



REGIONAL  
DISTRICT  
OF NANAIMO

## Options for Board Chambers Renovation

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the report titled 'Options for Board Chambers Renovation' dated July 25, 2023, be received for information.
2. That staff be directed to bring back a report to the Board on the projected 2026 Census population figures and the potential impacts to the Board's composition and voting strength.

### **BACKGROUND**

There are a number of reasons why a reconfiguration of the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) Board Chambers is being explored at this time, with a recommendation to undertake significant structural upgrades that will enable the Board to be well positioned to accommodate current and future eventualities as Board membership increases.

The Province has committed to supporting inclusive regional governance by advancing First Nations' participation on regional district boards in the action plan that supports the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Action 1.11 - Ministry of Municipal Affairs). In March 2023, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs provided the RDN and several other regional districts with a study grant to facilitate discussions among regional districts and First Nations about enabling First Nations to join regional boards as voting members outside the treaty process.

On November 8, 2022, the Regional District of Nanaimo and Qualicum First Nation signed a renewed Protocol Agreement. The Protocol Agreement provides for a representative of the Qualicum First Nation to serve as a participating non-voting member of the RDN Board. Chief Michael Recalma attends some Board meetings in this capacity under the Protocol Agreement and as an Alternate Director on the RDN Board.

It is conceivable that Chiefs or representatives from other First Nations will also, over time, regularly attend Board meetings, either through similar Protocol Agreements, as a result of becoming treaty Nations and seeking a seat on the Board, by inclusive governance initiatives for non-treaty Nations, or by virtue of legislative changes. At this time, the physical structure of the Board Chambers does not allow room for more than the current 19 Directors in the raised horseshoe area. This poses challenges for the respectful and inclusive participation of First Nations at the RDN Board table, presently and in the future.

Additionally, it is anticipated that the 2026 Census population figures will impact Board composition by increasing the number of members on the RDN Board which would also require additional seating at the Board table. Census population figures serve as the basis for voting strength and number of municipal directors on regional district boards. As a result of the 2021 Census, RDN Board composition did not change, however, the City of Nanaimo

gained three (3) additional votes, and the Directors of Electoral Areas A and G each gained one (1) vote in November 2022, as a reflection of increased population.

The *Local Government Act* establishes that the number of directors on a regional district board and the voting strength (number of votes) each director has are based on population and the voting unit in the regional district's Letters Patent. The number of municipal directors on the RDN Board, and voting strength is determined by dividing the population figures by the voting unit number of the RDN which is 2,500. In 2017, the RDN Board formally requested that the Ministry amend the Letters Patent for the RDN to change the voting unit from 2,500 to 2,750 as the 2016 Census data resulted in an increase in the number of Directors on the RDN Board by two (2) - one (1) additional Director for the City of Nanaimo, and one (1) additional Director for the City of Parksville. The Ministry did not approve the request to amend the voting unit as the rationale for the request at the time (keeping the number of Directors on the Board at 17) was not deemed more significant than responsiveness to population change.

As the impact of Census population figures in 2026 is anticipated to increase the number of Directors on the Board, a future report can be brought forward on the matter should the Board wish to consider changing the voting unit of the RDN. An increase in the number of Directors on the Board could potentially affect the operational and governance processes of the regional district which can provide new rationale for requesting a voting unit change. As an example, the projected population increase of the City of Nanaimo would require an additional municipal Director on the Board which would leave the city without an Alternate Director as all Council members would be Directors on the Board which would leave the City of Nanaimo without full representation should any of the City's Directors be unable to attend a meeting. For information, the Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO) was successful in having their voting unit amended in November 2022 to address challenges related to rapid growth in the region that impacted board composition and voting strength that created challenges regarding the Board's operational and governance processes.

The voting unit, prescribed in Provincial Legislation, is a foundational issue that has a direct impact on how the Board advances the business of the regional district. Projections for the 2026 Census population figures indicate that population increases will impact RDN Board composition (growth) and voting entitlement which could create challenges for advancing the business of the Board in a manner that supports the operations and governance of the regional district. A change in the RDN's voting unit could address future population growth in upcoming Censuses which could alleviate potential impacts on regional governance and better position the regional district in its responsiveness to regional growth.

### **Configuration of Board Chambers**

The Board Chambers is surrounded by 3 external walls and one wall that separates the Chambers from mechanical and washroom facilities. The floor, including accessibility ramp and stairs are poured concrete finished with carpet tile and encase conduit that provides access for data and power pulls within the room. The current configuration for Board seating allows for 19 members to be seated at the same elevation, with 6 seats at a lower elevation. The current room has a posted capacity of 80 people and none of the available options will impact the current posted capacity limit. However, an architect can identify a higher or lower occupant load as per the BC Building Code 3.1.17.1.1 if permanent signage is posted.

Six (6) options (Attachment 1) for the renovation of the Board Chambers have been provided, four (4) of which rely on a hexagonal layout for the Board seating, and two (2) that utilize the current circular configuration. The six (6) options provide gallery seating ranging from 17 to 26 seats and can be expanded by utilizing the current Committee Room, replacing the current table. All options except for option 6 relocate the lectern so that those presenting do not have their back to any member seated, and all options incorporate a fully height adjustable

lectern into the designs. Options one (1), two (2), and six (6) provide additional staff seating in front of the gallery nearer the CAO and Corporate Officer, while options three (3), four (4), and five (5) have additional raised staff seating (6") located at the back of Board Chambers behind the gallery.

If the Board chose to expand the public gallery space to the Committee Room to allow more of the public to attend (in an 'overflow' capacity), options are being developed for this as well.

Construction for the renovation of Board Chambers can be completed in approximately 12 weeks including a contingency of 2 weeks. It is recommended that a potential renovation to Board Chambers be scheduled during the summer of 2024 to minimize the impact on scheduled Board and Committee meetings. The Board calendar for 2024 can also be adjusted to accommodate a longer length of time between meetings in Board Chambers during this time. Significant supply chain challenges remain for some audiovisual components, and it is possible that some of the technology upgrades may be completed later than the primary renovations.

The construction timeline for the renovations will require the board to relocate regularly scheduled meetings for a portion of the construction window and staff will present several options for this, should renovations proceed.

The proposed renovations will coincide with replacement of end-of-life audiovisual components, with additional technology being added for microphones at each new seating position, large screen televisions located around the inside of the desks for improved viewing of presentations and attendees, and a large screen television in the lobby for overflow. As well, power and networking infrastructure are included for future audiovisual upgrades. Again, staff have developed options, which include electronic voting options, for Board consideration, should renovations proceed.

### **Additional Considerations for the Renovation of Board Chambers**

The Board is currently developing its new strategic plan which will inform the financial planning process and related staffing plan. Staff will update this report in the fall in when more is known about the Board's public service objectives and the staff recommendations to support those objectives. We propose that space considerations that potentially involve renovations be considered together when possible.

Additional considerations include the expansion of transportation services and the impacts on available parking space and the addition of transit drivers and, potentially, facilities to support the service expansion.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Staff have recommended that \$500,000 funding for this project be allocated through the Growing Communities Fund.

Depending on the direction provided by the Board on the scope of the renovation and allocation of Growing Communities Fund resources, staff will provide further information on funding sources in a future report.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT**

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

**REVIEWED BY:**

- S. Racz, Manager, Facilities and Fleet
- J. Birch, Chief Technology Officer, Information Services and GIS Department
- D. Holmes, Chief Administrative Officer

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Plans 1 to 6 - Construction options for the renovation of the Board Chambers