



REPORT

To: Chair and Directors

Report Number: FN-BRD-021

From: Amber Vieweg, Investment Officer

Date: September 29, 2020

Subject: PRRD Housing Needs Assessment Project Update – FN-BRD-021

RECOMMENDATION: *[Corporate Unweighted]*

That the Regional Board receive the report titled “PRRD Housing Needs Assessment Project Update, FN-BRD-021” for information.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

At the May 28, 2020 Regional Board Meeting, the following resolution passed:

MOVED, SECONDED, and CARRIED

That the Regional Board award RFP 08-2020 “Housing Needs Assessment” to Urban Matters, for a total cost of \$196,722 (excluding GST); further, that the Chair and the Chief Administrative Officer be authorized to sign the agreement on behalf of the PRRD.

Since that time, Urban Matters and PRRD staff have completed the following Phases and Tasks:

Phase 1 – Information Review

Comprehensive analysis and overview of housing in the study areas (Electoral Areas B, C, D, and E, Dawson Creek, Pouce Coupe, Chetwynd, and Hudson’s Hope), including but not limited to:

- a) demographic and economic profile of the study area;
- b) home ownership vs. rental ratios, compared to projected need;
- c) historic and forecast information on housing in the study area;
- d) Official community plan bylaws and policies in place in each of the participating local governments in the study area;
- e) housing demand determinants;
- f) housing supply determinants;
- g) housing affordability determinants; and
- h) regional factors.

Phase 2 – Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is nearing completion. This engagement is being completed to gather feedback and perception of demand and supply, and provide suggestions for best practices. A total of 22 individuals participated in stakeholder engagement through interviews and focus groups, including four First Nations staff representatives, one Electoral Area Director, 10 service providers and community organizations, and seven housing providers.

Nine focus groups were originally scheduled; however, only two went ahead due to low response from invited stakeholders - despite a number of requests for participation. Due to low participation in focus groups, the primary engagement method shifted towards interviews, which generated valuable insight into the housing system.

Low interest may have been due to a number of factors. In many of the communities, there were few organizations dedicated to housing and some invitees responded that they did not feel the engagement was relevant for them. Engagement was initiated in the summer months to align with the desired project schedule and some potential participants may have been on vacation. However, engagement was extended into September to allow more opportunities for participation. The Covid-19 pandemic has been an added stressor, and many organizations are facing reduced capacity or prioritizing emergency response, which may have prevented them from participating.

It must be noted that based on the total amount of stakeholder engagement achieved thus far, this engagement is considered to be successful and on par with the experiences of other communities in BC with similar characteristics. The interview methodology is often preferred in these cases because it allows for in-depth discussion. Rural areas in particular tend to have only a small number of organizations that can provide insight into housing trends, and they tend to be volunteer-based with limited capacity. However, it should be noted that the RFP requested a significant number of focus groups and interviews—more than is likely possible given the total number of stakeholders with housing-related knowledge and the limited response from stakeholders to invitations for participation.

Urban Matters also sought to complete a select number of confidential interviews with people with personal experience of housing vulnerability in the study area, including renters, young families looking to buy their first home, individuals with experience of homelessness, and other life circumstances. The purpose of this engagement was to provide case studies of what it is like to experience housing vulnerability in the region. Urban Matters, with support from PRRD staff, reached out to local governments and a wide range of organizations requesting support in identifying potential individuals to interview. Many of those who were asked for assistance expressed support for this methodology and distributed the request through their networks. However, no individuals have committed to participating at this time. This may be because, due to the pandemic, there are fewer in-person interactions where stakeholders can have one-on-one conversations with potential interviewees about participating. It may also be because this is a relatively new form of engagement for the community.

To fill the remaining stakeholder engagement, Urban Matters is seeking to complete interviews with the remaining Electoral Area Directors (C, D, and E) and housing-related stakeholders from Pouce Coupe, Chetwynd, and Electoral Area C. The timeline for interviews with people with personal experience is being extended as the PRRD team and Urban Matters continue working to identify potential interviewees.

Phase 3 – Public Engagement

Public engagement has been conducted to explore findings from data included in Phase 1 and 2, to validate findings. A Community survey was launched on July 15, 2020, and closed August 14, 2020, with 315 respondents participating. The engagement analysis and summary has been completed and will be presented to the Advisory Committee for feedback.

Phase 4 – Analysis

Data has been analyzed with draft housing needs reports expected to be reviewed by municipal Working Group staff early in October, with feedback to be collected prior to their council presentations. Once feedback from the Working Group has been collected, the PRRD will then connect with its Advisory Committee to gather feedback on these draft reports, as well as discuss policy recommendations with them.

Phase 5 – Reporting

Presentations to the Board and Councils is set to take place at the end of October and early November, 2020, with draft housing needs reports expected to be finalized by November 20, 2020.

Phase 6 - Policy Recommendations

Policy recommendations will begin towards the end of October, with draft recommendations presented to the municipal Working Group for review and feedback towards the end of December 2020. These recommendations will then be presented to the Board and councils in January 2021, with feedback on the draft policy and regulatory recommendations incorporated into the final policy and regulatory recommendations report, expected by January 31, 2021.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

1. That the Regional Board provide further direction.

STRATEGIC PLAN RELEVANCE:

- ☒ Partnerships
 - ☒ Collaboration with Local and First Nations governments
- ☒ Advocacy
 - ☒ Senior's Housing – Needs Assessment and Investment

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATION(S):

In 2018, \$122,500 was allocated for this project, then carried forward to the 2020 budget. Combined with the Provincial grant funding of \$140,000, there is a total available budget of \$262,500. Fifty percent of the \$140,000 Provincial grant has been received by the PRRD, with the remaining 50% available after a satisfactory final report and financial summary has been submitted to the Union of BC Municipalities.

COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATION(S):

None.

OTHER CONSIDERATION(S):

None.