

REPORT

Climate Action, Planning and Development

To: Mayor Cote and Members of Council **Date:** November 1, 2021

From: Emilie K Adin, MCIP **File:** 01.0185.20
Director, Climate Action, Planning and
Development

Item #: 2021-481

Subject: Regional Growth Strategy Update: Metro 2050 Comment Period

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council direct staff to send the attached letter to Metro Vancouver as formal City comments on the draft updated Regional Growth Strategy, Metro 2050.

PURPOSE

To seek direction from Council regarding the proposed City response to the draft updated Regional Growth Strategy, Metro 2050.

SUMMARY

Metro Vancouver, in consultation with member jurisdictions, has prepared a draft updated Regional Growth Strategy (RGS), Metro 2050. The updated strategy integrates emergent issues and important lenses, such as centering climate and resilience, integrating equity and reconciliation, and giving more focus to affordable and diverse housing. Land use designations, the Urban Containment Boundary, and major overlays are not changed from the current RGS.

Staff have commented throughout the update process and have drafted a letter providing proposed City comments (Attachment 3). The draft Metro 2050 is seen to be in alignment with New Westminister's planning framework, and minor comments are offered around refining the regional affordable housing focus, adjusting the Major Transit Growth Corridor concept, and clarifying member jurisdiction actions. Staff is seeking Council's direction in advance of the November 26, 2021 deadline for official comments from member jurisdictions.

BACKGROUND

The Regional Growth Strategy (RGS), Metro Vancouver 2040: Shaping our Future (Metro 2040), was adopted in 2011 by Metro Vancouver, its member jurisdictions (including the City of New Westminster), TransLink and adjacent regional districts. Metro 2040 “is the region’s collective vision for how growth (population, housing and jobs) will be managed to support the creation of complete, connected and resilient communities, protect important lands and support the efficient provision of urban infrastructure like transit and utilities” (source: Metro Vancouver website).

In 2019, Metro embarked on a 10 year update to the plan. At their regular March 1, 2021 meeting, Council received a report for information introducing the RGS update and providing the scope and timeline for the update process. Staff participated in the development of the draft through Intergovernmental Advisory Committee meetings, during which verbal and written comments were provided chapter by chapter.

In July of 2021, the Metro Vancouver Regional District Board referred the draft plan for comment to member jurisdictions and other signatories. Metro Vancouver staff presented the draft strategy to Council on October 18. The City is invited to provide written comments on the draft by November 26.

ANALYSIS

The updated plan does not make any changes to regional land use designations or the Urban Containment Boundary, nor does it add any new Urban Centres or Frequent Transit Development Areas (FTDAs). It does expand policies and integrate new and emerging planning lenses into the five goals and strategies of the plan. It also incorporates growth projections to the year 2050. Staff have reviewed the draft updated RGS. The major changes are summarized in Attachment 2.

Alignment with Principles and Values of New Westminster’s Planning Framework

The draft updated RGS, with its stronger focus on climate, equity, reconciliation, and housing, is seen to be consistent with the principles and values that inform the City’s Official Community Plan and Council’s Strategic Plan.

Staff comments throughout the plan update process have encouraged stronger and bolder moves towards integrating these principles, for example:

- by suggesting adding heatwaves and air quality impacts from increasing forest fire intensity as climate impacts to plan for;
- by suggesting that member jurisdictions should have policies that not only protect but enhance lands with a Conservation and Recreation land use designation, to increase their ecological integrity and importance; and by suggesting that an equity lens be applied to support planning for green space and tree canopy coverage.

The above comments and others have informed and been integrated into the draft.

Metro Vancouver staff were also very responsive to concerns around the need for better consultation and engagement with First Nations in the update process. Although regional district staff were and are working with defined timelines for the update, they gave careful consideration to the feedback provided at Intergovernmental Advisory Committee meetings. First Nations were subsequently invited to inform the creation of a consultation process that was more meaningful and workable.

However, some City staff comments were not fully addressed by the July 2021 draft that has been referred for comment. The plan notes where Metro Vancouver will continue to convene discussions and undertake research, monitoring and evaluation to further equity, reconciliation and climate action, recognizing that regional and municipal plans have not yet solved or fully addressed these challenges and calls to action. In those regional discussions, staff suggest the City continue to advocate for consideration of the following issues:

- Considering the impact and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ways planning can support the creation of urban environments that are more just and resilient to pandemics and health crises as one type of shock.
- Continued consideration of equity implications of policy and opportunities to improve, such as:
 - advocating for more capacity-building initiatives for groups that face significant and unique challenges in participating in the industrial economic sector (indigenous groups, newcomers, women, etc.);
 - increased support for tenants with accessibility challenges, such as for improved access to adaptable and accessible units for those who need them, and provision of a full range of accessible unit types, to ensure households of all types can access adaptable and accessible housing; and
 - building on the plan's support for sufficient child care by advocating for child care to be affordable and inclusive.
- Further action on climate, such as by advocating for monitoring and tracking of embodied emissions of buildings during all stages of their life cycle including design, construction and operations.

Opportunities for Improvement to Metro 2050

While the updated regional plan and the City's Official Community Plan are predominantly consistent with each other, staff have identified a few areas of opportunity for improving the regional plan to maximize potential for successful implementation.

Affordable Rental Housing

The City is very committed to pursuing opportunities to support and provide affordable rental housing developments of different types. The new proposed regional target of 15% of new units in Urban Centres and Frequent Transit Development Areas (FTDAs) as affordable rental housing is consistent with the City's commitment in this regard. Because land economics and construction costs make achieving new affordable rental housing so challenging, the City's approach will continue to be the pursuit of all reasonable opportunities, including the following:

- supporting purpose-built affordable rental housing proposals, including when opportunities arise outside of Downtown (our Urban Centre) and FTDAs. Lands in closest proximity to rapid transit can have very high land values, and New Westminster's urban context provides great potential for projects with good transit access in shoulder areas outside of tightly defined FTDAs.
- protecting tenants and existing purpose-built rental housing (which often provide significant affordability) by having strong protection, retention and replacement policies.
- leveraging large-scale redevelopment in FTDAs, such as through projects like Sapperton Green, to achieve affordable rental housing; and
- pursuing the inclusion of non-market and below market rental housing units in multi-unit strata and mixed-use residential developments through the citywide inclusionary housing policy.

Given the degree of the challenge and the depth of the housing crisis, staff suggest more focus be given to finding ways to better achieve affordable housing goals. For example:

- Metro Vancouver's recent Transit-Oriented Affordable Housing Study provided helpful analysis and started a conversation on a regional affordable housing fund, as one potential piece of the puzzle. These kinds of detailed analyses and exploration of solutions could be built upon.
- Staff appreciate the regional action around advocating for the legislative ability for local governments to mandate affordable housing through inclusionary zoning powers that do not rely on negotiated rights. There is also room for more regional support on the implementation of inclusionary housing policies, such as exploring the potential for Metro Vancouver Housing Corporation to operate or otherwise support units generated through inclusionary housing policies.
- There may also be a regional role for cultivating community acceptance and support of affordable and supportive housing projects.

Staff support setting a regional target for affordable rental housing, and for pursuing a variety of affordability levels. The challenge is going to continue to be in the implementation and achievement of these targets, and regional collaboration and problem-solving is needed.

Major Transit Growth Corridors

With more and more parts of the region on the Frequent Transit Network, that network is no longer seen as a useful growth organizing framework at the regional scale. Metro has incorporated TransLink's draft Major Transit Network (MTN) as a new organizing principle to guide identification of new FTDA's (see map in Attachment 2). This network provides a helpful framework through which to better integrate transportation and land use planning.

The updated RGS also names and maps parts of this network, and lands surrounding it, as Major Transit Growth Corridors. Staff understand the intent of these corridors to be to better guide the location of new FTDA's, and not to prescribe a corridor growth pattern. However, the depiction of these lands as "growth corridor" areas may suggest this pattern to land speculators and developers. Including a map in the RGS further signals an openness to transit-oriented growth along these very wide corridors.

In the New Westminster context, transit-oriented growth along the SkyTrain MTN has been purposefully nodal in nature, and the City's OCP does not direct growth along the complete MTN; there are areas that have transit access constraints, are protected for industrial uses by both local and regional policies, or are otherwise not appropriate for significant growth due to topographical considerations or other barriers to development. Staff suggest Metro consider removing the map of the growth corridors, or removing the growth corridor concept altogether as it risks signaling development potential where municipal and regional policies may not support significant growth. Instead, the regional plan could retain strong regional targets for accommodating growth in FTDA's and urban centres, and provide descriptive language around appropriate FTDA locations, including suggesting that these be in close proximity to MTN stations or stops.

Member Jurisdiction Actions and Regional Context Statements

The draft RGS is structured around five goals, each with corresponding strategies, including actions assigned to member jurisdictions. Each of these actions will need to be addressed by the City when its Regional Context Statement is updated following plan adoption. There are various instances in the plan where actions for member jurisdictions could be clarified and tightened, to ensure that what is being asked of municipalities is something that municipalities have the jurisdiction to undertake.

The following actions in Goal 5 (supporting sustainable transportation) are illustrative of this challenge:

- member jurisdictions are asked to manage and enhance municipal infrastructure in support of multiple-occupancy vehicles, though City infrastructure has little influence on multiple-occupancy vehicle use (given that high occupancy vehicle lanes are typically found on provincial highways and the TransLink-controlled major road network); and
- member jurisdictions are asked to protect rail right-of-ways, though these are not within municipal jurisdiction.

Advancing regional objectives is made challenging by the number of different players involved and the evolving and complex nature of the challenges faced. Staff see value in having member jurisdictions express support for initiatives that may be outside of the traditional purview of local authorities. Still, staff would encourage Metro Vancouver to differentiate between issues for advocacy and issues for action, thereby ensuring that all RGS actions are as clear and actionable as possible. This would set the region and member jurisdictions up for successful implementation of the plan.

NEXT STEPS

The City is invited to provide written comments on the draft by November 26, 2021. Staff have included a draft letter to Metro Vancouver as Attachment 3, for Council's consideration.

The City will have the opportunity to endorse the finalized Metro 2050 prior to final reading of the bylaw by the Metro Vancouver Regional District Board, anticipated for June of 2022.

Following adoption of an updated RGS, the City will have two years to update its Regional Context Statement. To inform this update, staff will undertake additional analysis to determine response options to the updates to the RGS described in Attachment 2, such as the removal of the Special Employment Area designation, the opportunity to consider the appropriateness of using employing the Trade-Oriented Lands overlay, and the ways the City can contribute to meeting new regional targets.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

The Transportation, Parks and Open Space Planning, and Climate Action Divisions were consulted on this report.

OPTIONS

1. That Council direct staff to send the attached letter to Metro Vancouver as official City comments on the draft updated Regional Growth Strategy, Metro 2050.
2. That Council provide staff with alternative direction.

Staff recommends option 1.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – New Westminster Regional Overlays

Attachment 2 – Summary of Key Changes in Metro 2050

Attachment 3 – DRAFT Written Comments to Metro Vancouver

APPROVALS

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