Strategic Planning Session Report
The Thompson-Nicola Regional District (TNRD) held its 2007 strategic planning session in Kamloops on April 18th and 19th. Nineteen of 22 Board members participated, along with eight members of the District’s senior management team.

TNRD Chair Peter Milobar and CAO Greg Toma hosted the 2007 session. Linda Allen of CitySpaces Consulting was the facilitator. At the outset, it was emphasized that the 2007 session marks a shift from an administration-led process to one that relies on the input of Board members to set goals and priorities. It was noted that 2007 is the 40th anniversary of the TNRD.

Ms. Allen introduced the agenda, format and intended outcomes of the strategic planning session. She also provided comparative information for the TNRD and its eight neighbouring Regional Districts. Among BC’s 28 regional districts:

- TNRD has the 6th highest population at 122,000+. (2006)
- TNRD has the 2nd lowest operating expenditures per capita. (2005)
- TNRD has the 5th lowest capital expenditures per capita (2005).

The remainder of the strategic planning session was conducted as a small group basis with reporting back to the plenary. The following material provides a synopsis of these group discussions.

**What are the TNRD’s Accomplishments?**

While a wide range of activities was identified in the group discussion, the following topics were repeatedly noted as significant accomplishments.

- Quality library system.
- Prudent fiscal planning and management.
- Good working relationship between the Board and staff.
- High profile film commission.
- 911 Service / Emergency planning.
Are we fulfilling our Mission?

The mission of British Columbia’s Regional Districts is explicitly set out in the *Local Government Act*. The groups were asked to comment on how well the mission is being fulfilled by the TNRD. Generally, there was a shared view that the RD is carrying out its mission but is challenged by certain matters that are outside its jurisdiction/control. These include:

- New and changing regulatory requirements that are costly and may inhibit ability to provide services (e.g. water systems).
- Pine beetle impacts — social, economic, and environmental.
- Economic diversification and growth (decision-making of the private sector).

The groups also tackled the question from the perspective of “what can we do better?” The following topics were repeatedly mentioned.

- Seek out opportunities to improve our relationships with First Nations.
- Improve communications with the public.
- Engage in more lobbying with BC government.
- Complete the solid waste plan review.
- Ramp up staffing to meet the expressed demand for the TNRD to take over the operation of community water systems. This requires both technical and project management resources.
- Undertake strategic planning more often.
- Regional parks – could be looking for attractions/sites for public use
- Economic development – explore new industry(s) for region

What is the Vision for the TNRD?

The groups’ discussion took two tacks — one that focused on a corporate vision and values; the other focused on a broader community vision.

**Corporate Vision:**
The TNRD is committed to providing excellent governance that achieves — and exceeds — our legislative mission. We will accomplish this through responsiveness to community needs, innovative leadership, transparent decision-making, fiscal choices that provide value for our taxpayers, and effective internal and external communications. We will be an employer of choice, fostering a positive and ethical working environment, encouraging innovation, and demonstrating sustainable practices.
**Community Vision:**
To be the best region in British Columbia to live, work and play. We place high value on environmental, economic and social sustainability, uphold measures to create safe, diverse, affordable communities, and support continuing business investment.

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**What are the top goals and priorities in the next 2-3 years?**

The groups covered a number of topics. For this synopsis, they are grouped into services, policy and governance.

**Services-oriented:**
- Economic development, diversification and differentiation. Recognize our opportunities and challenges and position the TNRD and its members to be business-friendly and welcoming of newcomers to our region. Work proactively to address the impacts of the Mountain Pine Beetle infestation.
- Safe drinking water. Renew efforts to tackle the challenge of taking over responsibility for community water systems. Acknowledge that this will require additional staff resources.
- Solid waste management. Completion of updated plan, be proactive in utilizing new technologies.
- Emergency preparedness. Continue to recognize the critical importance of this service in light of the potential impacts of climate change on the region.

**Policy-oriented**
- Protect and preserve the region’s rural/wilderness character.
- Embrace sustainability and environmental stewardship in carrying out our mission, including through the delivery of regional services.
- Be a “green” corporation.

**Governance-oriented**
- Continue to work collaboratively at a regional level and respect sub-regional differences.
- Continue to work with neighbouring regions and First Nations on common interests and investigate the potential for partnerships for service delivery.
- Make greater efforts to collaborate with First Nations communities within the region.
- Increase efforts to make the Provincial government aware of the region’s needs and lobby for additional provincial funding (e.g. transportation, health, MPB transition).
- Improve communications with the public about the role, services and initiatives of the TNRD (e.g. interactive website, annual report).
- Ensure appropriate and adequate resources to provide services.
**What services should be enhanced?**

This discussion identified several existing services that should be improved or enhanced. It was acknowledged that there are staffing and financial challenges to consider and, consequently, the need for management to develop an implementation program.

**Services-oriented:**

1. Community water systems. TNRD needs to do what is necessary to ramp up to assume responsibility for the operation of community water systems where there are requests to do so. The existing moratorium should be lifted as soon as possible. This requires additional staffing/resources — environmental engineering, project management, operations and monitoring. Initial emphasis should be on failing systems, but TNRD should investigate a model (financial, operational) for new systems where they are needed.
2. Fire protection. Examine fire protection needs and investigate regional or subregional fire departments. Continuing concern with increased settlement in fire interface areas.
3. Regional Parks. Examine new opportunities for tourism.
4. Bylaw enforcement. Support the enhancement of this service.
5. Broadband Internet and cell phone services need to be region-wide (not directly TNRD delivered).
6. Communications: Improve both internal and external. Some other RD’s offer interactive web-based services (e.g. payments, plan approvals) and have search engines. Need to improve customer service and educate regional residents on the role and services of TNRD. Consider 0.5 FTE communications coordinator.
7. Library branches. Investigate the need for any new branch locations.

**Should any new services/approaches be considered?**

This discussion was preceded with a live-link to a few websites of other Regional Districts (e.g. Fraser Fort George, Fraser Valley, Nanaimo, Central Okanagan). The following topics arose from the discussion.

- Create more opportunities for communications with First Nations — formal and informal. Develop an implementation plan for this.
- Consider a coordinated approach to Arts, Culture and Heritage, possibly collocated with library system – potential region-wide service.
- Investigate alternative energy sources — cogeneration, wind power.
- Consider partnering with others to build “assisted living facilities” in rural areas. Seniors have few choices but to move to larger centres.
• Consider ways and means to encourage greater volunteer participation on EA service committees. This is an important familiarization opportunity for potential future EA Directors and services to increase awareness of TNRD activities.

**TNRD’s Committee Structure/Governance**

Thursday morning’s session involved a recap of the previous day’s events. The fourth and final group session focussed on whether the existing committee structure is the best arrangement or whether some consolidations or realignments would be more effective.

• There was a general view that the existing committee structure provides an opportunity for all Board members to participate and that the work of the TNRD is being accomplished. It was recognized that some committees have a clearly defined scope of work / time frame (e.g. Audit) while the work program for other committees is less clear or developed on an issue-only basis. It was also noted that staff attendance and committee agendas/minutes can be very time consumptive.


• Maintain special purpose committees as single-purpose, and time-limited (e.g. Solid Waste Plan, Drinking Water Plan, MPB).

• Consider establishing a Government Relations Committee comprised of the Chair, Vice Chair, CAO and possibly others depending on the subject. Main purposes: to raise TNRD issues and funding requests with the Provincial Government and to be a channel for the Board to bring forward resolutions to OMMA, UBCM, and FCM.

• Have the CAO develop a clear terms of reference for each committee, including periods of appointment and revolving Chair.

**In Conclusion**

The participants were asked for feedback on their experience and whether they felt that they had met the intended objectives of the 2007 strategic planning session. Peter Milobar and Greg Toma thanked everyone for their involvement and outlined the intended “next steps.”