



# Standing Committee Report Committee of the Whole

**To:** Committee of the Whole  
**From:** Manager of Development Services  
**Date:** April 11, 2024

**Subject:** Regional Growth Strategy Implementation Update Report

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**Objective:** To provide an update on the implementation of the Regional Growth Strategy.

## **Discussion:**

On June 23, 2014, Regional Growth Strategy Bylaw No. 1336 (RGS) was adopted, and on July 24, 2017, the Regional Board endorsed the RGS Priority Projects Plan. This five-year Action Plan outlined priority initiatives for the RDCO to implement based on commitments defined in the RGS. Regional planning projects in the five-year Action Plan were approved in principle by the Regional Board with projects that required funding from the RDCO to be reviewed annually through the budget deliberation process.

A number of successful initiatives and projects related to the implementation of the RGS have been completed that had significant strategic investment values supporting various goals and policies. Projects were selected and scoped to provide regional coordination and collaboration with our partners in support of regionally shared needs.

### Regional Growth Strategy

The RDCO adopted Regional Growth Strategy Bylaw No. 1336 on June 23, 2014. A regional growth strategy is a long-range planning tool governed by Part 13 of the *Local Government Act* that assists local governments to plan a coordinated future for their communities while dealing with regional issues and decisions that cross local political boundaries. The RGS is also a collective vision from the regional partners for the future to create a region that promotes growth that is economically, environmentally and socially healthy over a twenty (20) year time horizon.

The RGS represents a joint-planning approach to addressing the growth issues that go beyond local government boundaries. It was developed in collaboration from member municipalities, First Nations and Provincial agencies and accepted by all partners. The strategy is an agreement among governments and agencies to work together on common issues to find common solutions. The strategy reflects a shared regional vision for the future, as well as goals and policies necessary to achieve effective growth management.

### RGS Steering Committee

Being accountable for progress towards achieving the goals of the RGS requires a commitment to implementation. A key driver of implementation comes from the work of the RGS Steering Committee, established in 2016. The committee is a forum for senior representatives of regional and municipal planning departments, First Nations and agencies with an interest in regional planning to coordinate the strategic priorities around the region and align the priorities with the goals and policies of the RGS.

### RGS Priority Projects Plan

In accordance with the RGS, through a collaborative process, RDCO staff, RGS Steering Committee members and elected officials developed a 5-year action plan to outline priority initiatives. The action plan is the framework for RGS implementation and based on the regional initiatives identified within the RGS. The Priority Projects Plan was endorsed by the Regional Board on July 24, 2017.

The Plan contains nine projects supporting over 25 policies, across eight Issue Areas of the RGS. These projects are a framework for maintaining momentum toward RGS goals and policies. The projects were selected and scoped to support regional coordination and collaboration in support of regionally shared needs and goals, and with the expectation that there will be efficiencies from conducting work at the regional level.

The Plan was not a rigid work plan. Each year, the RDCO Board was asked to consider the recommended projects and approve the requisite resource allocations on a case-by-case basis. As new opportunities or unexpected demands came up, the projects in this Plan were revised, re-sequenced or replaced as needed.

It should also be noted there are many other projects that occur throughout the region to implement the direction in the RGS. At the time the action plan was developed, projects highlighted were based on gaps identified by the RGS Steering Committee in RGS implementation. Since 2017, there were other regional projects completed based on emerging opportunities for regional collaboration such as the 2020 Climate Projections Report, exploration of a Central Okanagan rent bank, 2022 Central Okanagan Poverty and Wellness Strategy, and the Okanagan Lake Responsibility Planning Initiative.

### RGS Priority Projects Plan – Summary of Projects (2017-2022)

| <b>Project</b>                                       | <b>Status</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Regional Floodplain Management Plan – Phases 2 and 3 | Complete      |
| Regional Planning Labs                               | Ongoing       |
| Regional Housing Needs Assessment                    | Complete 2019 |
| Regional Growth Strategy Monitoring Program          | Complete 2019 |
| Regional Citizen Survey                              | Complete 2022 |
| Regional Housing Strategy                            | Complete 2022 |
| RGS 5 Year Review*                                   | Complete 2021 |
| Central Okanagan Agricultural Background Report      | Complete 2022 |
| Regional Employment Lands Inventory                  | In process    |

### Regional Flood Management Plan - Phases 2 and 3

Description and Rationale: Flooding is a serious concern for developed areas in the Central Okanagan and will only become more of a risk with the effects of climate change. Given this, a three-phase Regional Floodplain Management Framework was outlined with the objective of developing a better understanding of flood risk in order to reduce and mitigate damage and impacts from future floods in our region. Completed in June of 2016, the Regional Floodplain Management Plan: Phase 1 Final Report identified flood hazards within the Central Okanagan and established the scope and priorities of Phases 2 and 3.

Phase 2 focused on delineation and confirmation of the flood-prone streams and floodplains identified in Phase 1. Through various funding sources and partnerships, a number of great projects were completed, including:

- LiDAR and Aerial Image Acquisition for the Okanagan Valley Watershed.

- Okanagan Mainstem Flood Mapping.
- Dam inundation studies for reservoir lakes (Ideal, Crooked Lake) and Rose Valley Reservoir.
- Flood Mapping for Peachland / Trepanier Creeks, Mill Creek, and Mission Creek.

Phase 3 used the information and data collected through the first two phases to create non-structural flood mitigation strategies.

### Regional Planning Labs

**Description and Rationale:** Planners from across the region regularly struggle with common challenges and determining effective solutions. However, the collective experience and lessons-learned from this work is not always shared. Further, particularly stubborn challenges often require creative approaches and ideas for problem solving that can only come from multiple perspectives, discussions among experienced professionals, and the lesson learned from piloting potential solutions.

A Regional Planning Lab is a forum for planners and other professionals from around the region to meet (once or several times over a series of meetings) to work through difficult technical challenges related to a specific planning topic, or the production of regionally significant projects. As a forum for discussion and relationship building, the Lab is strengthening the foundation of regional knowledge-sharing and consistency. As a space to identify and test possible solutions to shared problems, the existence of the lab continues to expand the opportunities for collaboration.

Since 2018, the RDCO has hosted nine Regional Planning Labs. Feedback received from participants continues to demonstrate that there is great interest and value in working collaboratively together to tackle regional issues. As an example, in November 2023, RDCO hosted a Planning Lab that gathered various professionals to share knowledge, discuss challenges, and improve planning and implementation for environmental protection during development (see attached bulletin).

### Regional Housing Needs Assessment

**Description and Rationale:** As real estate prices rise faster than household incomes, access to affordable housing is a growing concern regionally as it is in much of the Province. Unaffordability affects people of a diverse set of backgrounds and profiles. As such, the provision of affordable housing can come through a number of mechanisms and solutions that cut across a range of types and tenures of housing. Given the proximity of Central Okanagan communities and their integration through the transportation network (i.e. commuting patterns), the supply and demand of the housing market is best considered at the regional level.

The Assessment is a descriptive analysis of the current housing needs and issues in the Central Okanagan: two electoral areas, six First Nation reserve lands (including Westbank First Nation and Okanagan Indian Band), the District of Peachland, the City of West Kelowna, the City of Kelowna, and the District of Lake Country.

The overall objective of the Regional Housing Needs Assessment was to gain an understanding of the regional housing market and how the individual member municipalities', Electoral Areas', and First Nations' housing markets impact the region.

The objective was achieved by:

- Outlining where housing gaps exist for Central Okanagan communities and how individual member municipalities, Electoral Areas, and Westbank First Nation housing markets affect the regional housing market.
- Coordinating the collection and reporting of housing needs information on behalf of the region.

- Considering the impact of transportation and connectivity between communities.
- Identifying where along the housing continuum the greatest needs are (or may be in the future) throughout the region by completing a comparison of regional housing supply and demand.
- Reviewing the needs in terms of administrative, institutional, and governance function related to the supply of housing.

#### Regional Growth Strategy Monitoring Program

Description and Rationale: Provincial legislation requires that once a RGS is adopted, ongoing monitoring must be established to assess implementation and measure progress being made towards the stated objectives. A monitoring program helps identify areas where RGS goals and policies are successful, where more work needs to be done, or where adjustments and adaptations to current initiatives need to be made.

In alignment with this directive and RGS Section 4.1.4, a monitoring program has been established to complete an evidence-based assessment of the RGS goals and policies. The RGS Monitoring Program developed in 2019, outlines a framework for monitoring impact and process for tracking implementation. The framework recommends intermediate monitoring every two to three years and comprehensive monitoring every five years. The program identifies 22 indicators across the ten Issue Areas of the RGS, measuring where progress is being made and where further work is needed.

In addition to the core role of tracking policy success, ongoing monitoring can support decision-making processes and collaborations that are foundational to successful policy work at a regional level. Monitoring can support the identification of policy topics where different jurisdictions can collaborate, as well as finding policies that are especially effective in addressing shared challenges.

#### Regional Citizen Survey

Description and Rationale: A Regional Citizen Survey is a way of collecting data that cannot be attained any other way, and can be an invaluable resource for staff and elected officials in decision-making, as well as a strong communications tool for raising awareness about regional issues. As area surveys are completed regularly in some local jurisdictions or for other projects, care will be taken to ensure survey tools and questions are not repetitive or redundant; however, parallel projects may also provide an opportunity to leverage resources by combining survey tools.

The RDCO conducted its first regional citizen survey from October 27 to November 16, 2022. Data was collected by Ipsos through a randomly sampled, 12-15 minute telephone survey with 700 surveys completed.

Key survey results are largely positive with:

- 94% of residents reporting their overall quality of life as good
- 94% of residents reporting they are satisfied with the overall level of RDCO services they receive
- 79% of residents reporting they get good value for their taxes.

### Regional Housing Strategy

Description and Rationale: The Central Okanagan is one of the fastest growing regions in the province. Housing gaps exist at all levels across the housing spectrum due to a lack of suitable and affordable housing to meet local needs. These factors include high construction costs, aging housing stock, historically low rental vacancy rate, short-stay accommodation, an increase in demand, and a growing gap between what households can afford and the average cost of renting or entering home ownership.

Collaborative effort is required throughout all levels of government, the housing industry, community groups, and organizations to confront challenges within the region. Taking this regional perspective will ensure that individual communities are working in unison to improve the range of housing opportunities to meet the social and economic needs of the region.

The strategy was intended to establish a shared commitment, pool resources for more impact, gain momentum for collective action and advocacy, and promote the advancement of partnerships. The Regional Housing Strategy was completed in 2022 after extensive consultation. Recommendations of this work include:

- Coordinate a regional housing advocacy strategy aligned with Provincial and Federal housing policy to approach higher levels of senior government for additional Central Okanagan resources and support.
- Strengthen mechanisms for information sharing and partnerships with First Nations, local governments and non-profit housing providers.
- Develop best practices to assist with regulation and protecting the rental housing stock and assist with the development of affordable housing.
- Regionally assess policy and development processes to build staff capacity, identify opportunities for policy coordination and streamline approvals with senior government.

### Regional Growth Strategy Five-year Review

Description and Rationale: The RDCO has a statutory obligation under the *Local Government Act* to consider, at least once every five years, whether the RGS should be reviewed for possible amendment and to provide opportunity for input into the need for review. This requirement provides an opportunity for the Regional District to periodically assess the RGS and gather feedback from stakeholders to determine if a review of the RGS is warranted. Subsequent to receiving input from the public, affected local governments, First Nations, provincial ministries and agencies, and other levels of government, the Regional Board must decide on whether or not to undertake a 5-Year Review.

In April 2021, after providing input on whether the RGS should be reviewed, the Board determined a review was not required and supported staff to continue actively engaging with partners on implementation initiatives. The Regional Board must consider whether the RGS will be reviewed for possible amendments and provide opportunity for input on the need for review again by 2026.

### Central Okanagan Agricultural Background Report

Description and Rationale: Agriculture is a key component of the identity of the Central Okanagan. A Regional Agricultural Strategy could help support knowledge sharing, data collection, joint investments, and developing regionally consistent policies to help several aspects of the larger agricultural and food system. In 2022, a process to develop a regional agricultural strategy was launched. The first phase resulted in the completion of the Central Okanagan Agricultural Background Report which serves as a foundation to support knowledge sharing, data collection, and joint investments. It contains an agricultural profile for the region, findings of a policy review and information gathered from engagement activities with the agricultural community, partners, and stakeholders.

The next phase of the project will get underway in 2024 and will see development of regionally consistent policies to help the larger agricultural food system through a regional agricultural strategy developed in the final phase of the process.

### Regional Employment Lands Inventory

**Description and Rationale:** A key aspect of supporting sustainable and resilient economic development in the region is ensuring the availability of appropriate and adequately serviced employment supporting lands, including commercial, industrial, office and institutional land. As economic activity crosses municipal boundaries, this is most appropriately done at the regional scale. A Regional Employment Lands Inventory would also provide a foundation for a Regional Employment Lands Strategy, coordinating action at the local level, and development of tools to support prospective new business and investors to explore the region's assets and identify sites that may meet their needs.

The Regional Employment Lands Inventory is currently underway and will assess current and future usage of employment lands in the Central Okanagan. This will be done by conducting a market assessment and inventory of all employment land within the RDCO. From this, projected demand, future supply, and impending shortages by sector will be estimated. This information can then be used to direct future commercial and industrial land use development in the region, such as through intensifying existing lands. It would also provide a resource to inform more efficient development of infrastructure and transportation to promote growth towards more integrated communities.

### **Next Steps:**

Being accountable for progress towards achieving the goals of the RGS requires a commitment to implementation. The existing RGS framework provides flexibility for implementation. In 2021 when the Board decided that a review of the RGS was not required, the Board supported staff efforts to actively engage with member municipalities, First Nations, Interior Health Authority and other agencies regarding continued implementation of the Regional District of Central Okanagan Regional Growth Strategy.

Subsequent to the 2017 action plan, to ensure continued momentum of the RGS, a new work plan is being developed to explore various regional projects with our partners which will be considered by the Regional Board in 2024.

### **Recommendation:**

**THAT** the Committee of the Whole receives the Regional Growth Strategy Implementation Update report, from the Manager of Development Services, dated April 11, 2024, for information.

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*Respectfully submitted by: Danika LeBlanc, Senior Planner*

Report Approved by:

Brittany Nichols, Manager of Development  
Services

Approved for Agenda:

Sally Ginter,  
Chief Administrative Officer

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- Attachment(s):
1. RGS Priority Projects Plan
  2. Regional Bulletin Winter
  3. RGS Implementation Update
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