To: Regional Planning and Agriculture Committee

From: Lee-Ann Garnett, Senior Regional Planner
Planning, Policy and Environment Department

Date: August 27, 2013  Meeting Date: September 6, 2013

Subject: Consideration of the District of Maple Ridge’s Regional Context Statement

RECOMMENDATION
That the Board accept the Maple Ridge Regional Context Statement submitted to Metro Vancouver on July 29, 2013.

PURPOSE
The purpose of this report is to request that the Board consider acceptance of the District of Maple Ridge’s Regional Context Statement in accordance with Section 866 of the Local Government Act.

BACKGROUND
On July 29, 2011, the Metro Vancouver Board adopted the Regional Growth Strategy. Pursuant to Section 866 of the Local Government Act, each local government must submit a Regional Context Statement within two years of the adoption of the new Regional Growth Strategy.

A Regional Context Statement (RCS) identifies the relationship between the municipality’s Official Community Plan (OCP) and the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS), and, if applicable, how the Official Community Plan is to be made consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy over time. The RGS identifies Metro Vancouver’s role to accept (by a simple majority weighted Board vote) Regional Context Statements that support the goals and strategies of the RGS. The role of municipalities is to adopt RCSs that specify how the municipality’s OCP addresses each of the applicable RGS policy actions. In considering an RCS, the Metro Vancouver Board’s expectation is that the content of an acceptable RCS is generally consistent with the Goals, Strategies and Actions and the parcel based regional land use designations in the RGS.

The Maple Ridge Regional Context Statement was received by Metro Vancouver on July 29, 2013, for consideration of acceptance by the Board (Attachments 1 & 2). Metro Vancouver must respond within 120 days of receipt of the Regional Context Statement. Pending acceptance by the Metro Vancouver Board, Maple Ridge would then continue with its bylaw adoption process.

Maple Ridge Council gave the OCP Bylaw 1st Reading on July 24, 2013. Maple Ridge intends to give 2nd Reading, hold a Public Hearing and give 3rd Reading and final adoption to the Bylaw after Metro Vancouver’s acceptance of the RCS (anticipated in fall 2013). Prior to the OCP / RCS Bylaw receiving 1st Reading, Metro Vancouver staff worked with Maple Ridge staff to provide comments on the draft RCS.
DISCUSSION

Maple Ridge Official Community Plan
The Regional Context Statement reflects the OCP adopted by Maple Ridge in 2006. As the OCP was written to align with the previous RGS, there are some topic areas where Maple Ridge has indicated it will work towards updating its policy over time in order to more fully address the content of the new RGS and is undertaking a number of planning studies now (Commercial and Industrial Strategy, Strategic Transportation Plan, Environmental Management Strategy, Housing Action Plan, Albion Flats Area Plan, Population and Dwelling Unit Projections).

Maple Ridge Context
Located on the eastern boundary of Metro Vancouver, Maple Ridge has the third largest land base of all Metro Vancouver municipalities. Over 80% of Maple Ridge has a non-urban regional land use designation, with Conservation and Recreation being the predominant regional land use designation (15,000 ha or 58%), followed by Agricultural (3350 ha or 13%) and Rural (3,000 ha or 12%). Maple Ridge is projected to grow significantly, and will add approximately 40,000 people over the next 30 years. Thus, while Maple Ridge contains significant regional ecological, recreation and agricultural features, it is also experiencing growth challenges. Maintaining the Urban Containment Boundary and protecting non-urban areas are important goals while accommodating more people and jobs and providing transportation infrastructure and other services in support of developing a complete community.

Goal 1 – Create a Compact Urban Area

Urban Containment Boundary
Maple Ridge’s Regional Context Statement map depicts the Urban Containment Boundary, which is consistent with the boundary shown in the Regional Growth Strategy. The Urban Containment Boundary shown in Maple Ridge’s RCS is supported by an “Urban Area Boundary” depicted in the Maple Ridge OCP. The RCS Urban Containment Boundary and OCP Urban Area Boundary are important policy tools for protecting Maple Ridge’s non-urban areas.

Population, Dwelling Unit and Employment Projections
Table A.1 of the RGS sets out population, dwelling unit and employment projections by municipalities for the years 2021, 2031 and 2041 as guidelines for long range planning in Metro Vancouver and member municipalities. The Maple Ridge Regional Context Statement sets out projections for 2041, and while lower than the projections in the RGS, they are within an acceptable range and are generally consistent with the RGS. Maple Ridge’s 2011 population is 79,000, dwelling units are 29,000, and employment is 25,000 (2011 Census). For the year 2041, the Maple Ridge RCS projects a population of 118,000 (RGS 132,000), dwelling units of 45,000 (RGS 50,900) and employment at 42,500 (RGS 48,000).

A number of municipalities are requesting some degree of adjustment to the municipal growth projections contained in RGS Table A.1. Given the need to update the RGS growth projections following the full 2011 Census release, and some anticipated reallocation of regional growth projections among municipalities, Metro Vancouver staff conclude that the Maple Ridge’s projections can be accommodated within the RGS regional growth projections. It is anticipated that following Board acceptance of all municipal Regional Context Statements, municipal growth
projections in RGS Table A.1 will be amended to be consistent with projections contained in accepted RCSs.

Maple Ridge’s RCS does not include interim growth projections for the years 2021 and 2031. Projections for 2021 and 2031 are important because they assist with infrastructure planning (utilities and transportation), and all municipalities have been requested to include the interim numbers within their RCS. Metro Vancouver staff will work collaboratively with Maple Ridge staff to ensure that population, dwelling unit and employment projections for the years 2021 and 2031 be included at the next available opportunity for an update to the Regional Context Statement and Official Community Plan.

**Urban Centres and Frequent Transit Development Areas**

A Regional City Centre is identified for Maple Ridge. The RCS sets out the boundaries for the Centre, and identifies policies (OCP Town Centre Area Plan, Chapter 10.4) that support the Regional City Centre designation. To assist in reinforcing the importance of focusing growth within Urban Centres, the RGS requests that Regional Context Statements contain a target for the number of new dwelling units and the employment to be directed to the Urban Centre (RGS action 1.2.6(a)). Maple Ridge’s Town Centre Area Plan contains a projection to 2021 for population and dwelling units, and a goal for job creation based on population growth. The projections included in the Regional Context Statement are generally supportive of the RGS, but do not respond explicitly to the RGS action. Maple Ridge has included a work toward statement that it will undertake a review of its targets for the Maple Ridge Town Centre, and this should result in better alignment with the RGS. As indicated in the RGS, the revised targets should indicate the proportion of the municipality’s overall growth of new dwelling units and employment targeted for the Centre, and be estimated for the years 2021, 2031 and 2041.

Maple Ridge has not identified any Frequent Transit Development Areas (FTDAs) at this time. It is anticipated that municipalities will identify FTDAs as part of other local area planning processes. Given that Maple Ridge will grow by about 40,000 people to 2041, future OCP or Strategic Transportation Plan updates should consider creating FTDAs in due course to identify locations for growth in alignment with the Frequent Transit Network.

**Policies to Exclude Non-Residential Major Trip Generating Uses**

RGS action 1.2.6(d) directs municipalities to “include policies for General Urban Areas which: . . . iv) exclude non-residential major trip-generating uses, as defined in the Regional Context Statement, from those portions of General Urban areas outside of Urban Centres and Frequent Transit Development Areas”. Maple Ridge’s Regional Context Statement identifies an OCP policy that supports initiatives to reduce traffic demand and vehicle trips, but this policy does not respond fully to the RGS action, as municipalities have been requested to define non-residential major trip generating uses and explicitly exclude them outside of Urban Centres and FTDAs. Therefore, Maple Ridge is requested to amend its RCS at the next available opportunity to include a statement that it will work towards developing a policy to exclude non-residential major trip-generating uses in areas outside of Urban Centres and FTDAs. Including a work towards statement in the Regional Context Statement is consistent with the approach of other municipalities that do not have OCP policies in support of RGS 1.2.6(d) (iv).
Rural Land Use Designation and Policies to Protect Rural Areas from Urban Development

Policies to specify the scale of development in the RGS Rural areas are set out in the OCP (section 3). Maple Ridge’s OCP has three land use designations within the RGS Rural Area: “Rural Residential,” which allows for 0.8 ha lots where community water is available, and 2.0 hectare lots where on-site water is provided; “Suburban Residential,” which allows for 0.4 hectare lots and requires private sewage systems; and Estate Suburban Residential, which allows for 0.4 hectare lots and where “urban-level densities will not be supported”.

Goal 2 – Support a Sustainable Economy

The RCS supports creating a sustainable regional economy through OCP policy, and the preparation of a “Commercial and Industrial Land Use Strategy” (underway). One of the key strategies in RGS Goal 2 is to support the development of office space in Urban Centres; the RGS asks Regional Context Statements to identify policies such as density bonusing and zoning that reserves land for office space within the Centre.

In the past, Maple Ridge has supported business development in their Centre, specifically through the Town Centre Incentive Program. While it is not anticipated that Maple Ridge Town Centre will play a major role in the location of regionally significant office development in the near to medium future, programs that support smaller scale office development and office uses that support the local community are important from both an economic perspective and also for creating a vibrant town centre. Therefore, while the RCS may not reference specific policies now, it would be beneficial if the Commercial and Industrial Land Use Strategy identify such policies, programs or tools that are appropriate in the Maple Ridge context to continue to support office use in the Town Centre.

Protecting the Supply of Industrial Land / Policies for Mixed Employment Areas

The RCS identifies Industrial and Mixed Employment areas in Maple Ridge. While the existing OCP is generally supportive of the RGS goal, more detailed OCP policy would strengthen the protection of Industrial lands and clarify uses for Mixed Employment areas. The Commercial and Industrial Land Use Strategy will help support the RGS goals, and the Regional Context Statement indicates the strategy will be used to update OCP policies in this regard.

Protecting Agriculture Land and Promoting Agricultural Viability

Maple Ridge also has a significant Agricultural land base. Agricultural land and agricultural viability is supported through the OCP, and through an Agriculture Plan endorsed by Maple Ridge Council, and these policies support the objectives of the RGS.

Goal 3 – Protect the Environment and Respond to Climate Change Impacts

Protecting Conservation and Recreation Lands and Enhancing Environmental Features

Maple Ridge’s geography contains many significant ecosystems, natural features and watercourses. The RCS maps the regional “Conservation and Recreation” land use designation areas, and the OCP supports Maple Ridge’s natural features through Conservation, Forest, Park and Parks within the ALR land use designations. The RCS references the OCP’s many policies that support these land use designations. The OCP also contains a map of Maple Ridge’s natural features (Schedule “C”), and uses a number of policy tools to protect those areas (e.g., Development Permit guidelines, environmental impact assessments, etc.).
Reducing Energy Consumption and Greenhouse Gas Emissions, and Improving Air Quality

The OCP contains a greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of reducing community greenhouse gas emissions by 33% below 2007 levels by 2020 and 80% by 2050, and cites a number of air quality, climate change, land use and development, and transportation policies that work towards achieving the target.

Withstanding Climate Change Impacts and Natural Hazard Risks

The OCP provides a comprehensive response to this RGS objective and identifies natural hazard risks and identifies a number of strategies to reduce them (e.g., Watercourse Protection Development Permit Area Guidelines, Natural Features Development Permit Area Guidelines, Policies for Hillside Development, etc.).

Goal 4 – Develop Complete Communities

Provide Diverse and Affordable Housing

The RCS references the OCP which supports diverse and affordable housing by promoting a mix of housing types and tenures supporting affordable, rental and special needs housing. Maple Ridge is preparing a Housing Action Plan (anticipated in mid 2014), and this will help strengthen existing housing policies.

Developing Healthy and Complete Communities

The OCP provides a comprehensive policy response to developing healthy and complete communities.

Goal 5 – Support Sustainable Transportation Choices

Coordinate Land Use and Transportation to Encourage Transit, Multiple-occupancy Vehicles, Cycling and Walking

The Regional Context Statement references the OCP which supports coordinating land use and transportation to encourage more trips by transit, multi-occupancy vehicles, cycling and walking. Maple Ridge is completing a Transportation Plan (anticipated in late 2013), and the RCS indicates Maple Ridge will work towards greater consistency between the RCS and the OCP in this regard. As indicated in comments for RGS Goal 1, any future OCP update that identifies growth locations (e.g. Urban Centres, Frequent Transit Development Areas, Local Centres) along TransLink’s Frequent Transit Network will also help achieve the objectives of RGS Goal 5.

Movement of Vehicles for Passengers, Goods and Services

The Regional Context Statement map shows “Major Road Corridors,” and this supports the RGS actions on vehicle movement for passengers, goods and services.

Regional Land Use Designation Changes

RCS Map 1 Regional Land Use Designations contains four locations where the land use designation differs from that shown in the Regional Growth Strategy (see maps, Attachment 4):

1. Site 1 - Lands Spanning the North Alouette River - designated “Conservation and Recreation” in the RGS, and shown in the Regional Context Statement as “Agricultural”. 
Maple Ridge is requesting this change because it aligns with the OCP land use designation of “Agricultural”. The site is in the Agricultural Land Reserve. The change proposed is generally consistent with the intention of the RGS Agricultural land use designation.

2. **Site 2 - Lands north of 144 Avenue** is designated “Conservation and Recreation” in the RGS, and shown in the Regional Context Statement as “Rural”. Maple Ridge is requesting this change because it aligns with the OCP land use designations of “Rural Residential” and “Agricultural”. The change proposed is generally consistent with the intention of the RGS Rural land use designation.

3. **Site 3 – Site north of 128th Avenue near Alouette Road** is designated “Conservation and Recreation” in the RGS, and shown in the Regional Context Statement as “Rural”. Maple Ridge is requesting this change because it aligns with the OCP land use designation of “Suburban Residential”. The change proposed is generally consistent with the intention of the RGS Rural land use designation.

4. **Site 4 – Kanaka Business Park** – is designated “Industrial” and “Conservation and Recreation” in the RGS and shown in the Regional Context Statement as “Rural”. Maple Ridge is requesting this change because it aligns with the OCP land use designations of “Suburban Residential” and “Rural Resource”. The change proposed is generally consistent with the intention of the RGS Rural land use designation.

The Regional Context Statement contains these four areas where land use designations differ from the RGS. The map amendments are generally consistent with the RGS, and it is recommended that the Board accept the RCS map with the changes as described in this report. If the Board accepts the Regional Context Statement, then the RGS will be amended with a future housekeeping amendment.

**Special Study Area**

The “Albion Flats” area in Maple Ridge has a regional “Special Study Area” overlay. The Albion Flats area has a RGS land use designation of Agricultural, an OCP designation of Agriculture, and is in the Agricultural Land Reserve. The OCP contains two relevant policies for Albion Flats:

- **6-15** Maple Ridge will work with the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), the Greater Vancouver Sewerage and Drainage District (GVS&DD) and the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) to determine the future of the Albion Flats in conjunction with community, Regional and Provincial goals.

- **6-16** Prior to Council giving consideration to a change in land use, an extension of municipal services, or an amendment to the Urban Area Boundary, Maple Ridge will:
  - i. Develop and implement a Comprehensive Strategy as outlined in Section 11.1.3; and
  - ii. Collaborate with Regional and Provincial authorities to complete a comparative analysis to review land use, social, economic, and environmental goals.

Maple Ridge has taken many steps towards meeting the OCP policies for Albion Flats: they have completed an Agriculture Plan; reviewed the Urban Area boundary and are currently working on the Commercial and Industrial Land Use Strategy that will inform the future plans for the area. Maple Ridge has also been in discussion with the Agricultural Land Commission.
The implication of the RGS Special Study Area overlay for Albion Flats is that at such time that Maple Ridge requests a change in regional land use designation for all or a portion of the area from the existing RGS Agricultural designation to an RGS urban designation, the proposed amendment would be a Type 3 amendment (50% + 1 weighted vote of the Board / no regional public hearing), rather than a Type 2 amendment (two-thirds weighted vote of the Board / regional public hearing).

**ALTERNATIVES**
2. That the Board not accept the District of Maple Ridge’s Regional Context Statement, indicating the provisions to which the Board objects and the reasons for objection, and request the District of Maple Ridge amend its Regional Context Statement and re-submit the revised Regional Context Statement to the Board for consideration.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**
If the Board chooses not to accept the Regional Context a dispute resolution process may take place, as prescribed in the *Local Government Act*. The cost for this dispute resolution is also prescribed based on the proportion of assessed land values; Metro Vancouver would be responsible for most of the costs associated with a dispute resolution.

**OTHER IMPLICATIONS**
Maple Ridge’s Regional Context Statement is generally consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy and Maple Ridge staff has worked closely with Metro Vancouver staff to develop the RCS. Typically, municipalities send the RCS to Metro Vancouver staff at OCP Bylaw 1st Reading for comment, and Metro Vancouver staff can make requests for changes such as indicated in this report at that time. Then the municipality sends the RCS to Metro Vancouver after Public Hearing for acceptance, and there is no need for Metro Vancouver to request additional changes as they are usually done prior to public hearing.

In this case, because of the July 29, 2013 RCS submission deadline, Maple Ridge sent the RCS to Metro Vancouver before their Public Hearing for acceptance. This demonstrates a committed effort to meet the statutory deadline and is appreciated. However, as a result, Maple Ridge did not complete interim population, dwelling unit and employment projections for the years 2021 and 2031 nor add a statement that Maple Ridge will work towards reviewing its policy to exclude non-residential major trip generating uses outside of Urban Centres and Frequent Transit Development Areas. These changes cannot be made without asking Maple Ridge to revise and resubmit their RCS. The *Local Government Act*, section 866(4) states that any changes to the Regional Context Statement must be submitted to the Metro Vancouver Board for acceptance.

Consequently, staff is recommending these remaining issues be collaboratively approached and included in the next opportunity to update the RCS and OCP. Maple Ridge has indicated that the completion of their Housing Action Plan, anticipated for mid 2014, would provide such an opportunity.
SUMMARY / CONCLUSION
Maple Ridge has submitted a Regional Context Statement for the Metro Vancouver Board’s consideration. The RCS provides a response to the goals, strategies and actions of the Regional Growth Strategy. Maple Ridge staff worked closely with Metro Vancouver staff to prepare a Regional Context Statement that addresses the RGS, while meeting the needs of the municipality. In cases where there is not full consistency, Maple Ridge has committed to doing further policy work – in particular developing growth targets for the Maple Ridge Town Centre. The Maple Ridge Regional Context Statement is generally consistent with the Metro Vancouver Regional Growth Strategy, and acceptance is recommended.

Attachments:
1. District of Maple Ridge’s Regional Context Statement (Doc. #7723664).
2. Letter from the District of Maple Ridge received on July 29, 2013 requesting Board consideration of Maple Ridge’s Regional Context Statement (Doc. #7735588).

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