

DATE: April 24, 2025**FILE:** 6430-01**TO:** Chair and Directors
Regional District Board**FROM:** James Warren
Chief Administrative OfficerSupported by James Warren
Chief Administrative Officer***J. Warren*****RE:** **2025 Strategic Planning Update****Purpose**

To provide an update on the 2025 Strategic Planning Session and Government Advocacy Strategy, which supports key drivers, core services, and actions outlined in the [2023-2026 term of office](#) Strategic Plan.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer

THAT the proposed agenda topics outlined in the report dated April 24, 2025 be endorsed and incorporated into the agenda for the 2025 Strategic Planning Session scheduled for June 17, 2025;

AND FURTHER THAT the advocacy topics and implementation actions outlined in Appendix A of the report dated April 24, 2025 be endorsed as the 2025 Government Advocacy Strategy.

Executive Summary

[Strategic planning](#) helps identify and align Comox Valley Regional District's service delivery to the Board of Director's goals through regular progress reporting on all [CVRD Strategic Initiatives](#) (most recently updated in October 2024). For the 2023 to 2026 term of office, strategic planning sessions are held annually to further refine goals and objectives.

At the [2024 planning session](#), short, medium and long term actions were to be considered to enable further analysis and consideration of CVRD supports for non-market rental housing. A [workplan was recently adopted](#) by the board to establish the path forward.

With 16 months remaining in the term of office, during a challenging climate of economic instability, the 2025 Strategic Planning session proposes to address how to move forward in a fiscally responsible way, while ensuring that key service delivery goals are met. Allison Habkirk will facilitate the session in June and has

supported the Board for several years, bringing historic context and topic-specific knowledge to guide the discussion. This session will include updates from staff on the following topic areas, with a discussion about whether to stay the course, push forward or pull back given the current operational context.

Topic Areas of Discussion

- **Electoral Area Services** – Agricultural Planning, Septic Education/Regulation, Watershed Stewardship Service
- **Recreation** - Ice Facilities Analysis
- **Regional Sustainability** – Housing Authority Work Planning, Regional Parks Land Acquisition Strategy
- **Utilities** - Sewer and Water Extension South Projects
- **Transportation** - Active Transportation Network Plan

It is important to note that an Electoral Area specific discussion will be held during the June Electoral Area Services Committee meeting, in advance of the Board's strategic planning session.

In the afternoon, a presentation from staff, and discussion with the board on communication efforts in the current climate, will explore what CVRD services are top of mind for the community and how to align communications with those priorities over the remaining 16 months of the term of office.

Government Advocacy

The Government Advocacy Strategy outlines key topics and recommends actions for advocacy that strategically focus the CVRD's resources to support the Board's strategic priorities. This strategy, attached as Appendix A, carefully considers the uncertain fiscal climate - resulting from continued tariff threats, and supports the CVRD's Strategic Initiatives to help to inform discussion during the Strategic Planning process.

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Appendix A – 2025 Government Advocacy Strategy

2025 Government Advocacy Strategy

INTRODUCTION

The Government Advocacy Strategy outlines key topics and recommended actions for advocacy that will strategically focus the CVRD's resources to support the board's strategic priorities.

This strategy carefully considers the uncertain fiscal climate caused by continued tariff threats. There are no indications that clarity will be provided by the United States Government and threatened actions are ever shifting. It is widely understood that the impacts resulting from tariffs will be significant and potentially devastating for the Canadian economy.

CVRD staff acknowledge that the federal and provincial governments will continue to focus on advocacy in Washington and responding to this National threat for the foreseeable future (see Appendix A – Provincial Tariff Response Measures). It is also clear, from the changes in cabinet portfolios and new Ministry mandates, that government priorities are centered around Fiscal Responsibility, Economy, Housing, Healthcare and Safety (see Appendix B – Provincial Mandates). As such, six key topics for advocacy in 2025 have been chosen based on their criticality to CVRD's core services.

Some of the proposed advocacy topics support resolutions already put forward by the CVRD to the Association of Vancouver Island Coastal Communities for sponsorship at the Annual Union of BC Municipalities Conference (see Appendix C of the strategy, which lists the 2024 CVRD sponsored UBCM Resolutions for reference).

PROVINCIAL CABINET CHANGES

- Municipal Affairs has been grouped under the new Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs, which is overseen by Minister Ravi Kahlon, the former Minister of Housing.

- A new Minister of State for Local Government and Rural Communities Cabinet position has been established in the Office of the Premier. Minister Brittany Anderson will focus on the distinct challenges faced by rural and remote communities to act as a direct link between Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) and the Premier's office.
- Kelly Greene is the new Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness.
- Ravi Parmar is the new Minister of Forests.
- Josie Osborne is the new Minister of Health.
- Christine Boyle is the new Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

MLA AND MP RELATIONSHIPS

While Josie Osborne retained her seat as the MLA for Mid Island-Pacific Rim, Brennan Day was elected as the new representative for Courtenay-Comox. The outcome of the federal election on April 28, 2025, could also result in changes to the two local Members of Parliament.

CVRD will request an annual meeting with MLAs and MPs each spring to review priority issues and seek advice on next steps. Invitees will include: CVRD Chair and Vice-Chair, EASC Chair and MLAs for Courtenay-Comox and Mid-Island Pacific Rim, as well as MPs for Courtenay-Alberni and North Island-Powell River. MLAs and MPs will also be invited to a board meeting each fall to hear the progress report on the CVRD's strategic initiatives.

MINISTER RELATIONSHIPS

Provincial and Federal ministers attend the Comox Valley on official visits periodically. Depending on the nature of the visit, the CVRD Chair and other CVRD directors representing the Minister's portfolio, topic area of interest or geographic focus will be invited to attend. Speaking notes on relevant topics and senior staff attendance will also be sought when Ministers visit.

ADVOCACY TOPICS

1. Housing and Homelessness

Request

To encourage the province's continued commitment to addressing the housing affordability crisis through implementation of the Homes for B.C. Plan and partnership with the Comox Valley Regional District.

Background

The CVRD has recently completed the legislative process to establish a new service that will create an arm's length housing corporation to support the development of new affordable non-market rental housing to complement the efforts of the non-profit and private sectors.

Strategic Links

CVRD Core Service
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional Sustainability
CVRD Strategic Driver
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community and Social Wellbeing
Provincial Mandate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce costs for families including by helping people access homes they can afford through support for first-time homebuyers, increasing the supply of rental housing stock, and stronger measures to crack down on housing speculation.
Ministerial Mandate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase the supply of rental, co-op and non-market housing. Identify under-used capital that can be leveraged to construct new purpose-built rental housing across the province. Identify potential uses for surplus government real estate assets to support housing and economic development goals.

Proposed Actions

- **COMPLETED:** Brief local MLAs through a presentation and provide a briefing note at the spring meeting.
- **COMPLETED:** Send a letter to Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs, to provide an update on the CVRD's actions to address the housing crisis in advance of UBCM. This action can help to increase the likeliness of a meeting request being granted at the convention.
- Request a meeting at UBCM with Minister Kahlon to provide a status update on the CVRD's actions regarding the housing crisis. The purpose will be to keep the Minister updated on the CVRD's efforts and lay the groundwork for future funding requests.
- Brief Ministry staff at UBCM for the purposes of education and relationship building.
- **ONGOING:** Advocate with senior government housing-related agencies (such as the Canada Mortgage, Housing Corporation, and BC Housing) to inform them of the work underway in the Comox Valley and to solicit partnerships where appropriate.
- Request ministerial meeting in Victoria once housing entity is created and partnership agreements are established so that opportunities for non-market rental housing can be pursued.

2. Protection of Cultural Heritage

Request

For the province to move ahead with amendments to the Heritage Conservation Act (HCA) that supports First Nation efforts to protect their cultural heritage through permitting, and to bring the Local Government Act in line with the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA).

Background

K'ómoks First Nation has identified the Cultural Heritage Investigation Permit (CHIP) as an important part of reconciliation. Aligning with the CHIP can increase awareness of K'ómoks culture and history, increase the number of registered archaeological sites, decrease the number of site infractions, and support protection and community stewardship of cultural heritage sites.

Local governments do not have jurisdictional authority to align with the CHIP under current legislation, and work is needed to bring the HCA and the Local Government Act in line with DRIPA.

Strategic Links

CVRD Core Service
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional Sustainability
CVRD Strategic Driver
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indigenous Relations
Provincial Mandate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advancing reconciliation, implementing the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act and working in partnership with First Nations rights-holders to advance shared interests is the responsibility of every Minister.
Ministerial Mandate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Through the Declaration Act Secretariat, lead work with the Attorney General to ensure alignment of BC's laws with the rights of Indigenous peoples. (Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation)
DRIPA Action Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action 4.35 under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Action Plan calls for the province to work with First Nations to align the Heritage Conservation Act with DRIPA.

Proposed Actions

- **COMPLETED:** Meet with Ministry of Forests Staff to advocate for legislative changes through the [Heritage Conservation Act Transformation Project](#).
- **COMPLETED:** Brief local MLAs through a presentation and provide a briefing note at the spring meeting.
- Request a meeting at UBCM with Ravid Parmar, Minister of Forests and Christine Boyle, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, with members of the K'ómoks First Nation invited to present together as a delegation. The purpose will be to share the CVRD's procedure for building and development permits in support of the K'ómoks CHIP, while underscoring that provincial legislation requires amendments to support First Nations in the protection of cultural heritage under DRIPA.
- Brief Ministry staff for the purposes of education and relationship building.
- Additional steps may be informed pending the outcome of a legal review that is underway to determine if further actions to align CVRD operations with CHIP are possible under the Local Government Act.

3. Heritage Conservation Act Permit Wait Times

Request

For the province to provide more resources to the Ministry of Forests Archaeology Branch in order to clear backlogs and ensure timely processing of Heritage Conservation Act permits moving forward.

Background

Estimated wait times for HCA permits is impacting CVRD utilities maintenance and capital projects, currently ranging between 12-22 months. This prevents the CVRD from making timely repairs to utilities and park infrastructure, while increasing the timelines and costs of CVRD capital projects.

Strategic Links

CVRD Core Service
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional Sustainability, Sewage Treatment, Water Supply
CVRD Strategic Driver
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fiscal Responsibility, Indigenous Relations
Provincial Mandate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advancing reconciliation, implementing the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, and working in partnership with First Nations rights-holders to advance shared interests is the responsibility of every Minister.
Ministerial Mandate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with ministerial colleagues and First Nations to ensure the prompt, efficient, and effective delivery of permits required by industry while maintaining our world-leading environmental standards.

Proposed Actions

- **COMPLETED:** Meet with Ministry of Forests Staff to inform of permit delays and advocate for expedited review.
- **COMPLETED:** Brief local MLAs through a presentation and provide a briefing note at the spring meeting.
- Request a meeting at UBCM with Ravid Parmar, Minister of Forests, with local Mayors invited to present together as a delegation. The purpose will be to share the impacts on local government capital projects as a result of extensive wait times for HCA permits. This will provide an opportunity to advocate for additional resources and/or efficiencies to speed up reviews, to ensure taxpayers are not responsible for the extra costs created by project delays.
- Continue to follow-up with Ministry staff on status of outstanding permit status.

Note: There may be additional opportunity to follow-up with provincial staff or Ministers directly once applications for archaeological investigation permits are submitted for the Sewer Extension South Project. Subsequent dialogue about wait times with K'ómoks staff and Chief and Council could identify opportunities for joint advocacy and Ministerial meeting requests where appropriate.

4. Sustainable Funding for Emergency Management

Request

That the Government of BC provide core funding for emergency management programs so that local governments do not depend on grants. Grant funding restricts our capacity and ability to plan for disaster response and meaningfully consult with Indigenous partners.

Background

Emergency management is a legislated responsibility of local governments, requiring stable and sustainable funding to uphold public health and safety. While grants can support short-term projects and core activities—such as maintaining risk assessments, plans, and operations—they are not a predictable or sustainable funding model .

CVRD Core Service
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emergency Services
CVRD Strategic Driver
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fiscal Responsibility
Provincial Emergency Regulations Under Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local authority emergency management: To bring into effect requirements for risk assessments, emergency management plans and business continuity plans, as well as provide further details on multi-jurisdictional emergency management organizations, anticipated in Fall 2025

Proposed Actions

- Solicit support from Emergency Management partners (City of Courtenay, K'ómoks First Nation, Town of Comox and Village of Cumberland) to co-sign a letter to the Kelly Greene, Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness requesting core funding for emergency management programs.
- Request a meeting with the Minister at UBCM and attend as a regional delegation.
- Follow-up with Ministry staff to review grant program challenges.

Note: There may be additional opportunities to bring forward emergency management topics, or participate as part of a delegation, pending the identification of joint areas of interest for regional districts following the 2025 Regional District Chair and CAO Forum.

5. Small Water Systems funding

Request

That the provincial and federal governments work together to establish long-term sustainable funding programs, specifically for small water systems, to address high cost and regulatory compliance requirements and safeguard local food security.

Background

Small rural water systems face unsustainable financial burdens due to the high costs of water treatment systems, ongoing maintenance, and replacing aging infrastructure which can amount to millions of dollars. It is not possible for rural residents and communities to finance these systems through local taxation alone. Lack of funding threatens the viability of these water systems and the communities they serve, while also posing a significant risk to local food security.

Strategic Links

CVRD Core Service
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Electoral Area Services
CVRD Strategic Driver
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fiscal responsibility
Provincial Mandate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No relevant mandates related to funding infrastructure for rural communities.
Ministerial Mandate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No relevant mandates related to Municipal Affairs. New Ministry mandates are focused primarily on housing.

Proposed Actions

- **COMPLETED:** Submit a resolution to the Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities (AVICC) and subsequently the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) Convention.
- **COMPLETED:** Brief local MLAs through a presentation and briefing note at spring meeting.
- At the MLA presentation Minister Osborne committed to coming back with some advice in advance of UBCM. Depending on that direction, the following options could be considered:
 - Recognizing that economy, homes, healthcare and safety are the government's focus so no relevant provincial mandates apply - a delegation approach will be necessary to ensure a strong and unified voice on this important issue.
 - Solicit support from other regional districts with similar challenges to co-sign a letter to Brittney Anderson, the new Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities, the Minister of Health and Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs outlining the challenges facing small water systems.

- Request a meeting with the new Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities or the Minister of Health at UBCM.
- Request follow-up meetings with relevant staff at UBCM.

Note: Following the Chair/CAO Forum, the Thompson-Nicola Regional District and Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen identified an interest in participating in joint advocacy with the Comox Valley Regional District. This could include correspondence to the Minister in advance of UBCM with CVRD coordinating a regional district delegation at UBCM.

6. Legislative Changes to Address Conflicts of Interest

Request

That the province address potential conflicts of interests affecting individuals who simultaneously serve in elected roles for both local governments and First Nations governments as a result of the Local Government Act, which is informed by the federal Indian Act.

Background

While the Local Government Act has been revised to include Treaty First Nations and their respective directors on the same general terms as municipalities, the same has not been done for non-treaty First Nations. This results in a clear inequity in which municipal directors and treaty First Nation directors are not prohibited from voting on a matter affecting the interest of their municipality or First Nation, but a regional district director that is also elected to a non-treaty First Nation council is not afforded the same liberty.

Strategic Links

CVRD Core Service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance and Administration
CVRD Strategic Driver
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous Relations

Provincial Mandate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancing reconciliation, implementing the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act and working in partnership with First Nations rights-holders to advance shared interests is the responsibility of every Minister.
Ministerial Mandate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the Declaration Act Secretariat, lead work with the Attorney General to ensure alignment of BC's laws with the rights of Indigenous peoples. (Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation) • Work with the Parliamentary Secretary for Anti-Racism Initiatives on anti-Indigenous racism. (Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation)

Proposed Actions

- **COMPLETED:** Send a joint letter with K'ómoks First Nation to the Attorney General, Minister of State Responsible for Local Governments and Rural Communities, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, the Deputy Premier and local MLAs to state concerns with the existing legislation.
- Additional advocacy may include seeking support through the Union of British Columbia Municipalities and proposing specific statute updates such as adding add a new provision to section 104(1)(f) of the Community Charter to state that "the council member is an elected member of the governing body of a first nation and the matter relates to the municipality's relations with the first nation.

Appendices:

- A. Provincial Tariff Response Measures
- B. Provincial Mandates
- C. UBCM Resolutions

Appendix A: Provincial Tariff Response Measures

Anticipated Tariff Impacts for BC

- \$43 billion decrease in real GDP by 2029.
- 45,000 fewer jobs by 2029.
- Unemployment rate estimated to increase to 6.4% in 2025, and 6.7% in 2026.
- Up to \$1.4 billion annual loss in revenue.

Provincial Actions Announced

- Removal of all American beer, wine, spirits and products from BC liquor stores.
- B.C. government and Crown corporations are directed to buy Canadian goods and services first, including:
 - Reviewing existing contracts with American suppliers.
 - Cancelling non-essential government travel to the US.
- Tesla electric vehicle charging projects are not eligible for rebates unless purchased before March 12.
- Requirement for biofuels for gasoline and diesel be produced in Canada.
- Introduction of new Legislation that:
 - Breaks down inter-provincial trade barriers for trade and labour.
 - Provides new procurement tools to support buy Canadian and buy BC.
 - Provides the ability to impose tolls and fees on non-Canadian commercial vehicles using BC transportation infrastructure.

Appendix B: Provincial Mandates

Grow the economy by creating good jobs across British Columbia. We will collaborate with businesses, workers, and communities to attract investments in both new and traditional sectors as well as emerging sectors of the economy. This approach will bring certainty for business, security for workers, and generate the wealth needed to support the essential services British Columbians rely on.

Reduce costs for families including by helping people access homes they can afford through support for first-time homebuyers, increasing the supply of rental housing stock, and stronger measures to crack down on housing speculation.

Strengthen health care by expanding access to family doctors and recruiting and training more health professionals, ensuring that every British Columbian can access the care they need, no matter where they live. We will also increase access to addictions treatment and provide help for people whose struggles require intensive supports.

Make our neighbourhoods and communities safer by working with law enforcement and social agencies to address street disorder, crack down on organized crime, and do all we can to ensure repeat offenders stay behind bars.

Appendix C: 2024 UBCM Resolutions

[Link to Resolution Book](#)

EB25 Extreme Weather Response System Courtenay, CVRD, Cumberland, Powell River (P.51)	AVICC - Endorse UBCM – Endorse
EB49 Water Management for Agriculture CVRD (P.70)	UBCM - Endorse
EB53 Sustainable Funding for Solid Waste Management CVRD (P.72)	UBCM - Endorse
EB66 Rainwater Management in Roads Right of Way CVRD (P.83)	AVICC – Endorse UBCM –Endorse
NR25 Housing Authority Feasibility Study Work CVRD, Courtenay, Cumberland, Powell River (P.148)	AVICC – Endorse UBCM – No rec
RR12 Development Cost Charges for Affordable Housing CVRD (P.215) *UBCM referred to similar resolutions NR22 and NR62	AVICC – Endorse UBCM – Refer