Regional Board Report

Request for Decision

To: Regional Board
From: Director of Development & Engineering Services
Date: November 20, 2025
Subject: Initiation of new Regional Growth Strategy

Voting Entitlement: *All Directors – Unweighted Corporate Vote – Simple Majority (LGA s. 208)*

Purpose: To seek Board direction to initiate development of a new Regional Growth Strategy.

Executive Summary:

The Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) ensures that all governments and municipalities in the Central Okanagan region work together on critical regional matters such as housing, transportation, economic development and preparing for natural hazard events (e.g. extreme heat, wildfires, and floods). These regional matters cross jurisdictional boundaries and require a coordinated response to protect the health, safety and quality of life of Central Okanagan residents.

The RDCO has had an RGS since 2000, which has been stewarding and guiding a coordinated approach on regional growth-related matters for 25 years. For example, the RGS has been informing OCP's, which in turn, influence and guide major regional infrastructure investments. The current RGS (Bylaw No. 1336) was adopted in 2014. Significant changes to population growth, housing legislation, and natural hazard events have changed where and by how much the Central Okanagan region is growing. The current RGS was developed based on a regional population of 179,839 (2011 census). Since then, the Central Okanagan region has grown by 40% (approx. 72,000 more residents). Without a new Regional Growth Strategy, individual municipalities will increasingly individually grapple with regional matters, resulting in an inefficient approach that brings increased margins for error. The 2024 Regional Citizen Survey identified "regional planning and growth management" as very important to residents and residents relayed low satisfaction levels, hence, a new and relevant RGS is a primary opportunity which residents both want, and value.

In response, the Regional Board passed a resolution directing RDCO staff to commence the scoping of a Regional Growth Strategy. Creating a new RGS is included in the 2024-2028 RGS Priority Projects Plan that the Regional Board endorsed on December 12, 2024.

The Local Government Act requires that an OCP be updated after a new RGS is adopted. Timing of the RDCO RGS is intentional to streamline informing local governments and municipalities regarding their respective provincially required 2030 OCP updates. Developing a new RGS also benefits Electoral Areas, as the new RGS will be timed to inform the upcoming Electoral Area OCP updates. Developing a new RGS is a three-year timeline, with completion anticipated in 2028. This timeline is designed to support an efficient and streamlined approach to long-range planning in the region.

Developing a new RGS follows the requirements of Part 13 of the *Local Government Act*. After RGS initiation, a Consultation Plan is developed and subsequently will be brought to the Board for adoption (LGA Section 434(2)). Additionally, an Intergovernmental Advisory Committee would be established (LGA Section 450(1)(b)) to advise on the development of the RGS. Lastly, written notification would be

provided to affected local governments and to the Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs (LGA Section 433(4)).

Funding to develop a new RGS was included in the 2025 – 2029 Financial Plan. The RDCO has also applied to the UBCM Strategic Priorities Fund for grant funding to support this work. Once a new RGS is complete, all partner governments and municipalities will benefit as demonstrating regional alignment on major projects and initiatives are viewed favorably by granting/funding bodies.

The Central Okanagan region is growing rapidly. As the third largest metropolitan area in British Columbia, it is vital to keep up with best practices and ensure a modern and relevant policy framework. Developing a new Regional Growth Strategy is foundational to a coordinated response and ensures residents have a voice in the future of our region. Initiating this work now facilitates an efficient approach that benefits everyone; our residents, our local governments and municipalities, and our future prosperity for the Central Okanagan.

Recommendation(s):

THAT the Regional Board directs staff to initiate the development of a new Regional Growth Strategy for the Regional District of Central Okanagan;

AND THAT staff report back to the Regional Board with a Consultation Plan for the new Regional Growth Strategy.

Respectfully submitted by: Mariah VanZerr, Regional Planning Manager

Report Approved by: Danielle Noble-Brandt, Director of Development & Engineering Servies

Approved for Agenda: Sally Ginter, Chief Administrative Officer

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Strategic Plan Alignment:

√ Emergency preparedness	√ Truth and reconciliation
√ Health and wellness	√ Environment and climate – Regional priority only
√ Regional transportation	√ Growth and development – Electoral Area priority only

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Background:

The RGS has been ensuring a coordinated approach to regional matters that impact quality of life in the Central Okanagan for over 25 years. The RDCO adopted its first RGS in 2000. An update to the 2000 RGS was initiated in 2010 and the current RGS was adopted in 2014. Updating the RGS approximately every 10 years ensures it can address the changing needs of our growing region. In October 2024, the Regional Board passed a resolution directing RDCO staff to commence the scoping of a Regional Growth Strategy update for Board consideration.

The purpose of a Regional Growth Strategy is to “promote human settlement that is socially, economically and environmentally healthy and makes efficient use of public facilities and services, land and other resources.” (LGA Section 428). A Regional Growth Strategy establishes a common vision and regional

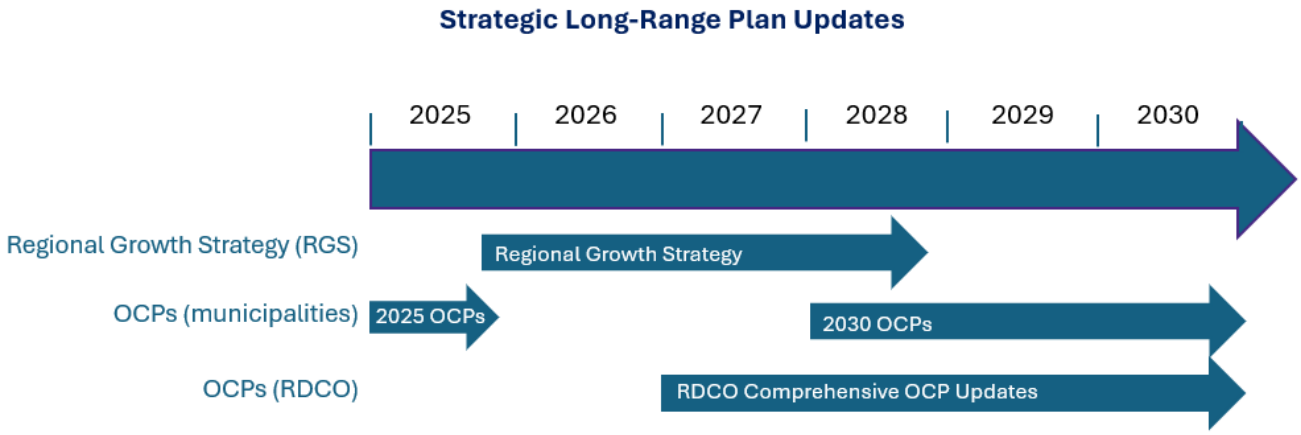
policy framework for member municipalities to manage growth over a 20-year time horizon. A Regional Growth Strategy includes actions proposed for the regional district to provide for the needs of the projected population in relation to housing, transportation, regional district services, parks and natural areas, economic development, greenhouse gas emissions, and any other regional matter identified during the development of the regional growth strategy (LGA Section 429).

Since the current RGS was adopted in 2014, population growth and new provincial housing legislation have significantly influenced both *how much* and *where* our region will grow. The current RGS was developed based on a regional population of 179,839 (2011 census). Since then, the Central Okanagan region has grown by 40% (approx. 72,000 more residents). Additionally, the increasing prevalence of natural hazards such as wildfires, landslides, and floods necessitates a review and update of the Regional Growth Strategy to ensure growth is guided in a fashion that protects human health, safety, and the natural environment.

Without a new Regional Growth Strategy, individual municipalities would increasingly need to grapple with these regional issues in isolation, resulting in an inefficient approach that may threaten the Central Okanagan region's livability and quality of life. As the third largest metropolitan area in British Columbia, it is vital to keep up with best practices and ensure a modern and relevant policy framework that can adapt and respond to today's challenges.

Benefits to Member Municipalities and Electoral Areas

Developing a new Regional Growth Strategy now will allow it to inform upcoming member community OCP updates (required by the province in 2030). This timing will allow for a streamlined approach to long-range planning that is efficient and minimizes the risk of re-work, since Section 446 (2) of the *Local Government Act* requires that OCPs be updated within two years after a new RGS is adopted. Developing a new RGS now will also benefit Electoral Areas, as the new RGS will be timed to inform the upcoming Electoral Area OCP updates.



The RGS will build upon and complement recent municipal plans and strategies, pulling together regional themes and amplifying policies and actions that tackle the complex inter-jurisdictional issues that no one member government can address alone. This will result in a clear, modern regional policy framework that can be easily incorporated into future OCP updates and topic-based master plans, increasing efficiencies and reducing the burden on municipal and first nation staff. The result is enhanced regional coordination and cohesion that brings benefits to all Central Okanagan residents.

Communications and Engagement

As staff begin the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) update, communications and engagement will be key to its success. The goal will be to create a process that is inclusive, accessible and engaging; one that connects with people in meaningful ways and reflects the values of our region. The approach will be designed to help people see themselves in the future we are planning and to know their input matters. The consultation approach will focus on:

- Clear, compelling messaging that highlights why the RGS matters
- Storytelling, plain language and visuals to bring the process to life
- A mix of in-person and digital engagement tools to reach people where they are
- Inclusive and culturally responsive engagement activities
- Multiple opportunities for input throughout the project

A consultant will co-lead delivery of the RGS, including communications and engagement, working closely with RDCO staff to ensure alignment, quality and consistency.

Consultation Plan: A detailed Consultation Plan will come to the Board for adoption before public launch, as required by Section 434 (2) of the *Local Government Act*. The Consultation Plan will be designed to provide opportunities for early and ongoing consultation with, at a minimum, the following key audiences:

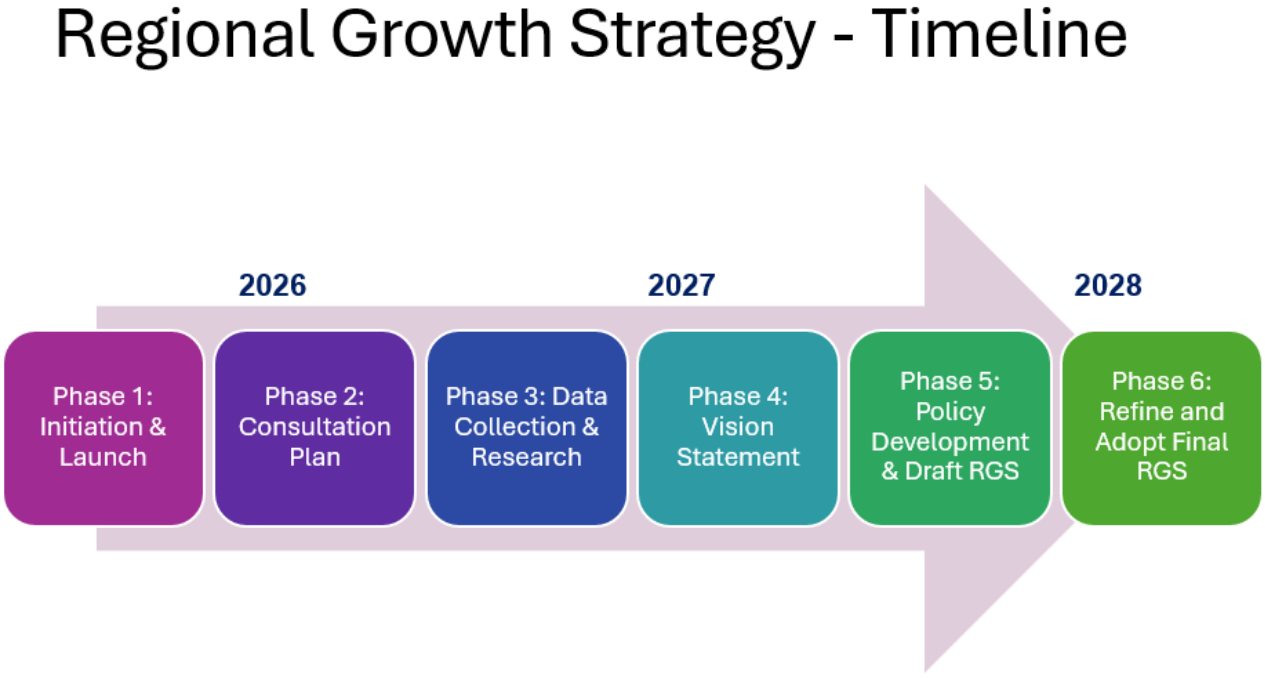
- **Central Okanagan Residents**: Central Okanagan residents will have an opportunity to provide input on the future of the region to ensure the new RGS reflects current community values. Residents will have a voice in how the RGS addresses current challenges related to population growth, housing, infrastructure, economic growth, climate resilience, and environmental protection, among others.
- **Member Municipalities:** Before it is adopted, the new RGS will need to be accepted by a resolution from each municipal council within the region. Municipal staff, CAOs, and elected officials will be involved to ensure the new RGS provides value to member municipalities and helps address regional challenges within their jurisdiction in a more efficient and productive way then if they were to tackle them alone.
- **First Nations**: As a 20-year vision for the region that is focused on managing growth, land stewardship and environmental protection, it will be important that the RGS is built on a foundation of indigenous knowledge and respect for the syilx / Okanagan lands on which we live, work and play.
- **Adjoining Regional Districts**: Before it is adopted, the new RGS will need to be accepted by a resolution from each adjoining regional district. This means the RGS will need a resolution of support from the Regional District of the Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS), Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO), Thompson-Nicola Regional District (TNRD), and the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary (RDKB), before the Regional Board can adopt the RGS.
- **Regional Community Partner Organizations**: Community partner organizations such as School District 23, improvement districts, and other community organizations with a regional scope will be included in the Consultation Plan.

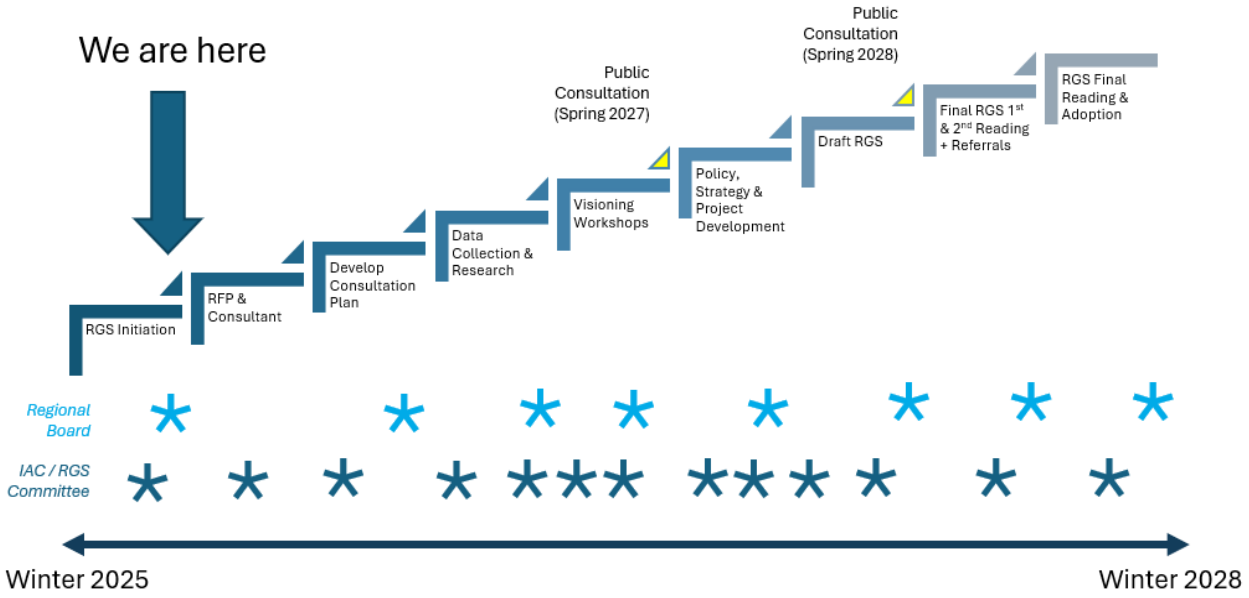
- **Provincial and Federal Governments**: Both provincial and federal government agencies will be engaged, as appropriate. Before it is adopted, the new RGS will be submitted to the Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs for review.

Intergovernmental Advisory Committee: In addition to the above, an Intergovernmental Advisory Committee would also be established (as required by Section 450 (b) of the *Local Government Act*). The membership of the Intergovernmental Advisory Committee would include the planning director of the regional district (or another official appointed by the Board), the planning director of each municipality (or another official appointed by the applicable council), provincial government representatives, and any other organizations invited to participate by the Board.

Project Timeline and Funding

The new Regional Growth Strategy is anticipated to be developed in six phases over a three-year timeline, with completion anticipated in winter 2028. Updates to the Regional Board will occur at key project milestones throughout the project timeline, as will presentations to the Intergovernmental Advisory Committee and Regional Growth Strategy Steering Committee.





Funding to develop a new RGS was included in the 2025 – 2029 Financial Plan. The RDCO has also applied to the UBCM Strategic Priorities Fund for grant funding to support this work. Once a new RGS is complete, all partner governments and municipalities will benefit as demonstrating regional alignment on major projects and initiatives are viewed favorably by granting/funding bodies.

Next Steps

Developing a new RGS follows the requirements of Part 13 of the *Local Government Act*. After RGS initiation, a Consultation Plan is developed and subsequently will be brought to the Board for adoption (LGA Section 434(2)). Additionally, an Intergovernmental Advisory Committee would be established (LGA Section 450(1)(b)) to advise on the development of the RGS. Lastly, written notification would be provided to affected local governments and to the Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs (LGA Section 433(4)).

Following initiation of the new Regional Growth Strategy by the Regional Board, staff would develop and release a Request for Proposal (RFP) to identify a qualified consultant team to co-lead the work. Following the procurement process, work would begin on developing the Consultation Plan, including meetings with First Nations. The next Board touchpoint would be a presentation of the Consultation Plan to the Regional Board for adoption, anticipated in spring 2026.



Data collection & research would include a review of regional data over the 20-year planning horizon related to population growth, demographics, housing, mobility, natural ecosystems, climate, public health, and economic development. A Summary Report of key findings would be developed and presented to the Regional Board in late 2026, followed by a series of visioning workshops with the Regional Board, general public, and key audiences to generate dialogue and get input on the future we are co-creating together in the Central Okanagan.

Conclusion
The Central Okanagan region is growing rapidly. As the third largest metropolitan area in British Columbia, it is vital to keep up with best practices and ensure a modern and relevant policy framework. Developing a new Regional Growth Strategy is foundational to a coordinated response and ensures residents have a voice in the future of our region. Initiating this work now facilitates an efficient approach that benefits everyone; our residents, our local governments and municipalities, and our future prosperity for the Central Okanagan.

Considerations:

Organizational/External:
The RDCO Development Services & Engineering Department would lead this work, with involvement from multiple internal departments, including Communications and Parks.

Financial:

The RDCO has applied to the UBCM Strategic Priorities Fund for $425,000 in grant funding to support this work over the three-year project timeline. This amount reflects the total project cost and would include all aspects of developing the project over the three-year timeline, including research and analysis, communications and engagement, and strategy development and adoption. The total project cost is consistent with previous RGS development costs and multi-year projects of a similar magnitude. If the

grant is not successful, funding of $367,500 from operating reserves is provided in the 2025 – 2029 Financial Plan.

Legal/Statutory Authority:
A Regional Growth Strategy must be developed following the requirements of Part 13 of the *Local Government Act,* which governs Regional Growth Strategies.

Considerations not applicable:

- Alternate Recommendation:

Attachment(s): 1. Regional Growth Strategy Initiation Presentation

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