



## **Conclusion**

The Comox Valley is facing a number of challenges as it looks to manage growth and land use activities over the next twenty years. This paper has provided an overview of the major trends and issues facing the Comox Valley and raises a number of questions and ideas as discussion points to be considered for public input prior to the preparation of a draft Regional Growth Strategy.

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to summarize some of the main ideas found throughout the paper and to put forward a set of approaches to managing growth that need to be considered through public review over the coming months.

## The trends and issues identified in this paper require action on a number of fronts

An increase in population will create a demand for more housing and require choices to be made on where and how to best direct settlement areas. We need to ensure that choices made today will result in a land-use pattern that can be maintained into the future in terms of economic costs, servicing needs and environmental impacts.



An aging demographic will create an increased demand on seniors' services and appropriate seniors living environments. Choices made today should ensure that the increasing elderly population has access to health care services, recreational opportunities and day-to-day shopping needs. The RGS should ensure that mobility choices are optimized through land-use patterns and the provision of balanced transportation options, including walking and transit.



Current proposals for new housing developments must be reconciled with a realistic supply and demand for the Comox Valley and should ensure a diversity of housing choices is maintained. It appears that current proposals for residential development exceed the projected housing demand for 2031. This supply and demand need to be better understood in order to ensure that these developments provide an appropriate mix of housing choices in terms of form, tenure and affordability.



Strategies to further diversify the local economy and help support ongoing job creation are required. The current ratio of 0.5 jobs per resident in the Comox Valley is below the 0.6-0.9 ratio that is typical of more "complete" communities. With stable core employers like CFB Comox, St. Joseph's Hospital and Mount Washington, a strong agriculture, forest and aquaculture resource base, a good supply of industrial land and excellent transportation connections, including

the Comox Valley airport, the region is well positioned to becoming a more complete community. Economic development strategies that build on these local strengths and potentially target new areas (e.g., increased industrial activities, post-secondary education) should be supported through the RGS.



There is a need for more value-added economic activity locally. Creating new jobs and keeping money circulating in the local economy could be supported through an increased emphasis on value-added agriculture, aquaculture and forestry. A similar focus on local retailers and local industrial activity should be explored.



Working together to create a strong economic environment that both attracts new businesses and retains existing ones is of critical importance. Internal competition between local governments or businesses agencies (intentional or not) will only weaken the region's collective attractiveness and performance. The RGS should provide a platform for regional economic development stakeholders, including K'omoks First nation to collaborate and cooperate on local and regional economic development, research, planning and programming by creating a regionally consistent development and business permitting standards.



Transportation investments must focus on significant public transit improvements and enhanced pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. While the private automobile will remain the primary means for moving around, the Valley is still performing below average in terms of transit modal share in comparison to other similar regions in British Columbia. The current transit modal share of less than 1% must be increased significantly if the Comox Valley is to achieve a sustainable future and make meaningful reductions in Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Achieving such an increase will require that improvements are made to current service levels and that land-use patterns support transit use.

Agriculture and aquaculture are significant features of the Comox Valley economy, landscape and culture. Both, however, are susceptible to the pressure from growth and urban development. Competition for land and water creates a significant impact on farmers. Outside the ALR there is significant pressure to convert remaining farmland to settlement areas. Within the ALR, issues of lot size, access to water and incompatible uses at the edges need to be addressed. The shellfish industry has its own unique issues, mostly related to the quality of water and impact on marine life, resulting from increased urbanization in the region.



A sustainable region requires a sustainable and secure local food supply. In addition to preserving agricultural lands, efforts must be made to ensure that farming and aquaculture remain viable local activities and that an appropriate local food distribution network exists in order to make this food available locally.



A conservation strategy that protects the regional watersheds and other ecosystem features needs to be part of the Regional Growth Strategy. The corollary to smart growth is smart conservation: in determining where to direct land use change, we need to understand where to protect and preserve those ecological features that are critical to the health, diversity and future of our bioregion. Building on the significant work done to date on the identification and mapping of ecological features in the Comox Valley, the RGS will need to consider and implement appropriate policies, regulations or measures for land-use activities within those identified areas.



Regional growth must be matched with appropriate regional infrastructure. A sustainable region requires sustainable approaches (environmentally and economically) to the provision of drinking water and the disposal of sewage and solid waste. While separate strategies are being developed for these systems, ongoing coordination with the Regional Growth Strategy is important to ensure consistent decisions are made and that infrastructure investments reflect a sustainable land-use pattern.

Ensuring a sustainable and safe water supply for residential, agricultural and ecological purposes is one of the most critical issues currently facing the Comox Valley. Projections for growth will place a greater demand on the existing water supply. Meeting that demand should not be achieved by continual extraction of more water from the Valley's lakes and groundwater supplies. There should also be concerted efforts at conservation and re-use.

In coordination with the Regional Water Strategy, the RGS will need to understand the issue of water capacity and water conservation, and develop a land-use pattern that places that minimizes the economic and environmental costs of water extraction.



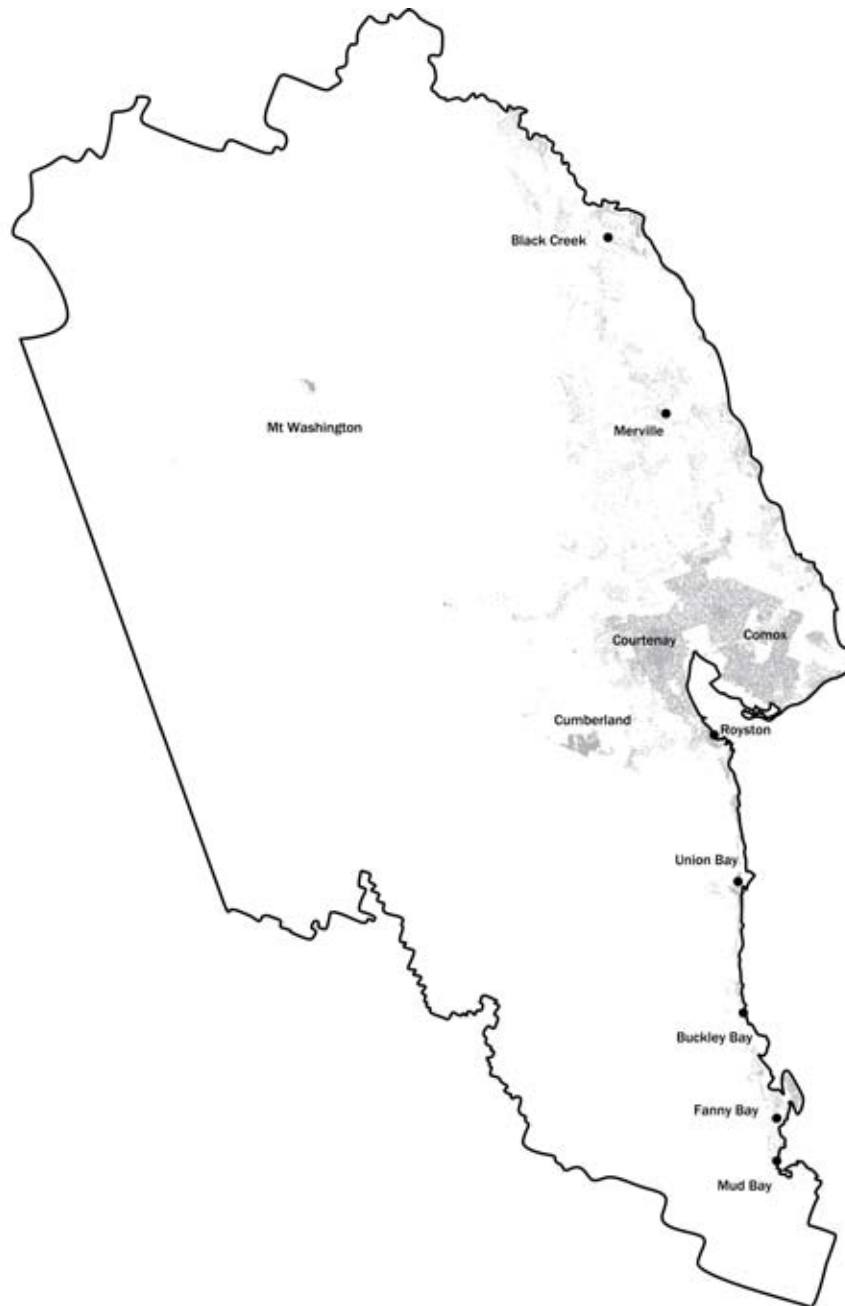
Land use patterns and activities have a variety of impacts on public health and safety – ranging from decreased levels of physical activity and higher incidences of obesity, limited means of accessing health care and emergency services, and drinking water contamination. While the RGS must consider all these impacts, primary consideration should perhaps be given to active transportation strategies (i.e., walking and cycling) that will facilitate more active lifestyles and improve the long-term health of people in the Comox Valley. Location of new health care facilities and access to emergency services will also need to be considered within the RGS.



The Comox Valley local governments are committed to addressing climate change through reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Strategies for greenhouse gas emission reductions are a Provincial requirement within the RGS and an important objective of sustainable growth management. Working with the BC government's baseline inventory of community energy use and emissions, a clearer picture of the local impacts on GHG emissions in the Comox Valley is evolving. Within this understanding, the RGS will need to establish policies to guide reductions in GHG emission through initiatives such as reducing conversion of land to settlement areas, reducing the number of trips by single-occupant vehicles, diverting solid waste from landfills, establishing green building standards and promoting clean and renewable energy sources.

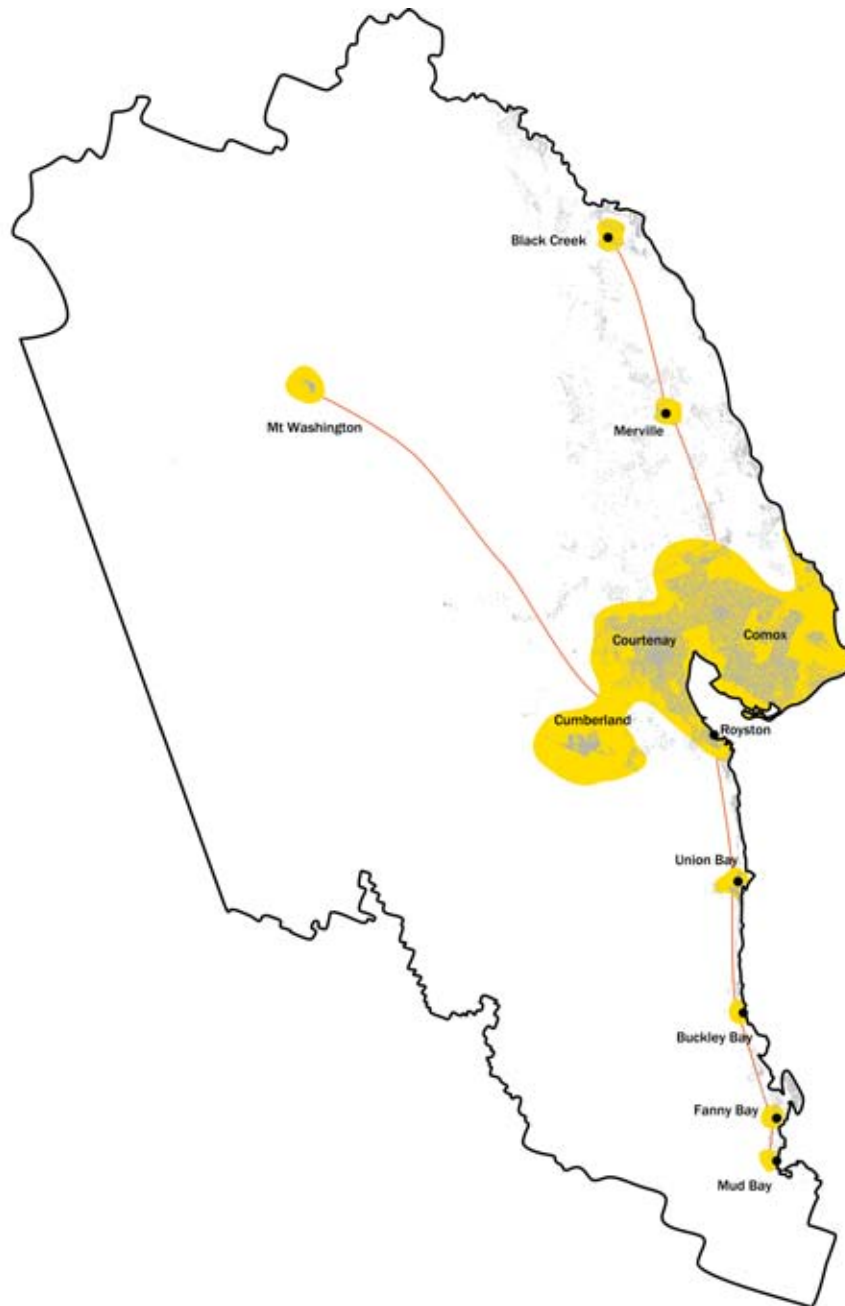
This paper has expanded on each of these challenges and articulated a set of ideas for public discussion and debate. The intent is to engage citizens in a dialogue about how best to address each issue and identify which ideas are most relevant and effective for the Comox Valley. The issues and ideas have been combined into one Comprehensive Background Paper because they are inter-related and are best understood and explored as a set of connected ideas.

In addition to understanding how each issue relates to the others, it is also important to understand how each issue impacts, and is impacted by, alternative growth scenarios, as the final RGS will need to include a plan for directing growth. To that end, a series of four approaches to growth are posited here in order to provide a visual context of how the Comox Valley could potentially grow and within which to consider the various policy ideas put forward in this paper, or additional policy ideas that will evolve in the course of the public discussion.



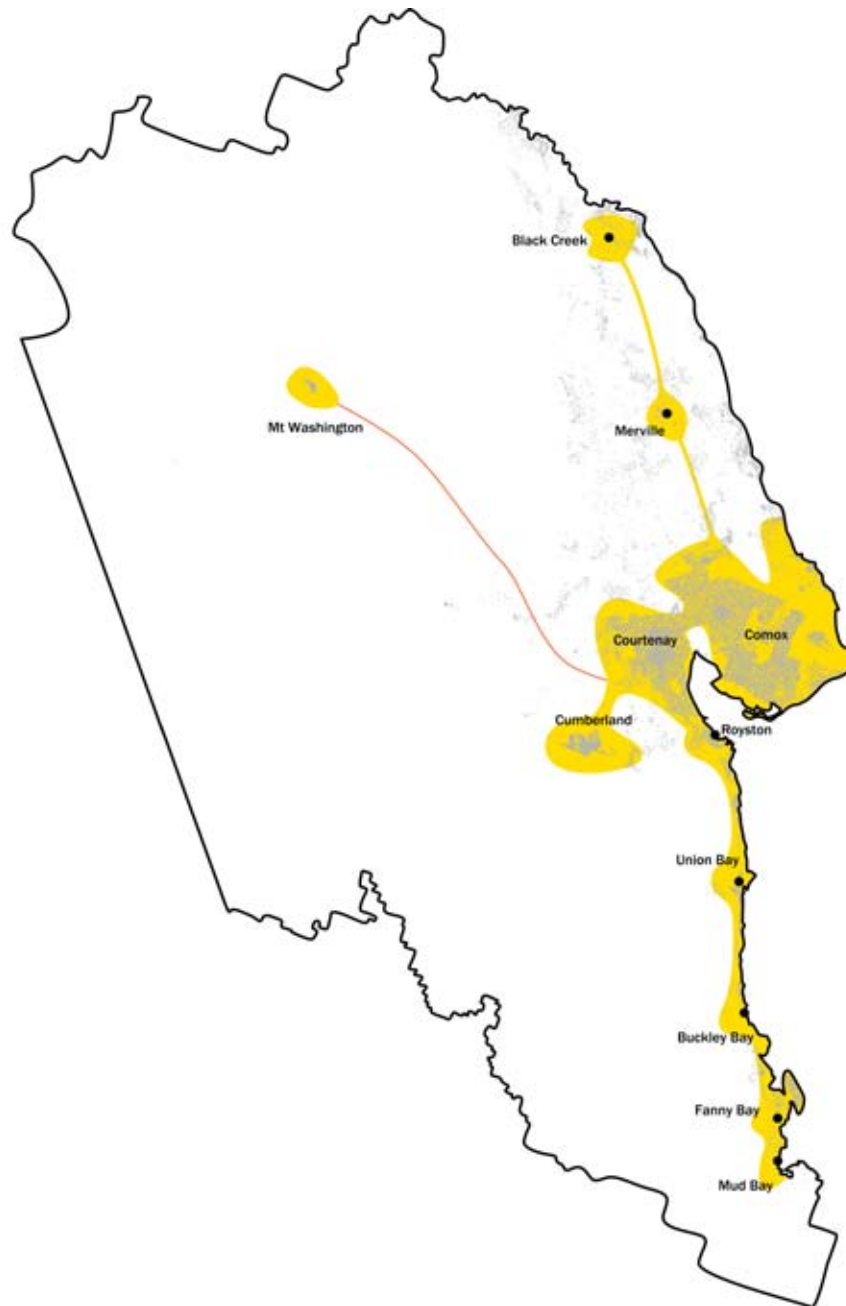
## Existing Settlement Pattern

The existing settlement pattern in the Comox Valley is fairly compact. Population and housing are concentrated around the Courtenay-Comox urban centre and, to a lesser extent, the village of Cumberland. Ignoring political boundaries, sixty percent of the population lives within Courtenay-Comox-Cumberland settlement area cluster. An additional ten percent is located within 500 metres of that cluster. The remainder of the population is dispersed throughout the unincorporated centres (e.g., Black Creek, Union Bay, etc.) and along the Old Island Highway.



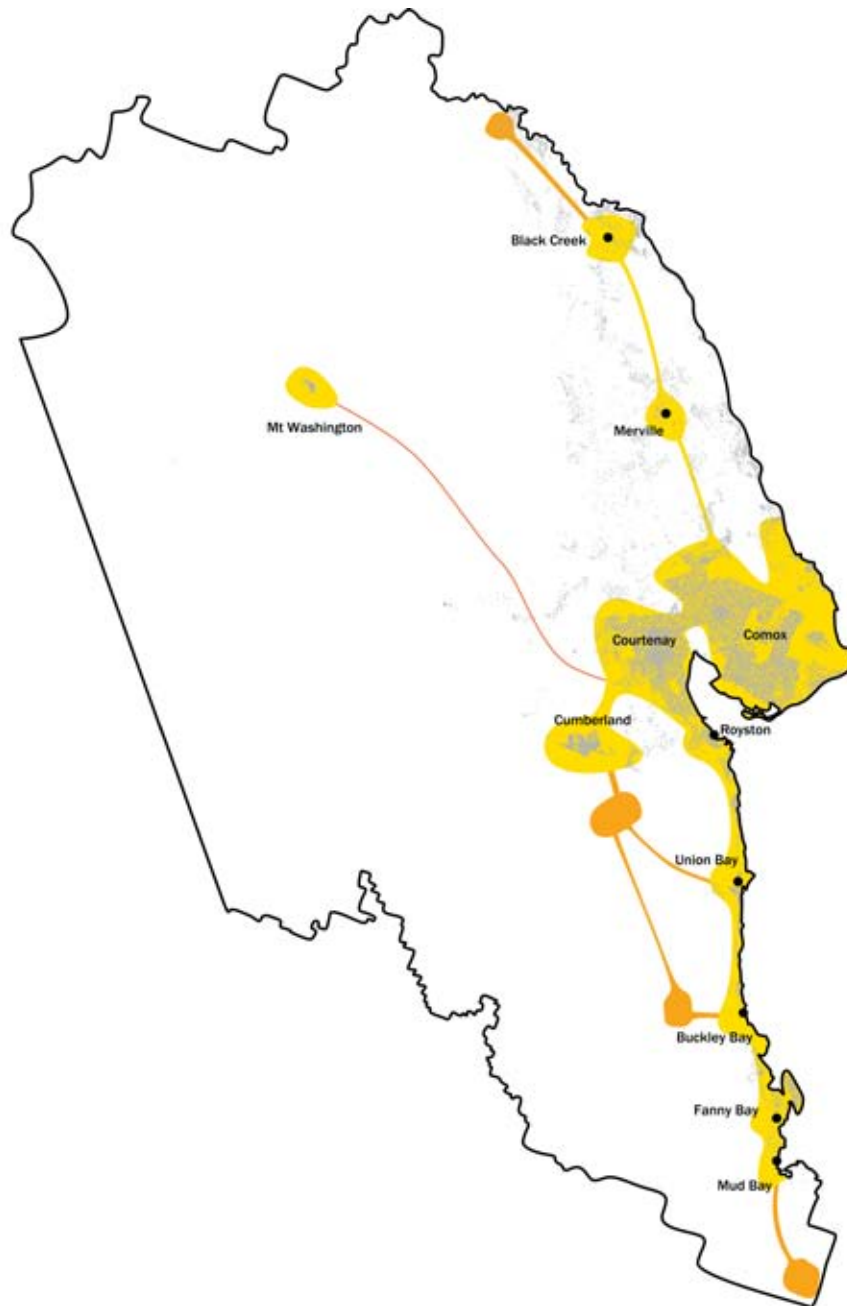
## Approach 1 Focused Development – Tight Settlement Boundary

This illustrates an approach to growth that would concentrate most new development within the Courtenay/Comox/Cumberland settlement area. The settlement area includes some electoral areas that effectively make up core settlement area for the Comox Valley. Within this approach some development could also occur in other established settlement areas (e.g., Black Creek, Union Bay, etc.), but such development would be limited and managed to retain the existing character of those places.



## Approach 2 Compact Nodal Growth

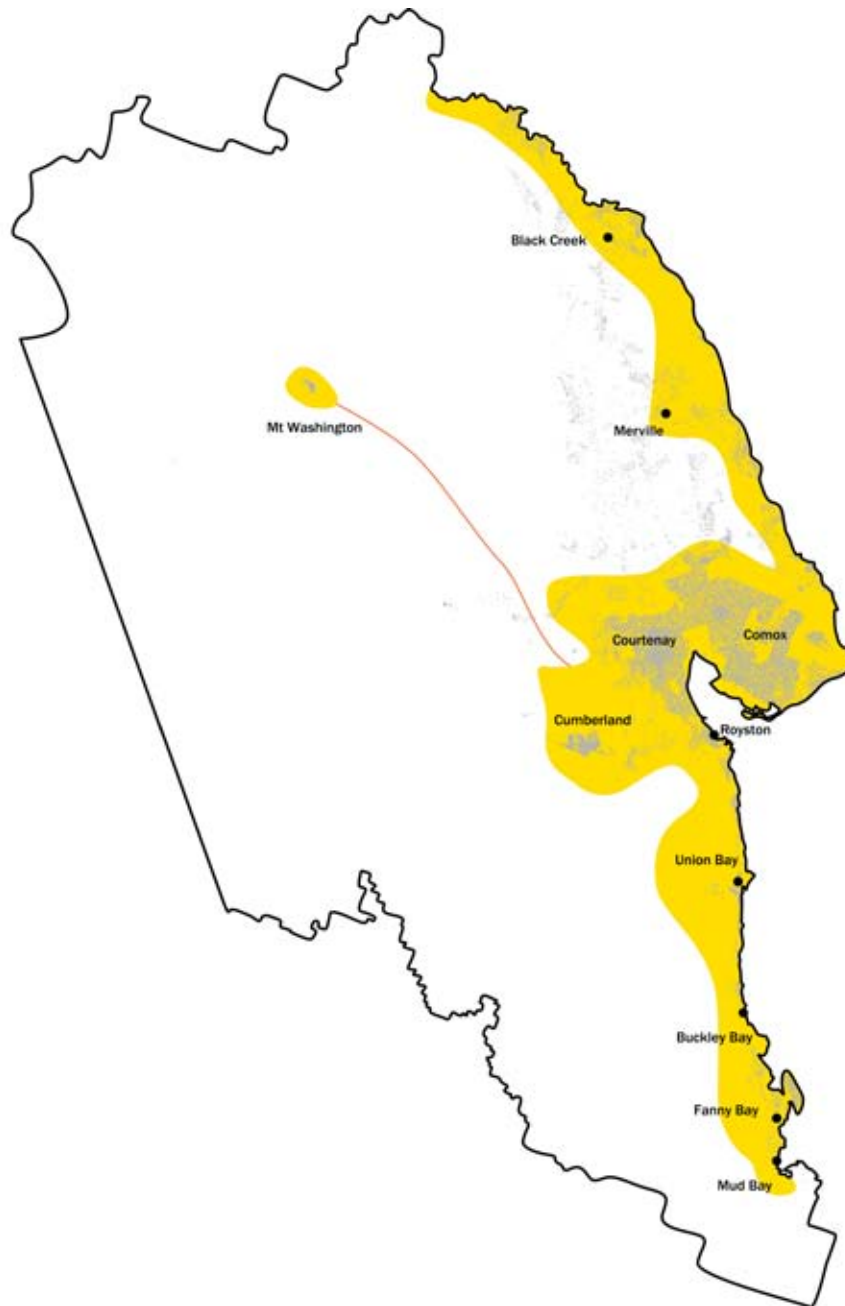
Similar to the concentrated growth approach, this approach also creates a settlement boundary around the existing Courtenay/Comox/Cumberland settlement area and the other established settlement areas. However, under this approach, less growth would be concentrated within the core settlement area and more growth would be permitted in other nodes (e.g., Black Creek, Union Bay, Mud Bay, etc.). Some additional growth along the Old Island Highway, which connects these nodes, could also be expected.



### Approach 3

#### Compact Nodal Growth With New Settlement Areas

This is a variation of Approach 2, whereby new settlement area nodes could also be considered. The implication here is that the core area would be less dense than Approach 2 and/or existing settlements area nodes would not see as much growth.



#### Approach 4 Loose Settlement Area

This approach allows for a much larger land area to be available for development than the other approaches. Conceptually, new settlement areas could be established in a large zone located mostly east of the Old Island Highway. It would, however, protect resources such as the Agricultural Land Reserve and significant ecological features that were within the identified area. The whole area shown is unlikely to be developed over the next twenty years as the market would not support this pace of development; however, all of this area would be available for development according to market demand.

## Next Steps

All Comox Valley residents, landowners, businesspeople and interested stakeholders are invited to review this document, and formally submit comments over the next few months. Comments relating to this background paper and RGS will be compiled and turned into a public record of feedback that will be available on the project website, in the fall of 2009.

There are a number of means to provide feedback:

Attend one of the upcoming June Open Houses

### **Tuesday, June 9**

6:00-8:30pm

K'ómoks

Band Hall, 3320 Comox Road,  
Courtenay

### **Wednesday, June 10**

12:30-3:30pm

d'Esterre Senior Centre,  
1801 Beaufort Avenue, Comox

6:00-8:30pm

Union Bay Improvement District,  
5539 South Island Highway,  
Union Bay

Or, provide feedback  
over the summer months:

**Email comments** [rgs@comoxvalleyrd.ca](mailto:rgs@comoxvalleyrd.ca)

**Call the project office** 250-334-6000

**Drop by the project office,**  
CVRD boardroom,  
550B Comox Road, Courtenay

All of the Open House materials,  
including the second Comox Valley  
RGS video, will be available on the  
**project website** [comoxvalleyrd.ca/rgs](http://comoxvalleyrd.ca/rgs).  
Check the project website for updated  
materials, event listings and general  
project information.

**Comments should be submitted  
by September 15th.**

Following this second round of public  
input, a third round of public engagement  
will be undertaken in the fall 2009  
at which time a set of recommended  
strategies (policies, targets, actions)  
and preferred approach to growth  
management will be put forward for public  
discussion. That public discussion will be  
followed by a draft RGS in January 2010,  
after which time formal public meetings  
and hearings will be held during the  
course of 2010.