

CAPITAL REGIONAL DISTRICT

Staff Report to the Regional Planning Committee
Meeting of Wednesday, March 21, 2001

SUBJECT:

Comparison of the draft *Regional Growth Strategy* to *Climate Crisis: Energy Solutions for B.C.*, a report by the David Suzuki Foundation

BACKGROUND:

The Federal and Provincial governments have indicated that they want to reduce energy demands and greenhouse gas emissions as partners in agreements entered into by Canada, specifically the Rio de Janeiro Treaty which took effect in 1994. The David Suzuki Foundation recently published *Climate Crisis: Energy Solutions for B.C.* (to be handed out at the meeting). The primary focus of the report is to identify provincially related general categories of energy users and offer means and methods of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, particularly Carbon Dioxide (CO²). The means and methods are directly related to land use issues, transportation planning issues and environmental protection. At the local level, initiatives such as the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) establish land use and transportation patterns that, due to their nature, increase or reduce greenhouse gas emissions. For information of the Regional Planning Committee, this report provides a brief comparison of some of the key components in the RGS and the Climate Crisis report.

DISCUSSION:

In general, the report *Climate Crisis: Energy Solutions for B.C.* identifies energy-related problems that have resulted in an increased level of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (CO²) in the world's atmosphere, and actions that can be taken to address these issues in B.C. Chapter 1 in the report provides a discussion on three main themes also covered by the draft RGS - Land Use, Transportation and Environmental Protection. It is noted that the Suzuki Report goes into considerable detail to identify areas where human activities create greenhouse gases and provides a number of policies for energy conservation and possible reduction of the gases. The Regional Growth Strategy is focused more on creating livable, economically viable and sustainable communities. However, it is worth noting that in many cases, both the RGS and Suzuki Report promote policies and actions that originate from different intents and travel on different paths, but ultimately arrive at the same location. This is summarised as follows.

Land Use

The Suzuki report recommends two main actions under the section titled Urban Design.

- Identify areas for compact and nodal development in regional land use plans.

- Zone for mixed-use and intensification.

The RGS under section 1.1, Keeping Urban Settlement Compact, proposes 5 measures.

- Establish a strong mixed-use Metropolitan Core in downtown Victoria;
- Accommodate a minimum of 15% of the region's cumulative new dwelling units to 2026 within the City of Victoria, to reinforce the Metropolitan Core;
- Focus new growth primarily in eight Major Centres revitalized as walkable, transit-focused complete communities with a dense mix of businesses, housing, services and public open space;
- Increase the amount of detached and ground access housing within the urban containment and servicing area in the core municipalities of Victoria, Esquimalt, Saanich and Oak Bay by 5% over 1996 designated capacities, by 2011; and,
- Locate a minimum of 90% of new housing starts to 2026 within the Regional Urban Containment and Servicing area.

As can be seen, both the Suzuki report and RGS promote the concept of Urban Containment Areas (UCA) and higher densities of building in compact urban centres which has the effect of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The Suzuki report goes even further by providing density targets under its many policies. One such target is that 40-50 people per hectare is an efficient compact urban design that also allows for the potential for improved mass transit. The draft RGS measures compare favourably to this goal as the proposed densities for the City of Victoria are near those suggested.

Transportation

A major benefit of the use of Urban Containment Areas and the concentration of people in a number of transit linked communities are the possibilities of creating efficiencies in transportation. Reducing the number of vehicles on roads and reducing both travel times and distances has an obvious positive effect on the amount of greenhouse gas, specifically CO², generated from these activities. The Suzuki report focus on these as very desirable goals under the Transportation Management policies;

- Invest in public transportation
- Integrate ferry, rail and transit service routes

The RGS encourages “Increased Transportation Choices” under the Transportation section, and action 1 is very comparable;

- The CRD agrees to partner with the Province and member municipalities to prepare and establish, through an implementation agreement, a Regional Transportation Strategy. The strategy would support the development objectives and pattern of major centres of the Regional Growth Strategy, and includes strategies and actions for walking, cycling, public transit, goods movement and a major street system

Environmental Protection

One of the differences between the two documents is the focus on environmental protection and the approach they take to ensure protection. The Suzuki report takes the position that "...compact and nodal development provides a series of other environmental and social benefits..." which in effect, can be defined as a means of protecting the environment because of the compactness of the built-up environment (page 23, paragraph 4). The RGS does this but goes further encouraging environmental and open space protection through implementation of the Regional Green/Blue Spaces Strategy. The intent is to ensure that a good part of the region's land base is reserved for open space that allows the environment to remain untouched.

Summary

Both the RGS and Suzuki report focus on aspects of quality of life improvements, albeit the Suzuki report looks at reducing gas emissions created by human activities, whereas the RGS focuses on long-term land use to create complete communities. However, when compared the result is that both documents appear to support increased long term planning so that land use efficiencies are established that will ultimately reduce cost, protect areas from urban sprawl and thereby reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Regional Planning Committee receive this report for information.

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS:

W.M. Jordan, Executive Director