



North Westside Governance & Services Study
Background Paper
March, 2022

REGIONAL DISTRICT GOVERNANCE

INTRODUCTION

This paper, titled *Regional District Governance*, provides an overview of regional districts in British Columbia's system of local government. Regional districts' fundamental roles are explained, as are their governance structure, voting rules, service responsibilities and system of service finance. The paper is intended to give Committee members, at the outset of the study, a common base of knowledge on which to build going forward.

WHAT IS A REGIONAL DISTRICT?¹

Regional districts are federations of municipalities and electoral areas. Each is governed by a regional board of directors with representation from every member jurisdiction. Member jurisdictions of the RDCO include four municipalities — Kelowna, West Kelowna, Lake Country and Peachland — along with the Electoral Areas of Central Okanagan East and Central Okanagan West. The Westbank First Nation is not part of the RDCO; the First Nation has, however, chosen to appoint a representative to the RDCO Board of Directors in a non-voting capacity.

Regional districts exist, first and foremost, to provide services. In this role, regional districts:

- serve as the local governments for their electoral areas, responsible for providing basic services such as community planning, water supply and fire protection

- are inter-jurisdictional service bodies that provide sub-regional services to different combinations of municipalities and electoral areas
- are regional service bodies, responsible for providing important regional services to their entire regional communities

Local, sub-regional and regional services are established by regional districts in direct response to the expressed needs, desires and instructions of the member municipalities and electoral areas. The boards of directors are the political forums in which these needs, desires and instructions are expressed.

Every regional district is required, by law, to provide certain services — general government, electoral area planning and solid waste management planning are examples. Most services provided by regional districts, however, are voluntary in nature, established to meet the specific needs of members.

WHO MAKES DECISIONS?

Each regional district board of directors consists of two types of directors:

- electoral area directors, elected directly by rural area voters for four-year terms
- municipal directors, appointed to the regional

consultant for the Union of British Columbia Municipalities.

¹ Information in this section is taken from the *Regional District Fact Sheet*, written by the



board by their municipal councils for a term determined by their councils

The board selects its own chair and vice chair from among the directors. The chair is the chief spokesperson for the regional district, runs board meetings and establishes standing committees to provide advice on key matters. At the RDCO, the primary standing committee is the Governance and Services Committee.

Each member municipality and electoral area has a voting strength on the board based on population. In the RDCO, every jurisdiction receives one vote for every 4,000 residents, including residents who live on First Nations Reserves. For municipalities, the resulting voting strength is divided by five to determine the number of directors appointed to the board. The RDCO Board consists of 13 voting directors, including one from each of the two electoral areas, one from Peachland, one from Lake Country, two from West Kelowna, and seven from Kelowna.²

Regional districts have special voting rules that are different from those which apply to municipalities. These rules mean that regional district decisions are made by the entire board of directors, whereas others are made only by the directors who represent the jurisdictions that participate in the services under consideration. Decisions that involve all directors are made using *corporate votes*, of which there are two types:

- *Corporate Unweighted Votes* — These votes are those in which each director votes and receives one vote. They used to establish new services, make decisions on regulatory services, set rules to govern the conduct of the board's businesses, and take certain other actions.
- *Corporate Weighted Votes* — All directors vote on these matters, but receive different numbers of votes based on the populations of their respective jurisdictions. Corporate weighted votes are used to acquire or dispose property, adopt annual budgets, authorize

borrowing, and address all other financial matters.

Decisions in which only a portion of the board participates are made using *stakeholder votes*. These votes are used to make decisions related to the operation and administration of existing services. Directors from jurisdictions that participate in the services are entitled to vote; other directors are not. All stakeholder votes are weighted, with directors receiving different numbers of votes based on their jurisdictions' populations. If there is only one participating area in the subject service, the entire board of directors votes.

Figure 1 shows the number of votes assigned to each RDCO jurisdiction for corporate weighted votes and stakeholder votes.

WHAT SERVICES DOES A REGIONAL DISTRICT PROVIDE?

Regional districts may provide a broad range of services. With the exception of a few provincially-

Figure 1
Voting Strength for Weighted Votes

Jurisdiction	Population*	Votes
Kelowna	144,576	37
West Kelowna	36,078	10
Lake Country	15,817	4
Peachland	5,789	2
Central OK West	13,797	4
Central OK East	4,258	2
Total RDCO	222,162	59

* 2021 Census. For purpose of determining voting strength, Kelowna's population includes OIB IR No. 7 population of 1,847. Central OK West's population includes 10,900 people on WFN IRs No. 9 and 10.

² Westbank First Nation appoints one non-voting director to the Board for a total of 14.

mandated functions, the services are determined by the regional board with the support of member jurisdictions and/or residents. Since the board only provides services that member jurisdictions or residents agree the regional district should provide, the menu of services varies by regional district, and tends to be different within each electoral area of any single regional district.

Services are established to respond to needs that may be identified by the board, electoral area directors, member municipalities, staff or residents. A proposed service must be examined through a process to determine its feasibility. Service scope, cost, delivery options and other factors are considered during feasibility studies. If a service is deemed feasible, a service establishing bylaw must be drafted and presented to the regional board. The bylaw must be approved by the board, and must receive the support of the residents that will receive and pay for the service. Support can be demonstrated through a petition, an alternative approval process, a referendum or through the approval by a council or electoral area director on behalf of residents within the specific jurisdiction. Ultimately the bylaw must be approved by the Inspector of Municipalities.

WHAT SERVICES DOES A REGIONAL DISTRICT NOT PROVIDE?

The provincial government provides certain key services to all electoral areas in the province, including local roads and policing. Regional districts have no responsibility for these services, and little ability to influence the delivery of them.

HOW DO REGIONAL DISTRICTS PAY FOR SERVICES?

Unlike a municipality, which has the flexibility to allocate "general revenues" to its services, each service provided by a regional district must be budgeted separately. Costs are recovered by billing homeowners and other property owners who benefit from the service. The full expense of providing a service must be covered by the tax and other revenue generated for the same service; one service cannot subsidize another. Taxes raised for fire protection, for example must be used for — and only for — the fire department.

Regional districts raise funds primarily through property taxation, including property value taxes that are based on the assessed value of a property. Tax bills sent to each property itemize each service and the associated tax rate.

Regional districts generate some revenues from user fees and charges, such as dog licences and development application fees. Provincial government grants are an additional source of revenue.

In electoral areas, the provincial government collects property taxes on behalf of regional districts. Within municipal boundaries, property taxes for regional district services are collected by the municipality. The province and municipalities transfer collected funds to the regional district to pay for the services provided.