



Regional Board Report

Information

To: Regional Board
From: Director of Communication and Information Services
Date: October 24, 2024

Subject: Regional District of Central Okanagan's Economic Development Commission's Strategy 2025 to 2030 – Project Update and What We Heard Summary

Voting Entitlement: All Directors - Unweighted Corporate Vote - Simple Majority (LGA s.208)

Purpose: To receive for information an update on the Regional District of Central Okanagan's Economic Development Commission Strategy 2025 to 2030 project and an outline of next steps.

Executive Summary:

The Regional District of Central Okanagan's Economic Development Commission (EDC) works to foster the development of a healthy, dynamic and resilient community economy by supporting existing businesses and encouraging new business investment in the Central Okanagan.

The EDC has been operating in alignment with the Moving Forward to 2025 strategy as received by the Regional Board on October 10, 2019. As the Moving Forward to 2025 strategy comes to an end, the EDC is undertaking a strategic planning process that will provide a guide for its activities over the next five years.

A consulting contract to lead the project was awarded to Deloitte in May 2024. Below is a summary of the strategic planning process progress and the input gathered to date, as well as an outline of next steps.

Recommendation(s):

THAT the Regional Board receive for information the report Regional District of Central Okanagan's Economic Development Commission Strategy 2025 to 2030 – Project Update and What We Heard Summary from the Director of Communication and Information Services, dated October 24, 2024.

Respectfully submitted by: Krista Mallory, Manager of Economic Development

Report Approved by: Jodie Foster, Director of Communication and Information Services

Approved for Agenda: Sally Ginter, Chief Administrative Officer

Strategic Plan Alignment:

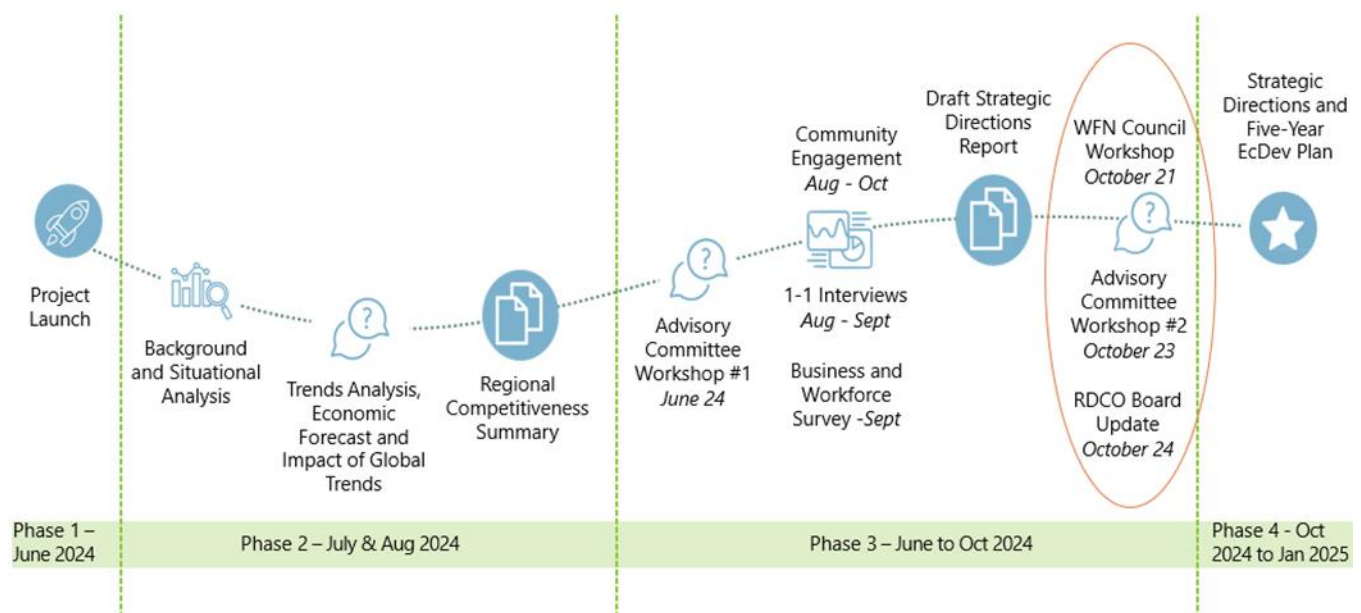
- √ Emergency preparedness
- Health and wellness
- √ Regional transportation
- √ Truth and reconciliation
- √ Environment and climate – Regional priority only
- √ Growth and development – Electoral Area priority only

Background:

On October 10, 2019, the Regional Board received the EDC's Moving Forward to 2025 strategic plan. The plan identified four strategic pillars: Growing Sustainably, Building Business, Competing Globally and Inviting Top Talent. In November 2021, a workshop was held with the Regional Board to realign the Moving Forward to 2025 strategic plan considering the impact of COVID-19 to the regional economy. The strategic pillars were found to remain valid, and the EDC continues to operate in alignment with the Moving Forward to 2025 plan.

EDC Strategic Plan to 2030 – Project Update:

Strategic Plan Project Overview



In 2024, the EDC received a grant from CanExport Community Initiatives to undertake a comprehensive strategic planning process that will guide its activities for the next five years. A consulting contract was awarded to Deloitte in May 2024, with an expected completion date of January 2025. Above is an overview of the project timing.

Project deliverables include:

1. Economic Base Analysis
 - Background review and situational analysis
 - Trend analysis and regional benchmarking
 - Economic forecasts and global trends
2. Community Engagement
 - 1:1 interviews with 13 community organizations
 - COEDC Advisory Committee workshops (2)
 - Business and workforce surveys
3. Strategic directions and five-year Economic Development Plan report

Engagement Summary – What We Heard Report

To garner input on priorities for the next five years, a business and community engagement was undertaken. This included a business survey, workforce survey and one-on one interviews. For more details, see Appendices A,B,C.

Key themes from engagement in Phase 2 and 3 of the project have been reviewed and compiled. These themes will be distilled into draft priorities to be further reviewed and refined.

Business Survey Insights

- 70% of all respondents felt somewhat or very satisfied with Central Okanagan as a place to do business. Factors with the highest level of satisfaction are:
 - Availability of post-secondary programming (75%)
 - Technology and productivity resources (73%)
 - Business-related training (69%)
- 63% believe their revenues will be increasing over the next 12 months, and over the next 24 months 36% of respondents have plans for expansion and 50% expect to maintain current business operations.
- 69% of respondents somewhat or strongly agreed they would recommend the Central Okanagan to another business looking to expand or relocate.
- Only 56% of business owners are aware of the various supports/resources available to them.

Workforce Survey Insights

- Newcomers to the region (last 1-4 years), were inspired to the region for quality of life (50%), job opportunities (43%), friends/family in the region (43%).
- Respondents displayed an 85% overall satisfaction level with Central Okanagan as a place to work.
- 26% of respondents were currently searching for work and identified limited opportunity in their occupation, lack of recognition for credentials, challenges finding work-life balance and inadequate salary options as top challenges.
- Respondents identified skills training (31%), housing accessibility (30%) and networking opportunities (27%) as areas where regional assistance would be helpful to achieve employment goals.

Key Themes from Interviews

Theme 1: Innovation and Technology Adoption

The region has a strong education system, including Central Okanagan Public Schools, Okanagan College, and UBC Okanagan, which provides a steady stream of skilled workers and connects research with local industries. While the tech sector is growing, traditional industries like tourism and agriculture also need to adapt to environmental challenges by shifting to higher-value, sustainable activities. The tech ecosystem in the region can support this transition. Small businesses in all sectors also need support integrating tech into day-to-day operations.

Theme 2: Impact of Cost of Living and Housing on Workforce Development

High housing costs and the overall cost of living make it difficult to keep new graduates, attract skilled workers, and retain trade workers and immigrants. Major institutions and growing companies need to attract mid-career and senior managers and specialists but are hampered by housing challenges. Although the region offers an attractive quality of life, it is becoming less appealing for those without high incomes or established wealth.

Theme 3: Leveraging the Critical Mass of a Growing Metro Region.

As the largest metro area between Calgary and Vancouver, the Central Okanagan offers opportunities to attract investment from companies attracted to the region's growth. However, there needs to be greater investment in infrastructure and transportation systems, and more support from higher levels of government. It's important to recognize that the region faces challenges similar to other metro areas, not rural ones.

Theme 4: Sustainability and Resilience

There is widespread recognition that industries must build resilience to climate change, but the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission (COEDC) should focus only on actions that are achievable within its scope. This theme also ties in with innovation and technology, as local institutions and businesses can develop solutions to address environmental challenges.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The final EDC Strategic Directions and Five-Year Economic Development Plan will be developed based on the findings of the Economic Base Analysis and the community engagement phases of the project. Additional inputs informing the plan include the Regional Employment Lands Inventory and economic priorities identified by member communities.

With these inputs complete, the draft plan will be developed and presented to the Regional Board in early 2025.

Considerations:

Organizational/External:

The Central Okanagan Economic Development Advisory Committee - a 45-member advisory committee of the Regional Board made up of elected officials, community partners and industry representatives- has provided input to the project through two workshop sessions. The EDC would like to thank members for their contributions to the project.

The EDC would like to extend their appreciation to the regional community organizations that provided 1:1 interviews during the community engagement phase. Their input will enhance the EDC's ability to work in partnership to drive economic growth in the region.

Financial:

The RDCO received funding for this project through a CanExport Community Initiatives grant in the amount of \$25,000.

The Strategic Directions and Five-Year Economic Development Plan must be executable within existing resources or signal the need for additional resources.

Considerations not applicable:

- Legal/Statutory Authority:
- Alternate Recommendation:

Attachment(s): 1. COEDC Strategy 2025-2030 – RDCO Presentation
 2. Appendices A to C - Engagement Summary
