



Municipal Requirements for Regional Context Statements

***Building Our Future: Implementing the
Regional Growth Strategy***

Introduction

The Local Government Act, Section 866 requires member municipalities to prepare a regional context statement following the adoption of a regional growth strategy. The regional context statement indicates how a municipality's Official Community Plan (OCP) conforms to the provisions of the regional growth strategy. A context statement is prepared by the municipality as an amendment to its OCP, or as an additional section in a new OCP.

According to the legislation, each member municipality must prepare a regional context statement within two years of adoption of the RGS. This means the regional context statements must be completed and submitted to the Regional Board before August 2005.

The purpose of this report is to describe the legislative and process requirements for a regional context statement. It was received for information by CRD Regional Planning Committee on February 18, 2004, and distributed to all member municipalities at the Committee's direction.

Overview

A regional context statement is essentially a chapter within an OCP which addresses how local planning and land use policy will work toward the goals and objectives established in the Regional Growth Strategy. The context statements provide the mechanism and opportunity to provide a local interpretation of the Regional Growth Strategy. It also provides the opportunity to clarify a number of issues that were raised during the RGS referral.

Regional context statements are a key implementation mechanism for the Regional Growth Strategy. It is important to note the Regional Growth Strategy is not binding on the member municipalities, however, the regional context statements are. As such, it is important to develop them in a careful manner.

The context statements should determine:

1. The extent to which the municipal OCP is consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy,
2. If it is not consistent, how the municipality intends to bring itself into consistency, and
3. The elements of the RGS which *are not* applicable to the municipality (e.g. development of urban centres in rural municipalities).

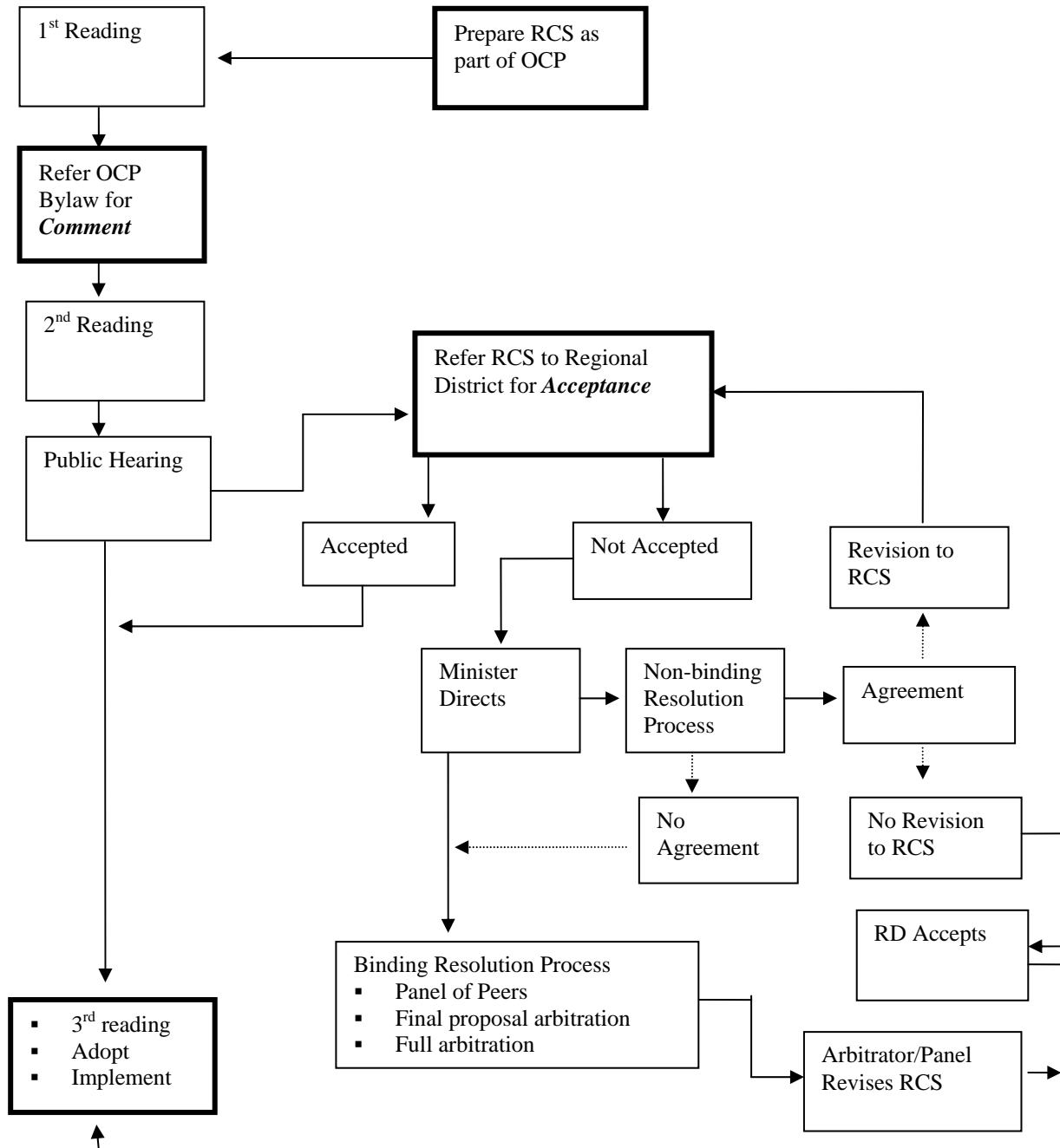
The Legislative Intent of Regional Context Statements

1. The regional context statement (RCS) was devised by the Province as a means of protecting a municipal council's authority to make local planning decisions while ensuring that the council and the regional board agree upon matters of legitimate regional interest.
2. A regional context statement is part of the OCP, and must be consistent with the rest of the OCP. As an amendment to an OCP, the RCS is binding on the Council that adopted it.
3. The legislation requires that the regional context statement spell out the relationship between the OCP and the content of the RCS. The intention is that all of the significant linkages would be identified. This would suggest that it would not be sufficient to simply acknowledge the broad goals or objectives of the RGS. The context statement would also have to identify the *specific policies and actions* proposed that would either affect the municipality or require action on the part of the municipality.
4. The legislation also requires that the regional context statement identify how the OCP is to be made consistent with the RGS over time. If a municipality indicates that certain parts of the OCP are not consistent with the RGS, it must indicate the steps that it will take to make it consistent.

The Acceptance Process for Regional Context Statements

5. Following the adoption of the Regional Growth Strategy by the Board (August 2003), each municipality must submit a proposed regional context statement to the Board within two years. The two-year period was created to allow municipalities to complete "in-stream" planning processes (e.g. a neighbourhood plan initiated prior to RGS adoption) and provide time to complete any technical work and consultation required to translate the strategic directions of the RGS into more specific planning actions.
6. The process for obtaining acceptance from the Board is very much like the process used to obtain acceptance for the RGS. It is recommended that a draft version of the regional context statement be sent to the regional district before second reading and the public hearing. This provides the opportunity to make any changes necessary without the need for formal bylaw amendment.
7. The regional context statement is subject to acceptance by the Regional Board to ensure that an appropriate level of consistency exists between the RGS and the local plans. If a Board doesn't accept a regional context statement, there is a dispute resolution process provided for in the Local Government Act similar to that used for the RGS process.

Adding a Regional Context Statement to an OCP



Consistency Considerations for the Regional Context Statements

The intent of the regional context statement is to indicate the relationship between the RGS and the municipal OCP. The RGS contains a combination of strategic directions, policy statements, and recommended actions. The regional context statement should indicate the nature and extent of consistency between the strategic directions and policy statements of the RGS and the policy directions of the OCP.

The RGS establishes 8 strategic directions, which include:

1. Keep urban settlement compact
2. Protect the integrity of rural communities
3. Protect regional green and blue space
4. Manage natural resources & the environment sustainability
5. Build complete communities
6. Improve housing affordability
7. Increase transportation choice
8. Strengthen the regional economy

The regional context statement must indicate how the municipality is consistent with the eight strategic directions.

Related to the strategic directions, are the six land use policy designations. These areas should be reflected in the OCP where applicable to the municipality in a manner consistent with Maps 3 & 4 of the RGS. The land use policy designations include:

1. Capital Green Lands Policy Area
2. Renewable Resource Lands Policy Area
3. Regional Urban Containment and Servicing Policy Area
4. Unprotected Green Space Policy Area
5. Rural/Rural Residential Policy Area
6. Victoria International Airport Special Policy Area.

The following are some of the planning issues that should be considered in determining consistency between an OCP and the Regional Growth Strategy:

Strategic Direction: Keeping Urban Settlement Compact

- Where applicable, indicate the location of the Urban Containment Boundary on an OCP map, consistent with RGS Map 3, and indicate the approaches to be used to maintain the integrity of the boundary and the planning concept behind it (*e.g. servicing strategies, pre-zoning, changing development incentives & disincentives to favour the desired growth pattern, etc.*)
- Where applicable, identify the location and policies associated with the Metropolitan Core and the major centres.

- Indicate the extent to which the OCP supports a mix of housing options in terms of type (singles, ground-oriented low & medium density housing, apartment style ranging from modest rental to high end of market ownership/condo) and market segments (families with children, seniors, different income levels, students, low-income workers, etc.).

Consistency Consideration: How does the OCP:

- Recognize and protect the urban containment boundary?
- Direct development into centres and transit-oriented corridors, and discourage (or contain) development elsewhere, in order to create the necessary critical mass of development in the centre?
- Provide for a mix of uses within the centres?
- Provide for a mix of housing types within, and in close proximity to, the centres?

Strategic Direction: Protecting the Integrity of Rural Communities

For those municipalities that are rural, or have rural communities:

- Indicate the extent to which the OCP supports the protection of rural character and indicate the options the municipality will consider to do this (e.g. designate the areas on the OCP land use maps, align the zoning bylaw provisions with the policy intent, provide for sensitive use and intensity transitions, utilize subdivision controls, consider alternative development standards and regulatory approaches – such as cluster development.
- Where applicable, indicate the location of the Capital Green Lands policy area (consistent with the RGS map #3).
- Where applicable, indicate the location of the Renewable Resource Lands policy area, consistent with the RGS map #3. Municipalities may also identify related policy and buffering requirements.
- Identify the mechanisms to limit the extent of rural development and subdivision to be consistent with the RGS growth projections and development strategies.

Consistency Consideration: How does the OCP:

- Recognize and protect the Agricultural Land Reserve, Capital Green Lands and Renewable Resource Lands?
- Provide opportunities for clustering new development to reduce the amount of land developed for rural-residential development?
- Minimize the potential for land-use conflicts?
- Manage the placement and extension of urban sewer and water services in rural areas and lands outside of the urban containment boundary?

Strategic Direction: Protecting Green & Blue Space

- Reflect the Green & Blue Spaces designations consistent with RGS Map #4 and explain how it will be protected from development (e.g. OCP designations, land acquisition)

- Identify the location(s) of the Unprotected Green Space Policy Area and explain the type of approaches that may be used to protect the sensitive environmental features. (e.g development permit area designations, conservation covenants, acquisition)

Consistency Consideration: How does the OCP:

- Recognize and protect the green and blue spaces indicated on Map #3 and #4?
- Provide for parks & trails?
- Protect the health and functioning of the watershed, particularly shorelines and streams?
- Describe the approaches used to protect the “unprotected policy areas”?

Strategic Direction: Manage Natural Resources and the Environment Sustainably

- Indicate the extent to which the OCP supports the principles of sustainability as outlined in this section of the RGS.

Consistency Consideration: How does the OCP:

- Support conservation of scarce resources, including water and land?
- Facilitate urban development within serviced areas?

Strategic Direction: Build Complete Communities

- Indicate the extent to which the OCP supports the development of the designated centres (to the extent applicable to the municipality)
- Refer to any OCP policies which support a greater integration of uses; support for transit-oriented development; jobs-housing balance; and greater choice in affordable housing types.

Consistency Consideration: How does the OCP:

- Address job/housing balance?
- Support mixed use developments within the Metropolitan Core and/or the major centres (where relevant to the particular municipality)?
- Support mixed use development in neighbourhood and village centres, and in locations well-served by transit?

Strategic Direction: Improve Housing Affordability

- Indicate the extent to which the OCP addresses the issue of affordable housing

Consistency Consideration: How does the OCP

- Provide for a range of housing types to accommodate a range of household needs and incomes?
- Facilitate housing development in locations which reduce the need to travel by car to reach services?

Strategic Direction: Increasing Transportation Choice

- Indicate the extent to which the OCP supports a comprehensive transportation system that includes a variety of travel modes, including driving, cycling, and walking. Indicate the approaches the municipality will consider to make the system work well and to make it convenient and desirable for people to utilize options to the car.
- Indicate if the municipality supports any measures intended to alter travel behaviour away from trend patterns?

Consistency Consideration: How does the OCP:

- Encourage pedestrian and transit supportive developments in appropriate locations?
- Encourage mixed-use development in centres & transit corridors to minimise auto-dependency?
- Provide for the safe and convenient use of auto-alternatives, including transit, walking and cycling?

Strategic Direction: Strengthening the Regional Economy

- Indicate how the OCP addresses the economic dimension of sustainable development.
- Where applicable, indicate any policy or strategy support for rural-based business, ranging from small-scale produce sales to resource-based industry (especially value-added forest products and high value-added agricultural products).

Consistency Consideration: How does the OCP:

- Recognise and protect the economic potential of renewable resource lands?
- Work toward a more balanced distribution of jobs and housing, esp. around the designated centres?
- Support appropriate location and policies for home-based and farm-based businesses?

Implementation Section: Inter-jurisdictional Planning

Consistency consideration: How does the OCP:

- Recognize the inter-municipal and inter-regional linkages related to settlement patterns, transportation routes, and economic development?
- Consider development impacts on other jurisdictions?

While the provincial legislation establishes the requirement for a regional context statement, the municipality determines the format and content. Examples of regional context statements for other BC municipalities, along with some suggestions for addressing RGS-related issues can be found through the following list of web contacts.

City of New Westminster OCP: www.city.new-westminister.bc.ca/cityhall/planning

City of Nanaimo: www.city.nanaimo.bc.ca/c_strateggic/pdf/ocp_12.pdf

City of Parksville: http://city.parksville.bc.ca/downloads/bylaw1370_part6.pdf (their context statement indicates wording for where they are not consistent with the regional growth strategy)

District of North Vancouver: www.district.north-van.bc.ca

City of Port Coquitlam: www.city.port-coquitlam.bc.ca

City of Kelowna: www.city.kelowna.bc.ca (see OCP chapter 2)

City of Vancouver: www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/bylaws/odp/rcs.pdf

City of Richmond: www.city.richmond.bc.ca/ocp/ocp98/ocp98_idex.htm This is a good, straightforward context statement. It is organised under the strategic directions of the GVRD growth strategy. It also provides information on dealing with ALR and related buffering.

For more information on the requirements and process for regional context statements in the Capital Region, please contact CRD Regional Planning Services.