



REGIONAL
DISTRICT
OF NANAIMO

**REGIONAL GROWTH STRATEGY:
2001-2002 ANNUAL REPORT REGARDING
IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS**

August 2003

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Regional District of Nanaimo is making progress towards becoming the more sustainable region envisioned by the Regional Growth Strategy.

In 2001 and 2002, the RDN, the City of Nanaimo, the City of Parksville and the Town of Qualicum Beach worked together and individually to make the region more sustainable by:

- ✓ continuing to encourage and contain urban growth inside the designated Urban Containment Boundaries;
- ✓ supporting initiatives to increase the density and diversity of uses in designated growth areas;
- ✓ retaining large parcel sizes and resource uses in rural areas;
- ✓ incorporating measures to protect watercourses and sensitive ecosystems into day-to-day decisions about land use and development;
- ✓ increasing the amount of park land in the region –both for nature preservation purposes and human activity;
- ✓ pursuing initiatives to widen the range of transportation options available;
- ✓ initiating investigations into methods of providing services to designated growth areas; and
- ✓ continuing to work with residents, non-governmental organizations, the business community and other levels of government to better coordinate decision-making.

Growth and development are being accommodated in the region in a way that protects aspects of the region that residents value.

INTRODUCTION

The Regional District of Nanaimo has long been – and continues to be - one of the faster growing regions of British Columbia.

In response to residents' concerns about the impacts of growth and the fact that the impacts cross jurisdictional boundaries, the Regional District of Nanaimo Board adopted a Regional Growth Strategy in January of 1997 to guide decisions about growth, change and development¹. Regional Growth Strategies promote human settlement that is socially, economically, and environmentally healthy, and that makes efficient use of public facilities, services, land and other resources.

The Regional Growth Strategy for the Nanaimo region establishes a more sustainable pattern of population growth and development by encouraging most new development in designated urban areas, thereby keeping urban settlement compact, protecting the integrity of rural and resource areas, protecting the environment, increasing servicing efficiency, and retaining mobility within the region.

The Regional Growth Strategy establishes eight goals for future growth and development in the region:

1. Strong Urban Containment
2. Nodal Community Structure
3. Protection of Rural Integrity
4. Environmental Protection
5. Improved Mobility
6. Vibrant and Sustainable Economy
7. Efficient Services and Resource Use
8. Cooperation Among Jurisdictions

The goals are to be achieved gradually, over a twenty-five year period, as decisions are made about development applications and initiatives are undertaken by the Regional District of Nanaimo and its partners in growth management.

This report highlights progress made towards the eight goals of the Regional Growth Strategy through implementation activities undertaken, or completed, in 2001 and 2002. The report also highlights some of the challenges that have been faced in achieving the goals of the Regional Growth Strategy during that time.

¹ The Regional District of Nanaimo adopted an updated Regional Growth Strategy on June 10, 2003.

GOAL 1: STRONG URBAN CONTAINMENT

The majority of new development in the region is to be focused into designated urban areas inside Urban Containment Boundaries, to keep urban settlement compact, protect the integrity of rural and resource areas, protect the environment, increase servicing efficiency and retain mobility within the region.

Achievements

- ✓ The Urban Containment Boundary (UCB) was not moved to include more land inside the UCB for urban development, despite pressures to do so. Since the UCB has not been moved, there has been more incentive to develop vacant land designated for urban uses inside the UCB and less pressure to establish urban type residential areas on rural land outside the UCB.
- ✓ In an effort to increase the density and diversity of development on land inside the UCB, the City of Nanaimo adopted a 'mainstreet' policy to allow mixed-use developments that have residential units on the second floor, above retail units. The City also adopted tri-plex and quadraplex multi-family policies to allow three or four units in structures designed to look like single-family homes on small lots.
- ✓ All of the official community plans for the City of Nanaimo, the City of Parksville, the Town of Qualicum Beach and the electoral areas continue to support the development of a mix of uses, including places to live, work, learn, play, shop and access services, on land inside the UCB, thereby reducing the pressure to establish these uses on land outside the UCB.

Challenges

- The RDN, the City of Nanaimo, the City of Parksville and the Town of Qualicum Beach are beginning to experience pressures to move the UCB so that more land is available for urban development, even though research indicates that there is a sufficient supply of land that could be developed for housing and commercial activity inside the current UCB. As a part of the first review of the Regional Growth Strategy the RDN received 22 development requests that would require a change to the UCB. These requests included changes in municipalities and electoral areas.

GOAL 2: NODAL STRUCTURE

Mixed use development that includes places to live, work, learn, shop, play and access services is encouraged on land inside the Urban Containment Boundaries.

Achievements

- ✓ The City of Nanaimo adopted new policies to encourage development downtown. New incentives for downtown development include tax exemptions for up to ten years in return for seismic upgrading of heritage buildings, reduced parking requirements for downtown residential units, and the elimination of Development Cost Charges for downtown development.
- ✓ The City of Nanaimo initiated an examination of its growth centre policies, to determine if changes are necessary to encourage growth in these areas.
- ✓ Small steps were taken towards enhancing one of the designated village centres in Electoral Area E. The RDN Board approved a rezoning for a parcel of land in the Red Gap Village Centre to allow a parcel previously used for residential purposes to be used for a commercial use. This approval resulted in the establishment of an additional medical clinic in the designated nodal area.

Challenges

- The relatively slow economy has made the development community more cautious and reluctant to propose the more innovative developments generally intended for nodal areas.
- The low price of existing and new single-family homes in the region continued to reduce the demand for multi-family housing in the designated growth areas, thereby resulting in minimal diversification of housing types in designated nodal areas.
- The servicing of designated nodal areas in electoral areas continues to be a challenge, due in part to the land owner cost of providing community sewer services to existing properties to facilitate the development desired for the nodal area.

GOAL 3: PROTECTION OF RURAL INTEGRITY

The rural economy and lifestyle is to be protected by retaining large parcel sizes and land for agriculture, forestry and other resource uses.

Achievements

- ✓ The RDN and the member municipalities did not reduce the amount of land allocated to rural and resource uses by putting more land inside the Urban Containment Boundary.
- ✓ The RDN helped retain land for agricultural purposes in the electoral areas by not supporting several applications to exclude land from the ALR and by supporting an application to include land in the ALR at Rupert Road in Electoral Area G
- ✓ The RDN Board helped retain land for forestry purposes in the electoral areas by supporting an application to include land in the FLR.
- ✓ The RDN Board adopted a policy of relying upon the Provincial Agricultural Land Commission's agricultural knowledge and experience to make decisions about whether land in the Agriculture Land Reserve will be needed for agriculture in the future and whether the land is suitable for agriculture.

Challenges

- The RDN experienced pressure to support several applications to remove land from the ALR in electoral areas to establish non-agricultural uses and to remove land from the FLR to establish non-forestry uses.
- The RDN experienced pressure, in some areas of the region, to not increase the minimum permitted parcel size on land designated by the Regional Growth Strategy as Rural Residential to 1 hectare (pursuant to Regional Growth Strategy Bylaw No. 985.01) regardless of whether the property was or could be provided community water or community sewer service. Some owners of property located in community water service areas wanted to retain the same level of development potential that was permitted by the existing zoning with community water service in their neighbourhood (i.e. 1600 m²; 2000m²). Other property owners with land that is not in a community water or community sewer system wanted community water and community sewer service provided so that they could achieve the smallest parcel size permitted by the current zoning bylaw (1000 m²).
- Several senior government actions threatened the RDN and member municipalities' abilities to maintain rural character along the Inland Island Highway and on lands outside the Urban Containment Boundary. The Ministry of Transportation and Highways decision to not follow through on a commitment to maintain the vegetation along the Inland Highway created a potential fire hazard and liability that threatens the natural character of the corridor. The Ministry's initiative to commercialize specific rest stops in the Province, including two in the RDN, threatened rural character by potentially enabling commercial-like development in a rural area. Also, Land and Water BC, in pursuit of increasing the development value of its holdings, has suggested developments that would establish types of developments that might compromise the rural land base.

GOAL 4: ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The environment will be protected and ecological damage related to growth and development minimized.

Achievements

- ✓ Throughout the region, watercourse protection was considered and advanced in most developments close to watercourses, through a requirement to obtain a development permit prior to construction to make sure the development does not harm the watercourse. However, development permits are still not universally required throughout the regional district for development that is close to shoreline.
- ✓ Work continued to improve the accuracy of mapped information about watercourses by ground-truthing watercourses in various areas of the region with the assistance of non-governmental organizations.
- ✓ The Regional District of Nanaimo and the City of Nanaimo joined the federal Partners for Climate Protection Program.
- ✓ Measures were taken to raise public awareness about the benefits of water conservation and to consider other actions to encourage water use reduction.
- ✓ New park land was created in the RDN, the City of Nanaimo, the City of Parksville and the Town of Qualicum Beach. Some of the more notable park land additions include a Regional Park at Horne Lake, and a Regional Park on Gabriola Island.
- ✓ The RDN initiated the Zero Waste program to encourage residents to reduce – and ideally eliminate – solid waste disposal.

Challenges

- Every watercourse in the region is not designated as within a Development Permit Area designation to protect the watercourse and adjacent riparian areas as a part of development decisions.
- Only 22% of the Sensitive Ecosystems are designated as within a Development Permit Area to promote their protection in development decisions.

GOAL 5: IMPROVED MOBILITY

Mobility options within the region will be improved and diversified so that transportation is more efficient and there is less dependence upon the automobile.

Achievements

- ✓ The RDN completed a Transportation Study that examined the possibility of establishing a regional road network designation, identified regional transportation issues, and recommended a framework to address the identified issues.
- ✓ The RDN updated its Transit Business Plan to ensure that transit service maximizes service opportunities to residents within available budgets. A new transit service route was established to provide a direct connection between Malaspina University College and the downtown core to respond to market demand.
- ✓ A multi-use trail was constructed along the E&N Railway. The trail provides a safe transportation linkage for residents to incorporate walking or cycling into their commute to work or leisure activities.
- ✓ The RDN, the City of Nanaimo, the City of Parksville and the Town of Qualicum Beach supported the incorporation of pedestrian friendly design features, such as bicycle racks, benches and waling paths, into urban developments to encourage non-automobile forms of transportation.
- ✓ The City of Parksville continued to work with its Bicycle Committee to raise public awareness about cycling as fun, healthy, environmentally friendly method of transportation.

Challenges

- The automobile remains the most convenient form of transportation, in part due to the spread out linear form of development in the region.

GOAL 6: VIBRANT AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

Strategic economic development that respects the rural and environmental protection priorities of the region will be supported.

Achievements

- ✓ The City of Nanaimo updated and continued to implement its Economic Strategy. Some of the key economic development initiatives the City has supported in the last two years include: the promotion of the Central Vancouver Island area as a film production location by Film Nanaimo, the Vancouver Island Economic Developers Association Marine Frontier Strategy which targets in-bound investment in the marine sector, the Human Resources Strategy for the Central Vancouver Island area which identifies employment skills gaps and identifies strategies to remedy these gaps in concert with Malaspina University College and others, the Business CARE business and retention program which focuses on problem solving for existing local businesses, the establishment of a conference centre to further enhance the appeal of the area as a tourist destination.
- ✓ The City of Parksville completed a new state-of-the-art civic centre to provide incubator space for high tech businesses.
- ✓ The City of Parksville initiated an examination of its downtown water front policies to encourage downtown water development.
- ✓ The City of Parksville updated its resort area zoning to enhance the viability of its resort development sector.
- ✓ The RDN modernized its home-based business regulations to enable a wider range of economic development opportunities that are compatible with rural neighbourhoods.

Challenges

- The slow BC economy makes it difficult to see economic growth in the region.

GOAL 7: EFFICIENT SERVICES AND RESOURCE USE

Cost efficient services and infrastructure will be provided where urban development is intended. Services will be provided in other areas where the service is needed to address environmental or public health issues and the provision of the service will not result in additional development.

Achievements

- ✓ The RDN, the City of Nanaimo, the City of Parksville and Town of Qualicum Beach provided community water and community sewer service to property in the region in accordance with the Regional Growth Strategy. Services were only provided to land outside the Urban Containment Boundary to fix an environmental or public health problem and not to facilitate additional development.
- ✓ The RDN completed a study regarding community sewer service options for the Village Centres in Electoral Area H.

Challenges

- Not all property owners in the region agree with the Regional Growth Strategy policy to only support the provision of community sewer and community water services to land outside the Urban Containment Boundary if there is an environmental or public health problem, and not to facilitate development.

GOAL 8: COOPERATION AMONG JURISDICTIONS

All levels of government, the public, and key private and voluntary sector partners will understand and commit to the goals of growth management.

Achievements

- ✓ The RDN, in partnership with the City of Nanaimo, the City of Parksville and the Town of Qualicum Beach, reviewed the regional growth strategy to consider whether changes should be made to improve the region's strategy for a more sustainable region. The review involved substantial public discussion, technical analysis and intergovernmental review. An \$80,000 grant from the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services and a \$30,000 grant from the BC Real Estate Foundation were obtained to help complete the project. The review culminated in the development of a revised regional growth strategy bylaw that was adopted in June of 2003.
- ✓ The RDN developed and adopted the first ever zoning bylaw for Electoral Area F to minimize land use conflicts between existing and future land uses and to promote development in the area that is compatible with the long term regional strategy.
- ✓ The RDN developed an indicator based monitoring program to track progress towards the attainment of the objectives of the Regional Growth Strategy and published the first report based on the data for the indicators.
- ✓ The RDN adopted an updated official community plan for Electoral Area A that is consistent with the regional growth strategy direction.

Challenges

- Provincial government changes and decisions have made it more challenging to implement the Regional Growth Strategy. Specifically, Provincial government changes to rules concerning drinking water protection, septic disposal regulation, use of provincial parks adjacent to highways, farming and forestry have placed increased responsibilities on local governments to ensure the Regional Growth Strategy is implement without providing any increase in resources to do so.