



# STAFF REPORT TO COMMITTEE

**DATE OF REPORT** March 11, 2024  
**MEETING TYPE & DATE** Committee of the Whole of March 27, 2024  
**FROM:** Environmental Services Division  
Strategic Services Department  
**SUBJECT:** Cowichan Adapts Update  
**FILE:** 5280-30

## **PURPOSE/INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to update Directors on the Cowichan Adapts including actions for climate adaptation and climate mitigation.

## **RECOMMENDED RESOLUTION**

For information.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 2021, the Board adopted the [Climate Change Adaptation Strategy](#) which identifies actions for responding to the impacts of climate change. As directed in the 2014 to 2018 Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) Strategic Plan, the CVRD began a five-phase process to establish a Climate Change Adaptation Strategy:

1. Climate Projections and Impacts Analysis (**complete 2017**)
  - clear identification of local effects and impacts at CVRD scale
  - 16 key recommendations ([Climate Projections Report](#))
2. Vulnerability and Risk Assessments
  - clear identification of what this means to CVRD residents (flooding, fire, drought, sea level rise, continuity of service and asset management) (**ongoing**)
  - Natural hazards risk policy (**complete 2019**)
3. Climate Change Adaptation and Risk Management Strategy (**complete 2021**)
  - Asset management climate impact analysis framework (**complete 2021**)
4. GHG mitigation strategy
  - Completing a Regional Energy Strategy to identify opportunities for developing locally-sourced renewable energy. (**2012 strategy in need of update**)
  - Developing a strategic Energy Management Plan for CVRD building, community centres and assets. (**2013 strategy in need of update**)
  - Residential Retrofit Strategy and recommendations (**complete 2020**)
5. Adaptation Strategy Work Plan
  - development of 4 year work plan 2023-2026 and supporting budgets (**complete 2022**)
  - establishment of an intergovernmental advisory group to implement actions in the work plan. (**initiated 2023**)
  - implementation of high priority actions identified in the workplan (**ongoing and to be reviewed annually in line with Corporate Strategy and approved budgets**)

Phase 5 – In 2023, the CVRD board adopted the [Cowichan Adapts Implementation Plan](#), as a key milestone in the establishment of the CVRD New Normal Climate Adaptation Program. The Plan highlights 39 local government led actions clustered around 5 thematic areas and 20 defined objectives. For each high priority action, 2023 to 2026 activities were established with municipal partners. Information about the activities will be gathered regularly from adaptation partners as both the description and the status of activities may change according to divisional work planning and budgets.

## **ANALYSIS**

The Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Implementation Plan have been developed to document previous efforts and to guide future action by various entities. The purpose of this Strategy is to coalesce, contextualize, and celebrate previous and ongoing initiatives, while serving as a framework for the development of supporting tools, processes and new strategic programs going forward.

The strategy can also guide land use planning, provisions of services, and infrastructure decisions, to the extent that these are under CVRD and municipal partner jurisdiction. The February ...2024 Update of the Cowichan Adapts Implementation Plan (Attachment A) includes progress updates on the actions over the prior year.

### Next steps for implementing the Cowichan Adapts strategy (2024)

- Implementing the high priority actions identified in the 2024 to 2026 workplan.
  - Complete the review and refresh of the New Normal Cowichan program to communicate projections, impacts and actions related to a broader set of hazards including extreme heat and drought, flood and sea level rise, wind and storm events and landslides. This includes an updated website, online communication tools and printed media.
  - Conservation strategy development, updated ESA inventory, set conservation targets, develop strategy for conservation network including connectivity among ESAs
  - Ongoing Invasive Plants monitoring and identification of new priority plants for inclusion in the bylaw
  - Implementing the airshed protection strategy (updated in 2023)
  - Implementation of high priority items in the 10 year Drinking Water and Watershed Protection Strategy
  - Flood management planning (with focus on Chemainus and lower Cowichan floodplains)
  - Planning for updates to the State of Environment Reports (future Staff report to Board)
  - Working with partners (Cowichan Tribes, Cowichan Watershed Board, Province, Paper Excellence) on replacement of the Cowichan Lake weir now that funding has been secured from the federal and provincial government, along with associated flood mitigation on the mid and lower river
  - Ongoing collaboration with partner climate initiatives (e.g., participating in North Cowichan climate planning)
  - Examination of potential partnership opportunities to work with local stewardship groups to support priority work
- Ongoing hosting of the advisory group which includes intergovernmental participants to support implementing all priority actions in the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy.
- Hosting a Regional Climate and Health forum to invite broader participation of partners in the community so that community led actions in the Strategy can be supported.

- Updating the rolling 5 year strategy to reflect 2024 budget direction and included Board priorities.

#### Next steps for climate mitigation (2024)

Both the corporate and community greenhouse gas reduction strategies are out of date and new assessment of priority actions is needed to identify where resources should be allocated. As such, the next steps include:

- Initiating an update to the community greenhouse gas reduction strategy
- Initiating an update to the corporate greenhouse gas reduction strategy
- Continuing to implement ongoing actions across the organization? to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions footprint (e.g. support for electric vehicle charging infrastructure and building upgrades).

#### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Activities within the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy have been brought forward for consideration as part of the 2024 budget process by individual lead partners. Minor communication funding to support general education and communications is within budget 131. Budgets (core or supplemental) for actions which carry over into 2025 will be submitted as part of the 2025 budgeting process by each relevant group.

Funding for climate mitigation activities could be drawn from provincially granted funds currently held under budget 131.

#### **COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS**

The 2024 Update of the Cowichan Adapts Implementation Plan will be shared with the community on our website and media release around Q2 2024.

#### **STRATEGIC/BUSINESS PLAN CONSIDERATIONS**

This climate adaptation update is a key milestone towards the action to complete the high priority items (1-4 years) in the Cowichan Adapts Implementation Plan.

The climate mitigation update is a key milestone towards the action to identify, build support for and act on additional initiatives across all of our services to reduce our wastes, cut our emissions, and minimize our overall footprint.

#### **Referred to (upon completion):**

- Community Services (*Cowichan Community Centre, Cowichan Lake Recreation, South Cowichan Recreation, Arts & Culture, Facilities & Transit*)
- Corporate Services (*Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Legislative Services*)
- Operations (*Utilities, Parks & Trails, Recycling & Waste Management*)
- Land Use Services (*Community Planning, Strategic Initiatives, Development Services, Building Inspection & Bylaw Enforcement*)
- Strategic Services (*Communications & Engagement, Economic Development, Emergency Management, Environmental Services*)

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Reviewed for form and content and approved for submission to the Committee:

Resolution:

Corporate Officer

Financial Considerations:

Chief Financial Officer

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment A – Cowichan Adapts Implementation Plan 2024 update