this as a dense population area, as compared to Nanaimo. Woodgrove – Malaspina bus is packed.
• Nodal structure parking areas should be located to promote a transit site, but can this be sustainable in 10km versus 30km.
• We should survey students to determine needs.
• We need more and safer sidewalks and cycle routes as some routes intersect vehicle traffic. Use of more permeable surfaces would replace the environmental impact of concrete and asphalt.
• Seniors need to be considered for the cost of transit as some could be diverted to handiart, especially in nodes or more affluent areas. Culturally, there are more single women who don’t drive in this group. We also need to upgrade licensing for driving to increase rider ship.
• We could provide incentives for public use, like DVD’s, tickets that do not expire and student card that includes 10 % with the business community. The incentives should be limited to where the system works.
• Don’t move bus stops if they work.
• Better ferry connections would help.
• Bus stops are unattractive and riders need to feel safe. Bus stops at Starbucks and Tim Horton’s could include 10 % off coupon.
• Busses need their own transit line.
• Need to increase weekend – evening hours, as well as provide alternatives for student hours.

More Sustainable Suburbs – mixed use, rental and single family
There is a need to revitalize existing suburbs and new development should meet standards that meet sustainability objectives.
Suggestions for existing suburbs were:
• Suburbs need mixed usage to include commercial, high density and non-polluting industry (noise / light) and should include trails and parks (need for lighting to insure safety be addressed).
• Commercial shops should be self sufficient.
• Tax incentives could be encouraged to assist with changes.
• Other funding sources could be accessed.
• Rezoning to implement these changes should include hearings.
Suggestions for new development were:
• Designs should incorporate trail ways and parks dedications that are part of the subdivision process.
• New development areas should be zoned for mixed usage which includes commercial centers and affordable housing.
• There should be limits on parking to reduce the impact of cars.
• Use of form, character and landscaping should be considered for esthetics.
• Energy conservation should be incorporated into the design, along with alternative treatments for: grey water recycling, runoff retention and permeable surfaces.

**Closing:** Thank you
Chairman Holdom and Director Bartram thanked the group for their time and participation.