



Standing Committee Report Committee of the Whole

To: Committee of the Whole
From: Director of Development and Engineering Services
Date: October 10, 2024

Subject: Regional Agriculture Strategy (Phase 2) - Overview

Objective: To provide an overview of the Regional Agriculture Strategy (Phase 2) which will develop a regional approach to protecting the region's agricultural land base from the pressures of population growth and a changing climate.

Discussion:

Agriculture is an important part of the heritage and cultural identity of the Central Okanagan. It contributes to the economy, landscape, and high quality of life enjoyed by residents. Agriculture also continues to compete with other land uses due to a limited land base, and additional pressures from the impacts of climate change and a fast-growing population. The Regional Agricultural Strategy will develop a comprehensive, regional approach to preserving and protecting the agricultural land base to support the long-term viability of agriculture in the Central Okanagan.

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 outlining priority initiatives for the RDCO to implement based on commitments defined in the RGS. Among the priority initiatives was the Regional Agriculture Strategy (RAS) for modernization of the RDCO's 2005 Regional Agricultural Plan. A process to develop the strategy was launched in 2022. The first phase resulted in the completion of the Central Okanagan Agricultural Background Report which serves as a foundation for the development of the RAS.

The Regional Agriculture Strategy will establish a collective vision and set regional agricultural and food system goals by prioritizing the agricultural land base given the realities facing the industry. The Strategy will identify actions to help achieve the vision and goals, set realistic and measurable targets through an implementation plan, and set a monitoring and evaluation framework with metrics that can be used to track the progress of the RAS over the next 10 years.

A consulting contract to lead the project has been awarded to Upland Agricultural Consulting. The next stage involves a collaborative process to inform the project involving RDCO staff and a working group comprised of subject matter experts, staff from partnering communities and key industry leaders.

Background:

Regional Growth Strategy

The RDCO adopted Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) 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.

RGS Priority Projects Plan

In accordance with the RGS and through a collaborative process, an action plan to outline priority initiatives was completed. The Priority Projects Plan is the framework for RGS implementation and was based on the regional initiatives identified within the RGS. The Priority Projects Plan was endorsed by the Regional Board on July 24, 2017.

Several successful initiatives and projects related to the implementation of the RGS have been completed that have had significant strategic investment value supporting various goals and policies. Projects were selected and scoped to provide regional coordination and collaboration with our partners in support of shared regional needs. Among the priority initiatives was the Regional Agriculture Strategy (RAS), intended to modernize the RDCO's 2005 Regional Agricultural Plan. A process to develop the strategy was launched in 2022.

Regional Agriculture Strategy

Regional agricultural plans are considered one of the most effective means for integrating agricultural, farming and local food system priorities into local and regional government policies, practices, and functions, while also providing leadership and coordination in various community-based initiatives in support of agriculture. A regional approach has the advantage of a holistic perspective on complex issues, creating efficiency and maximizing assets and resources. This approach also recognizes and engages many parties and resources to collaboratively achieve common goals, while building and strengthening community connections.

As agriculture in the Central Okanagan continues to face development pressures, production intensifies on existing farms and expands up into higher elevations, member communities in the Central Okanagan have an opportunity to explore innovative options and solutions to support agriculture. In particular, emergency planning, water and utilities infrastructure, farm worker housing, soil management, climate change and the protection of ecosystem services will continue to be priority issues that cross local political boundaries and require collective action for the regional agricultural sector in the years ahead.

A process to develop a Regional Agriculture Strategy was launched in 2022. The first phase resulted in the completion of the [Central Okanagan Agricultural Background Report](#). It contains an agricultural profile for the region, findings of a policy review and information gathered from engagement activities with the agricultural community and partners.

Upon completion, the Regional Agriculture Strategy will deliver policies to steward a sustainable path as we navigate growth pressures to support several aspects of the larger agricultural food system throughout the region and coordinate implementation actions to be embedded in local level agricultural plans for regional consistency. The Strategy will also inform regional soil management with the development of soil deposit and removal policies.

The RDCO is committed to environmental stewardship and intends to support this by introducing new regulations aimed at better controlling soil deposition and preventing illegal dumping in the region's rural areas. An action identified in the Board's Strategic Priorities for 2023-2026 is to create and enforce a soil deposition strategy and bylaw. As there is a significant agricultural component to soil deposition in the region, regional soil management will be incorporated into the RAS and part of the scope of this work. This will also support staff efficiencies and financial resources.

The RAS will benefit the region and member communities through:

- The development of agriculture policies to create consistency & streamline processes

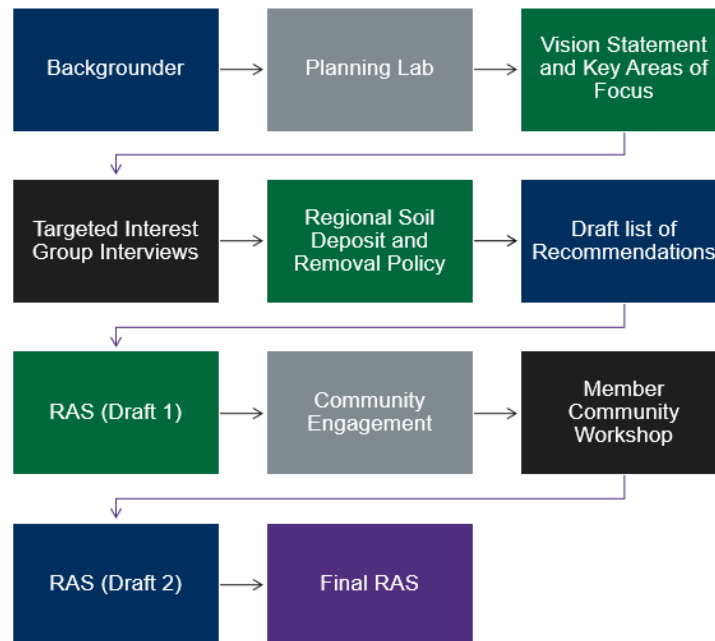
- Education and awareness
- Priorities that will foster regional consistency by assisting municipalities in being more responsive and allowing for more effective agricultural updates every 5 years within their Official Community Plans
- Clear and consistent soil deposit and fill policy direction to enable member communities to align their polices and/or regulations accordingly
- Insights for the next Regional Growth Strategy review and update

A consulting contract to lead the project was awarded to Upland Agricultural Consulting. This phase of project has recently commenced and is currently in phase 1 (see Figure 1 below). A collaborative process will be utilized to inform the project involving RDCO staff and a working group comprised of staff from partnering communities, subject matter experts, and key industry leaders.



Figure 1: RAS Phase 2 Project Timeline

The Regional Agriculture Strategy workplan has been tailored to meet the objectives of the project:



The Regional Agriculture Strategy will establish a collective vision and set regional agricultural and food system goals. The Strategy will identify actions to help achieve the vision and goals, set realistic and measurable targets through an implementation plan, and set a monitoring and evaluation framework with metrics that can be used to track the progress of the RAS over the next 10 years.

Funding:

As part of the 2024 budget deliberations, the Regional Board approved \$50,000.00 for the Regional Agriculture Strategy and \$25,000 for the Regional Soil Management Plan.

Next Steps:

The first few of phases of the workplan are intended to set the foundations for the development of the Regional Agriculture Strategy. Phase 2 - Setting the Vision includes hosting a regional planning lab to gather information to identify key opportunities for coordinating policy on soil deposit and removal within the region and identifying key areas of focus. This phase also includes the establishment of a working group comprised of RDCO staff, member community liaisons, local producers and industry experts while conducting one-on-one interviews with organizations such as Interior Health Authority and Urban Development Institute.

By fostering collaboration and setting clear, achievable goals, a Regional Agricultural Strategy strengthens local food systems and ensures a sustainable and prosperous future for the residents of the Central Okanagan and the environment.

Recommendation:

THAT the Committee of the Whole receives the Regional Agriculture Strategy Phase 2 overview from the Director of Development and Engineering Services, dated October 10, 2024, for information.

Respectfully submitted by: Danika LeBlanc, Senior Planner and Thor Goodman, Planner I

Report Approved by: Mariah VanZerr, Regional Planning Manager and Danielle Noble-Brandt, Director of Development and Engineering Services

Approved for Agenda: Sally Ginter, Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment(s): 1. PowerPoint Presentation
