



COMMUNITY ISSUES ASSESSMENT FOR ELECTORAL AREA G – FINAL REPORT

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Board receive the Electoral Area G Community Issues Assessment Final Report by Neilson Strategies and Leftside Partners Inc., dated July 2025, and forward it to the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs.
2. That the Board send correspondence to the City of Parksville and Town of Qualicum Beach to determine their interest in and support for commencing discussions with the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs on next steps for a study or studies that explore the potential opportunity for municipal boundary adjustments to encompass the French Creek portion of Electoral Area G, possibly as a multi-staged process that assesses cost impacts, potential funding support, benefits and opportunities before determining whether to proceed to a public engagement process.
3. That the Board direct staff to commence discussions with the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs for an Electoral Area boundary realignment study with adjacent Electoral Areas E, F and H with respect to portions of Electoral Area G except the community of French Creek.

BACKGROUND

History of the Study Process

In June 2021, the Board directed staff to explore the possibility of a restructure study for Electoral Area G in response to community concerns including changing demographics, population growth, confusing boundaries, uneven service mix, and dissatisfaction with service delivery mechanisms. After consultation with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (Ministry), various study options were presented for consideration to Directors on September 28, 2021, and the Board directed that a Governance and Services Study be requested for Electoral Area G.

In November 2021, the RDN submitted a request to the Ministry, seeking approval and funding for a Governance and Services Study (Attachment 1). A subsequent letter sent by the RDN to Minister Kang on May 30, 2023, seeking an Incorporation Study for Electoral Area F also reiterated the Board's request for a Governance and Services Study for Electoral Area G (Attachment 2). On October 19, 2023, Minister Kang visited Nanaimo and met with Chair Craig and CAO Holmes. The RDN requests for an Area F Incorporation Study and an Area G Governance and Services Study were discussed during this visit. RDN staff met with Ministry staff several times in 2023 and 2024 to provide additional information in support of an Area G Governance and Services Study being granted.

On February 23, 2024, Assistant Deputy Minister Tara Faganello and Ministry staff met with Chair Craig, Director Wallace, CAO Holmes, and Elizabeth Hughes to discuss the Minister's decision with respect to the request for an Area G Governance and Services study. Ministry staff advised that instead of a Governance and Services Study, a "Community Issues Assessment" had been approved as a first step in a potentially longer, sequenced approach. On March 13, 2024, correspondence was received from Minister Kang awarding a grant of \$45,000 for a

Community Issues Assessment for Electoral Area G (Attachment 3), followed by grant stipulation letters (Attachment 4).

The purpose of the Community Issues Assessment is to assemble and share information on the governance and services delivery within Area G, to seek perspectives of residents, First Nations, service providers, improvement district and neighbouring municipalities, and to identify emerging issues and share the findings with the Board. The study area involves all of Electoral Area G, which includes the communities of Englishman River, San Pareil, French Creek, Little Qualicum, and Dashwood. Under the Terms of Reference (Attachment 5), the Community Issues Assessment does not include recommendations for governance change, an examination of incorporation, detailed technical or financial information on the current situation or make recommendations on changes to the existing governance model, services, or boundaries.

Study Process and Timeline

The Terms of Reference for the Community Issues Assessment, developed by the Ministry with input from the RDN, were approved by the RDN Board on June 25, 2024. Neilson Strategies was retained by the RDN on August 27, 2024, to lead the study, working closely with Leftside Partners Inc.

On January 21, 2025, Chair Craig sent correspondence to the following Nations inviting them to provide written comments or to meet with RDN or Ministry staff to learn more about the study, in addition to participation in the public engagement activities of the study:

- Snuneymuxw First Nation
- Snaw-Naw-As First Nation
- Qualicum First Nation
- K'ómoks First Nation
- We Wai Kai Nation
- Wei Wai Kum Nation
- Stz'uminus First Nation

The study commenced in October 2024 and the consultants' interim study report was completed in March 2025. Three community meetings took place between April 29 and May 14, 2025, in different locations in Electoral Area G. An online and printed survey was open from April 9 to May 19, 2025. In addition to issuing news releases, mailouts, posters and print ads at various points in the study, the RDN developed a project page on Get Involved RDN, and a social media strategy to broaden public awareness and the sharing and collecting of information. The Electoral Area G Community Issues Assessment Final Report presented by the consultants is attached as Attachment 6.

Next Steps for Consideration

As noted, a Community Issues Assessment is a preliminary step to gather and collect information in what may be a longer study process, and, while it does not provide recommendations, it may identify issues about which the Board can consider further actions.

The Final Report by Neilson Strategies and Leftside Partners is comprehensive and contains a great deal of information for consideration, with a variety of themes raised by residents. Given the range and complexity of the service and governance issues raised by the study, several potential options exist for next steps.

While requesting a full Governance and Services Study is an option, it is staff's view that conducting a Governance and Services Study after having done a robust Community Issues Assessment runs the risk of covering ground that has already been covered in terms of identifying the existing governance and services for Electoral Area G and identifying challenges and concerns experienced by residents. It also runs the risk of frustrating communities in Electoral Area G by appearing to be a repetitive exercise and adding time and expense to the study process.

Given that an important theme arising from the Community Issues Assessment relates to the differing needs of the denser, more urban French Creek and municipal fringe areas versus the rest of the communities in Electoral Area G, it is recommended that the RDN Board write to the City of Parksville and Town of Qualicum Beach to determine their interest in and support for commencing discussions with the Ministry on next steps to explore the potential opportunity and conditions for municipal boundary adjustments to encompass the French Creek portion of Area G. This could be a multi-phased process that assesses cost impacts, potential funding support, benefits and opportunities before determining whether to proceed to a public engagement process.

In addition, it is recommended that discussions be commenced with the Ministry for an Electoral Area boundary realignment study with adjacent Electoral Areas E, F and H with respect to portions of Electoral Area G except the community of French Creek.

The Electoral Area boundary realignment study could dovetail with results of an Incorporation Study in Electoral Area F. If a portion of Electoral Area F incorporates in the future, realignment of boundaries may need to be considered. Having realignment considered in advance so that there is a "default" option in place for the remainder of Electoral Area F may be advisable. If incorporation proceeds after an Incorporation Study and a referendum, there would be a plan for what could happen to the remainder of Electoral Area F, and a potential "Plan B" if incorporation was not successful. This Electoral Area boundary realignment study could still be an option even if municipalities do not wish to consider exploring the possibility of municipal boundary adjustments as described above.

Pending the outcome of the options above, if a new configuration or set of boundaries is in place, the Board could consider other ways of addressing service and governance concerns identified by Electoral Area G residents, in ways that do not require Ministry involvement, such as the creation of an advisory committee. The Board continues its ongoing advocacy work to address concerns of Electoral Area G residents: for example, meeting with Ministry of Transportation and Transit staff about road maintenance, active transportation, traffic safety issues and housing (implementation of Bill 44); collaborating with the provincial approving officer with respect to subdivision development proposal; undertaking water studies to understand the quality and quantity, including restrictions and opportunities in the area; and advocating for support in the management of encampments.

As noted in previous staff reports and by former Municipal Affairs Minister Josie Osborne in her letter of January 13, 2022 (Attachment 7), while the unique and distinct issues and challenges in Electoral Areas F and G have supported undertaking separate studies tailored to each area's specific needs and vision, recommendations arising from the study process in one Electoral Area may impact another, particularly if boundaries are ultimately restructured in either or both areas, and there will be points of connection as solutions are identified.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

In anticipation of a Governance and Services Study being approved for Electoral Area G, taxes were requisitioned in the amount of \$150,736 over a two-year period in 2023 and 2024. On March 13, 2024, the Ministry approved a Community Issues Assessment for Electoral Area G (instead of a Governance and Services Study) and awarded a grant in the amount of \$45,000 to support the Community Issues Assessment. The 2024 budget allowed for

\$195,736 for study-related expenses for Electoral Area G, including the \$45,000 study grant. In 2025, the budget allows for \$192,181 for study-related expenses, after taking into account study-related expenditures in 2024.

Costs relating to undertaking the Community Issues Assessment include consultant fees, hall rentals, sound and amplification equipment, printed materials, postage costs, advertising and communications, refreshments for public meetings and other expenses. The table below outlines spending, subject to receipt of final invoices.

Item	Actual Spending	Funding Source
Consultant fees	\$66,500	\$45,000 2024 Ministry Grant \$21,500 2023/2024 Taxation
Consultant disbursements to date ¹	\$888	2023/2024 Taxation
Advertising	\$7,634	2023/2024 Taxation
Audio visual expenses	\$1,808	2023/2024 Taxation
Miscellaneous disbursements (Open house materials, table and chair rental...)	\$561	2023/2024 Taxation
Venue rentals	\$1,797	2023/2024 Taxation
TOTAL	\$79,188	

The final report of study expenses is due to the Ministry on August 10, 2025. Not all invoices have yet been received. It is estimated that there will be approximately \$112,000 remaining to put towards further Electoral Area G studies (not including any additional feasibility funds in reserve). There are several decision points involved in terms of next steps, particularly if the RDN wishes to enter into discussions with the Ministry about further studies. Financial considerations will depend on the scope and nature of those studies and more detailed information will be brought to the Board as appropriate.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT

5.1 Collaborate with the Province in undertaking restructure studies to improve the RDN's governance.

REVIEWED BY

- T. Moore, Chief Financial Officer
- D. Holmes, Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

1. Letter to Ministry Area G Study Request November 2021
2. Letter from CAO to Minister Kang EA F and G Request May 30, 2023
3. Letter from Minister Kang Approving Area G Community Issues Assessment Grant March 13, 2024
4. Grant Stipulation Letters for Area G Community Issues Assessment
5. ToR RDN EA G Community Issues Assessment June 25, 2024
6. Community Issues Assessment for Electoral Area G Final Report July 2025
7. Letter from Minister Osborne to Chair January 2022

¹ This includes expenses related to travel costs to attend three community engagement meetings, as well as meetings with EPCOR, Town of Qualicum Beach, City of Parksville and Little Qualicum Waterworks Improvement District.