



# Regional Board Report

## Request for Decision

**To:** Regional Board  
**From:** Director of Development and Engineering Services  
**Date:** October 24, 2024  
**Subject:** Proposed sequencing for updating the RDCO's strategic, long-range plans (Regional Growth Strategy and Official Community Plans)

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

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**Purpose:** To consider a recommended sequencing for updating the RDCO's strategic, long-range planning documents (Regional Growth Strategy and Official Community Plans).

### Executive Summary:

This report provides a recommended sequencing for updating the RDCO's strategic, long-range planning documents. These include the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS), the RDCO's Official Community Plans, and the Joe Rich Rural Land Use Bylaw (RLUB), which were all developed a decade or more ago. Given rapid population growth, recent provincial housing legislation, and the increased prevalence of extreme heat, wildfires and floods, it is timely to conduct a comprehensive and coordinated update of these plans. This will ensure they remain relevant and able to guide our region's growth and development in a fashion that considers emerging issues and trends, while continuing to protect our region's natural environment, economic resilience and high quality of life.

The RGS provides overarching policy direction for all communities within the region related to growth and regional issues that cross local political boundaries. The *Local Government Act* requires Regional Context Statements be included in member municipality's OCPs that identify how they are consistent with the RGS. Further, Bill 44 now requires municipalities to update their OCPs by December 31, 2025, and every 5 years thereafter. The current RGS was adopted in 2014 and is due for an update. It would be beneficial for the RGS to be updated in advance of each member municipality initiating their 2030 OCP update processes so that it can inform their policy direction and required Regional Context Statements. This timeline would also allow the RGS to inform the needed updates of the RDCO's OCPs and Joe Rich RLUB.

Within the RDCO, there are four OCPs and the Joe Rich RLUB all of which are due for an update as they were adopted between 12 and 18 years ago. Sequencing the RGS to come before the updates of the RDCO's OCPs and Joe Rich RLUB could provide opportunities for shared project efficiencies across both initiatives. It would also place the RDCO's OCP updates on a similar cycle as local governments in the rest of the province and time them to be informed by the RDCO's updated Housing Needs Report. This would ensure the RDCO's approach to long-range planning remains proactive and up to date, positioning the organization well to compete for future grant funding opportunities.

### Recommendation(s):

**THAT** the Regional Board direct staff to commence the scoping of a Regional Growth Strategy update for Board consideration.

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Respectfully submitted by: Mariah VanZerr, Regional Planning Manager & Danika LeBlanc, Senior Planner

Report Approved by: Danielle Noble-Brandt, Director of Development and Engineering Services

Approved for Agenda: Sally Ginter, Chief Administrative Officer

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### Strategic Plan Alignment:

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

#### Regional Growth Strategy

The purpose of the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) is to promote human settlement that is socially, economically and environmentally healthy and that makes efficient use of public facilities and services, land and other resources. The *Local Government Act* (LGA) requires Regional Growth Strategies to cover a period of 20 years and provide for the needs of the projected population and employment in relation to housing, transportation, regional district services, parks, natural areas, and economic development, among other topics.

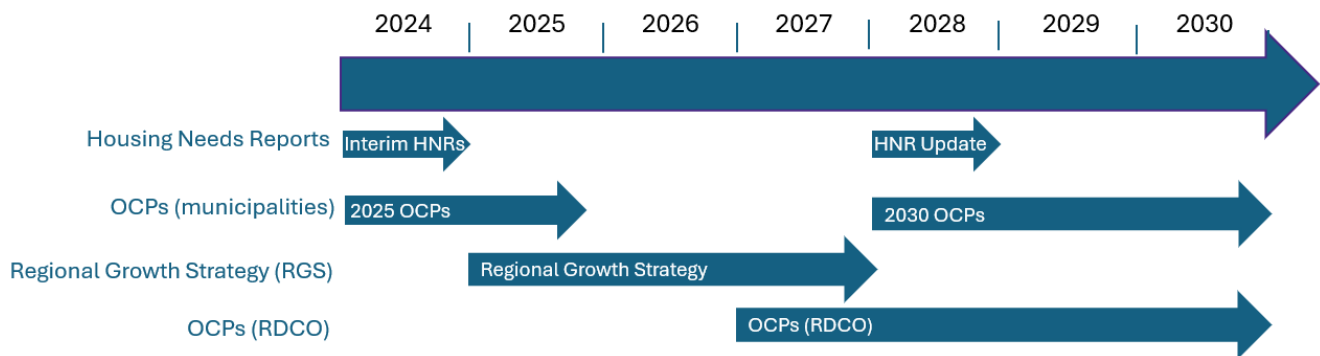
The RDCO adopted its first RGS in 2000. An update to the 2000 RGS was initiated in 2010 and the current RGS was adopted in 2014. In April 2021, after providing input on whether the RGS should be reviewed, the Board determined a review was not required and supported staff to continue actively engaging with partners on implementation initiatives. Since 2021, population growth and new provincial housing legislation have been major changes that are influencing both how much and where our region will grow. Additionally, the increasing prevalence of natural hazards such as wildfires, landslides, and floods mean a review and update of the Regional Growth Strategy is necessary to ensure growth is guided in a fashion that protects human health, safety, and the natural environment.

- *Population Growth*: Population growth continues to be higher than anticipated. For example, the current RGS projects a 2036 population of about 270,000. However, the latest population projections from BC Stats for 2036 are now over 329,000 – 22% higher than the last update of the RGS.
- *Provincial Housing Legislation*: In 2023, the province introduced new landmark housing legislation that will significantly influence growth and development in the Central Okanagan. A summary of changes in Bill 44 relevant for the RGS are below:
  - *New prescribed densities for single family zones*: Bill 44 requires municipalities over 5,000 people to amend their land use bylaws to allow 3-4 units in single family zones within urban containment boundaries (and up to 6 units near frequent bus service).
  - *Secondary suites*: Bill 44 requires secondary suites to be allowed in single-family residential zones in regional district electoral areas, including the RDCO.

- *Housing Needs Reports*: Bill 44 requires local governments, including the RDCO, to develop new 20-Year Housing Needs Reports, with an interim report due January 1, 2025, and then regularly updated reports thereafter.
- *Official Community Plans*: Bill 44 requires municipalities to update their OCPs by December 31, 2025, and then every 5 years thereafter. This requirement applies to the RDCO’s member municipalities, but not to the RDCO. However, it is still expected that regional districts would ensure alignment of their Electoral Area OCPs with corresponding updated Housing Needs Reports as soon as practical, reflecting good planning practice.

Timeline Considerations and Proposed Approach

Per Section 447 of the *LGA*, member municipality OCPs must include a Regional Context Statement that identifies how their OCP is consistent with the RGS. Given this, it is prudent to consider how the new mandated provincial OCP update timelines influence the development and updating of the Regional Growth Strategy. It would provide significant value to have the updated Regional Growth Strategy completed in advance of each member municipality initiating their 2030 OCP process. It would also allow the RGS to inform the future updates of the RDCO’s OCPs and Joe Rich Rural Land Use Bylaw, all of which are outdated and due for an update.



If the RGS commenced in 2025, it is anticipated that the RDCO’s OCP updates could commence in 2027, allowing them to be informed by the RGS and ultimately adopted by 2030, in alignment with the member municipality’s OCPs. Moving forward, the RDCO’s OCPs could then be informed by the unincorporated area’s updated Housing Needs Report every 5 years, on the same cycle as local governments in the rest of the province. This would ensure the RDCO’s approach to planning remains proactive and up to date, positioning us well to compete for future grant funding opportunities.

Regional Growth Strategy Review and Update

Updating the RGS would entail a multi-year process and include an assessment of the current growth strategy, a review of existing and future conditions, comprehensive public and community partner engagement, and the identification of high-priority implementation actions to advance responses to region-wide issues. The refreshed RGS would also respond to and incorporate the updated Housing Needs Reports currently in development across the region.

On Sept 4, 2024, staff met with the RGS Steering Committee, comprised of senior representatives of regional and municipal planning departments across the region. The RGS Steering Committee was

supportive of advancing an update of the Regional Growth Strategy next year to respond to the emerging and pressing issues our region is currently facing. In addition to helping inform OCP updates, it was noted that an update of the RGS would also facilitate updates to capital infrastructure, servicing and financial plans that are vital to support our growing region. On balance, the RGS Steering Committee noted value and efficiencies that could be gained for each municipality if the RGS update was approached in a way that provided content and policy direction for individual OCP updates at a time of regional growth pressures and overarching resource constraints.

### Conclusion

Advancing the RGS in 2025 would provide value to all the RDCO's member municipalities and bring region-wide benefits. These include addressing the key major changes related to population growth, provincial housing legislation and increased natural hazard events. It would also provide a consistent regional approach to growth in time to inform member municipality's 2030 OCP updates, as well as the needed updates to the RDCO's four OCPs and Joe Rich Rural Land Use Bylaw.

If the Board directs staff to commence the scoping of a Regional Growth Strategy update, staff will return with a future report that provides more detail on the scope, schedule and budget and a request for a resolution from the Board to initiate the RGS update process.

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### **Considerations:**

- Organizational:** In accordance with the *Local Government Act*, at least once every 5 years, a regional district that has adopted a regional growth strategy must consider whether the regional growth strategy must be reviewed for possible amendment. However, the Regional Board may pursue a review of the RGS at any time should there be a desire to do so.
- External:** The Regional Growth Strategy Steering Committee supports advancing the Regional Growth Strategy review and update as soon as practical to support planning initiatives within each respective community. Staff at member municipalities recognize the benefit of the RGS update being completed in advance of each member municipality initiating their 2030 OCP update processes.
- Financial:** The resources and timeline required to complete an RGS update depends on the scope of the project and breadth of community consultation and engagement. A substantial update process typically takes multiple years to complete and requires significant resources including staff time and consulting budget. Should the Regional Board decide to proceed with a review of the RGS, staff estimate approximately \$300,000 over three years (2025 – 2027) would be needed in budget allocation to support this initiative. Staff will seek out opportunities for external funding where possible.
- Legal/Statutory Authority:** The provision for the review of a regional growth strategy is contained in Part 13 – Regional Growth Strategies of the *Local Government Act*. In accordance with Section 433 of the *Local Government Act*, a Regional Growth Strategy must be initiated by resolution of the board.

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Attachment(s): 1. PowerPoint Presentation

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