



Corporate Report

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COUNCIL DATE: January 28, 2008

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: Mayor & Council DATE: January 25, 2008
FROM: General Manager, Planning and Development FILE: 0450-01
SUBJECT: Choosing a Sustainable Future for Metro Vancouver -
Surrey Comments on the November 2007 Report -
Options for Metro Vancouver's Growth Management Strategy

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council:

1. Receive this report as information; and
2. Endorse the comments contained within this report and direct staff to forward a copy of this report and the related Council resolution to Metro Vancouver as the City of Surrey's response to the document "Choosing a Sustainable Future for Metro Vancouver – Options for Metro Vancouver's Growth Management Strategy".

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to review and provide comments on the document entitled "Choosing a Sustainable Future for Metro Vancouver – Options for Metro Vancouver's Growth Management Strategy" for Council's consideration and response to Metro Vancouver. This options paper is part of the public consultation process in the development of a new Regional Growth Strategy for Metropolitan Vancouver, to replace the current Liveable Region Strategic Plan.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Under the provisions of the *Local Government Act*, regional districts are required to prepare a Regional Growth Strategy in order to "promote human settlement that is socially, economically and environmentally healthy and that makes efficient use of public facilities and services, land and other resources". It must cover a period of at least 20 years and include a comprehensive statement on the future of the region, including

social, economic and environmental objectives of the board, population and employment projections, and actions proposed with regard to housing, transportation, regional district services, parks and natural areas and economic development.

The current Regional Growth Strategy for Metro Vancouver is the Liveable Region Strategic Plan (the "LRSP"), which was adopted by the then GVRD board in January of 1996. The LRSP rests on four fundamental strategies:

- Protect the Green Zone;
- Build Complete Communities;
- Achieve a Compact Metropolitan Region; and
- Increase Transportation Choice.

The Regional Context statement is one of a number of plans under the umbrella of the region's "Sustainable Region Initiative" ("SRI"), which also includes documents such as Liquid and Solid Waste Management Plans, the Air Quality Management Plan, Regional Parks Plan and Regional Affordable Housing Strategy.

Municipalities are required to prepare and adopt Regional Context Statements as an element of their Official Community Plan ("OCP"). The Regional Context Statement must explain the relationship between the OCP and the Regional Growth Strategy. Surrey's Regional Context Statement is contained in Appendix B of Surrey Official Community Plan By-law, 1983, No. 12900, as amended. It specifies how Surrey's OCP reflects the interests and strategies of the current Regional Growth Strategy, the LRSP. It is anticipated that Surrey will be required to update its Regional Context Statement subsequent to the adoption of a new Regional Growth Strategy by Metro Vancouver. This will be part of the pending major review of Surrey's OCP.

BACKGROUND

Over the past several years, Metro Vancouver has been undertaking background studies, workshops and public forums leading to the preparation of a revised Regional Growth Strategies. The revisited Regional Growth Strategy is intended to address the new challenges of climate change, a growing and aging population, traffic congestion, housing affordability and the region's ties to a global economy.

In September of 2007, the GVRD Board, authorized staff to begin public discussions for the Regional Growth Strategy, based on an identified set of issues and strategies presented to the Board at that time. The document, entitled "Choosing a Sustainable Future for Metro Vancouver: Options for Metro Vancouver's Growth Management Strategy" (the "Options Report") was produced in November of 2007. Regional Staff held a series of community meetings throughout the region, including two meetings in Surrey, on December 6, 2007, at the Newton Recreation Centre and January 17, 2008, at the Newton Seniors' Centre.

The City received correspondence in November 2007, from Metro Vancouver staff, advising of this public consultation process. On December 17, 2007, the Manager of the Policy and Planning Department for Metro Vancouver attended Council-in-Committee and provided a presentation on the Options Report.

It is noted that this round of consultation was intended to "initiate dialogue on the directions for the new Regional Growth Strategy". Following this preliminary consultation a Draft Regional Growth Strategy will be prepared for public and municipal review. Comments will be taken into account in the preparation of the actual draft Regional Growth Strategy document.

DISCUSSION

Overview

As the Options Report notes, a new plan for Metropolitan Vancouver (a 25 year plan to the year 2031) will need to address issues of climate change, a growing and aging population, traffic congestion, housing affordability and the region's ties to a global economy. Land use concepts in the new Regional Growth Strategy will be linked to TransLinks's *Transport 2040* vision.

The plan anticipates the need to accommodate 820,000 more people in the region, or a population of 3 million by 2031, 420,000 new dwellings and 400,000 additional jobs, while maintaining natural, cultural and heritage assets. Of this, Surrey/Delta/White Rock is predicted to have:

- A population of 766,000 or 25.2% of the regional population; and
- Employment of 324,000 or 20.8% of the regional jobs.

The Options Report notes that to maintain a healthy economy, economic activities such as port, airport and rail activities supporting the region's gateway role, and city serving businesses, will require sufficient land. The paper notes that the regional supply of industrial land has decreased as a result of lands being rezoned to higher value market uses. The challenges are to ensure effective use of space to support economic activity, while protecting communities and the region's thriving agricultural sector. A further challenge is to build an urban area that does not undermine the biodiversity and natural assets of the region.

Proposed Vision and Goals

The proposed Vision as set out in the Options Report is:

Metro Vancouver will be a liveable and sustainable region. It will be a region of well-designed, connected and diverse communities where people of all ages, incomes and origins can live, work and play in safety and comfort. The conservation of land, water and energy resources will drive regional decision-making. Valuable farmland and natural areas will be protected and enhanced. An affordable and efficient transportation system will support economic prosperity, healthy living and community well-being.

The Report puts forward five goals, and 12 strategies within these goals. The goals are similar to those of the four fundamental strategies currently in the LRSP, but add reference to housing and the regional economy.

A Choice of Strategies

A key theme throughout the Report is the question of governance and the role of Metropolitan Vancouver versus the role of the local municipalities within the region. For each of the 12 strategies put forward in the Report, the public is asked to choose whether the Regional Growth Strategy and, therefore, Metropolitan Vancouver, should:

- (a) State general, high level goals and policies; or
- (b) State general goals and provide targets and general guidelines; or
- (c) Set regulations and establish specific targets.

Following is a description of the goals and strategies, and of the choices set out in the Options Report. These are accompanied by commentary with regard to the City of Surrey's preferences, issues and concerns:

GOAL 1: A sustainable, compact metropolitan structure

Strategy 1: Focus growth in centres and along transit corridors

This strategy retains the concept of a strong Metropolitan Core, Regional Town Centres (including Surrey City Centre and Langley City, south of the Fraser) and Municipal Town Centres (including Guildford, Fleetwood, Newton, Cloverdale and Semiahmoo/White Rock). It is a strategy of concentrating growth in centres and transit corridors. The Report notes that a practical transit option is needed in newer areas, and that additional transit corridors are needed that link centres and that link neighbourhoods to centres. The Report asks whether this structure should be expressed:

- (a) as a statement of general goals that centres and corridors should be the primary location for jobs, shops, services and housing;
- (b) as a map of centres and corridors, but with general guidelines on the types of uses to be encouraged in the centres and corridors; or
- (c) with centres, transit stations and corridors designated, and providing housing and job targets, transit service expectations, minimum density guidelines and maximum parking guidelines established for centres and station areas.

Response: Option (b) is preferred as it provides a sufficient level of detail in the regional plan to be useful to local governments, citizens and the development industry in directing growth to centres and corridors, without taking on the role of local government. Local municipalities are best placed to understand the local context and economic realities, and to set specific and realistic densities and targets rather than having them determined at a regional level. The region can and should provide a valuable role in assisting with research and information of which densities and land use mixes will result in the provision of quality transit services.

Strategy 2: Establish defined areas for urban growth

This strategy provides for the continued growth in newly developing areas, (including Grandview, north and west Cloverdale, South Port Kells and Douglas), but emphasizes the proportion of growth in established areas versus newly developing areas. It notes that municipal OCPs have designated sufficient land to accommodate residential growth beyond 2031. The Report asks whether the Growth Strategy should:

- (a) state general goals for developing a compact region; or
- (b) designate an urban area and a green zone similar to the current plan to act as a boundary for urban growth; or
- (c) designate Urban, Rural and Green Zone land uses. The Rural designation would include areas "not conducive to urban development". The Hazelmere area and lands outside of the ALR, south of Campbell Heights, are included in this designation in the options paper. The Green Zone would protect the region's natural assets.

***Response:** Option (b) is preferred. This option retains the existing urban containment boundaries and protects the ALR and Green Zone from urban encroachment. Municipalities are best placed to determine the staging of urban development through their local OCPs and guidelines provided in the Regional Growth Strategy. Surrey already provides for a rural designation in its OCP, and Council has recently not approved applications for urban development in more remote areas, based on the need to ensure the efficient and sustainable phasing of development. As well, local municipalities should be hesitant to accept further designations in the plan, prior to clearly understanding the details of the amendment process that will be associated with the new Regional Growth Strategy.*

*While the Option Report notes that there is sufficient land available for residential development, this section does **not** speak to the shortage of industrial/employment land in the region. The City should not agree to a rural designation in advance of understanding more about the regional supply and protection of industrial land and the Growth Management Strategy amendment process.*

GOAL 2: Diverse and affordable housing choices

Strategy 3: Increase housing supply and diversity, including the supply of housing for low and moderate income households

This strategy notes that all municipalities across the region should have an adequate stock of affordable housing, including a healthy supply of market and non-profit rental housing. It notes that senior levels of government have a critical role, while local governments can "use the land development approval process to provide additional opportunities for affordable housing". The Report asks whether the Regional Growth Strategy would:

- (a) retain the current approach of stating general goals to promote increased housing supply; or

- (b) establish targets by sub region and require municipalities to prepare Housing Action Plans to identify specific objectives and actions for housing supply, diversity and affordability; or
- (c) establish region-wide requirements to provide a uniform approach to matters such as reduced parking regulations, DCCs, and exclusionary zoning.

Response: *Option (b) is preferred. Sub-regional targets will ensure that all municipalities address sub-regional housing targets. The requirement for Housing Action Plans means that all municipalities will be required to assess a range of housing options that is consistent with their local context. Surrey intends to undertake the development of a Housing Action Plan this year.*

Surrey's housing is among the most affordable in the region, and Surrey is already providing relatively affordable housing for a significant proportion of employees in municipalities that have less affordable housing.

Option (c) is far too prescriptive a role for the region and does not recognize local context and circumstances. The region should not be involved in setting local parking regulations or in the establishment of municipal DCCs required to finance the infrastructure necessary to provide for new development.

GOAL 3: A strong diverse regional economy

Strategy 4: Maintain an adequate supply of industrial lands to meet the needs of the regional economy

This strategy recognized that the regional economy needs industrial land, including land for storage, distribution, and truck parking, yet the supply of industrial land is declining. The options include:

- (a) stating general goals for industrial protection; or
- (b) identifying significant industrial lands on a map and stating their importance; or
- (c) designating industrial land as a regional land use category with specific guidelines on permitted uses. The regional industrial land use designation would include manufacturing, warehousing, distribution, and supporting office and retail uses, but would not allow stand alone office or retail uses.

Response: *It is clear that there is not a sufficient supply of industrial land to serve the region's long term needs. The Report does not address where a sustainable supply of industrial land will be found in the region. It is also clear that many municipalities have converted large areas of industrial land to "higher order" uses such as residential. Municipalities such as Surrey, with the largest amount of available industrial land, are expected to provide for the storage, distribution and truck storage needs of the region. This is clearly not acceptable as they are land intensive uses and do little for the quality of life or the tax base of the City.*

Option (b) provides for identification of industrial land in the region, but may not be sufficient to stem the tide of conversion of employment lands to other uses.

Option (c), the designation of industrial land, could be considered as a viable option. It would put all municipalities on a level playing field in not converting their industrial lands to residential uses. Surrey is now undertaking an Employment Land Strategy to consider how to protect employment land to ensure that there is a balance of assessment and of jobs to the employed work force. However any consideration of designating industrial or employment land must be based on:

- *clearly understanding the process for amending the Regional Growth Strategy; and*
- *deleting any provision under which the Regional Growth Strategy would regulate the nature and type of employment uses that could go into local employment areas. The Report notes that the only reason that higher density employment uses go into business parks is for economic reasons. Indeed, many office type users require space that is outside of city centres. Other municipalities have attained high job to workforce ratios through high-end business parks. Surrey is seeking higher employment densities in its employment areas to provide for jobs close to Surrey residents that will have the effect of shortening average commuting distances and, therefore, will have positive effects on the environment and overall quality of life. It is not appropriate for the region to dictate the nature of employment uses, which may direct that some municipalities, such as Surrey, accept the lion's share of "lower order" uses.*

Strategy 5: Facilitate the location of major commercial (retail, office and entertainment) activities in centre locations to enhance access for workers and customers and build prosperous, attractive centres in every sub region

This strategy maximizes the use of infrastructure and transit by concentrating mixed use development in existing urban centres. It notes that regional town centres and the metropolitan core need to capture new office growth. To do this, the options are for the Regional Growth Strategy to:

- (a) identify the major centres and encourage the establishment of jobs and activities;
or
- (b) designate centres and other strategic economic growth centres and develop policies and guidelines to set out development expectations including commercial and residential density objectives; or
- (c) establish policies and incentives to encourage commercial development in centres and discourage commercial development outside of centres.

Response: *Option (b) is preferred. Surrey is in the process of undertaking a major review of its City Centre Plan, and is attempting to find ways to attract new business and high density office development to its City Centre. While all regional town centres are*

attempting to attract major office development, the lack of a "head office" economy has created a circumstance where all municipalities are competing for the same market. Neither the metropolitan core nor the town centres are seeing significant office growth unless it is supported by the public sector. Consultants have advised that many more industrially oriented office uses, which require road accessibility, will gravitate to business park and many are not suited to downtown locations. If they are deterred from locating in suitable locations, they will more likely move elsewhere than to town centre locations.

Density targets and objectives are best left in the hands of municipalities that understand the local context. Option (c) is not recommended as it is too prescriptive. The regional government should not be involved in evaluating local land use decisions. Any policy to promote the concentration of commercial uses in town centres should focus on incentives as opposed to regulator restrictions. Incentives could include improved transit service levels.

Strategy 6: Maintain the agricultural land base for food production through supportive land use and development policies

This strategy recognizes the importance of the agricultural sector to the local economy, and the value of the Agricultural Land Reserve, but notes that with continued population growth there will be continue pressure to convert agricultural land to other uses. To protect agricultural land, the Regional Growth Strategy could:

- (a) make general goal statements to protect agricultural land; or
- (b) provide a regional agricultural land designation to reinforce the ALR; or
- (c) provide an agricultural land designation and require municipalities to provide urban/agricultural interface polices in their OCPs.

Response: *Surrey strongly supports the retention of the ALR and Surrey's OCP already contains polices with regard to setbacks and buffering adjacent to the ALR, as recommended by Option (c). As part of the pending major review of Surrey's OCP, staff will be reviewing the setback and buffering requirements in consultation with the local stakeholders. In addition, Surrey has Council-adopted policies containing stringent criteria for considering ALR exclusion applications.*

There is concern that the agricultural designation would be redundant with the protection provided by the ALR, however the agricultural designation would be virtually the same as the current Green Zone designation in requiring an amendment to the LRSP before land can be taken out of the Green Zone for urban uses. Understanding the amending formula for the new Regional Growth Strategy would, again, be important in determining support for this option.

An agricultural designation in the Regional Growth Strategy would recognize the function of and economic value of ALR land, as opposed to the current situation where all ALR land is combined as "Green Zone" with other land that has environmental or recreational value. Option (b) or (c) could be supported.

GOAL 4: Protect and enhance the region's natural assets

Strategy 7: Ensure the long-term protection of critical habitat areas, drinking watersheds, riparian areas, parks, recreation corridors, forests and agricultural lands

The Green Zone is intended to protect the region's natural assets, such as environmentally sensitive areas, major parks, recreational areas, some golf courses and riparian areas. Two options for the future of the Green Zone are to:

- (a) designate a Green Zone in the Regional Growth Strategy and provide general guidance to municipalities on what areas should be included: or
- (b) designate the Green Zone and identify the permitted uses, taking a more direct regional role to ensure consistency for the protection of natural areas.

Response: Option (a) is preferred. At this time, there is inconsistency among municipalities in the areas included in the Green Zone, and the region could provide better guidance as to the types of areas to be included and general guidance as to the permitted uses. Option (b) is too prescriptive and does not recognize distinctions and diversity among the types of landscapes included in the Green Zone.

Similar to industrial land, the natural assets map in the Report shows that many municipalities, and especially the Burrard Peninsula communities, have long since converted most of their natural areas to urban areas. The proposals suggest that the region should intervene to preserve remaining natural areas to balance this historic fact. The City of Surrey has policies and programs to address environmentally sensitive areas, maintain natural areas and promote biodiversity. The most complete knowledge of natural areas is at the local level and Surrey is undertaking further work in updating its ESA mapping and developing a biodiversity plan. Surrey does not support a regional function in this area beyond the general principle of supporting and providing general policies for the Green Zone, and coordinating the provision of important linkages between municipalities.

Strategy 8: Ensure the protection and enhancement of ecological and recreational connectivity across the region

The Report notes that natural assets are located throughout the region, not just in the Green Zone. The Strategy explores two options:

- (a) the Regional Growth Strategy would continue to state general goals and provide high level guidance for integrating ecological values into land development processes and for the provision of regional ecological and recreational corridors; or
- (b) the Strategy would provide regional guidelines for integrating ecological values into the development process and identify regional ecological and recreational

greenways on a reference map. It would be specific about the location of corridors and would provide guidelines for protecting natural assets.

Response: *Option (a) is preferred. Ecological and recreational corridors are defined and managed by the City, with input by agencies such as DFO, where there is more complete local knowledge of environmental values. There would be little value in the region becoming involved in the local development approval processes.*

A general map of biodiversity values would be useful, as well as a map showing regionally owned assets, links and corridors. The current plan does not show the links between key assets, or contain policies to address biodiversity in these areas. Maps and plans for linking key regional assets with municipal assets, and showing links between municipalities would be of value.

The map currently in the Options Report combines a number of objectives, and should be broken out to more accurately reflect regional objectives with the understanding that fish corridors, wildlife corridors and green pedestrian corridors are distinct from one another and should be considered separately.

GOAL 5: A sustainable regional transportation system

Strategy 9: Increase transit supply through the region and promote walking and cycling

This Strategy promotes increased transit and the link between land use decisions and the provision of transit. Options outlined for the Regional Growth Strategy are:

- (a) to state general goals of increasing transit use; or
- (b) to identify a frequent transit network for the region and set targets for increased transit trips in the Strategy; or
- (c) to identify a frequent transit network, set targets for transit ridership in each sub region, set density guidelines and establish targets for cycling and walking. Guidelines would set minimum densities in transit corridors.

Response: *Option (b) could be supported. While it is noted that TransLink, not Metro Vancouver, provides the frequent transit network, it is important to show this network in the regional plan and link land use and density decisions to this network.*

A concern has been raised at a number of the public meetings held by Metro Vancouver, that the Regional Growth Strategy may not coordinate with the decisions and actions of the Province and TransLink in making major transportation decisions. While Surrey will strive to increase densities in its centres and along corridors, Option (c), as set out, is too prescriptive, especially without the guarantee of major investments in transit infrastructure. It is appropriate for the region and TransLink, working in cooperation with municipalities, to identify transit corridors and service design guidelines that provide incentives for compact more dense land use patterns. Any establishment of density and transit trip targets in the plan should be done by agreement with

municipalities and should recognize historic development patterns, and realities such as the presence of the ALR along major corridors over which municipalities have no control.

Strategy 10: Advance a regional network of roads and highways that prioritize goods movement, transit operations and high-occupancy vehicles

This strategy recognizes the importance of goods movement in the region's economy and notes the need to allocate road capacity in a way that prioritizes users and manages demand. Options for the Regional Growth Strategy are to:

- (a) state general goals for a regional roads and highways network; or
- (b) map regional roads and highways and continue to state general principles for implementation, noting that TransLink and the Province implement major roads and highways; or
- (c) map the network and have specific lane/corridor road management and transit priority guidelines.

***Response:** Option (c) can be supported. The Regional Growth Strategy should contain updated maps of the major road network and policies for implementation, and Metro Vancouver should clearly link land use and transportation to the extent possible through the maintenance and management of the network and transportation demand management measures. If major transportation infrastructure is indeed the role of other agencies and levels of government, the Regional Growth Strategy should set a clear transit strategy and clear expectations as to what is needed from these other levels of government in order to meet the goals set out in the document.*

Strategy 11: Manage Transportation demand

This strategy notes that the current pricing structure of transportation options hides the true cost of car travel. Pricing mechanisms include such items as U-Pass, transit passes, parking fees, fuel taxes, and vehicle levies. Options for the Regional Growth Strategy are:

- (a) to state general goals on managing transportation demand. TransLink would design DTM programs to achieve regional goals; or
- (b) to identify demand management strategies at the local level such as bus lanes and parking supply measures, or road pricing mechanisms at the regional level.

***Response:** Road pricing will be managed by TransLink and the Province. Coordination/Alignment between the Regional Growth Strategy and the TransLink Plans is essential. Option (a) is preferred. Municipalities can work with Metro Vancouver and TransLink to develop transit priority measures that can provide for improved service levels. For example, working to provide for bus lanes and layover spaces help in accommodating more service. Regional control over parking supply is not supported, although Metro Vancouver is encouraged to work with municipalities to conduct*

research and provide a level playing field for development by promoting measures such as lower parking standards, taking into account phasing and local context. These activities can take place without providing prescriptive measures in the Regional Growth Strategy.

What Is Missing?

Through the public consultation process Metro Vancouver staff has asked if there are items missing from the Options Report that should be addressed in the Regional Growth Strategy. The following items are noted for consideration:

- While the document discusses the need for sustainability and measures to reduce the production of greenhouse gases, it does not contain any guidance or goals on how the region will adapt to inevitable impacts of climate change;
- With the exception of providing diverse and affordable housing choice and mixed use centres, the document does not contain any policies with regard to the social and cultural aspects of region; and
- The final document should contain a more detailed description of how the links to other documents under the umbrella of the Sustainable Region Initiative, such as the Liquid Waste Management Plan, the Solid Waste Management Plan, etc., are used as tools to shape and manage the growth of the region.

General Comments

In the tables and maps describing current population and employment and predicting future population and employment growth, there is a concern that the City of Surrey has been combined with the low-growth municipalities of Delta and White Rock. This does not provide an accurate portrayal of the relative rate of growth of these municipalities over the next 25 years. Major municipalities should be described separately in future documents.

It would appear that the concept of the Growth Concentration Area is being dropped from the revised Regional Context Statement in favour of policies promoting compact development and a clear growth containment boundary. The Growth Concentrations Area was seen as contradictory to the objective of creating complete communities in other viable locations, and the City of Surrey supports the removal of this concept from the Regional Context Statement.

Finally, it is noted that one of the great assets of the regional structure, at this time, is that it is a federation of municipalities working together to reach consensus on major issues. It has been successful, and in the vast majority of instances, municipalities have followed the policies and principles set out in the current Regional Growth Strategy – the LRSP. **Surrey is opposed to the Regional Growth Strategy being overly prescriptive and Metro Vancouver becoming another regulatory agency with respect to local land use decisions.** Options, which state general goals and provide targets and general guidelines toward which municipalities can work in cooperation with the region are generally preferred.

CONCLUSION

This report provides an overview of the document entitled "Choosing a Sustainable Future for Metro Vancouver – Options for Metro Vancouver's Growth Management Strategy" for Council's consideration and response to Metro Vancouver.

It is recommended that Council:

- Receive this report as information; and
- Endorse the comments contained within this report and direct staff to forward a copy of this report and the related Council resolution to Metro Vancouver as the City of Surrey's response to the document "Choosing a Sustainable Future for Metro Vancouver – Options for Metro Vancouver's Growth Management Strategy".

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