

2.0 Regional Context Statement

Goals

Meet the Local Government Act requirements for adoption of a Regional Context Statement pursuant to the adoption of a Regional Growth Strategy.

Demonstrate consistency between the City of Vernon Official Community Plan and the North Okanagan Regional Growth Strategy.

Guiding Principles Met

Foster prosperity for people, business and government
Protect and preserve green spaces and sensitive areas
Ensure housing meets the needs of the whole community
Create a culture of sustainability
Protect agricultural land
Create strong, compact and complete neighbourhoods
Provide alternative transportation
Revitalize the Downtown
Create a youth friendly city

Legislative Context

The City of Vernon is required by the Local Government Act to include within the Official Community Plan a Regional Context Statement that identifies the relationship between the Official Community Plan and the Regional Growth Strategy. The North Okanagan Regional Growth Strategy Bylaw No. 2500, 2011 was accepted by the City of Vernon on August 8, 2011 and adopted by the Regional District of North Okanagan on September 21, 2011.

The Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) provides an integrated strategic policy framework for addressing growth management, compact complete communities, economic development, transportation, infrastructure, environmental concerns and long term regional sustainability, resilience and prosperity. These policies play three key roles:

- Provide direction for implementation of the Regional Growth Strategy;
- Create a common strategic framework for planning at various levels within the North Okanagan; and
- Provide a vision for all levels of government to strive towards.

Much of the implementation of the RGS occurs through local planning and actions. An Official Community Plan (OCP) must include a Regional Context Statement (RCS) that is accepted in accordance with Section 446 of the Local Government Act. The RCS identifies the relationship between the OCP and the policies included within the RGS. If necessary, the RCS also provides guidance on how the OCP is to be made consistent with the RGS over time.

The City of Vernon's RCS is a key implementation mechanism for the RGS. It maintains the City of Vernon's authority to make local planning decisions while ensuring that Council and the Regional Board agree upon matters of regional interest.

Local-Regional Context

The City of Vernon is the major commercial and population centre within the North Okanagan and comprises approximately 47% of the regional population. Over time, it is projected that this will increase slightly to approximately 50%. Detailed population statistics and projections for the city, as well as information regarding employment, income and dwelling units, is contained in Section 4.0 Population and Housing Profile and Projections.

In addition to the urbanized City Centre and developing neighbourhood commercial centres, Vernon contains several urban scale neighbourhoods, lower density subdivisions, large format commercial centres and significant lands within the Agricultural Land Reserve. Vernon is also a centre for employment in the region, and has adequate space for both new commercial development and the intensification of existing older commercial areas. However, limited lands are available to accommodate new industrial uses. As such, large scale industrial uses are most likely to be accommodated by other jurisdictions within the region.

While the community has, and has planned for, a variety of housing types and densities to serve a variety of housing needs, there are fewer opportunities for rural scale development than in neighbouring jurisdictions.

RGS Strategic Directions & OCP Consistency

The RGS includes policies that guide communities in achieving a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable region. To achieve this, the RGS has 21 major goals and numerous supporting strategies, as well as a section on implementation and monitoring.

This section of the RCS illustrates how the City of Vernon will assist in achieving the 21 goals established in the RGS. For each of the goals, this section identifies the supporting policies in the OCP and provides a high level overview of whether the OCP is consistent with that goal. Where goals and their supporting policies are very similar, they are grouped together. As a result of the policy amendments contained in the OCP, the City's OCP is fully consistent with the RGS, as detailed below.

1. Focus development into growth areas

Supporting policies: 5.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10, 7.3, 7.14, 8.7, 8.8, 8.10, 8.11, 10.1, 10.5, 10.6, 11.3.b, 11.4, 11.5, 11.6, 11.8, 11.9, 11.10, 11.11, 11.12, 12.1, 12.6, 13.2, 13.3, 13.6, 13.11, 13.12, 14.8, 15.1, 15.6, 15.7, 17.3, 17.5, 17.14, 17.5, 18.1, 18.6, 18.11, 18.12, 24.1, 24.4, 24.6

The OCP policies are consistent with this RGS goal. The land use plan (Map 3) focuses and promotes development and redevelopment in and around the City Centre (District 1) and in designated neighbourhood centres (District 2). Growth is accommodated in the Hillside Residential and Agricultural District (District 3) primarily in the adopted neighbourhood plan areas. This approach corresponds with the growth areas, future growth areas and rural protection area boundary identified in RGS maps B-5: East Vernon and B-6: West Vernon (Maps 1 and 2).

This approach concentrates commercial services, employment opportunities and new multiple family development in and around the neighbourhood commercial centres and in designated areas which are close to services and amenities. The clustering of density in these key areas throughout the city aims to create transit-supporting densities to ensure the efficient and cost effective provision of public transit. Several areas of the city have also been designated for small lot single and two family development to provide greater opportunities for attainable housing proximate to services and amenities. It is important to stress that the land use plan provides opportunities for a broad range of housing forms, tenures and cost.

The intent of the District approach is to utilize existing infrastructure more efficiently while providing cost effective options for new development in the existing built up areas of the city. Growth is encouraged in these areas by using the tools available to local government, including Development Cost Charges calculated on the basis of size and location; tax revitalization bylaws; Local Area Services to spearhead streetscape revitalization; and capital investment in target redevelopment areas.

2. Protect rural lands

Supporting policies: 15.11, 24.2, 24.3, 24.5

The OCP policies are consistent with this RGS goal. As a result of the adoption of the RGS, Section 24.0 Boundary Extension has been significantly amended to recognize the rural protection area boundary and provide the City with new guidelines pertaining to boundary extension applications. Through these amendments, the City will support a block boundary extension process along its boundary in the rural protection area to address issues of failing onsite septic systems where the properties are immediately adjacent to City infrastructure. In order to meet the intent of the RGS policy, properties annexed for this purpose will be included in Development District 3, the Hillside Residential and Agricultural District, and be rezoned to an agricultural zoning district.

It is important to recognize that the City's growth strategy will evolve over time. This is acknowledged in the RGS goals regarding the consideration of both the rural protection boundary and the potential identification of new future growth areas during the five year reviews of the RGS. Where a boundary extension application falls within the designated rural protection area, but serves the City's growth strategy and is in keeping with the RGS goal of compact, complete communities, it is necessary to receive RDNO approval as part of the boundary extension process on the redesignation of the lands as growth or future growth area, as appropriate. Such a consideration need not be initiated by a boundary extension application.

In addition, the relative costs and benefits of the extension of the municipal boundaries in the Swan Lake Corridor should be examined. This corridor is identified as a future growth area in the RGS and the extension of servicing is key to realizing significant development potential. As the development of this area is beneficial to the entire sub regional area, given the potential to provide significant new highway oriented commercial development, it is desirable to work with RDNO and Electoral Areas B and C to ascertain the feasibility and desirability of a boundary extension process to include this corridor.

3. Water is managed sustainably so all reasonable needs, including agriculture, are met in a balanced manner

Supporting policies: 10.1, 10.2, 10.3, 10.5, 10.7

The OCP policies are consistent with this RGS goal. The City recognizes that water is a valuable resource and its sustainable management is crucial to the long term viability of the entire region. The City's water supply is licensed and treated under the jurisdiction of the Regional District, while the operation and maintenance of the water distribution network within the city boundaries is contracted to the City to provide. While planning for water supply is not the responsibility of the City, the City actively participates in the Master Water Plan process in conjunction with the Regional District. In addition, the City's Liquid Waste Management Plan process is exploring options for use of the City's reclaimed water supply, including expansion of the distribution system where economically viable to do so. Virtually all properties in the city are metered, with the few remaining properties being captured during the redevelopment process.

4. Maintain and diversify the agricultural land base

Supporting policies: 15.1, 15.2, 15.10, 15.12

The OCP policies are consistent with this RGS goal. All ALR lands in the City are located in the Hillside Residential and Agricultural District (District 3). The City has a strong policy with regard to the consideration of ALR exclusion applications: lands which have viable, productive soils (which may be improved through standard farming practices to be of soil capability classes 1-3) will not be considered for exclusion, and ALR lands which are not able to be improved through standard farming practices, classes 4-7, will be considered against specific criteria, including the proposed use with reference to the supply of other lands designated for the proposed use, and anticipated impacts on, and isolation of, adjacent agricultural lands.

As a refinement to this policy, it is desirable to consider the exclusion of lands (classes 4-7) that are immediately adjacent to infrastructure, services and amenities, with due consideration of the rural protection area boundary. Where such lands are deemed to support the City's growth strategy and are in keeping with the RGS goal of compact, complete communities, the City will work with the Regional District on the redesignation of the lands as growth or future growth area, as appropriate.

5. Support a robust and diverse agricultural economic sector

Supporting policies: 15.3, 15.4, 15.5, 15.8, 15.9, 15.10, 15.14, 15.16

The OCP policies are consistent with this RGS goal. Vernon residents place a high value on both the productive capacity of active local agriculture and the idea of proximity to agricultural lands. As a result, support for the protection of agricultural capacity, production and access to agricultural products is strongly supported by the community and is represented in the policies contained in Section 15.0 Agriculture and Food Access.

Vernon strives to support local producers and small scale, integrated food production. Local processing, marketing and distribution facilities for local producers are all supported, thereby stimulating economic development and supporting food access and choice for all members of the community. Section 15.0 Agriculture and Food Access has an explicit goal regarding the support of agricultural economic development through support for agri-tourism, value added production, agricultural business start up activities and intergenerational learning/land transfer.

The City recognizes that an agricultural area plan and agricultural economic development plan would benefit from the involvement of all regional partners in a joint planning process to establish solution oriented policies.

6. Encourage a healthy, accessible and resilient food system

Supporting policies: 13.15, 15.5, 15.8, 15.9, 15.10, 15.13, 15.14, 15.15, 15.16

The OCP policies are consistent with this RGS goal. An accessible and resilient food system supports both the production of and access to local farm products. The City supports the creation of community and neighbourhood gardens for those without access to productive land, and supports local processing, marketing and distribution facilities for local producers to enhance food access and choice for all members of the community.

The City encourages collaboration and partnerships with community agricultural organizations, private industry and government agencies to support and encourage food access programs and alternatives wherever feasible and practical.

7. Protection of our groundwater

Supporting policy: 15.11.c

The OCP policy is consistent with this RGS goal in so far as the City does not support new development utilizing groundwater within any of its identified growth areas. The rural protection area within the city boundary is entirely contained in the Hillside Residential and Agricultural District (District 3). In this rural protection area, where extension of the water system is not supported by the Master Water Plan, ground water use may be supported.

8. Protection and conservation of water resources

Supporting policies: 10.2, 10.3, 10.4, 10.7

The OCP policies are consistent with this RGS goal. Section 10.0 Infrastructure explicitly supports initiatives to encourage and support water conservation, including working with the Okanagan Basin Water Board and Regional District member communities to protect the water supply, initiate water conservation measures and improve water quality. In addition, the City requires the use of low flow fixtures in new development and through the Liquid Waste Management Plan, supports cost effective and innovative liquid waste disposal techniques, where feasible. Vernon residents are subject to the Regional District's Water Restrictions Bylaw.

Given the jurisdictional responsibility for water supply (RDNO) and distribution (City of Vernon), at this time the City has no plans to undertake specific water supply plans, such as a drought management plan, but will participate in the development of any such plans at the request of RDNO, the Okanagan Basin Water Board or other agencies to ensure sufficient availability of water for all users. The City does, however, have significant policies related to the protection of water resources within its boundaries, as discussed in detail in RGS Goal 10 (Protect our watersheds), below.

The City will coordinate its water conservation goals and programs with RDNO as the benefits of domestic water conservation reduce the demands on both water supply and sanitary waste treatment and disposal.

9. Consider the true cost of water

Supporting policies: 10.1, 10.5, 10.6

The OCP policies are consistent with this RGS goal. Through the Sustainable Infrastructure Investment Plan (SIIP), the City seeks to develop and implement a consistent full cost accounting framework for municipal infrastructure that reflects the true cost of delivering a long term sustainable infrastructure system. This also includes the explicit goal of requiring all development to consider both onsite and offsite life cycle costs so as to be financially self supporting, at a minimum. Currently the City tracks and considers the extension of transportation assets as part of the development approval process. The intention is to include the extension of water, sewer and storm systems to further identify the potential long term operation, maintenance and replacement costs associated with a development proposal.

The City provides infrastructure and services related to sanitary collection, treatment and disposal through its sanitary utility. Upon completion of the Liquid Waste Management Plan, improvements and changes to the operational and disposal methods may be planned and integrated through asset management to maximize the benefits to reduce and reuse liquid waste and minimize costs.

In order to plan for growth within the community and the servicing of areas currently using onsite disposal systems, the City utilizes several processes for the extension of the sanitary collection system. Sewer main extensions are typically funded and constructed by developers to service areas of new development in the designated growth areas. Main extensions to existing unserviced developments or neighbourhoods are funded through Local Area Services or through Municipal Fee projects, whereby the costs are borne by the benefiting properties. Sewer main extensions are discouraged in the rural protection area, but may be required in some cases to provide existing development with a gravity system or when area wide failure of septic systems has occurred.

10. Protect our watersheds

11. Protect our parks, natural areas and open spaces

Supporting policies: 10.3, 10.4, 10.7, 10.8, 10.9, 13.1, 13.2, 13.3, 13.4, 13.5, 13.6, 13.7, 13.8, 13.9, 13.10, 13.11, 13.12, 13.13, 13.14, 13.15, 16.1, 16.7

The OCP policies are consistent with these RGS goals. The City has developed consistent, integrated environmental policy through the Environmental Management Areas (EMA) Strategy, which has been incorporated into the development approval process. The EMA Strategy provides an effective, transparent and biophysically appropriate strategy for use in land use decision making with the objectives of:

- protecting environmentally sensitive areas;
- managing development to avoid negative impacts on natural features and environmentally significant areas which ensure ecosystem resilience;
- supporting the reduction, prevention and mitigation of pollution and its sources in the air, water and soil; and
- protecting, conserving, restoring and enhancing natural areas.

The City supports the RGS direction to coordinate mapping initiatives consistently across the region. The EMA Strategy was founded on comprehensive environmental mapping conducted on the Greater Vernon area prior to 2007 and updated on a regional basis in 2013. Subsequently, detailed foreshore inventory mapping was undertaken by the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program with support from the City and the Regional District.

This data is utilized in the review of development applications and referrals. The EMA Strategy and accompanying Habitat Assessment Terms of Reference provide guidance on the required actions to be undertaken to protect sensitive ecosystems while balancing the demands of development, interests of residents and the promotion of a healthy, active community.

Section 13.0 Environment contains several supporting policies that speak to the protection, preservation and enhancement of ecosystems throughout the city; the reduction, prevention and mitigation of pollution and its sources impacting water; and the collaboration with neighbouring jurisdictions and senior levels of government to balance the interests of shoreline habitat protection with development and recreational activities, as well as to address issues of water quality improvement.

The City's ongoing development of the Liquid Waste Management Plan fundamentally addresses pollution prevention, drainage quality and quantity and the protection of our water resources. As a result of that process, the City may undertake additional policies or bylaws aimed at improvements to urban drainage and pollution prevention.

12. Reduce and prevent pollution

Supporting policies: 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 8.7, 10.3, 10.4, 10.9, 11.9, 11.10, 11.11, 12.1, 12.2, 12.3, 12.4, 12.5, 12.6, 12.7, 12.8, 12.9, 12.10, 12.11, 12.12, 12.13, 13.10, 13.14

The OCP policies are consistent with this RGS goal. Section 12.0 Energy contains several policies supporting energy efficient buildings, the use of green infrastructure, innovation in green building design and the promotion of energy conservation.

The City will explore dedicated funding to support drainage improvements that will improve water quality in our lakes and streams, as well as expand on the current water quality requirements of the Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw and Sanitary Use Bylaw through amendments that pro-actively protect the stormwater system.

13. Promote a regional approach to economic development

14. Encourage a sustainable, resilient and diverse regional economy

Supporting policies: 8.6, 8.13, 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 9.8, 11.3, 14.1, 14.2, 14.3, 14.4, 14.5, 14.6, 14.7, 14.8, 14.9, 15.3, 15.4, 15.5, 15.8, 15.16, 18.1, 18.2, 24.6

The OCP policies are consistent with these RGS goals. The City is committed to retaining and expanding local businesses, promoting the creation of new jobs, diversifying the economy and growing the commercial and industrial tax base.

The OCP speaks to the desirability of regional cooperation on key economic initiatives, particularly related to the industrial land supply. Given the lack of appropriate sites in Vernon for industrial uses, the City will work with RDNO and its members to assist businesses in locating industrial uses to appropriately designated sites within the region that are compatible with adjacent existing and planned uses. Another area of regional cooperation is on the development and maintenance of an inventory of employment lands throughout the region to help attract new businesses and allow existing businesses to expand. Further, the City has committed to the designation of the rail line as a transportation corridor, and strongly supports initiatives to maintain rail service to support the many businesses that depend on that service.

The City's growth strategy seeks to intensify employment activity in the City Centre and designated neighbourhood centres. Public and private capital investment in the City Centre and Waterfront Neighbourhood Centre are particular priorities at this time.

In addition to policies intended to attract investment to the community, attracting a strong workforce is also a priority. Policies throughout the OCP are intended to attract young families and youth through investment in amenities and facilities and the provision of attainable housing options. In addition, the City is committed to partnering with educational organizations such as the University of British Columbia - Okanagan, Okanagan College and School District #22 to maximize opportunities to produce a skilled workforce that meets the needs of growing Vernon businesses.

15. Manage regional transportation corridors

16. Support integrated regional transportation planning

Supporting policies: 5.1, 5.5, 7.3, 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.5, 11.6, 11.7, 11.8, 11.9, 11.10, 11.11, 11.12

The OCP policies are consistent with these RGS goals. The City is committed to working with its regional partners, senior levels of government, local agencies and community members on the development of efficient and cost effective transportation options that serve the diverse needs of our population. Fundamental to this is the City's growth strategy as embodied in Section 5.0 Growth Strategy and Land Use Plan. The growth strategy facilitates growth and redevelopment in the City Centre and Neighbourhood Districts, thereby maximizing the use of existing infrastructure while concentrating employment and medium and high density residential opportunities in the City Centre and identified neighbourhood centres. This creates both a north/south and west/east axis of higher density development areas, all connected by transit. In addition, the neighbourhood centres are intended to provide walking and cycling connections to the surrounding neighbourhoods, thereby giving residents options to access commercial services, amenities and transit.

Coordination with our regional partners and neighbours is explicitly identified in the Section 11.0 Transportation, as is the need to protect the major corridors identified in the Regional Growth Strategy. To that end, the City has worked cooperatively with RDNO on the development of the 25 Year Transit Future Plan and the development of the Pedestrian and Bike Master Plan to ensure the continuity of connections across jurisdictional boundaries. The City has also forwarded resolutions to the Union of BC Municipalities to encourage the Province to incorporate cycling infrastructure in highway construction (where appropriate),

as well as to create new funding mechanisms to support the local government's ability to invest in active transportation options such as walking and cycling.

17. Create effective, efficient and sustainable infrastructure

Supporting policies: 5.1, 5.3, 5.5, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10, 5.11, 6.4, 6.6, 7.3, 9.2, 10.1, 10.4, 10.5, 10.8, 10.9, 11.1, 11.2, 11.7, 11.9, 11.10, 11.11, 12.1, 12.2, 12.3, 12.4, 12.5, 12.6, 12.7, 12.8, 12.9, 12.10, 12.11, 12.12, 12.13, 12.14, 14.7

The OCP policies are consistent with this RGS goal. The sustainable management of infrastructure is a key principle of Section 5.0 Growth Strategy and Land Use Plan and Section 10.0 Infrastructure. The Sustainable Infrastructure Investment Plan seeks to define levels of service that are financially sustainable and maximize the efficient replacement of existing infrastructure for the benefit of all residents. The City has extensive policies to support and focus growth toward areas with existing infrastructure, as well as to ensure existing subdivisions reach build out stages before new greenfield subdivisions are approved.

The City supports regional cooperation on utility planning, and is committed to building and maintaining effective partnerships for the delivery of both water and sanitary sewer services.

18. Support and encourage a variety of housing options to meet the diverse housing needs of all residents in the region

Supporting policies: 5.3, 5.5, 6.4, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8, 7.9, 7.10, 7.11, 7.13, 12.2, 12.3, 12.7, 12.10, 12.12, 13.10

The OCP policies are consistent with this RGS goal. As part of the preparation of the OCP, the City undertook a housing needs assessment to identify gaps, challenges and policies to ensure that an appropriate range of housing options was available to meet both market and non-market demand. Housing affordability can be a challenge for many residents in the City, yet local government is very limited in its ability to contribute financially to the creation of new affordable and attainable housing units. Senior government subsidies are not a sustainable way to meet this need.

As such, the City has opted to utilize tools to encourage the provision of affordable and attainable housing units by working cooperatively with the development industry to create win-win situations. In exchange for increases in density and the ability to expedite development approvals, the City has been securing both rental and for sale units in new developments that are made available at below market rates and secured through housing agreements. New zoning regulations support the creation of small lot single and two family homes in the City Centre and Neighbourhood District, thereby providing more affordable options than traditional large lot development. Development Cost Charges are assessed both by proximity to the City Centre and by the size of the unit, thereby favouring smaller homes in the heart of the city. The City works with local stakeholders and industry partners to promote these initiatives, and continues to explore new opportunities and initiatives.

While the City supports energy efficient development and retrofits, as well as green building initiatives, it has limited ability to provide financial incentives. The City is committed to investing in cost effective upgrades at civic facilities.

19. Support regional governance based upon a foundation of regional cooperation

20. Pursue efficient, effective and fiscally responsible service delivery

Supporting policies: 9.1, 9.2, 11.2, 14.2, 15.4, 15.5, 17.2, 24.6

The OCP policies are consistent with this RGS goal in that they identify several specific initiatives and areas of mutual interest that effective regional cooperation can significantly further. Economic Development is a key area of mutual interest, and in 2011 the regional jurisdictions confirmed their desire to pursue participation in economic initiatives, led by the City of Vernon, on a voluntary project by project basis. The City recognizes that economic growth in the region benefits Vernon's business community and residential building sector.

The OCP also speaks to the desirability of partnering with agencies such as the Interior Health Authority and the Okanagan Basin Water Board, which furthers the RGS goal of considering partnerships with organizations prepared to invest in and/or support the goals and policies of the RGS.

In addition to the policies contained within the OCP, the service review discussions that are being concluded are looking to achieve the most effective, efficient and fiscally responsible service delivery for the benefit of all residents within the regional district, particularly at the sub regional level.

21. Reduce regional greenhouse gas emissions by 15% by 2020 and 25% by 2030

Supporting policies: 12.14

The OCP policy is consistent with this RGS goal. Vernon established GHG reduction targets through energy modeling processes undertaken as part of the Regional Growth Strategy and the development of the OCP. Local Government Act Section 473(3) establishes the requirement for inclusion of these targets in the Official Community Plan. To ensure that the targets set are those that can be met, the City developed an understanding of achievable emissions reduction targets in partnership with the other jurisdictions of the North Okanagan and during the BC Hydro Quickstart Program. As a result of these partnerships, a draft 2013 Community Energy and Emissions Plan (CEEP) was developed in 2013 and a 2% reduction per year to 2018 was identified as a goal. A 54% overall reduction in GHGs by 2050 was identified through the CEEP process.

While only one supporting policy speaks explicitly to this RGS goal, it must be mentioned that the many OCP supporting policies related to compact, complete development, the provision of alternate modes of transportation and other issues related to growth strategy and land use plan are the primary mechanisms by which this target can be achieved.

Implementation

As set out in the Implementation and Monitoring section of the Regional Growth Strategy, preparation and adoption of the Regional Context Statement is a key implementation tool that serves to implement Regional Growth Strategy policy with the City's OCP.

The City of Vernon and the Regional District of North Okanagan are committed to working in partnership to achieve the shared goals of the Regional Growth Strategy and Official Community Plan.

Section 446(4) of the Local Government Act requires that amendments to the Regional Context Statement be submitted to the Regional District of North Okanagan Board of Directors for acceptance. Should disagreement occur, both the City and the Regional District are committed to cooperative discussions to resolve disagreements in keeping with the provisions of the Local Government Act.



