

DATE OF MEETING May 17, 2021

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SUBJECT REGIONAL GROWTH STRATEGY AMENDMENT – NANAIMO AIRPORT

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To obtain Council approval to accept the Regional District of Nanaimo's Regional Growth Strategy amendment for the Nanaimo Airport lands.

Recommendation

That Council:

1. support the proposed Regional Growth Strategy amendment; and
2. direct Staff to forward Council's decision to the Regional District of Nanaimo's Board.

BACKGROUND

On 2021-MAR-24, the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) Board referred a proposed Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) amendment bylaw for the Nanaimo Airport lands to the City to consider for acceptance (see Attachments A and B). In accordance with the RGS process for 'major' amendments, the City has 60 days to submit a resolution to the RDN Board regarding the City's acceptance of the proposed amendment.

Following approval by the City along with other RDN member municipalities, the existing RGS was adopted by the RDN Board on 2011-NOV-22. The RGS is a strategic plan that represents a commitment between the RDN and its member municipalities to support a more sustainable region by coordinating actions that foster shared sustainable social, economic, and environmental goals. Managing growth in a sustainable manner through land use designations and a Growth Containment Boundary (GCB) are fundamental aspects of this strategic agreement.

Consistent with the RGS amendment approval process and in accordance with the *Local Government Act*, the RDN must determine whether a proposed amendment is considered 'minor' or 'major' prior to referring the proposed changes to member municipalities for either their feedback or acceptance. The types of RGS amendments considered 'minor' can include those that result from a full Official Community Plan review or administrative text or mapping changes. Amendments considered 'major', include those that lead to adverse impacts to the environment and agricultural lands, require significant works to address a natural hazard, require new community water and sewer systems outside of the GCB and/or are not consistent with measures or policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or improve air quality.

The Nanaimo Airport Commission (NAC) owns and operates the Nanaimo Airport. In 2019, the NAC updated its Land Use Plan, and an associated Airport Master Plan.

The updated Airport Plans do not align with the existing land use designations in the RGS for a portion of the airport lands:

- between the airport terminal and the Trans-Canada Highway, and
- at the southern tip of the airport at Simpson Road.

In 2019, the RDN Board, in consultation with the NAC, initiated amendments to the Regional Growth Strategy, Electoral Area A Official Community Plan (OCP), and “Regional District of Nanaimo Land Use and Subdivision Bylaw No. 500, 1987” (“RDN Zoning Bylaw”) to align with the Nanaimo Airport Land Use Plan and Nanaimo Airport Master Plan. The proposed amendments are intended to both recognize and support existing and future airport operations, and facilitate future commercial development on lands fronting the Trans-Canada Highway. Before the Electoral Area A OCP and RDN Zoning Bylaw amendments can be adopted by the RDN, an amendment to the RGS is first required.

DISCUSSION

In order to align the RGS with the Nanaimo Airport Land Use Plan and Nanaimo Airport Master Plan, the RDN is proposing to amend the RGS maps, as shown in Attachment C, by:

- extending the Growth Containment Boundary (Cassidy Village Centre boundary) to include a section of the highway frontage of the airport lands, and designating those lands Rural Village Centre; and
- changing the area of industrial-designated land by adjusting the boundary between the Industrial Lands and the Resource Lands and Open Space designations.

Expanding the Growth Containment Boundary and associated Rural Village Centre land use designation (approximately 12.4 ha) is intended to support future highway and airside commercial development on the east side of the Trans-Canada Highway for commercial uses, as well as passenger flow and parking.

Adjusting the area of land designated for industrial use on the airport lands would recognize existing airport-related industrial use and allow for a small amount (approximately 7.3 ha) of further light industrial development, as well as terminal expansion. The City’s 2020 Land Inventory and Capacity Analysis (see Attachment D) identifies the need for, and supports increasing the availability of industrial land in the city. The report further notes that the NAC’s proposed investments in airport infrastructure are expected to increase the demand for industrial land in the region.

The proposed land use designation changes would support more intense use of the airport lands, and as such, require the NAC to expand its drinking water supply system, upgrade its wastewater disposal system, and complete highway access improvements.

The airport lands are identified as critical habitat of the Coastal Vesper Sparrow, and are located over the Cassidy aquifer. The NAC’s Airport Master Plan identifies protection measures for the habitat of the Coastal Vesper Sparrow Habitat and the Cassidy aquifer.

OPTIONS

1. That Council:

1. Support the proposed Regional Growth Strategy amendment; and
 2. Direct Staff to forward Council's decision to the Regional District of Nanaimo's Board.
- **Advantages:** Supporting the proposed RGS amendment would facilitate the Nanaimo Airport Commission's plans for the growth and development of the Nanaimo Airport. The proposed RGS amendments are consistent with the NAC's Land Use and Airport Master Plans.
 - **Disadvantages:** Supporting expansion of highway commercial uses may increase vehicle-centred strip-mall commercial development outside of the city boundaries and impact the evolution of sustainable, walkable, efficiently-serviced commercial centres in South Nanaimo. Should this occur, it would be contrary to RGS growth management goals. Future development that would be supported through these amendments would require additional servicing and transportation infrastructure improvements in an area with environmental constraints that would need to be addressed.
 - **Financial Implications:** There would be no direct financial implication to supporting the proposed RGS amendment application for the Nanaimo airport.

2. That Council:

1. Deny the proposed Regional Growth Strategy amendment with justifications and provide alternative direction; and
 2. Direct Staff to forward Council's decision to the Regional District of Nanaimo's Board.
- **Advantages:** By providing alternative direction, Council may propose to the RDN an alternative amendment to the Regional Growth Strategy.
 - **Disadvantages:** Not supporting the application may have relationship considerations between the NAC and City of Nanaimo. Furthermore, this would trigger a dispute resolution process as part of the RGS amendment process that may be resource-intensive for the City and RDN.
 - **Financial Implications:** There are potential financial implications associated with a potential dispute resolution process should the City not support the proposed RGS amendment application for the Nanaimo airport.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The Regional Growth Strategy is meant to coordinate the actions of member municipalities to foster sustainable social, economic, and environment communities.
- The RDN Board initiated amendments to the Regional Growth Strategy to align the RGS with the Nanaimo Airport Commission's Land Use and Airport Master Plans.
- The proposed RGS land use amendments would facilitate future commercial development on NAC lands along the Trans-Canada Highway, and adjust the area of available land for industrial use at the airport.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: RDN Referral Letter of 2021-MAR-24

ATTACHMENT B: RDN Bylaw No. 1615.04, 2020

ATTACHMENT C: Proposed Amendment to RGS for Nanaimo Airport lands

ATTACHMENT D: Link to “City of Nanaimo Land Inventory and Capacity Analysis”

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