



REGIONAL
DISTRICT
OF NANAIMO

Growth Management Plan for the Regional District of Nanaimo

1997 Annual Report

A Growth Management Strategy for the Regional District of Nanaimo

The Regional District of Nanaimo adopted by bylaw a Growth Management Plan on January 14, 1997 and approved a Master Implementation Agreement with the Province. The legislation provides that after a Regional District has adopted a regional growth strategy, it must establish a program to monitor its implementation and progress made toward its objectives and actions and prepare an annual report on that implementation and progress.

This annual report provides an overview of the Growth Management Plan and focuses on the various follow up activities undertaken in 1997.

Rapid growth and change have profoundly affected the Regional District. The Growth Management Plan has been prepared to guide the development of the region over the next 25 years.

1.0 Background

In 1993, the Regional District of Nanaimo recognized the need for a longer term regional approach to manage growth and change and initiated work on a growth management strategy. During the District's growth management planning process, the Province adopted Bill 11 - the Growth Strategies Statutes Amendment Act 1995. As a result, the Regional District Board in 1996 requested that the Province recognize the work undertaken on the Growth Management Plan. The Minister of Municipal Affairs on March 12, 1996, through a transitional order, provided for the Regional District of Nanaimo's growth management process to fit within the provisions of the Municipal Act amendments which were contained in Bill 11.

As required by the Municipal Act, the Board held public hearings in the Spring of 1996 and submitted the Growth Management Plan to the Councils of the City of Nanaimo, the City of Parksville and the Town of Qualicum Beach and the Boards of the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District and the Comox-Strathcona Regional District for acceptance.

After more than two years of discussion and involvement by the public, technical specialists, government staff and elected representatives, and after all of the above affected local governments had accepted the Plan, the Regional Board adopted the 'Regional District of Nanaimo Growth Management Plan Bylaw No. 985, 1995' on January 14, 1997.

The Regional Board, by a January 1997 resolution, also approved a Master Implementation Agreement between the Province and the Regional District. The Agreement provides for coordination between the Regional District and the Province in supporting the goals and providing for the implementation of the Growth Management Plan. In addition, it addressed issues related to Plan acceptance as expressed by the Councils of the City of Parksville and the City of Nanaimo, and the Town of Qualicum Beach and provides for certain identified items to receive priority attention within Plan implementation.

In February 1997, the Regional District received a Ministerial Order from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, recognizing the Growth Management Plan as a regional growth strategy under the Growth Strategies Statutes Amendment Act. The completion of this planning process establishes the Regional Board and the three municipal councils as leaders in the province with respect to coordinated intergovernmental planning at the regional level.

It is important that many informed choices are made now to ensure that the quality of life enjoyed by RDN residents is maintained and enhanced.

2.0 Purpose of the Growth Management Plan

The Growth Management Plan has been prepared by the Regional District of Nanaimo to guide the development of the region over the next 25 years. The Plan is intended to guide the preparation and review of Official Community Plans, zoning bylaws, local service area functions and other regulations prepared by local and regional governments.

Provincial and Crown corporation activities, too, will be influenced by the Growth Management Plan. RDN programs to manage land, liquid waste, solid waste, water and transportation will be guided by the direction provided by the Growth Management Plan. The activities of the development industry - builders, developers, realtors, financial institutions- will also be changed by the Growth Management Plan.

The Plan will support servicing decisions, open space protection programs, and technical studies dealing with transportation, economic development, and environmental issues. It articulates a vision of a desirable future for the region and a strategy for attaining the vision.

The Plan is also a blueprint for change for the community, and challenges citizens to help create new ways of designing and building communities that resolve present and anticipated problems.

The Growth Management Plan is at an early stage of implementation, and the full effect of the policies contained in the Plan will not be achieved for a number of years. However, 1997 has been a year when a number of key activities have been undertaken, contributing significantly to the Plan's progress toward goal achievement. This report reviews major activities to date since the adoption of the Plan and outlines key objectives for 1998.

The direction of the Growth Management Plan became clear as information was collected on the nature of growth, public concerns and values, and the options available for its management.

3.0 Growth Management Plan Goals

The Growth Management Plan is based on eight fundamental goals directed toward maintaining the environmental quality and livability of the Regional District of Nanaimo. The goals are:

1. *Strong Urban Containment*
2. *Nodal Community Structure*
3. *Protection of Rural Integrity*
4. *Protection of Environmentally Significant Features*
5. *Improved Mobility*
6. *Creation of a Vibrant and Sustainable Economy*
7. *Efficient Service and Resource Use*
8. *Cooperation Among Jurisdictions.*

The adoption of the Growth Management Plan and the realization of these goals is being achieved through a number of actions, some *enabled* by the Municipal Act provisions for regional growth strategies and others *required* by the Act. These actions include:

- ⇒ the establishment of implementation agreements with the province and other organizations to support achievement of the Growth Management Plan;
- ⇒ the establishment of an Intergovernmental Advisory Committee involving the municipalities and the province;
- ⇒ the development of regional context statements in municipal official community plans to show how municipalities will contribute to achieving the Strategic Plan's objectives.;
- ⇒ the provision of RDN works and services consistent with the achievement of the Growth Management Plan;
- ⇒ amendment of the RDN's eight electoral area official community plans to align the plans with RGMP objectives;
- ⇒ the establishment of a program to monitor regional change;
- ⇒ involvement of residents in the implementation of the RGMP; and
- ⇒ the preparation of an annual report on implementation and progress toward Growth Management Plan goals.

A number of these actions were completed in 1997; others will be achieved in 1998; many are processes that will continue over time. The following outlines key activities accomplished in 1997 and sets out objectives for 1998.

4.0 Key 1997 Activities

At the outset, it should be noted that the Municipal Act requires the establishment of a program to monitor the implementation of the Growth Management Plan. While such a program includes the consideration of progress achieved on the agreements necessary to implement the Growth Management Plan, on a more fundamental level it involves the examination of whether or not change in the Regional District of Nanaimo is leading toward or away from the goals of the Growth Management Plan. The determination of this general trend will be the basis for changing or reinforcing implementation actions and for reviewing the goals of the Growth Management Plan.

The Growth Management Plan assumes that local quality of life should be the basis for growth management.

During 1997, the Regional District has undertaken a number of key actions and activities in support of the Growth Management Plan, as listed below. The following provides an account of the work program and illustrates the progress of the Plan from 'adoption' to 'implementation'. The listing does not, however, provide a measure of the performance of the Plan. One of the key activities for 1998 will be the development of performance measures, to review the 'success' of the Growth Management Plan and provide indicators of the Plan's performance.

Attaining urban containment, nodal development, and the other goals of growth management will require a set of consistently and rigorously applied policies and guidelines.

4.1 Implementation Agreements

Implementation of the RGMP will require coordinated planning and action among RDN departments, the eight electoral areas, member municipalities, the province and adjacent jurisdictions. Since the Plan is at an early stage in implementation, much of the focus since adoption has been on establishing agreements and developing strategies. The following identifies key 1997 implementation actions:

- **Master Implementation Agreement**

The RDN and the province have entered into a Master Implementation Agreement, which was approved by the RDN Board and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in January 1997. This Agreement identifies the shared goals and responsibilities of the partners in implementing the objectives of the Growth Management Plan.

- **Draft Implementation Agreements- Urban Containment & Fringe Area Management Implementation Agreements**

As part of the Master Implementation Agreement, the RDN, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and the three member municipalities met in 1997 to develop coordinated and collaborative approaches for providing for urban containment boundaries within municipal boundaries and processes for their subsequent review and amendment. Approaches to dealing with fringe area land use issues were also a topic of discussion. The Urban Containment and Fringe Area Management Implementation Agreement was received by the RDN Board and forwarded to the three municipal councils for their consideration and approval in December 1997. Further meetings among the member municipalities, the province and the RDN are scheduled to resolve municipal issues with these agreements.

- **Vancouver Island Highway Corridor Implementation Agreement**

The RDN is currently involved, along with other local governments and provincial ministries, in drafting the Vancouver Island Highway Corridor Implementation Agreement. The Agreement addresses issues such as the reduction in the number of and consolidation of access points for safety, the visual integrity of the highway and buffering. The implementation of this agreement will include the consideration of a 'tree protection bylaw' for the buffer area adjacent to the Highway. It is expected that a draft of the Agreement will be forwarded to the RDN Board and municipalities for consideration early in 1998.

The Growth Management Plan provides direction for local planning processes through policies and guidelines, but local jurisdictions need to actively interpret and apply the Plan elements if the promise of growth management is to be realized.

4.2 Electoral Area 'F' Planning Project

In October 1997 the Board appointed 34 members to the Electoral Area 'F' Community Advisory Committee. The mandate of the Committee is the preparation and implementation of an official community plan and supporting zoning bylaw for Electoral Area 'F'.

To date, much of the work of the Committee has focused on administrative and organizational issues, such as chairperson selection, review and acceptance of a Terms of Reference, and the development of committee operating guidelines.

In 1998, Committee activities are proposed to include the completion of a land use inventory, and the identification of alternative planning models as well as ongoing communication to residents in Electoral Area 'F'.

4.3 Implementation Studies

As part of the commitment made by the Regional District in the Master Implementation Agreement, the RDN and province agreed to undertake 'further studies and planning work related to regional growth management.' The following outlines 1997 major studies; approval by the RDN Board will enable the adoption of the proposed strategies and recommendations contained in the studies.

- **Economic and Industrial Land Planning Study**

In February 1997 the Board received for information the Economic and Industrial Land Planning Study. The study recommended a number of initiatives to be undertaken by the RDN, municipalities and the provincial government, with varying implications for the levels of government. Some implications can be considered minor, such as those involving the refinement of zoning and servicing specifications, official community plan reviews, soil removal bylaw development and a development cost charge review. Others, such as the Industrial Expansion Assessment Framework (outlined below), are major in nature with broad based inter-jurisdictional implications. Further implementation strategies resulting from this study are being considered as part of the Economic Development Strategy and the Large Land Holdings Study.

As long as a regional perspective is maintained, creativity and innovation are fully in keeping with the spirit of growth management.

- **Industrial Expansion Assessment Framework**

The Board, at its June 1997 meeting, considered an Industrial Expansion Assessment Framework for assessing the feasibility and implications of expanding the Region's rural industrial land base. The framework was considered due to concerns raised regarding the possibility of undermining the Regional Growth Management Plan should the rural industrial land base be expanded. The Board passed a resolution that limited the application of the Assessment Framework to two specifically-identified parcels considered to have minimal regional implications. This precludes the consideration of other industrial expansion proposals until such time as their regional implications can be thoroughly assessed in terms of a formal Growth Management Plan review and update in 1999.

- **Economic Development Strategy**

A select Steering Committee of the Board and staff from the RDN and the three member municipalities was struck in 1997 to consider strategies to achieve Goal 6 (*create a vibrant and sustainable economy*) of the Growth Management Plan. The objectives of the Economic Development Study are to identify major economic trends and issues, identify feasible options to facilitate economic development and growth in the RDN, and formulate a 'road map' for achieving the report's objectives. The study will also make recommendations on ways to maximize the benefits of economic development in a manner that is consistent with the goals of the Growth Management Plan. A forum of civic and business leaders will be held in January 1998 to provide feedback on the recommendations in the report. A final report is expected to be completed in early 1998.

- **Large Land Holdings Study**

A select Steering Committee of the Board and staff from the RDN and the three member municipalities was struck in 1997 to consider strategies to implement Goal 3 (*protect rural integrity*) and Goal 6 (*create a vibrant and sustainable economy*) of the Growth Management Plan. The Large Land Holdings study is intended to identify the characteristics and locations of large land holdings in the RDN and to examine opportunities for, and the impact of, alternative uses of these large land holdings. A final report is expected in early 1998.

The Growth Management Plan seeks to foster cooperative relationships among municipalities, the public, and regional and provincial governments.

4.4 Intergovernmental Advisory Committee (IAC)

The Regional Board approved the establishment and terms of reference for the IAC in Fall of 1996. The IAC held its inaugural meeting in March 1997. This committee is comprised of senior staff from the RDN and member municipalities and representatives of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ministry of Environment, Land and Parks, Ministry of Forests, Ministry of Employment and Investment, Ministry of Transportation and Highways, the Central Vancouver Island Health Region and the Agricultural Land Commission. The purpose of the committee is to provide a venue for informing member municipalities and provincial agencies on the implementation of Growth Management Plan objectives and to encourage inter-municipal and interjurisdictional cooperation and coordination among the participating governments. The following initiatives were considered by the Committee in 1997:

- **Regional Context Statements**
A process for RCS preparation and review was reviewed by the IAC in 1997. The Committee is currently involved in the review of the City of Nanaimo's draft Regional Context Statement.
- **Growth Strategies Statement**
A 'Provincial Growth Strategies Planning Mandate Statement of the East Coast of Vancouver Island' was distributed to local jurisdictions in the Summer of 1997, providing direction for provincial involvement in the development and implementation of regional growth strategies.
- **Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory/Streamside Protection**
The Committee sponsored a presentation by the Conservation Data Centre in November, 1997 on their environmentally sensitive areas mapping project, followed by a comprehensive summary of local government tools to protect and enhance streamside areas.
- **Aggregates Study Proposal**
A draft study proposal for an Aggregates Study was prepared in 1997. The Ministry of Transportation and Highways and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing have indicated the potential for joint-funding of the study. Implementation actions in 1998 arising from the study could include zoning changes, updates in 1999 to the Growth Management Plan and specific implementation agreements among the RDN, provincial agencies and other jurisdictions.
- **Transportation Plan Initiative**
A sub-committee of the Intergovernmental Advisory Committee was struck in 1997 to discuss time frame and objectives of a Regional Transportation Study. The study would focus on transportation planning at the strategic policy level and provide for the development of monitoring systems to measure key indicators relating to land use and transportation changes. The IAC has recommended that, due to the various activities underway in 1997 and proposed for 1998, the transportation study should be considered a 1999 project.

The Growth Management Plan does not directly regulate land use, but is intended to guide the preparation of OCPs and zoning bylaws in local jurisdictions.

4.5 Regional Context Statements

The Regional Board in December 1997 approved a Process and Framework for Regional Context Statement Preparation and Review and forwarded this framework to the member municipalities.

With the adoption of the Growth Management Plan, each member municipality must (by January 1999) adopt a Regional Context Statement. The Statement must identify the relationship between the member municipality's official community plan and specify how the official community plan will be made consistent with the Growth Management Plan over time. The Regional Context Statement is prepared by the municipality as an amendment to its official community plan and must be consistent with the rest of the community plan.

The member municipalities have taken the initial steps required to prepare Regional Context Statements as part of their official community plans. Staff discussions are underway with Nanaimo, Parksville, and Qualicum Beach, directed toward ensuring the receipt by the RDN Board of all context statements by January 1999.

4.6 Community Planning Initiatives

Two official community plan reviews were undertaken in 1997; French Creek and the Nanoose Bay Official Community Plans (OCPs). Both plans were prepared from a 'growth management' perspective, and structured around the eight goals of the Growth Management Plan. The public consultation process for both plans, as well, was developed around specific goals and the achievement of growth management policies.

The OCPs are essentially the means of implementing the Growth Management Plan objectives at a local level. Through the integration of the Growth Management goals and policies into the OCPs' goals and policies, communities can work together toward achieving the future desired for the region.

4.7 Liquid Waste Management Plan (LWMP)

The Liquid Waste Management Plan (received by the Board in December 1997 and awaiting Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks approval) provides a comprehensive approach to managing liquid waste reduction, treatment, utilization and disposal. The LWMP was developed in concert with the Regional Growth Management Plan, and is consistent with the goals, policies and guidelines of the Plan. More specifically, the LWMP recognizes and supports the RGMP goals of urban containment, protecting rural integrity, protecting the Agricultural and Forest Land Reserves, efficient use and management of services and resources, and cooperation amongst jurisdictions.

Growth can be used to improve RDN communities. In the future, more attention must be paid to channeling growth in ways that benefit the communities and the region.

5.0 Implementation Objectives for 1998

- **Public Review Committee**

A major initiative in 1998 will be the creation of a 'performance review committee' comprised of Board appointed RDN residents. The committee's mandate will be to assess technical criteria for monitoring and assist in evaluating the achievement of the goals of the Growth Management Plan.

- **Performance Measurement**

In 1998, performance indicators for each goal will be determined and key activities and actions will be considered as they relate to each goal. These performance indicators will be based on their relevance to the specific goal, the 'usefulness' of the information, the availability of reliable data, the responsiveness of data to change, and the ability to communicate the information to the public, stakeholders, and the Board.

- **Regional Information Services**

The 1995 'Population, Demographic and Economic Forecast Study' (prepared as a background report for the Growth Management Plan) will be updated in 1998 to include the 1996 census data.

- **Regional Context Statements**

In 1998, Regional Context Statements will be completed by each of the member municipalities. The Statements need to be submitted to the Regional District of Nanaimo Board by January, 1999.

- **Growth Management Liaison**

Internal (among RDN departments) and external (among member municipalities and the province) liaison remains a key objective for 1998. As one of the first regional districts to implement a growth management plan, the RDN will have a role in communicating the impact of growth management planning to other jurisdictions.

