



Regional Board Report

Information

Approved for Board Consideration

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Brian Reardon, CAO

To: Regional Board

From: Todd Cashin, Director of Community Services

Date: May 30, 2022

Subject: Central Okanagan Poverty and Awareness Strategy Update

Voting Entitlement: All Directors – Unweighted Corporate Vote – Simple Majority (LGA s.207)

Purpose: To provide the Regional Board with an update on the Central Okanagan Poverty and Wellness Strategy (COPAWS).

Executive Summary:

The Central Okanagan Poverty Reduction Committee (COPRC) formed in 2017 with the goal of developing and implementing a regional poverty reduction strategy. In 2020, the Central Okanagan Community Wellness Analysis provided baseline data and insights into poverty and wellness both in the region and within each community. In 2020, Peachland, West Kelowna, Kelowna, and Lake Country partnered with the Regional District of the Central Okanagan and were successful in obtaining a \$149,000 grant from the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) for the development of the Central Okanagan Poverty and Wellness Strategy (COPAWS).

The purpose of this project is to provide a coordinated, shared community framework for poverty reduction in the Central Okanagan and strengthening coordination between regional systems through improved policies, practices and resources. This project endeavors to create a meaningful report which supports actions to address poverty and improve wellness in the Central Okanagan. The Consultant, Jen Casorso of Urban Matters, will present the draft Strategy and provide an overview of next steps.

Recommendation(s):

THAT the Regional Board receives the Central Okanagan Poverty and Awareness Strategy report from the Director of Community Services, dated May 30, 2022, for information.

Respectfully Submitted:

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Todd Cashin
Director of Community Services

Prepared by: Cheryl Wiebe, Senior Planner

Attachment(s):

- Central Okanagan Poverty and Awareness Strategy (Draft)
- Background Review Report
- What We Heard Report
- PowerPoint Presentation Slides - COPAWS Strategy dated May 30, 2022

Strategic Plan Alignment:

Priorities: Sustainable Communities

Values: Collaboration, Regional Perspective

Background:

In March 2019, the Province released their poverty reduction strategy called TogetherBC which set targets to reduce the overall poverty rate in British Columbia. Provincial funding was made available through UBCM to support local governments in reducing poverty at the local level.

The Central Okanagan Poverty Reduction Committee (COPRC), formed in 2017 with the goal of developing and implementing a regional poverty reduction strategy. In 2020, the Central Okanagan Community Wellness Analysis provided baseline data and insights into poverty and wellness in the region and within each community.

The previous work of the COPRC, the Regional District, and member municipalities have set the stage for a community driven, regional approach to addressing poverty and wellness. In 2020, Peachland, West Kelowna, Kelowna, and Lake Country partnered with the RDCO and were successful in obtaining a \$149,000 grant from the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) for the development of the Central Okanagan Poverty and Wellness Strategy (COPAWS).

A leadership committee, with representatives of local government and community service providers, was established and is actively supporting the strategy development through communication, outreach, community connection and knowledge. A governance committee with representatives from each member municipality is providing project oversight ensuring that the strategy reflects the unique needs of each community and aligns with and leverages existing strengths and resources.

Due to several challenges encountered including but not limited to impacts of COVID-19, in July 2021, this project was put on hold. In November 2021, Urban Matters CCC Ltd. was hired to complete the project scope for the June 2022 grant deadline. To date the engagement activities deployed have reached the following individuals or groups across the RDCO:

Engagement Method	Strategy Applied	Reach
Public Survey	Online survey distributed in 2022 by Urban Matters	748 respondents
People with Lived and Living Experience Survey	Online and paper survey distributed in 2021 by the United Way	223 respondents
Community Forum	Online public meeting to discuss poverty, its impacts, and community vision for reducing poverty	10 participants

Service Provider Interviews	Specifically for service providers working with target populations who were unable to make our other engagement, interviews were held to ensure their perspectives were collected	2 interviews
People with Lived and Living Experience Engagement	A combination of questionnaires distributed by service providers, interviews, and focus groups with people experiencing poverty	10 participants
Preliminary Planning and Implementation Session	A focused workshop with service providers and local government representatives to begin identifying possible solutions and interventions to reduce poverty	11 organizations
Local Area Focus Groups	Local community focus groups with service providers in West Kelowna, Peachland, and Lake Country were held to gather community specific concerns and experiences	16 participants over 3 focus groups
Indigenous Engagement	A combination of interviews, focus groups and workshops with Indigenous community leaders and service providers were held with Okanagan Indian Band, West Bank First Nation, Metis Community, Okanagan Nation Alliance, and Urban Indigenous services	Urban Indigenous Organizations – 5 engagements 12 participants Okanagan Indian Band – 3 engagements 8 participants Westbank First Nation - 2 engagements and 6 participants Okanagan Nation Alliance – 2 engagements and 8 participants
Leadership Committee Meetings	The Leadership committee has met to provide project oversight and input into the project.	20 Organizations over 3 sessions since the restart including representation from the 4 member municipalities. An additional meeting will be held prior to project end.

As there were project synergies, and to better understand residents' needs, the public survey also included questions relating to the RDCO's Regional Housing Strategy (RHS). This helped to ensure that target audiences were not experiencing survey fatigue and to maximize use of staff and consultant resources.

Summary of Key Findings from Engagement

These key findings contributed to the context of poverty in the region and the framing of the vision and actions within this Strategy. The following list provides a summary of findings in the Central Okanagan gained from the community engagement noted above:

A Vision for the Future:

- A future without poverty means basic needs are met, and people feel a sense of inclusion.
- Work done to address poverty and wellness must take an intersectional and equity lens to ensure that no one is left behind.
- Service providers and community leaders have a strong desire to see social service systems be more integrated and streamlined to give a better experience to service users.
- Everyone needs some help sometimes, and a stronger support system should come with easier access to services, less stigma about needing help, and more crisis prevention programs.
- By bringing together multiple sectors (government, First Nations and Indigenous communities, service providers, residents, people with lived and living experiences, businesses, and others)

this work will be more successful as the work can be done together and sectors can support each other.

Barriers Identified:

- Transportation ranked among the top choices of services that help or would help people stay employed.
- High cost of housing continues to impact residents negatively.
- Some groups of people are disproportionately impacted by poverty: Seniors and elders, people living with a disability, and children and youth/young adults.
- More and more people in the Central Okanagan need support with managing costs of daily living such as housing, transportation, food, health, and recreation, etc.
- Indigenous communities, who participated, emphasized that their experience of poverty is coloured by the ongoing impacts of colonialism, capacity challenges, and entrenched racism and stigma. These systems must be addressed for meaningful change to happen.
- Childcare was among the top services that respondents identified would help them acquire employment or remain employed.

Conclusion:

The draft strategy will be presented to member municipalities and First Nations in June. It is available online for public comment which will close on June 2, 2022. Finally, the draft strategy will be presented at the Regional Housing Symposium on June 8th.

The Central Okanagan Poverty and Awareness Strategy will require Regional Board endorsement prior to finalization and grant report submission prior to the end of June. Final comments will be collated, and the Final Strategy is expected to be provided to the Regional Board on June 27, 2022.

Considerations:

Organizational/External:	As the primary applicant, the RDCO is responsible to receive and manage the grant funding on behalf of the regional partners. The RDCO also assumed responsibility for the completion of the project, reporting requirements, and maintaining proper fiscal management. A staff liaison has been appointed for the duration of the strategy development to provide regular updates to the Regional Board.
Financial:	\$149,000 grant was provided from UBCM. An additional \$16,500 was approved by the Board to support the challenges associated with COVID-19 and schedule timelines.
Legal/Statutory Authority:	Mandated through the <i>Poverty Reduction Strategy Act</i> , the Province has created a poverty reduction strategy called "TogetherBC: British Columbia's Poverty Reduction Strategy." The intent of the Poverty Reduction Planning & Action program is to support local governments in reducing poverty at the local level and to support the Province's poverty reduction Strategy.

Considerations not applicable:

- Alternate Recommendation