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Project Comox Valley Regional Growth Strategy

To Comox Valley RGS Steering Committee

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Strategic and Long Range Planning

From Pino Di Mascio

Subject Summary Feedback and Opinion from Public Sessions (June 15-17)

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We had a very productive week and a very successful set of meetings. I have prepared this memo as a general summary of the feedback we received and to provide some commentary and perspective on how to deal with the issues that were raised and the upcoming process. In order to keep the memo short and to the point, I've tried not to duplicate any of the information that was provided in the update memos over the week from Rob and Geoff.

Inter-governmental Advisory Committee

The meeting went well as there were no major issues raised by any of the IAC members. Brent Mueller was very complimentary about the RGS and we received especially positive feedback in relation to the agricultural and food policies. There were some minor comments that were made at the meeting or passed on afterwards but their feedback was more commentary than recommendations and none of it appears to me to require any amendments to the document. The Provincial Approving Officer did not attend the IAC Meeting but did attend the public meeting held in Comox. His concerns dealt with the fact that his position does not formally rest with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and that legally, in his opinion, he cannot be directed to implement the RGS. We have removed the reference to MOTI when referring to the PAO in order to deal with the first concern. In terms of the second concern, the reference to the PAO notes that he/she "should" consider the RGS. We believe this does not interfere with his mandate but simply notes that the RGS is an important document that should be considered as he makes decisions

and so we believe his second concern is already addressed and have not made any further changes.

K'omoks First Nation

We met with Pamela Shaw on June 16th and she provided us with a number of written comments on various detailed aspects of the RGS but advised that these will be made more formally in a letter that will be forthcoming. More importantly than the detailed comments she advised that the KFN wishes for their known treaty settlement lands and private interest lands to be identified on the Growth Management Map. From our perspective, such an approach is not necessary as the RGS recognizes that the KFN will prepare land-use plans for any parcels they negotiate and that the local governments will work cooperatively with them through that process. We believe the approach detailed in the RGS is more flexible for them. Having said that, should they and the local governments agree to place other KFN lands on the map (in addition to the IR lands which are already illustrated), then I believe we discussed a couple of options with Pam that could work. But finalizing any approach would obviously involve more detailed discussion with KFN.

Public Sessions

The RGS was very well received by the public at the various sessions (Andrea has provided Geoff with our detailed notes). To be sure, there are some very strong opinions and concerns by many about the size and scope of the Settlement Expansion Areas and the requirement for boundary extensions into these areas. There was also some scepticism by some people that the RGS would ever be effective given past political decisions. However, at an overall level the document was well received and there was very positive reaction to its overall intent and policies. Many people noted appreciation that their input was reflected within the RGS and liked the policy directions. The areas most commonly cited as being positive were the conservation policies, rural polices, and the emphasis on municipal areas for new development.

In terms of the Settlement Expansion Areas, I expect you will continue to hear back that this area needs to be reduced in size. Having had time to listen to the various comments and study the areas in more detail over the past few weeks, I would provide you with the following recommendations to consider over the coming weeks and during/after the public hearing:

(1) The SEA shown north of the Puntledge River should be taken out of SEA and shown as a Rural Settlement Area. I believe this area was shown as an SEA in order to prevent sprawled development into those lands and so the Rural Settlement Area policies would better protect them for rural purposes.

(2) The proposed SEA north of Cumberland should be removed and shown as a Resource Area and Agricultural Area (as applicable). While this area is adjacent to a municipal area it is clearly not adjacent to any developed municipal area and is in no way similar to other identified Settlement Expansion Areas. Continuing to show this area on the map will, I believe, continue to

raise concerns with many people that SEA lands encourage sprawled development, whereas the intended effect is to contain sprawl.

(3) All ALR lands within the SEAs should be removed and shown as Agricultural Areas. There will be no policy change by doing this. However, continuing to show it as SEA unnecessarily shows a bigger potential development area than is actually the case. I don't believe there is any benefit to have those areas within the SEA.

As a final point, I would strongly encourage you all to stick with the existing schedule and proceed to 1st and 2nd Reading on June 29 and then to a Public Hearing. I believe that the public (including the development community and the environmental organizations) would not be happy with a delay in the process and their ability to make formal comments. As I noted, there will be many specific comments on specific policies and a fairly vocal critique of the extent of SEAs. But there is general support for the RGS to move forward and for the opportunity for the community to have further input sooner rather than late.

Next Steps

I will be available on conference call for June 22 and June 29 as required.