



SHAPING OUR FUTURE
THE REGIONAL DISTRICT OF NANAIMO
REGIONAL GROWTH STRATEGY REVIEW

Regional Growth Strategy Review 2007-2008

Nanaimo Workshop Report

For Saturday June 7, 2008

June 30, 2008

Introduction

The Regional District of Nanaimo held the second of two public workshops on Saturday June 7, 2008 to discuss the major sustainability challenges to be addressed in the Regional Growth Strategy Review. The workshop was held at the Oliver Woods Community Centre in Nanaimo from 1 to 5pm, with nearly 60 people participating (Appendix 1). The event was facilitated by Vince Verlaan of HB Lanarc for the regional district.

The event was advertised extensively throughout the region to encourage participation in the workshop. Public notification methods used included advertisements in local papers, advertisements on Shaw television, press releases, a Facebook events page, a postcard sent to every household in the region, email blasts to groups and individuals, and notices on community and the RDN web sites.

In compliance with the RDN Corporate Climate Change Plan, minimizing waste and GHG production was factored into planning for the event. Composting and recycling facilities were provided, RDN staff carpooled to the event, re-usable dishes were used – no disposable cups, plates or cutlery, the number of handouts was minimized and were printed on 100% recycled post consumer waste paper, and a local caterer was used that provided local and organic food choices.

Based on feedback from participants at the Parksville workshop, the discussion at the Nanaimo workshop was determined by the participants at the event. For the Parksville workshop the topics for discussion were chosen beforehand and were based on the results of the online survey. Many of the participants found the format too restrictive and suggested that there should be an opportunity to discuss other sustainability issues. In response to this request a new format was used. The 'Open Space' format was chosen as it allows participants to choose the topics of discussion.

Similar to the Parksville workshop, many of the themes emerging from the consultation suggests the need for implementation of existing policies rather than adopting new policies. Popular themes for discussion were issues around the preservation of farmland and the management of urban growth, particularly in relation to the implementation of land use policies. Other topics that received attention were air quality, housing and the meaning of sustainability.

Purpose

The intention of the workshops and the online survey is to inform RDN staff in drafting possible changes to the Regional Growth Strategy. Based on public feedback and the background assessment, several areas of the RGS may need to be changed so that the document may realise the RDN's vision for a sustainable future. The input from the public workshop will be used in drafting a second discussion paper in the fall of 2008. A second online survey will also run in the Fall to determine if the proposed changes represent the community's views on how the RGS should be addressing the various sustainability challenges.

Format

The workshop was organised on the basis of the 'Open Space' discussion format. Each workshop participant is invited to suggest a topic for discussion. After everyone has had an opportunity to identify a discussion topic, all of the suggested topics are posted for everyone to see in the 'marketplace of ideas'. Many of the topics were similar so it was possible to group the full list of topics into 24 topics. This allows for discussion on up to eight topics in each of three rounds of discussion. It should be noted that not every topic gets discussed. Some topics did not interest more than one person and were therefore not discussed. Only the topics that were discussed are recorded here. As can be seen below, only 19 of the 24 topics were discussed.

Following the small group discussion, the entire group collectively reviews and discusses the results of the 'break out' sessions.

Results

For each topic discussed over the three sessions, a synopsis of the discussion was prepared by the groups. As a guideline, the notes were recorded in sections titled "issues", "learnings" and "actions". Below are the results for each topic, written verbatim. Please note that as the comments are written verbatim and have not been edited, statements and claims made in the comments have not been verified.

Measurement of Environmental Protection Success?

Answer: *"Will be the RDN's willingness to accept, promote and implement innovations that protect the environmental priorities as opposed to economic growth."*

Issues:

- Difficult to measure against different belief systems
- What are the targets, yardsticks and who chooses?
- Implementation must occur in order to have measured success

Learnings:

- We need a base measurement (parameter) and a target
- We need a system that is results based, not process based
- Baseline historical or current?

Actions:

- Measure environmental capacity first
- Work with nature rather than against in order to reap economic, environmental, social, spiritual rewards
- Identify indicator species and monitor
- Cooperation between jurisdictions (sharing systems – citizens, municipalities, provincial and federal government and NGO's)
- Report card for 'best practices'
- Education and communications
- Support and encourage "green" developers

- Quality of environment index in easy to understand format (for layperson)
- “Binding legislation” – no variances
- Political courage
- Reconfigure suburbs to make communities that steward and protect their environment (villages – walking distances)
- Remember to enjoy and have fun (too much doom and gloom = hopelessness)

Protected Areas

Issues:

- What is it anyways?
- How do you actually protect a network of areas?
- Private forest land

Learnings:

- A protective area network consists of :
 - Waterways
 - Wildlife corridors
 - Parks
 - Heritage ecosystems
 - ALR / agricultural fields
- Habitat patches
- Green roofs

Actions:

- Biodiversity mapping
- SEI (sensitive ecosystem inventory) and more
- Establish a PAN (Protected Area Network) with DPA (development permit area)

What is Sustainability?

Issues:

- Exponential population growth
- Island can support only so many citizens
- Quality of life is diminishing
- We depend on nature; nature has limits
- We are using technology to exceed limitations
- Unrealistic aspirations
- Should include world view
- RGS has to deal with kind of change that has not been seen yet; change from global to local economy; food is key issue.
- Diminishes resources; agricultural land
- Planning is urban centric and should be focussed on total environment
- Climate change
- Water protection

Learnings:

- Think locally (e.g. food; minimise transportation requirements)
- Lack of support for local farms to produce food for local consumption
- Full cost accounting needed

Actions:

- Financial support for local farmers and food production
- Land use support for local farmers and food production from all levels of government
- Sustainability workshops should set example by using sustainability principles
- Farmers should have relief on property taxes for island sales
- Create connection of value with land that sustains us. How do we remember and practice the sacredness of this land we live on?
- Encourage green development to come to RDN; discourage non-sustainable development
- Just as we talk about having green developers get the “green light” (and incentives) for flexible and innovative projects that use sustainability principles in order to build, let’s have farmers and small holders get incentives and support for innovative “green” development of their farms; they are business people.
- Enforced sustainability checklist (LEED silver)
- RDN should increase communication to reduce resource consumption
- Educate public on history and value of rural lands
- Assist farmers in developing farming business

*First Nation’s reconciliation / disparity*Issues:

- How is land ownership / management coordinated with reserves / land claims
- Do reserve communities share a vision for RDN
- Historic pattern of development – can we venture into new / alternatives for real economic development

Learnings:

- Us vs. them attitude
- History of mis-communication
- CVRD – O.U.R. Ecovillage organisation precedent for sustainable rural land use zoning
- Where is First Nation representatives (we all live in the same land)
 - We all share the same watershed / airshed / food shed

Actions:

- Development must support innovative / alternative self supporting / sustainable off-grid systems / models
- Cultural corridor (sea to sky highway) cultural significance of land
 - Original place names (Mt. Tutuksen = Mt. Benson)

- How can we create a shared vision with First Nations. Where are we in our relations?
- Where are success stories of other regions where First Nation's and non-natives created shared vision.

How density aids sustainability

Issues:

- Lower cost association with transportation
- Land uses - servicing - shared energy
- Properly implemented – better neighbourhoods and sustainable communities
- Desirable community create density?
- Creating desire – density

Learnings:

- Attitude changes
- Neighbourhood plans can result in density
- Infill – community driven density
- Process of densification is important
- Less cars require interdependence
- Appear egalitarian
- Are we ready for community values

Actions:

- Density when no other options
- Demographic changes (find out the numbers)
- World view changes
- Teaching
- Walk the walk
- Implement bylaws that support sustainable communities
- More specific direction
- Region must maintain policies specific to sustainable density

Resource properties (small private holdings)

Issues:

- FLR – no longer exists – private property now resource designation – prior to FLR was rural
- What exemptions should there be for smaller resource properties?
 - Minimum parcel size - 5 acre - when in a rural residential area - only applies to smaller resource properties (less than 40 acres)

Learnings:

- FLR – no longer exists – RGMS needs to address that issue for smaller properties that were “blanket zoned” and caught in the process. Smaller properties surrounded by 2 ½ - 5 acre

residential properties. Property owners surrounding would have input

- Not a Cable Bay development

Actions:

- Look at previous zoning designations prior to OCP change of zoning
- Allow some zoning changes or amendments to resource properties within Rural Residential areas.

Targets for environmental protection

Issues:

- Targets for environmental protection
 - What do we want to protect?
 - What do we want to end up with?
- Toxic pesticides and pollution
- GHG outstripping our environmental capability
- Impacts on air

Learnings:

- Environmental Integrity
 - Adequate supply of clean and safe drinking water
 - Water bodies and riparian areas remain healthy and productive
- Assess environmental limits

Actions:

- Consider EcoCAP first
- Active environmental management
- Reduce consumption
- Cap on population (?)
- 100% best practices enforcement
- A cap on economic growth
- No development in riparian areas

Integrated transportation corridor

Issues:

- Majority of pollution close to corridor
- Trucks on road
- Existing asset not used to full extent
- Trains / trails (safety) / commuter rail – electrified
- Local transport for S. Wellington / Chase River
- Amount of land at VIU for parking / access by bus
- Pedestrian / bike movement
- Do not have density for buses, but still have buses
- ↑ Hwys / roads ↓ Train / extent of corridor ↑ costs
 - Bus service: smaller buses, more frequent

Learnings:

- Working relationship with the RDN and ICF (Island Corridor Foundation)
- Integrated transit – buses and trains → small buses feeding to corridor
- Tourism aspects – Kettle Valley; Kinsol Trestle
- Node as transportation function point (i.e. station) – focussing development
- Being strong against developers – stand behind “the plan”; where is accountability?
- Consultations not as Public Relations or Local Government requirement only – really need to listen and act (hear)

Actions:

- “City Repair” projects to draw attention / enhance corridor and adjacent land
- Community projects
- Revisit / revise / rationalise bus service – frequency; vehicle size; customer service
- Extend E&N trail throughout all RDN (and encourage the rest of the island to build it too - connecting with TransCanada trail)
- Drive densities towards the corridors – future commuter rail
- Better accountability by decision makers
- Return of advisory planning commissions

*Increased urban density, urban growth management, contain urban growth, limits to growth, balanced growth*Issues:

- Is regional growth sustainable at current level?
- Do we accept unlimited growth or do we aim for controlled growth; if the latter, what tools should be used?
- How to make it more attractive within municipalities / electoral areas to increase density within UCB on a small scale (small scale developers)
- Cost - effective and neutral development?

Learnings:

- Municipal UCBs can be reviewed every three years, depending on their OCPs
- Electoral OCPs must conform to RDN growth strategy
- Current zoning within UCB allows for 35,000 more people
- Density does not have to be up → increased density by providing stacked townhouses of mixed price range; also secondary suites, accessory buildings, coach houses, granny suites
- Cost – effective housing rather than affordable

Actions:

- RD should ensure UCBs are reviewed in a consistent time from across the region (municipal, electoral)
- Educate politicians and public on density options
- Need strong OCPs with zoning, DCCs, etc... to give guidance to developers
- Need to establish level playing field to compare costs / zoning at Regional level to direct member municipalities and electoral areas so that we do not have divide and conquer

Air quality

Issues:

- Improve air quality
- Stop residents burning leaves / branches
- Different rules for different municipalities and groups

Learnings:

- Everyone wants clean air but people need “recognition” for participation

Actions:

- RDN should set air quality standards
- Developers not allowed to slash and burn = All chipped up
- All wood fire places be charged for air / carbon footprint
- RDN provide mobile shredder service for community (pruning)

Urban containment boundary

Issues:

- Expansion of UCB
- Development outside of UCB
- Review of UCB and its fairness and logic

Learnings:

- More flexibility with rural density requirements
- Developers prefer large greenfield sites
- Urban reserves in Nanaimo
- Urban containment boundaries can and are frequently expanded

Actions:

- Require development in UCB before allowing development outside
- Better accountability – e.g. minutes of the RDN (Board notes, recorded votes)
- Greater enforcement of existing UCBs of municipalities and electoral areas
- More community driven, rather than developer

Implementation

Issues:

- Why has RDN not acted / adhered to RGS stated goals?
- Gap between policy and action
- Inadequate legal instruments or leadership (champion)

Learnings:

- Large void between policy / action
- Implementation fatigue reduces public involvement
- Citizen participation in election
- Citizen action

Actions:

- Moratorium on development until it is determined why the current RGS is not working
- RDN representation by area, not population
- Call for adequate legal instruments to implement (muscle)
- Research for successful implementation in other jurisdictions

HousingIssues:

- Affordability / social assistance / low income (relative homelessness)
- Cost of: housing, land, construction
- Variety of housing
- Rental vacancy
- Individual values – privacy and private property
- Wages too low

Learnings:

- Homes are where people want to live – places
- Relative vs. absolute homelessness
- Nanaimo vacancy – 2001 = 15%
2008 = 0.5%
- Arcology – Planned cities architecture and ecology

Actions:

- Require policies around affordability - find A # / % age
- Zoning flexibility (increase density, upzoning, flexible standards)
 - In return for affordability
 - Carriage house (detached suite)
- Add complete compact community language in RGS and OCPs
- New nodes? Idea
 - New cities
 - Car free
- Increase density (form and character)
 - Quality – Subdivision of existing large lots
- Look at co-housing (communal yards)

- Build up, not out for high density (location dependent)

Sustainable transportation

Issues:

- Connectivity (park and ride, cycling – covered, parking)
- Development of the city
- Government incentives (City of Nanaimo)
- Foot ferry

Learnings:

- Putting money into local transportation (vs. money being spent on airport expansion)
- Promotion of services
- School closures (need to drive to school)
- Cultural shift
- Safety (covered shelters, lighting)
- ICF
- Looking at other communities
- Education
- Communication (user / purveyor / RDN / public)
- Cost / benefit of alternative transportation

Actions:

- Make alternatives a priority (rail, sidewalks, park and ride, cycle, safety, lighting, shelters)
- Increase connectivity with park and ride, cycle shelters, improved service
- Decrease incentive to drive (less on parking)
- Education (schools)
- Bottom up implementation – where are the bus lounges? Vs. the airport lounges
- Bottom up implementation (what it means) – delegate resources to transportation systems and alternatives that can be utilised by the masses (cleanly – safely – comfortably - conveniently) rather than servicing the minority who fly. Airlines are heavily subsidized and very costly and solve few transportation issues. There are plenty of our tax dollars for airport expansion but few for trains, bike paths, rail, shuttles and foot ferries, etc... (which would also lead to economic prosperity but for a different group perhaps).

Locally grown food

Issues:

- Government regulations – meat regulations
- Horticulture - food production
- Restrictions on land
- Water (cost, availability, conservation – storage)
- Food production – farm land banking

Learning:

- Red tape
- Rural planning required
- Limit urban sprawl
- Inventory of farm policies
- Education of public – buying food
- Farm subsidies
- Food action plan
- RDN buy local

Actions:

- RDN policies supporting local farming (municipal and provincial)
- Support urban food production
- Support grey water systems
- Link people with the land
- Water metering
- Policy on water consumption
- Support farmers markets

*Principles of rural planning and rural integrity definition*Issues:

- Rural – subjective definitions
- Dictionary: limited access to services*, choice of lifestyle
 - 1) No understanding because developments going forward
 - Rural vs. agriculture?
 - No support for farming; forestry tracts sold to developers
 - Green sustainable development in rural areas
 - Rural zoning (what can be done? – lot sizes)
 - 2) What uses on land allowed?
 - What rural residents have to teach urban residents
 - Speculation in land (5 acres cleared)

Learnings:

- Misuse of resources
- Need for balancing of needs
- Green development of agriculture / housing
 - Identification of what's good to grow on / what can be for other uses (density transfer)
- Accepting limits on uses, growth; accepting regulation (conflict)

Actions:

- Get more rural political representation on boards
- Clarify definition of “rural”
- Planners need to pay as much attention to zoning, regulations in rural as urban
- Protection of resources identified
- Make rules clear; tell people what's coming

- Identify set of principles for rural development (make rural OCPs mesh...)

Agriculture regeneration

Issues:

- Land coming out of the ALR – 3 day warehouse supply of food, “urban food crisis”, food insecurity, systems
- No guarantee that agricultural land is being farmed
- Urban agriculture – urban farm grant
- Municipal encroachment bylaws. Fairness “to be close minded to preservation.” Too cut and dry
- Define open space and farmland
- Red tape (housing)
- More locally grown food (healthy)
- Farmland designation (1970s agriculture)
- CFIA slaughterhouse restrictions and loss of agricultural land (detracts from local food)
 - Farm succession planning (new / young farmers)

Learnings:

- Fractionalised lands (contentious issue)
- Success of first generation farmers
- Tax breaks for urban agriculture
- Think food land as sacrosanct as riparian areas / parks
- Address our food issues through climate change initiative
- Cash flow situation for famers – is development of some agricultural land the only way to create cash flow.
- How to revitalise our rural community to entice younger generations

Actions:

- Oppose current CFIA (meat regulations)
- Support farmers to farm – urban and rural
- Assess FLR land for agricultural capacity
- Tax credit relief for farmers
- Establish an apprenticeship farm program in the Region
- Find out how much food we can grow in our region

Drinking water and watershed protection

Issues:

- Need to inventory our water
- No evidence of understanding (small businesses!)
- Different sources (community owned – private ownership)
- Protecting water quality at source!
- Provide water delivery system for well owners and water buyers

Learnings:

- Need more taxes to provide solution

- We need the other governments to do something
- Water resources are limited – And water should be considered a primary determinant of growth
- Very political! (coming!)
- Regional districts do not have funds!

Actions:

- Complete implementation across regional district (electoral areas and municipalities) of Drinking Water Protection Plan
- Include education of residents

Island plan coordinationIssues:

- No real master plan between areas
- RGS does not apply equally to electoral areas and municipalities

Actions:

- Better coordinate OCP plans of all areas or rename RGS to electoral area growth plan
- Better government structure for better coordination of plans between areas

Open Discussion

Following the presentation of the results from the Open Space exercise, participants engaged in discussion regarding sustainability in the region. Topics of discussion included the lack of implementation of the RGS, food production and public involvement in the workshops. Statements and concerns of participants included:

- No First Nations representative were present at the workshop
- No developers were present at the workshop
- Setting example by making RDN workshops sustainable
- The need to consider other processes of consultation
- Participants will be notified of updates to the RGS website and future meetings
- Criticism of the RDN lack of implementation of RGS policies
- Much focus on food, but little on age (such as senior's issues)
- We need to figure out carrying capacity of the Region
- Cuba is the most productive country in terms of food production
- Participants preferred the open space format of the meeting rather than the World Café format that was used at the Parksville workshop.

Next Steps

A report will be prepared for the Regional Board that includes all feedback received so far, including the information received through workshops, the online survey or in writing. The information will be fundamental in preparing a draft of the second discussion paper, which will have proposed amendments and additions to the growth strategy. The draft discussion paper will be available in the Fall, as will another opportunity to comment on the proposed amendments through an online survey.

Appendix 1: Registered Participants

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Dan Appell

Barry Avis

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Larry Biccum

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