



## REPORT ON THE REGIONAL DISTRICT OF NANAIMO SOCIAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGY

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Board endorse the Social Needs Assessment and Strategy and the document be made available on the Regional District of Nanaimo website.
2. That the Board direct a report on creating a social planning service be provided by March 2022.

### BACKGROUND

The Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) is a mosaic of distinct rural areas, urban centres, and First Nation communities. People travel across the region for work, recreation, and to access services. Accessing some services, such as health care, recreational programs, and social services, can be difficult and are challenging to provide equitably across the region. This is compounded by a lack of regional coordination, which limits the effectiveness of advocating and applying for funding from senior government.

To review these issues and broader social needs, the RDN's Strategic Plan 2019-2022 under Goal 8.0 Social Wellbeing, Action 8.2 directed preparation of a:

"Social Needs Assessment and Study to identify the broad range of social service providers at the local level and include a strategy that identifies the RDN role".

On February 11, 2020, the RDN Board passed the following motion supporting this priority:

*That the Regional District of Nanaimo apply to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities Poverty Reduction Planning & Action grant program for a Social Needs Assessment and Strategy and that it act as grant manager for a regional application to include partnering local governments within the Regional District of Nanaimo.*

On May 14, 2020, the RDN received confirmation of grant funding from the Union of British Columbia Municipalities to a maximum amount of \$125,000. The following is a brief project summary.

***The development of the Social Needs Assessment and Strategy (the "Strategy") was made possible through collaborative efforts between local government, community partners and First Nations.***

The project was undertaken from June 2020 to September 2021, in partnership with the City of Nanaimo, Town of Qualicum Beach, District of Lantzville, and the Gabriola Island Local Trust Committee of the Islands Trust. Community partners included the Oceanside Health and Wellness Network, Nanaimo Area Health Network and the Gabriola Health and Wellness Collaborative. The resulting Strategy also incorporates insights gathered from engaging with the Snuneymuxw, Snaw-Naw-As and Qualicum First Nation community representatives.

***The Strategy leverages existing research and community engagement to amplify on-going efforts and identifies actions to advance regional coordination and collaborations.***

By understanding what is being done and exploring pathways with community partners, a strategic approach has been developed to identify goals, targets, key priority areas and opportunities to maximize regional coordination to address multiple social system challenges. Details of the background research and engagement is provided in the Strategy, Appendixes A, B and C. The six key priority areas are:

- Programs for families, youth and children
- Social supports and services
- Access to housing and homelessness
- Access to healthy and affordable food
- Safe, affordable transportation
- Discrimination and stigma

The Strategy recognizes best practices for addressing social needs and provides several starting point strategies for each of the six priority areas, called “Game Changer Actions”. Derived from the participating stakeholders, Game Changer Actions highlight existing actions and identify linkages between the needs and the actions to address it. An example is shown below.

Suggestion from Game Changers: Safe, Affordable Transportation

Identified Need	Game Changer	Suggested Action
Access to transit for families	Family orientated service	Develop access to transit and recreation programs together to increase participation

*Source: Excerpt from the Strategy, page 104*

On its own, the Strategy and supporting appendixes provides vital information on the social needs across the region that individuals, organizations and local governments can use. For example, the Oceanside Health and Wellness Network will consider the findings presented in this Strategy through their own strategic planning process scheduled to start in January 2022. The full potential of the Strategy, however, can only be realized by developing a regional approach to social planning via creation of a regional social planning service.

***Social Planning Service***

RDN Bylaw No. 1553 created a regional growth management service to provide “coordination, research and analytical services relating to the development of the regional district”. Distinct from other forms of development and land use planning, social planning is not considered a development service. Social planning is a process that focuses on people by working with community members, non-profit agencies, local government departments and other levels of government and local businesses to address topics that improve the well-being and quality of life of all in a community. Core activities of social planning include:

- **Social research:** Undertakes a range of research on social trends, needs and issues relevant to local communities. Including preparing provincially required Housing Assessment Reports, every five years.
- **Systems planning:** Planning that ranges from determining service needs to coordination and evaluation of programs and delivery.
- **Convening and collaboration:** Provides a non-threatening “meeting place” for discussion and a focal point for mobilizing those groups most affected by working together through partnerships, networks and coalitions.

- **Community development:** Facilitate and support positive change in collaboration with local government regional and community partners, individuals, and through engaging First Nation representatives and the local business community.
- **Policy analysis and development:** Provides expertise on a wide range of social, economic, and cultural issues to inform policy options and recommendations for decision-makers.
- **Advocacy and social action:** Serves as a catalyst for change by advocating for specific policy positions and resources to senior levels of government.

Social planning activities, such as the development of the Social Needs Assessment Strategy, management of the Community Health Networks or participation in the development of the Mid-Island Child Care Action Plan is in addition to the RDN's land use and community planning responsibilities and beyond the scope and current resources of the regional planning service bylaw to provide development services. Implementing the Strategy and related social planning projects will require creation of a new regional social planning service.

Establishing a social planning service would demonstrate leadership to implement the Strategy by providing needed resources and active regional coordination. For example, the two existing Community Health Networks (CHN) in Oceanside and Nanaimo have an established role as conveners by connecting multiple partners, service providers and agencies. With appropriate resources in a social planning service, the CHNs present an opportunity for the RDN to work directly with the CHNs and other partners to implement the Strategy and advance shared goals, recommended core practices and Game Charger Actions. Planning resources are exhausted administering the two CHN contracts with limited to no active participation in their functions. Implementing the Strategy and other studies, such as child care, are beyond current resource capacity.

### ***Comparative Social Planning Services***

In BC, nine local governments (including the RDN) are currently developing similar approaches (to this Strategy) to improve the wellbeing of their citizens, including:

REGIONAL DISTRICTS	MUNICIPALITIES
Nanaimo	Cowichan Lake
Comox	Richmond
Alberni Clayoquot	Williams Lake
Sunshine Coast	New Denver
	Cranbrook
	Qathet (Powell River)

Other local governments are demonstrating leadership by creating a range of social planning services that make impactful community-based change. A few examples are:

- Adopted in 2015, Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) created the Comox Valley homelessness support service to provide funds to non-government organizations to address homelessness in the Comox Valley. The service area includes Courtney, Cumberland and three electoral areas. It allows the CVRD to fund local affordable housing initiatives based on the Comox Valley Coalition's 5 - Year Plan.
- Initiated in 2017, the City of Powell River, qathet Regional District, and the Tla'amin Nation collaborated to build the Powell River Regional Planning Program, inclusive of a Social Planner position and a three-year social planning work plan. As a direct result, the qathet Ending Poverty Strategy was recently completed and adopted by Council.

- In 2018, as a result of a public referendum, the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) established a regional service delivered in partnership with Cowichan Housing Association to provide programs and services related to affordable housing and homelessness.

Exploring these potential actions at a regional level in collaboration with municipal and community-based partners and engaging the business community will be a key to successful implementation, in addition to adequate staff resources.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The cost of developing the Social Needs Assessment and Strategy was funded, in part, by the Union of British Columbia Municipalities Poverty Reduction Planning & Action grant program to the amount of \$125,000. Additionally, \$60,000 was allocated to the project in the 2020 - 2025 RDN Financial Plan.

The total project budget for the completion of the Social Needs Assessment and Strategy is \$127,684. Due COVID-19, the engagement program was adapted from in-person to online and telephone engagement, which resulted in a reduction in overall project costs.

The Corporate Services Department has advised the process to create a social planning service can be accommodated within current resources in 2022. The proposed service requisition would be for approximately \$130,000, subject to 2023 rates.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT**

The recommendations in this staff report directly respond to the Board's Strategy priority on:

Social Wellbeing - Prepare a Social Needs Assessment study, which identifies the broad range of social service providers at the local level, and develop a strategy to identify the RDN's role where appropriate.

## **REVIEWED BY:**

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## **ATTACHMENT**

Attachment - Social Needs Assessment and Strategy