RECOMMENDATION

That the 2019 Regional Growth Strategy Annual Report be received.

SUMMARY

The 2019 edition of the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) Annual Report (Annual Report) evaluates the progress made in 2019 towards advancing the eleven established RGS goals. Consistent with previous years, the 2019 Annual Report is part of the overall RGS Monitoring Program that measures progress on select indicators to help gauge the effectiveness of RGS policies and implementation. Progress towards these goals is measured by both qualitative and quantitative data provided by the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN), member municipalities and multiple external agencies.

In 2019, progress towards the RGS goals is mixed. The majority of indicators (fifteen) show either positive progress or remain stable, with four indicators moving away from the regional goals (see Attachment 1 – 2019 Regional Growth Strategy Annual Report). Notably, the number of non-single-family dwelling units and the number of properties earning income from farming made positive gains in 2019. Longer-term trends show continued positive gains in transit ridership, the distribution of growth and reduction in water usage. Per capita costs of services continued to increase and move away from the desired RGS goals, and the amount of land classified as Private Managed Forest Land (PMFL) decreased for a third consecutive year.

BACKGROUND

The RGS is the regional federation’s shared vision to guide growth by establishing a consistent and coordinated approach to foster socially, economically and environmentally sustainable communities across the region. This is to be achieved by directing the majority of new development in the region within designated Growth Containment Boundaries (GCB), thereby keeping urban settlement compact, protecting the integrity of rural and resource areas, protecting the environment, increasing servicing efficiency, and retaining mobility within the region.

The RDN adopted its first RGS in 1997 in response to residents’ concerns about the impacts of rapid population growth and development in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s. Since then, the most recent review took place in 2011, as new concerns rose to the forefront, including climate change, food security and affordable housing. In response, the current 2011 RGS (Bylaw No.
is based on a set of clearly stated sustainability principles designed to manage growth within designated growth areas, support economic diversification and to promote innovation to help shape the future of the region over the next twenty-years.

The *Local Government Act* Section 452 (1) (b), and RGS Policy 5.2.1 require a report be prepared on an annual basis. To provide consistent monitoring, evaluating and reporting, the RDN established an RGS Monitoring Program. The RGS Monitoring Program annually collects data and information to assess progress on each of the RGS Indicators that can help inform collective decision-making, improve service delivery and achieve planned results. The annual report and a dedicated RGS Monitoring webpage are available at: [www.rdn.bc.ca/regional-growth-strategy](http://www.rdn.bc.ca/regional-growth-strategy).

**DISCUSSION**

The RGS contains eleven goals and related policies that are founded on sustainability principles to guide regional growth towards a more thriving and sustainable future. The 2019 RGS Annual Report measures progress through 22 indicators to determine if growth is achieving set targets. For the complete list of RGS Goals, Indicators and Targets, refer to Section 6 of the attached 2019 RGS Annual Report.

The Annual Report provides insight into the state of growth management in the region with many sources of information from member municipalities, various RDN departments, Statistics Canada, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and BC Assessment. While the intent is to acquire comparable annual data with consistent geographies and methodologies, some data limitations exist and are noted within the content, charts or tables of the Annual Report.

**Land Use Implications**

In 2019, progress towards the RGS goals is mixed. The majority of indicators (fifteen) show either positive progress or remain stable, with four indicators moving away from the regional goals (see Attachment 2 – 2019 Summary of Indicators). Full details of the qualitative/quantitative data and key findings for all RGS Goals are in the 2019 RGS Annual Report (Attachment 1). The following is a summary of significant findings.

**Goal 2: Protect the Environment**

The intent of Goal 2 is to protect and enhance the environment and minimize ecological damage resulting from urban and rural growth and development. Since 2004, the overall trend is water consumption continues to decline despite continuous population increase. This is likely due to improvements in water efficient technologies and a growing community awareness of water conservation measures. Surface water quality is maintaining a stable condition in the region with a 5% increase in the number of sample sites and 20% increase in the number of streams monitored since 2018.

Actions implemented to reduce water consumption and protect groundwater in the region are proving successful. This indicates the intended objectives of Goal 2 “to protect and enhance the environment and ecosystems that provide ecological functions and resources that are essential to the long-term sustainability of our region” are being advanced.

**Goal 3: Coordinate Land Use and Mobility**

The intent of Goal 3 is to ensure land use patterns and mobility networks are mutually supportive and work together to reduce automobile dependency and provide for efficient movement of goods
in the region. Over consecutive years, the data has a positive trend, which is consistent with the associated targets for Goal 3. Both per capita ridership and the number of households living within close proximity to bus stops, employment lands and shopping within the RDN continue to increase, which indicates the intended objective of more compact, complete and connected communities is being advanced.

Ridership numbers have increased by 24% since 2015. This positive trend is attributed to a growing population, increased services and access to transit, technological innovation and continued public presence of the RDN Transit Department at public events throughout the region.

**Goal 4: Concentrate Housing and Jobs in Growth Centres**

Goal 4 is intended to establish distinctive activity centres that provide ready access to places to live, work, play and learn. Containing growth within well-defined activity centres is one of the most significant ways the RDN can become more sustainable. All three targets associated with Goal 4 show positive advancements. Increased population and density of dwelling units inside the GCB, along with an ideal land use, support complete, compact communities are all showing positive progress.

Positive progress for all three indicators associated with Goal 4 show continued progress towards achieving the RGS vision to create compact, complete walkable neighbourhoods that can be serviced more efficiently with transit, water, wastewater and solid waste. The continued compact form of development also achieves the RGS goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and preserve resource lands.

**Goal 5: Enhance Rural Integrity**

Goal 5 sets out to protect and strengthen the region’s rural economy and lifestyle by encouraging the majority of new development to be located within the GCB and by promoting rural forms of land use. Results this year show a mix in progress towards this goal.

The amount of land classified as PMFL in the region has decreased every year since data was first collected in 2015. This change is attributed to the sale of PMFL lands for residential use that is shown as a re-classification by BC Assessment from forestry to residential primary use resulting from a strong residential real estate climate in the region.

Additionally, an increase in parcels with Farm Class (as determined by BC Assessment) in 2019 shows a rebound in the number of parcels used for farming activity. Baseline data collected in 2017 showed a total of 713 parcels with Farm Class in the region. In 2018, this number dropped to 674. Within the electoral areas, 41 properties lost their Farm Class status with Electoral Area A seeing the largest decline of 25 properties. In 2019, the number of parcels receiving Farm Class increased to 682 (excluding the Town of Qualicum Beach), with Electoral Area A seeing an increase of 20 properties. This year-on-year fluctuation is likely due to the reporting cycle of farm gate income to BC Assessment.

Although losses in land classified as PMFL have occurred in four consecutive years, they are not substantial, and the results of Goal 5 also indicate the RGS policies in support of directing the majority of growth into well-defined activities within the GCB are achieving the intended results.
Goal 6: Facilitate the Provision of Affordable Housing

Goal 6 aims to support and facilitate the provision of appropriate, adequate, affordable, attainable and adaptable housing. The issues of housing affordability and suitability are challenges for most local governments across Canada. For the fourth consecutive year, progress towards the targets intended to support adaptable, affordable and attainable housing have regressed. The number of available units for lower income households within the Nanaimo and Parksville Census Agglomeration reduced from 2,301 (53%) in 2015 to 821 (17%) in 2019.

Continual rising costs in housing prices and rental prices, and the growing disparity between income and costs of rental housing are likely causes of this continued trend. Following adoption of the National Housing Strategy in 2017, initiatives locally, provincially and federally are underway to address housing affordability. Data in coming years will monitor progress trying to reverse this trend.

Goal 10: Efficient Services

Goal 10 seeks to provide efficient, cost-effective services and infrastructure. In 2019, indicators to decrease per capita waste disposal and per capita costs of water and sewer systems moved away from the desired targets. While the RDN waste diversion rates have remained around 68% annually over the past few years, the per capita disposal rates have increased. Potential reasons are a strong economy resulting in higher consumption and tourism, and a strong real estate market resulting in more waste generated from households moving and the renovation and/or demolition of older homes. Increases in per capita costs of water and sewer systems can be attributed to ever-increasing operating and maintenance expenses and the need to plan for asset renewal to ensure the reliable and uninterrupted delivery of services into the future.

The Annual Report provides insight into the state of growth management in the region based on the eleven RGS goals and related policies. With fifteen indicators showing either positive progress or remaining stable, the state of growth management in the region is strong and progressing in a positive direction towards achieving the shared vision for a healthy and more sustainable region as set out by the RGS. The four indicators moving away from the regional goals require further monitoring in future years and will be further explored, as a number of areas have been identified for review as part of the upcoming RGS review.

ALTERNATIVES

1. That the 2019 Regional Growth Strategy Annual Report be received.
2. That alternate direction be provided.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS


STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Growth Management - Provide effective regional land use planning and responsible asset management for both physical infrastructure and natural assets.

The 2019 RGS Annual Report is consistent with the 2019 - 2022 Board Strategic Plan by outlining how the RDN and member municipalities are contributing to the eight Key Strategic Areas and
associated goal statements and action items. The Annual Report is also consistent with the Strategic Plan’s values and guiding principles of ‘Collaboration and Relationships’ and ‘Good Governance’.

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Attachments:
1. 2019 Regional Growth Strategy Annual Report
2. 2019 Summary of Indicators
3. 2019 Regional Growth Strategy Annual Report Presentation