



PEACE RIVER
REGIONAL DISTRICT

REGIONAL GROWTH STRATEGY

Regional Board Presentation

February 20, 2025



Agenda

- PRRD Regional Growth Strategy
 - Project overview
- Final Draft Regional Growth Strategy
- Implementation and Adoption

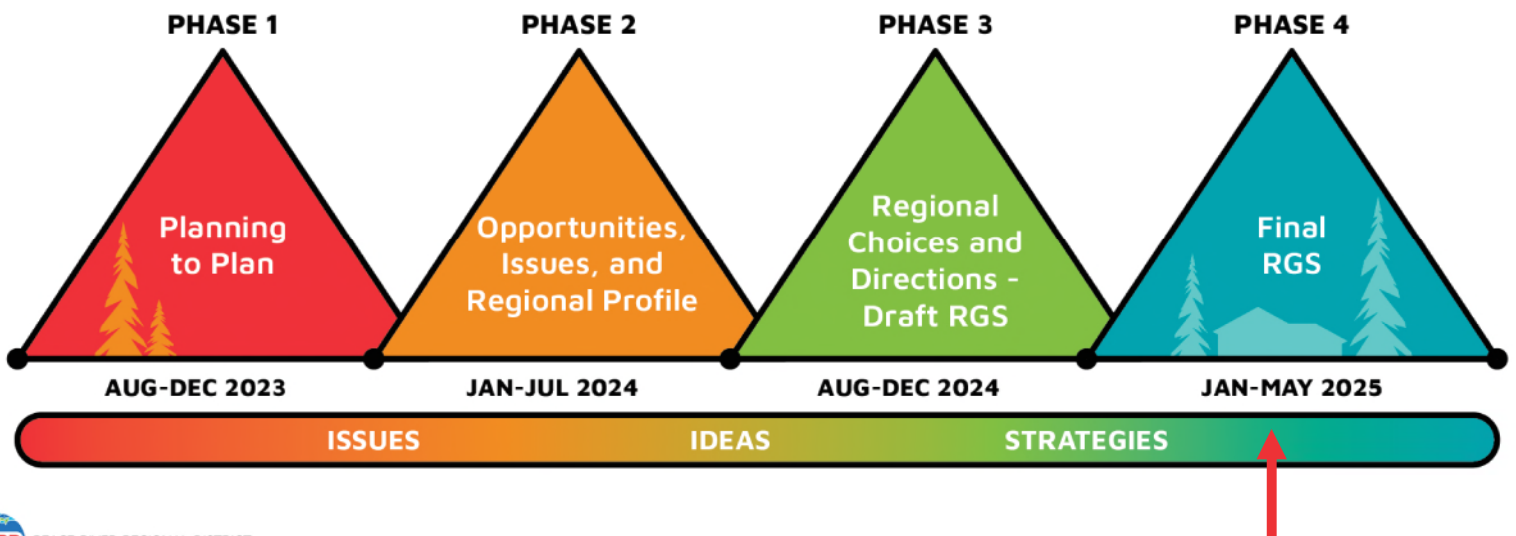
Project Overview

How we got here



RGS Timeline

We are here



RGS Steering Committee

- Representatives from all PRRD municipalities, province (Ministry of Transportation and Transit, Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs, Agricultural Land Commission, Northern Health)
- First Nations in the PRRD were invited to participate on Steering Committee, with Doig River First Nation choosing to participate
- Met five times (in person and on-line between November 2023 and January 2025) to review RGS document and help draft RGS
- Also helped support RGS engagement and outreach

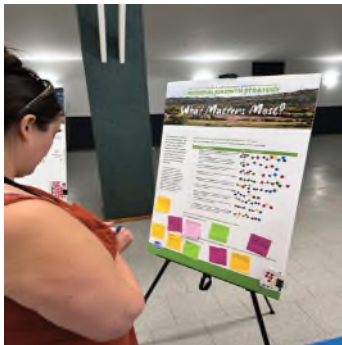
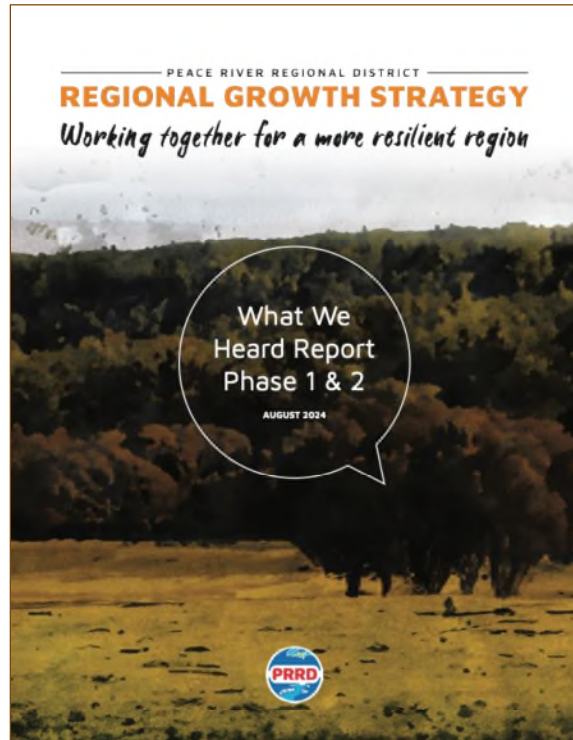


RGS Approach



Engagement

- Two rounds of communication and outreach
- September 2023 to August 2024
- Digital and in-person



PRRD RGS

Overview and Details

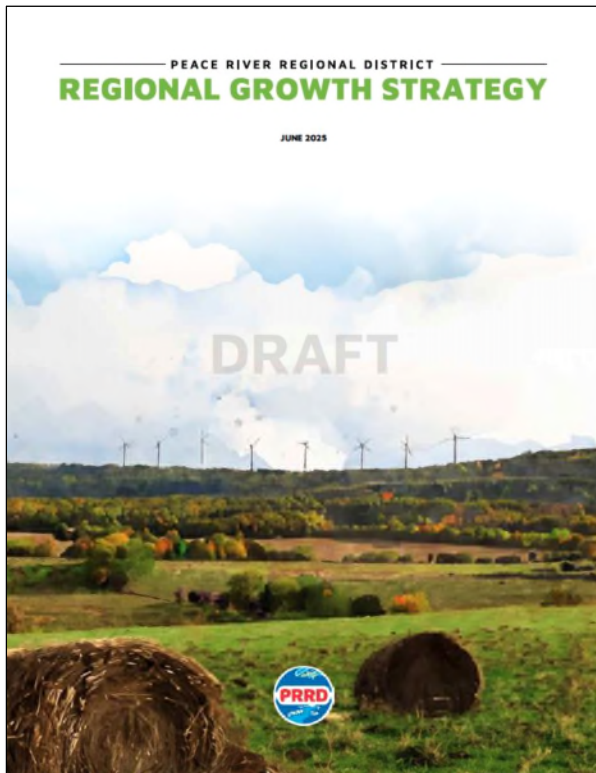


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RGS

- Population and job forecasts

POPULATION ESTIMATES AND PROJECTIONS

The population and demographics of the PRRD are significantly shaped by the region's geography and economy. While the region's population has historically been sensitive to natural resources (coal, natural gas, forestry), which has resulted in fluctuating counts, it could increase by up to 30% (19,000 new residents) in the next two decades.

The PRRD's population, on average, is also younger than the provincial median. However, its residents are gradually getting older and moving away from labour-intensive industries. This demographic shift is accompanied by population declines in many Electoral Areas and smaller municipalities, but larger urban centers are experiencing gradual and steady growth. At the same time, households in the region are getting smaller, with an increase in single-person households, reflecting changes in living preferences and economic realities.

From 2016 to 2021, the population of the PRRD declined at an average annual rate of -0.45%, reaching a total of 61,532 residents in 2021. However, the growth rate varies between local municipalities and electoral areas, with the District of Tumbler Ridge having experienced the fastest annual growth rate (4.1%) and Electoral Area D having experienced the greatest decline (-3.8%). The following table details the region's annual growth rate from 2016 to 2021 by population, municipality, and electoral area.

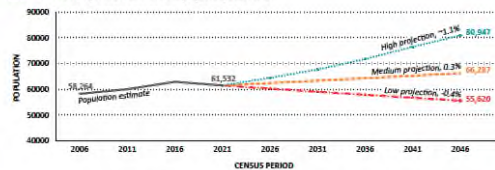
FIGURE 3: 2021 Population of PRRD Member Municipalities and Electoral Areas

Member Municipality/ Electoral Area	2016-2021 Annual Growth Rate	2021 Census Population
City of Fort St. John	1.2%	21,465
City of Dawson Creek	0.2%	12,323
District of Tumbler Ridge	4.1%	2,359
District of Chetwynd	-1.6%	2,302
District of Taylor	-2.1%	1,317
District of Hudson's Hope	-3.4%	841
Village of Pouce Coupe	-0.8%	762
Electoral Area B	-0.9%	5,379
Electoral Area C	-2.2%	5,947
Electoral Area D	-3.8%	4,793
Electoral Area E	-2.0%	2,660

The largest population centres are the City of Fort St. John, the City of Dawson Creek, and Electoral Area C. The smallest are the District of Taylor, the District of Hudson's Hope, and the Village of Pouce Coupe.

Despite a slight decrease since 2016, the overall population in the PRRD has increased steadily, with around 3,300 new residents since 2006. If these increasing growth trends continue, the PRRD could expect to welcome roughly 5,000 (0.3% per year) to 19,000 (1.1% per year) new residents over the next 20 years. However, if the population decline over the past 5 years continues, there may be 6,000 (-0.4% per year) fewer residents by 2046.

FIGURE 4: PRRD Population estimate and projection, 2006-2046



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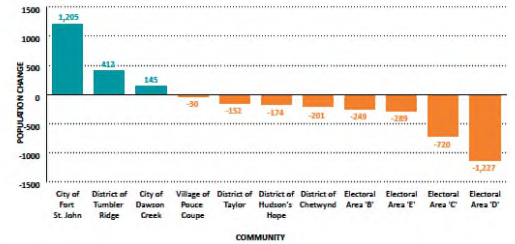
In Figure 4, overall population estimates in the PRRD since 2006 are shown with the solid line. The dashed lines represent population projections under high (BC PEOPLE Projection App¹ average growth over the past 10 years, +1.1%/yr.), medium (average annual growth over the past 10 years, +0.3%/yr.), and low (decline since 2016 continues, -0.4%/yr.) growth scenarios.

Since 2016, the population has only grown in three communities: the City of Fort St. John, the District of Tumbler Ridge, and the City of Dawson Creek (roughly 1,800 combined). Electoral Area C (the most populous Electoral Area) and Electoral Area D experienced the greatest population decline, around 1,800 combined.

Population decline is more pronounced in smaller and more rural Electoral Areas and Municipalities. The City of Fort St. John, the District of Tumbler Ridge, and the City of Dawson Creek were the only communities where populations increased. This demographic shift underscores the challenges that smaller and more remote areas face in sustaining their populations in contrast to larger urban centers that continue to attract most residents in the region.

In some municipalities and electoral areas, population decline is accompanied by moderate levels of immigration. This dynamic suggests a less stable population with a higher turnover of residents moving in and out.

FIGURE 5: Population change by community, 2016 - 2021



1 BC Stats Population Projections Application <https://bcstats.shinyapps.io/popApp/>



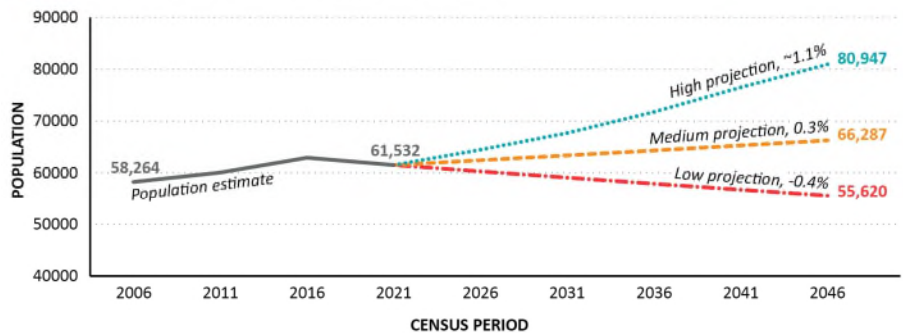
Photo: Pouce Coupe, Northern BC Tourism/Joan Henberg

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RGS – Population & Demographics

- Even with 'High' projection there is capacity to absorb most growth (19,000) in municipalities based on existing OCPs
- Reflected in RGS policies

FIGURE: PRRD Population estimate and projection, 2006-2046

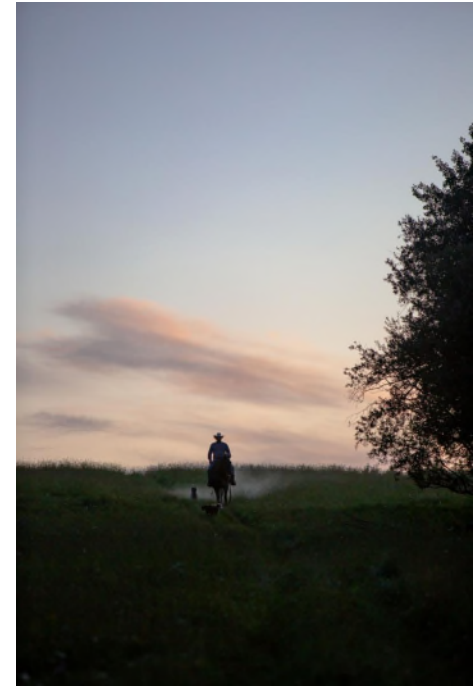


RGS Vision

The Peace River Regional District is comprised of distinct and unique urban and rural communities. The region is shaped by its roots in agriculture and its culture of independence, resilience and compassion for others.

With a strong regional economy, residents enjoy a high quality of life with a broad array of effective and responsive regional services.

Moving forward, we will continue to build strong collaborative relationships with all residents and First Nations in our region. And we will engage and involve all residents and communities as we move towards a bright, prosperous and healthy future.



RGS Goal Areas

- RGS organized around nine policy goals which were developed through community engagement and outreach
- Each of the policy goals is, in turn, supported by a series of related policy objectives
- All goals are interconnected

	1. Community Building Support compact, complete urban communities, maintain rural character and offer choice and affordability in housing.
	2. Economic Strength Encourage a diverse, resilient and prosperous economy that builds on regional strengths.
	3. Agriculture and Food Support agriculture and protect farmlands in the PRRD.
	4. Living Well Foster safe, healthy communities that support a high quality of life for all.
	5. Infrastructure and Services Provide efficient, cost-effective services that contribute to regional wellbeing and health.
	6. Ecosystem Health Protect the air, water and lands on which we all depend.
	7. Transportation and Mobility Collaborate with partners to provide an accessible, safe and efficient transportation system for people and goods.
	8. Climate Resilience Adapt and ensure the PRRD is prepared for a changing climate.
	9. Regional Collaboration Coordinate and collaborate with residents, PRRD member municipalities, rural communities, other levels of government and First Nations to achieve shared goals and address common issues.

RGS Goals & Policies

- Nine goal areas with supporting goal statement
- Short description of topic area
- Each goal is supported by two to five related policy objectives, each of which has between two to eight policies

Goal Area

2. ECONOMIC STRENGTH



Goal Statement

GOAL: Encourage a diverse, resilient, and prosperous economy that builds on regional strengths.

Context and Rationale

A healthy, diverse regional economy is one of the cornerstones of more sustainable, resilient communities. As a region, the PRRD has some economic diversity. Outside of the oil and gas sector, public sector employment is significant, with government, health, and education services clustered in Fort St. John and Dawson Creek. Agriculture is a major contributor, while forestry, and tourism form other key sectors. In the region, Fort St. John and Dawson Creek are the regional employment centres.

- g) Explore economic opportunities and collaboration on projects of mutual interest and benefit with First Nations in the PRRD.
- h) Consider the development of a Regional Economic Development Strategy through a collaborative process involving PRRD member municipalities, economic development stakeholders, industry groups, and First Nations in the PRRD who may be interested in participating.

Policy Objective

Public consultation carried out through the RGS process identified the local economy as areas of critical concern to the region.

1. Support a diversified regional economy.

- a) Encourage economic development that builds on the strengths and character of PRRD member municipalities urban and rural communities in the PRRD.
- b) Encourage business retention, expansion and attraction activities with special focus on region-serving businesses.
- c) Support secondary value-added industry in all sectors where feasible and appropriate.
- d) Collaborate with PRRD member municipalities and regional partners to attract high-tech, knowledge-based industries.
- e) Support the agricultural sector, including the preservation of agricultural lands and local food production and processing facilities.
- f) Support the development of a targeted regional workforce attraction program in collaboration with PRRD educational institutions like the Northern Lights College.

2. Support and promote tourism and tourism-related activities.

- a) Support regional tourism marketing efforts.
- b) Support and encourage regional recreational tourism initiatives and projects.
- c) Work with PRRD member municipalities and stakeholder groups to continue implementing recommendations from the Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan.

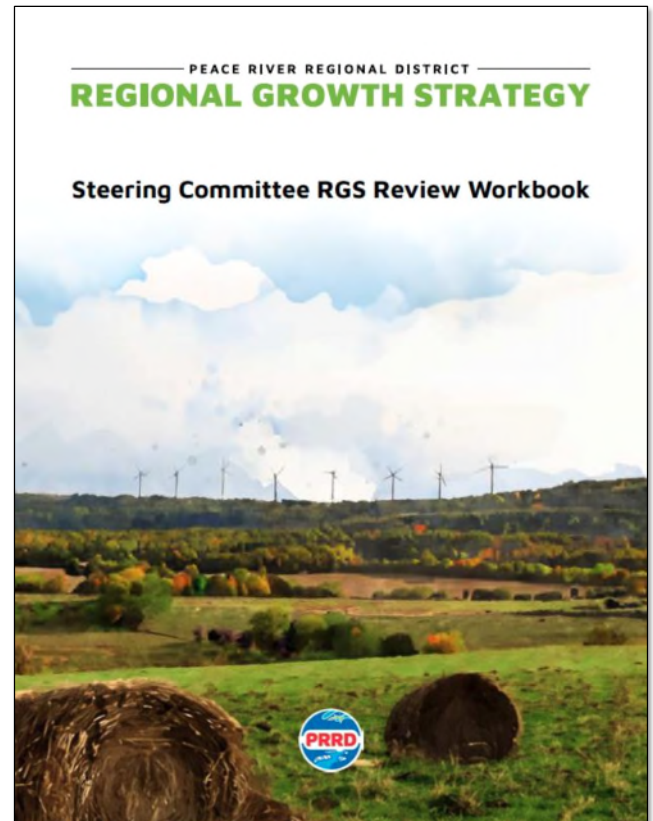
3. Address workforce housing.

- a) Work with the natural resource sector to identify opportunities to minimize the impacts of industry on housing issues.
- b) Advocate for senior government resources to pilot and support new initiatives for workforce housing.

Policies

RGS Policies

- General policy types include:
 - PRRD-focused policies
 - Joint and collective advocacy policies, i.e., role in representing the regional district (the collective voice)
 - Collaborative PRRD-led regional projects (RGS implementation actions)
 - Some policies and actions appear in more than one section



RGS Policies - highlights



1. Community Building

1. Encourage and support growth in urban centres.
 - a) Recognize the City of Fort St. John and the City of Dawson Creek as the PRRD's main urban centres with their established services and identified growth capacity.
 - b) Support growth in smaller urban centres (District of Chetwynd, District of Tumbler Ridge, District of Hudson's Hope, District of Taylor, Village of Pouce Coupe) that is within their Official Community Plans' established development capacities.
 - c) Work collaboratively with member municipalities on fringe area planning through PRRD OCP updates.



RGS Policies - highlights



1. Community Building

2. Protect the character of rural areas.
 - a) Identify and engage with rural communities throughout the region which could be designated as rural settlement centres and accommodate higher levels of development than other rural communities.
 - b) Ensure that potential rural settlement centres consider future servicing needs and associated development costs and financing.

1. COMMUNITY BUILDING

GOAL: Support compact and complete urban communities, maintain rural character, and offer choice and affordability in housing.

The PRRD is composed of diverse and distinct communities that range in size from small, rural settlements to larger urban centres like Fort St. John and Dawson Creek. Over the next 20 years, the PRRD is expected to accommodate an additional 15,000 residents. It is expected that about 90% of this growth will occur within larger communities, with most in Fort St. John and Dawson Creek and smaller amounts in Taylor, Tumbler Ridge, Chetwynd, Hudson's Hope and Pouce Coupe. The remaining growth is expected to occur in the PRRD's rural areas and communities.

Encouraging the development of compact and complete communities, whether urban or rural, will help reduce our impact on the surrounding natural environment, improve access to economic and social opportunities, and enable more efficient distribution of services, such as utilities and water, that benefit residents of all ages.

Like most regions across the province, the PRRD is facing the challenges of rising housing costs, limited rental stocks, and increasing homelessness. Larger communities like Fort St. John and Dawson Creek are particularly affected, but in general, affordability issues are a concern for most communities in the region, including rural areas.

Housing is a key determinant for many aspects of health, wellbeing, and economic prosperity. As a core land use planning issue, housing is an area where more coordinated planning across the region could have a significant impact.

One important sign of a healthy community is housing diversity that meets the needs of all residents, regardless of their age, income, or ability. Planning for a wide range of housing now will ensure the demand for accessible, affordable, and adaptable housing will be met in the future.

1. Encourage and help direct most growth to urban centres.
 - a) Recognize the City of Fort St. John and City of Dawson Creek as the PRRD's primary urban centres with their established development and growth capacity.
 - b) Support compact development in urban centres.
 - c) Develop a memorandum of understanding between the PRRD, local governments, and the Agricultural Land Commission to address the process for municipal boundary extensions, as required.
2. Protect the character of rural areas.
 - a) Discourage rezoning of large rural land parcels to smaller parcel sizes in rural areas.
 - b) Identify areas where rezoning to larger minimum lot sizes is necessary to protect agricultural uses and/or rural character.
 - c) Consider designating Prespatou as a rural settlement centre that could accommodate higher levels of development than other rural communities.
 - d) Work with the Prespatou Planning Committee on potential designation of the community as a rural settlement area.
 - e) Engage with other rural communities that may be interested in potential designation as rural settlement areas.

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RGS Policies - highlights



2. Economic Strength

1. Support a diversified regional economy.
 - h) Explore the development of a Regional Employment Lands Strategy.
 - i) Consider the development of a **Regional Economic Development Strategy** through a collaborative process involving PRRD member municipalities, economic development stakeholders, industry groups and First Nations in the PRRD who may be interested in participating.



RGS Policies - highlights



3. Agriculture and Food

1. Support local agriculture and related businesses.
 - e) Work collaboratively with member municipalities, agricultural producers, residents and First Nations to develop a Regional Agriculture Strategy.
 - f) Work with PRRD member municipalities to advocate to the Ministry of Agriculture to protect agricultural land within the rural areas while recognizing urban development needs within municipalities.



RGS Policies - highlights



4. Living Well

1. Collaborate for safe, healthy, and active communities across the PRRD.
 - f) Work with the Ministry of Transportation and Transit and member municipalities to create a Regional Transportation Master Plan that considers active transportation.

3. Enhance community wellbeing.
 - d) Consider working with PRRD member municipalities, non-profit housing providers, other housing and development partners and residents to develop a Regional Housing Plan.



RGS Implementation

Putting the RGS into action



Implementation Actions

1. PRRD Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw Update
2. PRRD Updated Development Permit Areas - Lakeshore Development
3. PRRD Parkland Acquisition Policy
4. PRRD Rural Settlement Centre Study
5. PRRD Regional Natural Hazard and Climate Risk Assessment
6. PRRD Regional Parks and Trails Master Plan Update
7. PRRD Regional Employment Lands Strategy
8. PRRD Regional Housing Plan
9. PRRD Regional Transportation Plan
10. PRRD Regional Agriculture Strategy
11. PRRD Regional Economic Development Strategy

1 – 4
years

Regional Context Statements

- Outline relationship between this RGS and municipal OCP
- Member municipalities required to prepare an updated OCP with a regional context statement within two years of RGS adoption
- Regional Board will approve the context statements
- RGS Implementation Framework provides examples from comparatively sized municipalities in BC



RGS Monitoring

- LGA requires regional districts to measure its progress on their RGS through a monitoring and evaluation program
- A set of indicators was developed based on the nine RGS goal areas
- Data for all the indicators are available freely from trusted sources with data refresh cycles of at least every two years



RGS Referrals and Adoption

- Final Draft to be presented to Regional Board for first and second reading (**March 20 PRRD Board Meeting**)
- Public Hearing (April 10 - TBC)
- RGS referred to municipalities, neighbouring regional districts (RDBN, RDFFG), Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs (**April**)
- Municipalities review RGS in the context of any community plans (current and planned) and for acceptance or refusal by resolution (**60 days from receiving RGS**)
- Regional Board third reading and adoption (**June 19 PRRD Board Meeting**)



Questions?

Comments?



Thank You

