

RESULTS OF THE JANUARY 2009

COMOX VALLEY REGIONAL DISTRICT

RESIDENT SURVEY

COMMISSIONED BY



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SURVEY OBJECTIVES

This survey of residents of the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) was undertaken to obtain residents' opinions about the regional district in general, and about various regional strategies being discussed by the CVRD. The specific objectives of the work were to:

- determine how often and by what method residents contacted the CVRD;
- identify the types of information residents were seeking when they made contact, and measure satisfaction with the service they received;
- determine the opinion residents have of the CVRD overall;
- identify sources that residents use for information about the regional district;
- discover the extent to which residents have heard or seen anything about CVRD activities in recent months;
- measure the level of awareness of regional strategies being discussed by the CVRD, and determine the importance residents place on these strategies;
- gather information on residents' use of and opinion of regional parks;
- identify priorities among residents for regional strategies over the next two years; and
- profile responses by key demographics, including age, home ownership, length of residence, and area of residence.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

The survey design consisted of telephone interviews with a random sample of 500 residents of the CVRD. The margin of error for a sample size of 500 is at most $\pm 4.4\%$, 19 times out of 20. For statistics based on smaller portions of the sample, the margins of error will be larger. In reporting the survey findings, the word “significant” is used to identify that the percentage change being noted is statistically different at a 95% level of confidence.

Satisfaction With the CVRD

- Overall, about 1 in 5 (21%) residents have contacted the CVRD in the past year, including 10% who made contact by phone, and 6% who visited a regional district office in person.
- Among those who made contact with the CVRD, most (82%) were satisfied with the service they received, including about half (49%) who were “very satisfied”.
- More than half (55%) of all residents surveyed have a positive opinion of the CVRD, while just 15% have a negative opinion, and 30% did not know or did not have an opinion. Considering only those who expressed an opinion, 79% had a positive opinion of the CVRD, while just 21% had a negative opinion.

Awareness of CVRD Issues

- “Local community newspaper” (71%) is the main source of information about the CVRD among residents of the region, followed by “the website” (13%).
- About half (49%) of residents have read or heard something in the past few months about the activities of the CVRD.
- Over half (54%) of residents surveyed are at least “somewhat aware” of the services offered by the CVRD, although just 9% said they were “very aware”.
- A total of 51% of residents are aware that the CVRD is developing a number of different regional strategies. However, when presented with the specific strategies, awareness stood at 70% for the regional water strategy, followed by the growth strategy (36%), sewer strategy (31%), and sustainability strategy (27%).
- Each of the four regional strategies were rated as at least “somewhat important” by a strong majority of residents, with the greatest importance being placed on the regional water strategy (90%), followed by the sewer strategy (85%), growth strategy (84%), and sustainability strategy (79%).

Regional Parks

- Two-thirds (66%) of those surveyed said that they or someone in their household visits a regional park at least once a month, including 7% who do so almost daily, and 27% who use a park once or twice per week.
- The most important benefits of the regional parks as identified by residents included “protecting greenspace for walking, cycling, and other non-motorized recreation” (81% identified this as a first, second, or third benefit), and “protecting wildlife habitat and ecosystems” (73%).

Regional District Priorities

- Preserving agricultural land was identified as a priority among residents, as 92% agreed that the CVRD should pursue this strategy, followed by 78% who agreed with expanding the regional park system, while 48% agreed with promoting higher density development to encourage transit use.

SURVEY CONCLUSIONS

The January 2009 survey of CVRD residents shows that residents generally have a positive view of the regional district, and although relatively few residents have made contact with the CVRD in the past year, most of those who have were satisfied with the service they received. The survey also showed that a large majority of residents turn to their local community newspapers to get information about the CVRD, and that about half are aware of current CVRD activities, and the services they offer.

The survey examined the level of awareness among residents of different strategies currently being developed by the CVRD. Overall, about half of residents said they were aware that the regional district was pursuing various strategies. Moreover, when asked directly, a significant majority (70%) were aware of the regional water strategy, while approximately one-third were aware of each of the other strategies including the growth strategy, sewer strategy, and sustainability strategy. Awareness of the water strategy was further confirmed by the more detailed unaided responses given by residents when asked what they knew about it, as most residents were able to identify a specific issue related to the regional water strategy (the installation of water meters being the single most mentioned). While each of the four regional strategies is viewed as important by a large majority of CVRD residents, the importance residents placed on the regional water strategy was significantly higher compared to the others.

CVRD residents frequently visit regional parks, and are conscious of the benefits these parks provide for the region, particularly those of protecting area greenspace, and preserving wildlife habitats. The survey revealed strong support for preserving agricultural land in the region, and for expanding the regional park system by acquiring additional parkland, while support was significantly softer for promoting higher density development to encourage transit use.

METHODOLOGY

A. Survey Design, Margin of Error and Sample Selection

The survey design consisted of telephone interviews with a random sample of 500 residents of the CVRD. A road directory was provided by the CVRD that identified the municipality/ electoral area associated with each road name and address range in the district. Venture had a random sample of current telephone numbers drawn based on the road names and address ranges provided. Survey participants were asked to confirm their street name and then asked if they lived within a specified address range. The area of residence used in the tabulations is based on the CVRD road directory information. As well, respondents were screened to ensure that they were 18 years of age or older, a decision maker in the household, and that no one in the household worked for the CVRD, a provider of local government services within the region, or worked in the market research, media, or advertising industries. The margin of error for a sample size of 500 is at most $\pm 4.4\%$, 19 times out of 20. For statistics based on smaller portions of the sample, the margins of error will be larger. This is an important consideration when interpreting the cross-tabulated results in Appendix A, including results by specific areas within the regional district. The table below provides a listing of the margins of error for various sample sizes that can be used when interpreting the detailed tabulations in Appendix A.

Margin of Error for Selected Sample Proportions and Different Samples								
Sample Proportion	Sample Size (n) and Margin of Error (\pm) Using a 95% Level of Confidence							
	n=50	n=100	n=150	n=200	n=250	n=300	n=400	n=500
10%	8.3%	5.9%	4.8%	4.2%	3.7%	3.4%	2.9%	2.6%
20%	11.1%	7.8%	6.4%	5.5%	5.0%	4.5%	3.9%	3.5%
30%	12.7%	9.0%	7.3%	6.4%	5.7%	5.2%	4.5%	4.0%
40%	13.6%	9.6%	7.8%	6.8%	6.1%	5.5%	4.8%	4.3%
50%	13.9%	9.8%	8.0%	6.9%	6.2%	5.7%	4.9%	4.4%
60%	13.6%	9.6%	7.8%	6.8%	6.1%	5.5%	4.8%	4.3%
70%	12.7%	9.0%	7.3%	6.4%	5.7%	5.2%	4.5%	4.0%
80%	11.1%	7.8%	6.4%	5.5%	5.0%	4.5%	3.9%	3.5%
90%	8.3%	5.9%	4.8%	4.2%	3.7%	3.4%	2.9%	2.6%

The sample selection process ensured that a minimum number of respondents were surveyed from each of the six areas within the CVRD, including Courtenay, Comox, Cumberland, and Electoral Areas A-C.

Since the survey asked for a decision maker in the household, sample weighting reflected the aggregate distribution of the population within the six areas of the regional district. The sample weighting ensured that Courtenay represented 37% of the sample, followed by Comox (21%), Cumberland (5%), and Electoral Areas A (12%), B (13%), C (13%). For full details on the CVRD population distribution, see the 2006 Canada Census population statistics on the CVRD website.

B. Data Collection Process

The data were collected using a telephone survey methodology. All survey pretesting and interviewing was undertaken during the period January 6 to January 13, 2009. The average time to complete each interview was just under 12 minutes, excluding the time to screen and make contact with a respondent. Of all households reached where someone qualified to do the survey, just over half (53%) completed the entire survey.

The questionnaires were completed using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) procedure. Data were entered into the computer as each interview progressed, and an audit of the data was carried out to ensure accuracy. Coding categories for the open-ended questions were determined based upon all of the completed surveys. Analysis of the responses was undertaken using a comprehensive statistical software package.

C. Questionnaire Design and Reporting of the Findings

The questionnaire was designed by Venture Market Research in consultation with Leigh Carter, General Manager of Corporate Communications for the Comox Valley Regional District.

Since the survey questionnaire included skip patterns, the number of respondents may vary from one question to another. It is important to note the changing number of survey participants answering each question when consulting the detailed tabulations provided in Appendix A. The total percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding to whole percentages, or where multiple responses were permitted.

In reporting the survey findings, the word significant is used to identify that the percentage change being noted is statistically different at a 95% level of confidence.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Age

A majority (57%) of residents surveyed were aged 55 and over, while 33% were aged 35 - 54, 9% were aged 18 - 34, and 1% declined to answer.

Gender

Data collection ensured that an even gender distribution (50% male and 50% female) was achieved.

Household Tenure

Almost 9 in 10 (89%) residents surveyed own their home, while 10% rent their accommodations, less than 0.5% have other living arrangements, and less than 0.5% declined to provide this information.

Length of Residence

About two-thirds (67%) of those surveyed have lived in the CVRD more than 10 years, while 11% have lived in the region for 7 to 10 years, 10% have lived there 4 to 6 years, 8% for 1 to 3 years, and 3% have lived in the region for less than a year.

Household Size

A total of 14% of respondents are from single person households, while 53% are from two-person households, 17% live in households with three people, 12% are from four-person households, and 4% are from households with five or more people, while 1% declined to answer.

Area of Residence

More than one-third (37%) of respondents live in Courtenay, while 21% live in Comox, 5% live in Cumberland, and the remainder live in the unincorporated electoral districts including 12% in Area A, 13% in Area B, and 13% in Area C.

SURVEY FINDINGS

A. Satisfaction With the CVRD (Q1-Q7)

Overall, 21% of those surveyed said they have contacted the CVRD in the past year, including 10% who made contact via phone, and 6% who made contact in person.

- More than one-third (34%) of those in each of Area B and Area C contacted the CVRD, compared to 20% or fewer residents in each of the other regions.
- Homeowners (23%) were significantly more likely to have contacted the CVRD in the past year than those who rent their accommodation (3%).
- Respondents aged 35 - 54 (26%) were significantly more likely to have made contact than those aged 18 - 34 (12%), and those aged 55 and over (18%).

When the 88 respondents who contacted the CVRD were asked to identify the reasons for their contact, those provided most often included:

- ▶ “To get information on planning/ zoning/ subdivision” (13%);
- ▶ “To get a building permit” (8%);
- ▶ “To get information on garbage dump/ recycling services” (8%); and
- ▶ “To inquire about Water Supply Services (e.g. hook-up/ quality/ water meters)” (6%).

More than 8 in 10 (82%) of those who had made contact with the CVRD during the past year were satisfied with the service they received, including 49% who were “very satisfied”.

Among the 15 respondents who were dissatisfied with the service they received when they contacted the CVRD, the reasons for dissatisfaction were:

- ▶ “They weren’t helpful/ didn’t listen to concerns” (8 respondents);
- ▶ “They did not have correct information” (3);
- ▶ “I didn’t get a reply” (2); and
- ▶ “Staff were rude/ unprofessional” (2).

Residents were asked if they had a positive or negative opinion of the CVRD. Overall, more than half (55%) said they had a positive opinion of the regional district, while just 15% said they had a negative opinion, as seen in Table 1. None of the respondents in Cumberland had a negative opinion of the CVRD.

Table 1: Residents' Opinion of the CVRD by Area							
Opinion	Total	Courtenay	Comox	Cumberland	Area A	Area B	Area C
Positive	55%	53%	53%	70%	56%	56%	52%
Negative	15%	14%	13%	-	12%	24%	22%
Don't Know/ No Opinion	30%	33%	33%	30%	32%	20%	26%

- Respondents aged 18 - 34 were significantly more likely to have a positive opinion (74%) of the CVRD than those aged 35 - 54 (57%), or those aged 55 and over (51%).
- Females (61%) viewed the regional district positively, significantly more often than males (49%).

Considering only those respondents who expressed a definitive opinion, nearly 8 in 10 (79%) had a positive opinion about the CVRD, while just 21% expressed a negative opinion.

Among those who have a positive opinion of the CVRD (55%), the reasons provided most often were:

- ▶ “They’re doing a good job/ providing the services I need” (54%); and
- ▶ “I don’t have any problems/ have not heard of any problems” (36%).

Of those who have a negative opinion (15%), the reasons cited most often included:

- ▶ “Too much bureaucracy” (19%);
- ▶ “I had a negative experience/ I have heard negative comments” (11%);
- ▶ “They don’t provide enough services” (7%);
- ▶ “Unhappy about outcome of issues in the community” (7%); and
- ▶ “They take too long/ are slow to respond” (6%).

B. Awareness of CVRD Issues (Q8-Q15)

Table 2 lists the sources where residents of the CVRD most often get their information about the regional district. Almost three-quarters (71%) get information from their “local community newspaper”, followed by 13% who get information from “the website”.

Table 2: Sources of Information About CVRD Issues by Area*

Source	Total	Courtenay	Comox	Cumberland	Area A	Area B	Area C
Community Newspaper	71%	72%	81%	78%	54%	80%	60%
Website	13%	11%	10%	10%	8%	14%	26%
Local Radio	5%	7%	3%	6%	2%	2%	6%
Friends/ Co-workers	5%	5%	4%	-	4%	8%	4%
Other Source	20%	17%	15%	18%	34%	24%	24%
Don't Know	8%	11%	3%	6%	10%	6%	6%

* Totals add to more than 100% since up to two sources could be identified

- Residents aged 18 - 34 were significantly less likely to get information from their “local community newspaper” (42%) than were those aged 35 - 54 (64%), and those aged 55 and over (80%).

About half (49%) of those surveyed have read or heard something about the activities of the CVRD in the past few months.

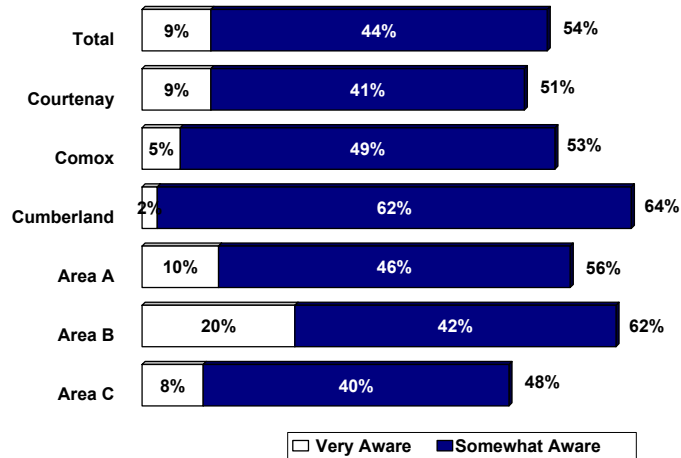
- Residents aged 18 - 34 were significantly less likely to have read or heard anything (25%), compared to those aged 35 - 54 (47%), and those aged 55 and over (54%).

When those who had read or heard something about CVRD activities were asked to identify specific activities that they had become aware of, 30% could not recall any specific issues, while those identified most often were:

- ▶ “Water services/ restrictions/ quality/ supply issues/ meters” (17%);
- ▶ “Information about elections” (13%);
- ▶ “The division of the regional district” (12%);
- ▶ “Relocating the hospital” (6%); and
- ▶ “The gas station on Dyke Road/ Gas N Go” (5%).

Figure 1 shows the level of awareness of CVRD services. Overall, more than half (54%) said they are at least “somewhat aware” of the services, although just 9% said they were “very aware”. More than half of residents in each region are at least “somewhat aware” of CVRD services with the exception of those in Area C, where 48% were at least “somewhat aware”.

Figure 1: Awareness of CVRD Services by Area*

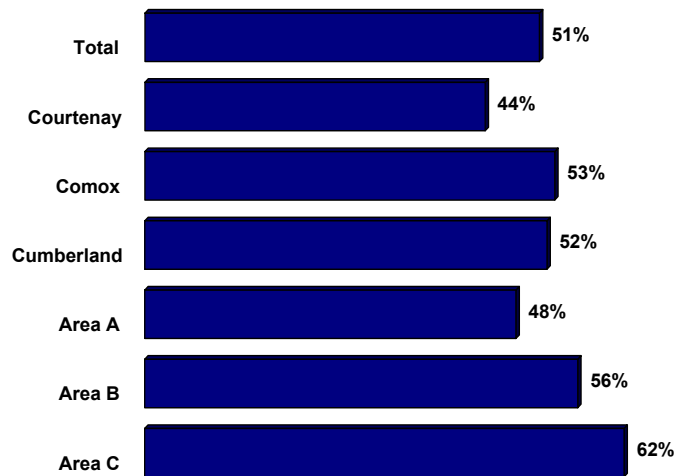


* Combined "Very Aware" and "Somewhat Aware" responses may not equal Total due to rounding

- Residents aged 18 - 34 were significantly less aware of regional services, as just 28% said they were at least “somewhat aware”, compared to 52% of those aged 35 - 54, and 58% of those aged 55 and over.
- A majority (56%) of homeowners are at least “somewhat aware” of CVRD services, significantly higher than 35% among those who rent their accommodations.

Just over half (51%) of those surveyed are aware that the CVRD is developing a number of different regional strategies. As presented in Figure 2, awareness among residents was highest in Area C, and lowest among those in Courtenay.

Figure 2: Awareness of Development of Regional Strategies by Area



- Again, respondents in the 18 - 34 age group were significantly less aware (26%) that the CVRD is developing different regional strategies, compared to those aged 35 - 54 (49%), and those aged 55 and over (55%).

Awareness among residents of the specific regional strategies being developed by the CVRD is presented in Table 3. Most (70%) residents are aware of the regional water strategy, significantly greater than the awareness level for any other strategy.

Table 3: Awareness of the CVRD Regional Strategies by Area

Strategy	Total	Courtenay	Comox	Cumberland	Area A	Area B	Area C
Water Strategy	70%	81%	75%	78%	42%	74%	48%
Growth Strategy	36%	32%	39%	36%	28%	48%	34%
Sewer Strategy	31%	32%	34%	28%	34%	36%	18%
Sustainability Strategy	27%	29%	34%	20%	16%	32%	18%

- Awareness of the regional water strategy is significantly lower among residents of Area A and Area C than among those in all other regions.
- For the water, growth, and sustainability strategies, awareness was significantly lower among residents aged 18 - 34 than among those aged 35 - 54 and aged 55 and over. For all strategies, awareness was highest among those aged 55 and over.

Overall, 180 respondents were aware that the CVRD is developing a regional growth strategy. Of these, 43% did not recall anything specific, while the responses most often provided were:

- ▶ “They are planning growth/ new developments/ expansion within the district” (16%);
- ▶ “They are trying to control/ slow growth of the district” (10%); and
- ▶ “They are looking into the effects of growth/ preparing for infrastructure/ services needs” (6%).

A total of 355 respondents were aware of the CVRD water strategy, and of these, 19% did not recall any details. The specific responses given most often included:

- ▶ “The installation of water meters” (42%);
- ▶ “The Comox Lake water supply/ quality/ deep water intake” (17%);
- ▶ “Water sustainability/ conservation” (8%); and
- ▶ “Expand/ upgrade/ consolidate water infrastructure” (7%).

Of the 157 respondents who were aware of the regional sewer strategy, more than half (52%) could not identify any details of it, while the responses given most often were:

- ▶ “Adding sewer connection to more communities/ areas” (21%); and
- ▶ “Upgrading the sewer system” (10%).

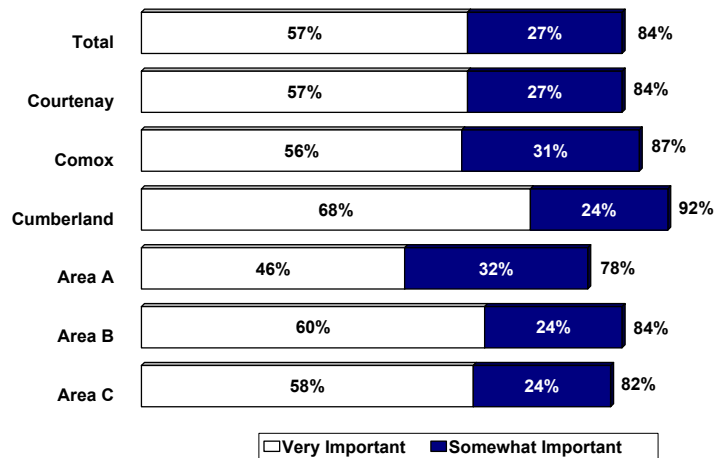
The sustainability strategy generated the lowest level of awareness, with 138 respondents saying that they were aware of this strategy. Most (78%) of these could not recall anything specific about it, while the responses most often given were:

- ▶ “Maintaining agricultural land” (4%);
- ▶ “Infrastructure and services to keep up with growth” (4%); and
- ▶ “They are working with various groups/ communities/ governments to develop a sustainable plan for the future” (4%).

Residents were asked about the level of importance they place on each of the four regional strategies currently being developed by the CVRD. Each of the four strategies was deemed at least “somewhat important” by a strong majority of respondents, with the highest level of importance being placed on the regional water strategy.

Figure 3 shows that overall, 84% of those surveyed feel that the development of a regional growth strategy is important, including 57% who said it is “very important”. More than three-quarters of those in each region said this strategy is important, with the strongest response coming from residents of Cumberland.

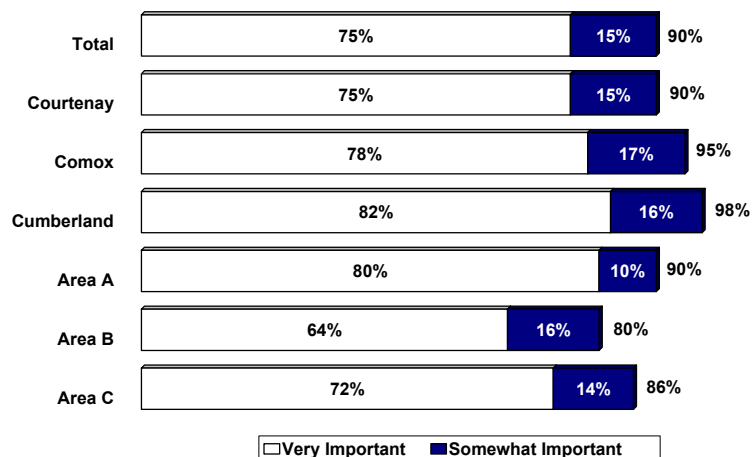
Figure 3: Importance of Regional Growth Strategy by Area*



* Combined "Very Important" and "Somewhat Important" responses may not equal Total due to rounding

Nine in 10 (90%) CVRD residents said that the development of a regional water strategy is important, including 75% who said it is “very important” - see Figure 4. At least 8 in 10 respondents from each region said this strategy is important, including nearly all residents in Cumberland and Comox.

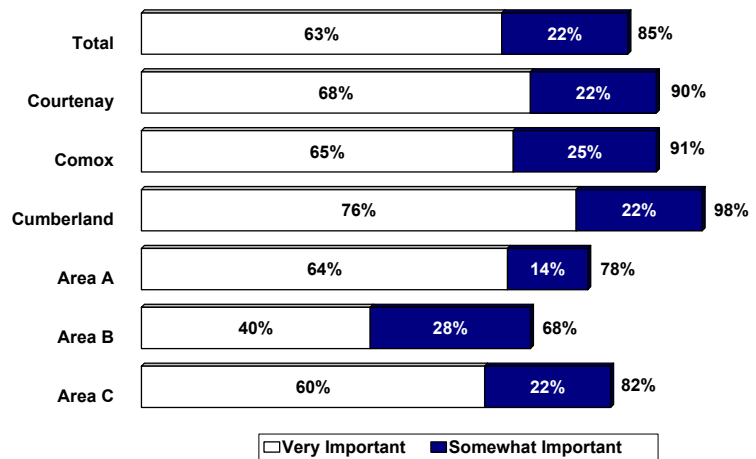
Figure 4: Importance of Regional Water Strategy by Area*



* Combined "Very Important" and "Somewhat Important" responses may not equal Total due to rounding

The regional sewer strategy is at least “somewhat important” to 85% of CVRD residents, including 63% who said it is “very important”. There was a difference of opinion among regions, as at least 9 in 10 from each of the three incorporated regions (Courtenay, Comox, and Cumberland) said the sewer strategy is important, compared to between 68% and 82% of those in the unincorporated areas, as seen in Figure 5.

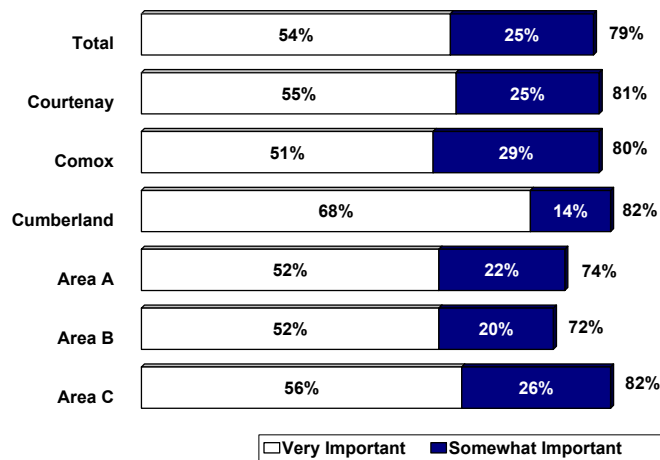
Figure 5: Importance of Regional Sewer Strategy by Area*



* Combined "Very Important" and "Somewhat Important" responses may not equal Total due to rounding

Figure 6 shows that the regional sustainability strategy was viewed as important by nearly 8 in 10 (79%) of those surveyed, including 54% who said it is “very important”. While importance by region was similar, ranging from 72% to 82%, residents of Cumberland were most likely to say that this strategy was “very important” (68%), compared to just over half of those surveyed in all other regions.

Figure 6: Importance of Regional Sustainability Strategy by Area*



* Combined "Very Important" and "Somewhat Important" responses may not equal Total due to rounding

C. Regional Parks (Q16-Q17)

Two-thirds (66%) of CVRD residents surveyed said they or someone in their household visit one of the regional parks at least once per month, including 7% who do so almost daily, and 27% who visit a park once or twice per week. In addition, 12% visit a park about twice every six months, 9% use a park once a year or less, and 14% said they rarely or never visit a regional park.

- Use of regional parks was highest among respondents aged 18 - 34, as 86% said someone in their household visits one at least once per month, compared to 73% of those aged 35 - 54, and 57% of those aged 55 and over.
- Park use at least monthly was highest among respondents in Area B (82%), followed by Comox (72%), Cumberland (68%), Courtenay (63%), Area C (58%), and Area A (46%).

When asked to identify the main benefits of having regional parks, “protecting greenspace for walking, cycling, and other non-motorized recreation” (81%) was the benefit named most often as a first, second, or third selection, followed by “protecting wildlife habitat and ecosystems” (73%), as presented in Table 4.

Benefit	Total*	First Choice	Second Choice	Third Choice
Protecting greenspace for walking, cycling, and other non-motorized recreation	81%	32%	36%	13%
Protecting wildlife habitat and ecosystems	73%	36%	25%	12%
Increasing the walkability of neighbourhoods	49%	8%	14%	27%
Generally increasing the attractiveness and livability of the community	40%	13%	8%	19%

* 1st, 2nd and 3rd choices combined

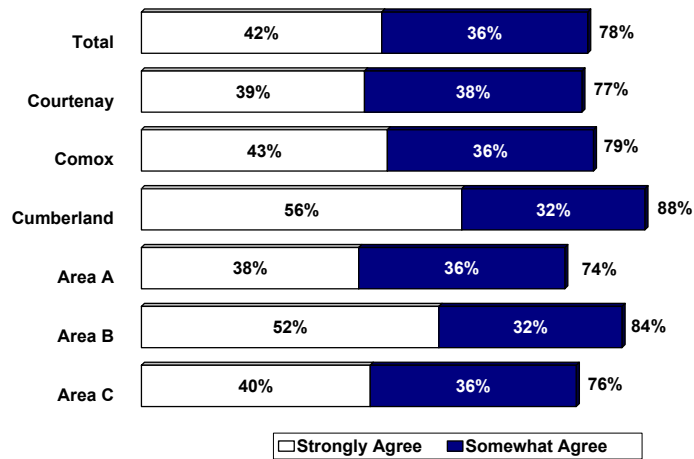
D. Regional District Priorities (Q18-Q19)

Residents were asked their opinion about three distinct regional priorities in order to determine their needs and desires, including expanding the regional parks system, preserving agricultural land, and promoting higher density development to encourage transit use. Respondents were cautioned that each issue may have tax implications, including how tax revenue is allocated or spent by the CVRD.

Overall, more than 9 in 10 residents (92%) agreed with preserving agricultural land, followed by 78% who agreed with expanding the regional park system by acquiring additional parkland, and 48% who agreed with promoting higher density development to encourage transit use.

Figure 7 shows that almost 8 in 10 (78%) residents agreed that expanding the regional park system by acquiring additional parkland should be a priority, including 42% who said they “strongly agree”. Support was highest among residents of Cumberland (88%) and Area B (84%), although about three-quarters or greater of residents in all regions agreed with this strategy.

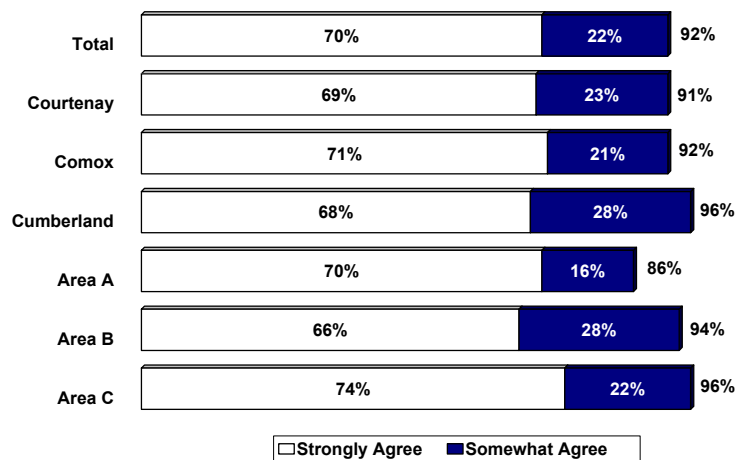
Figure 7: Agreement with Expanding the Regional Park System by Area*



* Combined "Strongly Agree" and "Somewhat Agree" responses may not equal Total due to rounding

Preserving agricultural land generated the strongest agreement, as 92% agreed that this should be a CVRD priority, including 70% who said they “strongly agree” - see Figure 8. Agreement was strong among residents of all regions, with at least 86% responding this way, and at least two-thirds of those in each region expressing that they “strongly agree”.

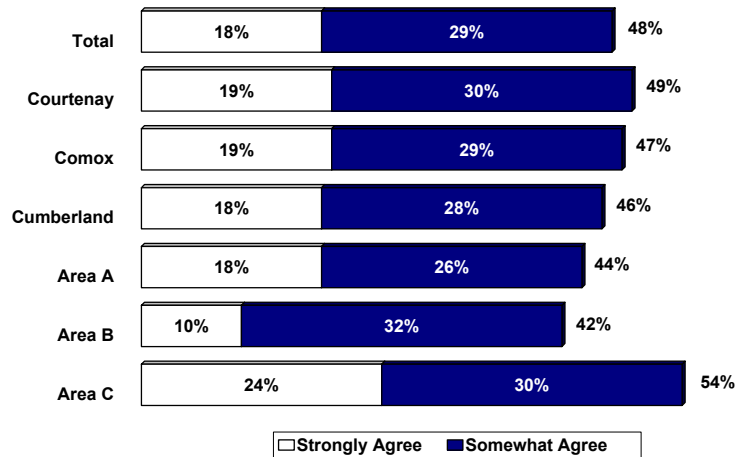
Figure 8: Agreement with Preserving Agricultural Land by Area*



* Combined "Strongly Agree" and "Somewhat Agree" responses may not equal Total due to rounding

Less than half (48%) of CVRD residents agreed that promoting higher density development to encourage transit use should be a priority, including just 18% who said they “strongly agree”. Responses were generally similar across regions, although just 10% of residents of Area B said they “strongly agree”, while this sentiment was highest among Area C residents (24%), as seen in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Agreement with Promoting Higher Density Development by Area*



* Combined "Strongly Agree" and "Somewhat Agree" responses may not equal Total due to rounding

Finally, respondents were asked if there was anything specific they would like the CVRD to accomplish in the next one to two years. About 4 in 10 (41%) respondents did not identify anything, while the issues named most often included:

- ▶ “Protection/ expansion of environment/ parks/ green spaces” (9%);
- ▶ “Improve/ develop water system infrastructure/ strategy” (9%);
- ▶ “Improve/ develop sewer infrastructure/ strategy” (6%); and
- ▶ “Improve public transit/ reduce traffic congestion/ build bridges” (5%).