



REGIONAL
DISTRICT
OF NANAIMO

Strategic Directions **2003 - 2005**

***The Strategic Plan of the Board of Directors
of the Regional District of Nanaimo***

April 2003

CONTEXT

This document is the fourth in a series of plans – dated 1994, 1997, 2000, and now 2003 – prepared soon after the election of a new Board. Each plan has set the tone, priorities and directions for the upcoming three year term.

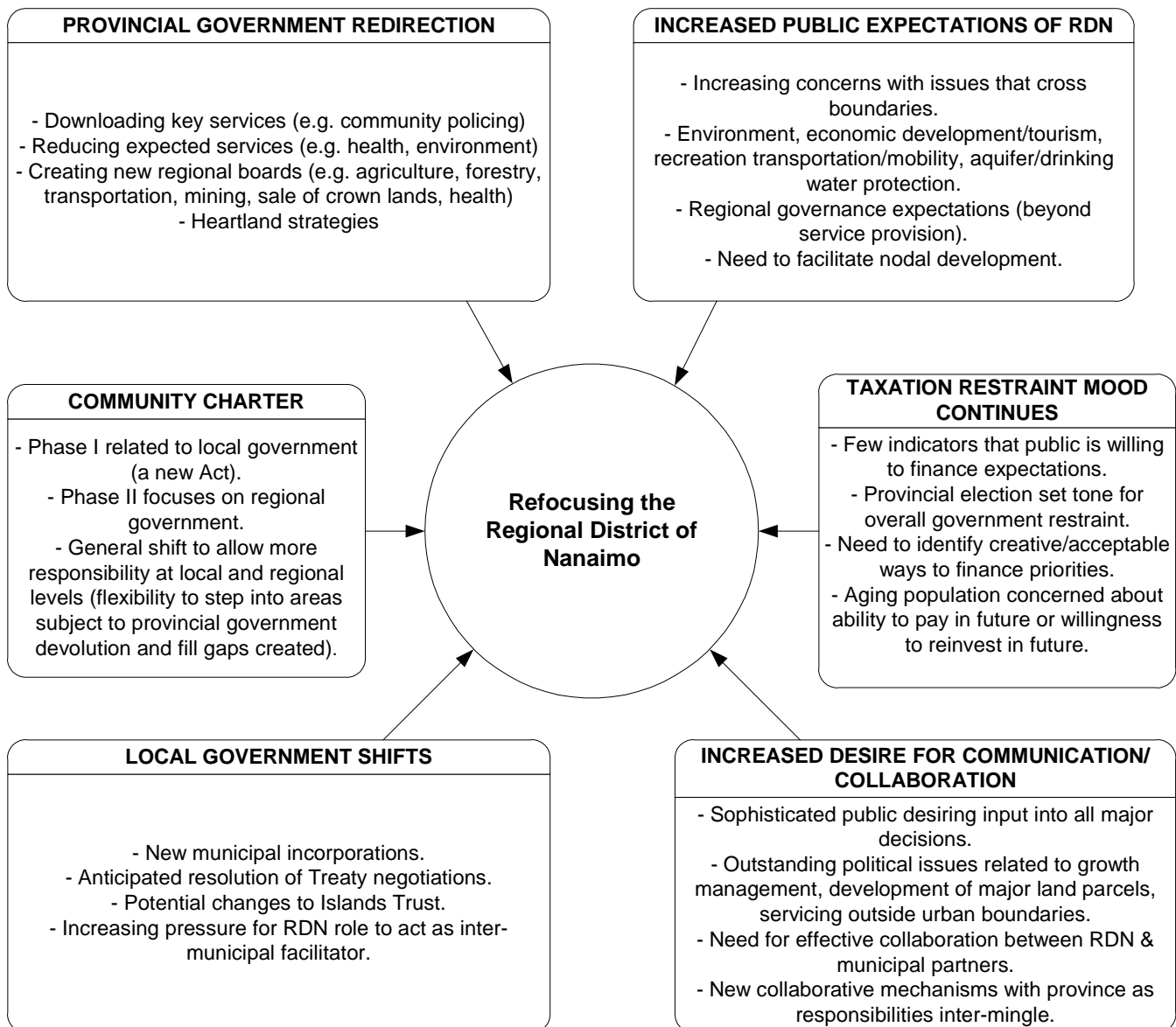
These plans have in turn spawned the Growth Management Plan, related Official Community Plans and statutory agreements, fringe area agreements, operational plans for each major RDN responsibility area, and memoranda of understanding with senior governments. The strategic directions decisions have also been translated into business plans, budgets and performance management expectations for senior staff and each RDN department.

This plan summarizes the focus and strategic directions of the current Board for the three year period including 2003, 2004 and 2005. Annual reviews will be conducted to monitor progress and update outcomes and strategies. Although the details will change along the way, it is anticipated that the mission, vision and focus areas will remain in place until the end of the current Board's term of office.



This first decade of the new millennium will be remembered as an era of government repositioning in British Columbia. The Regional District of Nanaimo must find creative ways to deal with downloading pressures from senior levels of government, increasing public expectations in a variety of service areas (existing and potential), and a continuing call for taxation restraint.

Board members will face these challenges wearing their traditional two hats: reflecting the local perspective of their immediate constituents AND the increasing need to consider the regional view. The common good depends on 'big picture' decisions related to environmental issues, watershed/aquifer/drinking water protection, economic development, growth management, and the provision of facilities and amenities enjoyed by all.





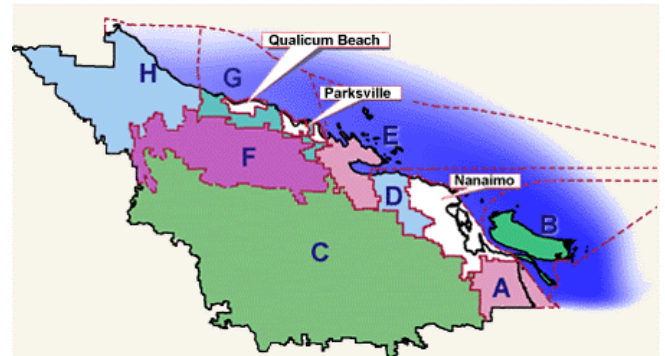
Purpose

To enhance the quality of life and the social, environmental and economic well-being of the people and communities we serve and represent.

The Regional District provides those services that are best delivered on a cooperative, region-wide basis and has the special mandate to ensure access to basic services for residents of unincorporated areas.

Key Roles/Responsibilities

The RDN has three major roles: a **regional governance role** that requires it to act in the best interests of all residents, a **service provision role** related to functions that have been assigned to it, and a **facilitation role** designed to stimulate and support collaborative action on issues of common interest.



We are mandated to strive for excellence in the following core service areas:

- **planning and development** – regional planning & support for community plans
- **transportation and mobility** – public transportation, trail development and input to other jurisdictions on matters of regional import
- **waste management** – disposal, public education, zero/waste initiatives
- **utilities** – basic water, sewer and rural street lighting in areas not served by municipalities or Improvement Districts
- **leisure services** – District 69, support for electoral district initiatives
- **fire and emergency services**
- **parks and environmental preservation.**

Operating Philosophy

We strive, in our day-to-day operations, to be:

- efficient and effective
- resident-driven and service oriented
- flexible, innovative and proactive
- fair and equitable
- accessible, and
- entrepreneurial.

The Regional District believes in and is committed to:

- professionalism, quality and excellence in all we do
- development of our human resources and provision of a quality work environment
- teamwork and cooperative approaches with other governments, our diverse communities of interest, and the private sector
- stewardship – of both the environment and the Region's capital assets
- minimizing government and supporting community initiative.

The Board of Directors will do its utmost to:

- listen to and respect all points of view prior to decisions being taken
- understand both rural and urban perspectives and effectively govern both
- ensure stakeholder input and involvement in all major decisions that affect the well-being of both residents and the environment..

Vision



Our vision was developed through the complex process of generating consensus and agreement on the Regional Growth Management Plan in 1997. The updated version below emerged during the 5-year GMP review in 2002. This vision has been embraced by the Regional Board and will be endorsed by each of our municipal partners through adoption of the GMP and through accompanying statutory agreements committing governments throughout the RDN to efforts designed to make the vision become our reality.

The vision statement describes the future desired for the region. It frames goals for the region and establishes the context and basic direction for all policies, plans, decisions and action to follow.

RDN VISION

The region will be recognized for its **outstanding quality of urban and rural life** and for its commitment to **environmental protection**. We have committed to working with interested organizations, together achieving:

- **quality residential development** - in safe neighbourhoods with well planned access to nearby workplaces, services, recreation opportunities, and natural areas
- **a strong and sustainable economy** based on our resource assets, our natural appeal to tourists, and the footloose industries and activities of the information age
- **contained urban development**, surrounded by contiguous corridors of open space, protected rural integrity and an end to sprawl
- **reduced dependency on the automobile as mobility options expand**
- **high standards of environmental protection** - that preserves habitat, enhances ecological diversity, and maintains air and water quality
- **efficient, state-of-art servicing**, infrastructure and resource utilization.

... vibrant rural and urban communities in a natural paradise!



Strategic Priorities



The Regional District has made significant progress since the inception of this strategic planning process in 1994. Many of the priorities and related strategies designated in earlier plans have now become essential components of a new way of doing business in the region; responses to earlier strategic directions related to growth management, the environment, public accountability and communication are now imbedded in public policy, ongoing budget, job descriptions, etc. The priorities are no less important, but many are now dealt with as part of the 'flow' or ongoing work of the corporation. It needs to be emphasized that many of these previous focus area initiatives may not be completed yet and may require resources or policy decisions from the Board to complete. However, new opportunities or issues have been identified by the Board that are critical for the organization to focus on for the next three years to reposition in a changing operating environment and continue to aggressively pursue the regional vision.

In the view of Board members, it is now time for increased and special emphasis on:

Refocusing the REGIONAL ROLE

- reflecting our commitments to providing the best regional government possible, to regular performance evaluation, and to taking a proactive stance to significant shifts in our operating environment

GROWTH MANAGEMENT

- confirming our belief that a strong approach to growth management is the key both to long term, sustainable economic development AND to achievement of our vision that speaks to the quality of both urban and rural life in the region

WATERSHED and DRINKING WATER PROTECTION

- demonstrating our understanding that the future of our region depends on protection of our life-giving waters and collaborative approaches focused on the common good

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

- committing to doing our part to protect the ecosystems that sustain us, in a shifting government context that reinforces the need for local initiative and stewardship

PUBLIC WORKS/ INFRASTRUCTURE

- ensuring responsible approaches to the generation and management of both liquid and solid wastes and facing the realities of modernizing traditional responses to a growing challenge

GOVERNANCE PROCESS and COMMUNICATION

- determined to provide strong and effective leadership based on meaningful dialogue with our constituents and partners on issue of regional import.



the ISSUE

- Provincial government redirection and restructuring presents significant challenges for regional government in general:
 - accelerated downloading of services (e.g. policing)
 - service reduction in areas critical to RDN vision (e.g. environment, health)
 - creation of regional boards (decentralized administration of provincial functions) that do not relate to regional government: agriculture, forestry, transportation, mining, sale of crown lands, health)
 - the evolving 'Heartland Strategy
- the Community Charter affecting the roles of local government – Phase II focus on regional government
- increasing interest in local incorporation shifts RDN role from that of local government for electoral areas to increased inter-governmental facilitation
- anticipated resolution of Treaty negotiations and need to develop a meaningful voice for First Nations in regional affairs
- increased public understanding of issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries and expectations for expanded RDN roles in areas such as environment, economic development/tourism, recreation, transportation/mobility, drinking water and watershed protection
- high municipal interest in Regional Services Review process to ensure optimal service levels, effective management, and equitable cost allocation.

Desired OUTCOMES

- improved public understanding of the regional model and RDN roles/responsibilities
- clarity on how downloaded services will be managed (left unattended, RDN role with appropriate funding, local government role with increased taxation)
- compensation for downloaded responsibilities
- updated assignment of regional functions
- equitable funding for regional park, recreation and arts/culture facilities
- a strong RDN position from which to advocate and negotiate during provincial restructuring exercises (to ensure that our view of appropriate regional roles can be accommodated within the Community Charter and related revisions to legislation)
- clarity on results and impact of Treaty Negotiations and how First Nations will participate in regional policy, planning, decision making, and accountability

STRATEGIES under consideration

- take a strong, proactive role in the Community Charter process
- April 2003 review of the implications and impact of the first round of Regional Services Reviews (after first two years) – Transit, Septage, Recreation/Sports Fields, Regional Parks/Trails
- a customized approach to Phase II of the Regional Services Review to reflect the fact that we will be looking into possible new functions for the RDN – economic development and tourism, policing, watershed/drinking water protection, increased environmental protection (beyond liquid and solid waste management)
 - initial discussions with municipal partners (both political and administrative)
 - development and evaluation of strategic options
 - public input prior to decision
- test all proposals against 'Long Term Operational Budget Model' so that decision makers are aware of financial implications
- use Intergovernmental Advisory Committee to research government restructuring trends and their implications for the RDN
- assist the Provincial Government to understand the incremental implications for regional government of their various initiatives and advocate for increased respect and involvement prior to major decisions being taken (e.g. sale of large tracts of crown land, commercialization of highway corridors, change in health/septic policies)
- develop a special issue of 'Regional Perspectives' to educate public as to complexity of the redefinition challenge and to stimulate high level debate on options and the future of regional government in this area - develop a communications strategy to facilitate further understanding and involvement

the ISSUE

- *final approval of the revised Growth Management By-Law was tabled just prior to the last election given the difficulties associated with a major, last-minute proposal*
- *municipalities require additional discussion/debate on issues that directly affect development near their boundaries (particularly Parksville)*
- *the delay provides an opportunity to reflect on the impact of recent provincial government initiatives that relate to specific GMP goals (e.g. transportation/mobility, sustainable economic development, environment, inter-jurisdictional collaboration)*
- *recent Provincial Government decisions that significantly reduce the involvement of urban regional directors in rural planning and development decisions increases the importance of the GMP and Fringe Area Agreement process as the primary vehicle for coordinated planning/development*
- *need to provide special consideration for Lantzville's newly elected Council – a new incorporated partner in the GMP process*

Desired OUTCOMES

- *an updated GMP ASAP*
- *restored municipal confidence in the GMP process and policy*
- *increased public understanding of the implications and importance of the GMP*

STRATEGIES under consideration

- *develop a communications strategy to convince both municipalities and electoral areas of the benefits of growth management*
- *commit to implementation agreements to address areas where further discussion and refinement is required*
 - *update Fringe Area Agreement*
 - *further study into servicing of rural areas and industrial areas*
 - *water protection as new regional function develops*
- *identify the type and level of planning and development decisions that must be addressed by the entire RDN Board and make provision for same in Goal 8 (Cooperation Among Jurisdictions)*
- *adopt Policy 8F that allows the newly incorporated Lantzville to initiate an interim update of the GMP within two years (based on an updated OCP and Regional Context Statement)*
- *review the Major Land Holdings Study and consider amendments to GMP to ensure that potential development in these areas respects the regional Vision and the policies inherent in the GMP*
- *development Memorandum of Understanding with the Province related to respect for the RDN GMP – specifically in relation to sale of Crown Lands, commercial development along major road corridors, approval of development on resource lands, ALR reviews, and transportation/mobility issues*
- *development of a reference practical document to complement the GMP: containing Board supported guidelines related to each Goal (many from first GMP before it was simplified) – to increase public and developer understanding of the implications of the policies and a resource document to help standardize the language of OCP's (where appropriate).*

the ISSUE

- *public concern related to both the quantity and quality of drinking water has increased dramatically over the past decade*
- *recent RDN studies and debates have emphasized the seriousness of groundwater and aquifer issues, inter-jurisdictional management issues, and raised carrying capacity concerns related to growth management*
- *the pending Drinking Water Protection Act (provincial) and related Drinking Water Action Plan includes measures for developing a regulatory framework to ensure groundwater protection – but will likely place increased responsibility on both local purveyors and local government*
- *more specific concerns relate to:*
 - *reduced provincial health monitoring of rural development relying on septic systems & wells*
 - *expanded ‘rural’ development near urban areas dependent on the same water supply*
 - *the long term impact of aging septic systems in areas where dug wells are common*
 - *the impact of logging and deforestation on aquaculture and water supply*
 - *anticipated local shortages increasing dependence on water from other jurisdictions*
 - *the adequacy of current governance structures to deal with comprehensive water supply issues*
 - *increased appreciation of the need to adopt a watershed based approach to both water supply and overall environmental issues*
 - *capital and operating costs of providing adequate storage and distribution infrastructure.*
 - *Requirement for the City of Nanaimo to develop additional water supplies by 2017.*

**Desired
OUTCOMES**

- *a clearly defined RDN drinking water protection function*
- *public confidence in the region’s drinking water supply (quantity and quality)*
- *increased understanding of water-related carrying capacity prior to next GMP review*
- *mechanisms in place to coordinate local water supply planning and decision-making*
- *equitable, conservation-based management of development decision affecting aquifers and/or watersheds serving two or more jurisdictions*

**STRATEGIES
under
consideration**

- *continue to advise the Province that watershed protection initiatives are considered to be a provincial responsibility and request initiation of watershed protection plans*
- *establish a regional function: initial RDN focus on protection (quality) with a more cautious approach to involvement in supply issues*
- *initiate RDN involvement with an educational phase (bringing in experts, workshop similar to 2001 Nodal Development Workshop)*
- *develop a partnership agreement or Memorandum of Understanding with the Provincial Government related to watershed protection planning and to approval/monitoring of wells and septic systems as the provincial government restructures and revises related regulations*
- *investigation of application of Development Permit Areas to put increased onus on developer to demonstrate sustainable water supply and protection of related rights of others in area; and to broaden the framework for evaluating applications (water related)*
- *modify Goal 8 of the GMP (Cooperation Among Jurisdictions) to provide for more collaboration with Improvement Districts and other water purveyors.*

the ISSUE

The region's natural environment is the foundation for our health, our attractiveness to new residents, and our growing tourism industry. Recent studies and sensitive area analyses have identified key issues and areas requiring protection. It is also increasingly understood that environmental issues cross jurisdictional boundaries and a regional perspective is required. Public support for an expanded RDN role is high.

The revised GMP has clearly defined the role of the RDN, in partnership with its member municipalities:

- *to protect significant open spaces and natural corridors*
- *to gain a greater understanding of regionally significant environmentally sensitive areas*
- *to consider ecological issues in land and resource use decisions*
- *to protect streams and streamside areas*
- *to protect the supply and quality of surface water resources and aquatic habitat*
- *to take measures to identify and protect the groundwater resources of the region*
- *to preserve or protect remaining natural segments of the coastal zone*
- *to strive towards 'zero waste'*
- *to promote measures to maintain good air quality in the region*
- *to improve coordination in environmental protection and management in the region.*

However, while the policy commitment is in place, Directors are concerned with:

- *related provincial and federal downsizing in environmental protection capabilities*
- *proposed changes to the regulation of septic installations*
- *provincial downloading of regulation and control of floodplains*
- *the pace of new development and related pressures on the environment*
- *the rate at which land identified in the Regional Park Plan is being developed or logged – our parks, natural areas and coastlines are arguably the most important foundations of the region's growing tourism industry.*
- *The financial capacity for local taxpayers to fund these initiatives.*

**Desired
OUTCOMES**

- *protection of sensitive ecosystems, habitats and species*
- *clear understanding of roles and responsibilities of each level of government*
- *key park, open space and environmental assets protected*
- *appropriate development of newly protected/acquired regional parks to facilitate use and public support for a continued/expanded program of acquisition*

**STRATEGIES
under
consideration**

- *develop an environmental policy document containing the guidelines that were removed from the GMP in the streamlining process*
- *obtain a commitment from the Provincial Government that the Memorandum of Understanding developed under the previous provincial government is still valid and supported – negotiate additional clauses as required to deal with new provincial environmental budget and staffing realities*
- *develop an agreement with the Provincial Government to clarify how development decisions are made on resource lands (agriculture and forestry) and to further refine ALR review and exclusion processes in the region*
- *evaluate the cost benefit of assuming subdivision approval authority*
- *include investigation of possible expanded RDN environmental roles/responsibilities in Phase II of the Regional Services Review*
- *investigate regulatory opportunities to fill void left as Province backs away from its traditional environmental protection mandate*
- *continue to act on our commitment to reducing greenhouse gas through active participation in the Climate Change Standing Committee*
- *update Regional Parks Plan and investigate innovative funding mechanisms to facilitate both increased acquisition and priority development for public access*
- *investigate partnerships with the Natures Trust of BC, the Land Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited Canada and other non-profit groups to leverage regional resources - consider a regional 'Parks Foundation' and/or 'Adopt a Park' program to encourage volunteer and philanthropic involvement.*

the ISSUE Water, sewer, and waste management systems are all under intense pressure as:

- urban growth continues (requiring expanded or new facilities and infrastructure)
- public expectations and related standards rise
- older systems age or fail and must be upgraded or replaced
- development occurs on 'remaining lands', always more difficult to service
- older septic based systems (often over large areas) fail and health requirements force unplanned servicing.

The RDN lacks a detailed understanding of the challenges and costs ahead. Yet we realize that adequate infrastructure is a critical foundation to economic development and fundamental to our commitment to environmental protection.

More specific concerns relate to:

- anticipated changes in provincial regulation of septic systems – towards industry self regulation and reduced provincial monitoring
- the question of whether the Nanaimo based RDN treatment facility is best served as a regional facility
- how services will be extended to nodes
- the challenge of determining the conditions that justify extending services beyond the urban containment boundary
- the adequacy of development cost charges to cover the immediate incremental costs, the 'sunk' costs, and the contribution of the proposed development to future upgrading needs
- whether the current strategy of 'exporting' solid wastes once the land fill site is to capacity is sustainable.

**desired
OUTCOMES**

- improved protection of public and environmental health
- identification and adoption of cost effective approaches to solid and liquid waste management
- adequate and equitable financial contributions to expected capital replacement, upgrading and expansion programs.

**STRATEGIES
under
consideration**

- development of agreements (or Memorandum of Understanding) with provincial authorities to ensure that effective approval and monitoring systems are in place for septic systems
- development of a guidelines and strategies for the introduction of community sewer systems into areas where frequency of septic failures is high
- development of fringe area implementation agreements to guide decisions to extend urban servicing infrastructure - criteria, funding formulas, etc. for 'sub urban' areas
- review of all engineering solutions to increase longevity and cost-effectiveness (possibility of reducing disposal cost per ton) of current land fill site
- position strong policies that separate provision of community water and sewer provision from acquisition of additional development rights – address health issue but retain rural status.

the ISSUE

The abovementioned issues can only be effectively dealt with in a collegial and open environment where all perspectives are considered and the 'team' consciously pursues the common good. Some have expressed concern that the region could do more to facilitate collaboration and improvement. Specific concerns include:

- the challenges associated with representing one's constituency and also voting from the regional perspective – looking at the 'big picture' and the common good
- the recent Provincial Government directive that significantly reduces the urban voice when rural issues are considered – a pendulum swing related to the ongoing challenge of respecting and blending urban/rural perspectives
- difficulties in negotiating acceptable resolution of fringe area or boundary issues (servicing, water protection, development rights)
- the need for a more balanced approach between rural, urban and regional interests
- the need to complete First Nations treaty negotiations and to find the best way to facilitate a First Nations voice in the regional forum
- the extent to which individual input, advocacy and lobbying can influence major decisions
- a public perception that RDN Directors need to be more involved in policy decisions

Directors also indicated the need for improved communication with the public:

- whenever a major development is proposed to avoid last minute 'surprises' (e.g. Fairwinds land swap/second golf course, Texada)
- so that more information is available during referendum processes
- so that the community planning process is transparent and residents know that their input is respected.

desired OUTCOMES

- Increased respect for the need to balance urban and rural perspectives
- Improved cooperation on matters of regional interest
- a formal First Nations voice on key regional matters
- mechanisms for rapid identification of public perspectives to balance the input of lobbyists and advocates
- improved confidence in and trust of RDN decision-making processes

STRATEGIES under consideration

- an updated public consultation policy (RDN Public Consultation/ Communications Committee)
- create more opportunities for informal discussion of both issues and views – annual strategic planning workshops, longer 'Ideas and Updates Meetings'
- completion of Treaty negotiations followed by high level meetings between RDN and First Nations representatives to establish optimal mechanisms for involvement in RDN affairs, planning and decision-making processes
- see previous suggestion related to refining GMP Goal 8 (Cooperation Among Jurisdictions) to identify the type and level of planning and development issues that would require involvement of the full Board - issues that are geographically located in rural areas but have significant impact on urban neighbours
- regular monitoring/evaluation of Board performance
- create opportunities for Board to debate merits of a major issue before a final decision is made
- consideration of a 'rapid polling' mechanism to solicit a cross section of views on major issues and balance input from 'dedicated participants' (general public and special interest) in the RDN decision making process.