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TO: Chair and Directors
Electoral Areas Services Committee

Supported by James Warren
Chief Administrative Officer

FROM: James Warren
Chief Administrative Officer

J. Warren

RE: Saratoga Beach Local Area Plan Progress and Timeline

Purpose

To provide an update on the Saratoga Beach Local Area Plan (LAP) project, and the 2026 workplan and schedule.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

This report is provided for information purposes only.

Executive Summary

- The Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) is preparing a LAP for the Saratoga Beach Settlement Node to provide place-specific policy guidance for land use and community change over a five to ten-year horizon. The plan does not approve development, rezone land, or commit funding.
- Saratoga Beach is in the traditional unceded territory of the K'ómoks First Nation and the CVRD acknowledges the proximity of K'ómoks lands to the south in Williams Beach area.
- Aspects of the Saratoga Beach Local Area Plan relate to water sources, the Oyster River and coastline areas, and potential archaeological sites within the Cultural Heritage Investigation Permit (CHIP) area. These areas align with K'ómoks interests in protection of cultural heritage and environmental stewardship.
- In 2025, staff completed an initial technical review and public engagement, including a survey (358 responses), an open house (more than 100 attendees), meetings with residents' associations, and hosted a business, tourism, and development focus group (22 participants). Key themes were documented in the Phase 2 [What We Heard report](#).
- Feedback reflected interest in accommodating housing and local services over time, alongside concerns about water supply, drainage and sewage management, environmental sensitivity and hazards, and maintaining rural character. Views differed across resident, business, and development interests, signalling trade-offs that need to be made explicit before draft policies are

released.

- To support evidence-based policy decisions, staff are advancing a set of targeted, short foundational studies, to be completed within the next few months, focused on area constraints and carrying capacity, with the aim of defining feasible growth parameters and clarifying servicing risks and environmental implications.
- The studies include an on-site sewage study, an environmental baseline assessment, , and a high-level community wastewater servicing benchmark, developed with qualified professionals and supported by CVRD Engineering.
- With the studies underway, the 2026 workplan prioritises integrating results into a draft plan, communicating the updated schedule to residents and interested parties, and initiating early referrals to external agencies and First Nations, followed by public review and engagement period and the bylaw adoption process.
- Staff are targeting completion in advance of the October 17, 2026, local government election.

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Government and Community Interests Distribution (Upon Agenda Publication)

Electoral Area C Advisory Planning Commission	✓
Saratoga and Miracle Beach Residents’ Association	✓
Macaulay Road and Area Neighbourhood Association	✓
Strathcona Regional District	✓
K’ómoks First Nation	✓

Background/Current Situation

Saratoga Beach is identified as a Settlement Node in the Comox Valley Regional Growth Strategy (RGS). Settlement Nodes are areas where context-sensitive growth may be considered outside Municipal Areas, informed through local planning policy within a LAP.

In alignment with the RGS, the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan (OCP) identifies Settlement Nodes as primary growth areas in the CVRD electoral areas, intended to function as mixed-density rural communities with a range of housing

types and small-scale services. A LAP provides place-specific objectives and policies and has the same legal authority as the OCP.

Work on the Saratoga Beach LAP began in early 2025 with a five to ten-year planning horizon and defined scope. The plan guides how the area may change over time and under what conditions. It does not approve development, rezone land, or commit funding.

The process is organised in four phases: baseline conditions and technical review, community visioning and engagement, draft plan and policy development, and refinement and bylaw adoption.

As part of project initiation, the CVRD met with Chief and Council in April 2025 and were advised of K'ómoks concerns around water availability, protecting fish flows in the Oyster River, as well as water quality along the coast. Saratoga Beach is also located within the K'ómoks Area of Potential and contains significant archaeological interests. K'ómoks indicated a desire to participate in the development of the Local Area Plan but due to staffing constraints additional collaboration was not possible. CVRD will ensure archaeological considerations inform the plan and subsequent water supply and wastewater analysis, as well as baseline mapping (described later in this report), will help to inform policy that addresses the Nation's environmental concerns. K'ómoks will also receive a referral as part of the engagement period in Phase 3.

Phase 2 engagement was completed in spring 2025 and included a survey (358 responses), an open house (more than 100 attendees), meetings with residents' associations, and a business, tourism, and development focus group (22 participants), supported by ongoing correspondence and online questions and answers.

In July 2025, the Electoral Areas Services Committee received a progress update and the Phase 2 [What We Heard report](#) for information. The update compared engagement input with technical findings and identified areas of alignment and tension that require clear direction in Phase 3.

Engagement feedback consistently prioritised environmental protection, rural character, parks and trails, public beach access, and habitat and natural system restoration. Nearly half of survey respondents, 46 per cent or 166 of 358, indicated that the current density pattern is sufficient. Where change was supported, it was generally limited to secondary suites and carriage houses to support aging in place and multigenerational living. Interest in additional or more targeted density was expressed by a smaller group, more commonly among business, tourism, and

development participants, and focused on limited density near services or small-scale mixed-use to support local viability. In these cases, support was framed around service access and economic function rather than population growth as an objective.

Infrastructure and transportation concerns were prominent. Frequently raised issues included inadequate water supply, aging infrastructure, rainwater management and flooding, septic performance, and water quality. Views on community sewer were mixed, including concern that enhanced servicing could change growth expectations. Transportation input focused on seasonal congestion, speeding, parking pressure, highway crossing safety, and gaps in walking and cycling infrastructure, noting that some matters fall within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Transportation and Transit.

The July 2025 update highlighted that most residents supported maintaining the current density pattern, with only limited, incremental change. The initial technical scan revealed a number of gaps in foundational work to understand the carrying capacity of the LAP area, particularly regarding the servicing and environmental constraints. Further technical work is required to confirm water and wastewater capacity, rainwater management, environmental limits and ecosystem services, and hazard exposure. These findings will guide what forms of development can be accommodated on the ground. This gap between community expectations and missing data and the development potential implied by current policies in the Regional Growth Strategy and Official Community Plan provided a clear rationale for advancing foundational studies as a part of this LAP, so that policy direction is grounded in clear, transparent, and accurate information.

Targeted foundational studies are being advanced to support clear, defensible policy drafting in Phase 3. This work will identify where change may be feasible, where constraints are binding, and the trade-offs associated with different growth directions. Water supply and wastewater analysis will inform policies on the scale and location of potential growth relative to servicing capacity and risk. On-site sewage and rainwater management work will inform policies related to density, lot size, drainage, and flood risk. Environmental baseline mapping will support spatially specific policies to protect sensitive ecosystems.

Prioritizing this work up front reflects a proactive planning approach, consistent with recent provincial direction under Bill 44 and related housing requirements. Completing foundational technical work early ensures the draft plan is grounded in known servicing, environmental, and hazard constraints, reducing downstream conflict and supporting more defensible, implementable policy over the long term.

This work does not predetermine growth outcomes or commit the CVRD to infrastructure investment. It supports a draft plan that is clear about what is feasible, what would increase risk, and what conditions would need to be met if change is considered.

The 2026 workplan consolidates the remaining work into three delivery phases.

- Phase 1 (January to April 2026): complete targeted foundational inputs, confirm mapping requirements, and provide an interim update to the Electoral Areas Services Committee and the community on study scope, timelines, and how results will be used in the draft plan.
- Phase 2 (May to mid-July 2026): prepare a draft plan integrating the foundational study results; introduce the draft at the Electoral Area open house on May 19, 2026; release the draft on [Engage Comox Valley](#) with a survey; and undertake informal referrals to agencies and First Nations.
- Phase 3 (mid-July to September 2026): advance the Local Area Plan bylaw through readings, statutory referrals, and the statutory public hearing, with subsequent consideration of third reading and adoption subject to input received and any required revisions.

This schedule recognises the October 17, 2026, local election date as a constraint on what can be completed within the current term, particularly where referral responses or public hearing input necessitate substantive changes that require additional review and re-notice under the statutory process.

The Saratoga Beach LAP is the highest-ranked priority in the 2026 planning workplan. The revised workplan focuses staff and technical resources on a limited set of foundational studies so that draft policies are implementable and clear about conditions, constraints, and consequences.

This revised LAP scope improves decision readiness by clarifying what the plan can influence, what it cannot, and which policy choices are contingent on servicing and environmental realities.

Financial Factors

Delivery is CVRD-led and primarily in-house to support timely integration of technical analysis, policy development, and engagement. Engineering, GIS, and Communications staff are providing direct support for technical inputs, mapping, and engagement materials. External support is limited to discrete technical work where specialised expertise is required.

Functions 503 (Electoral Area Planning Policy) and 500 (Electoral Area Planning) jointly fund the Local Area Plan within existing programs and approved budgets. This work is also supported by provincial Local Housing Initiatives grant funding, which is being applied toward eligible planning activities aligned with current housing requirements.

Strategic Considerations - Strategic Drivers									
Fiscal Responsibility	✓	Climate Crisis and Environmental Stewardship and Protection	✓	Community Partnerships	✓	Indigenous Relations	✓	Accessibility, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	✓

- **Fiscal Responsibility:** The updated workplan limits work to the minimum set of foundational inputs needed for a defensible draft plan, reduces rework later in the bylaw process, and prioritises in-house delivery. This approach contains costs by limiting external technical work to discrete needs and strengthens internal capacity for future local area planning.
- **Climate Crisis and Environmental Stewardship and Protection:** Early environmental baseline and rainwater management work will link land use direction to ecosystem function, hazards, and climate resilience.
- **Community Partnerships:** Engagement remains proportionate and transparent, focused on testing draft policy trade-offs with residents, residents’ associations, and business, tourism, and development interests.
- **Indigenous Relations:** The LAP will consider K’ómoks First Nation interests in cultural heritage, water supply and fish flows and referrals will be sent to Nations with overlapping territory to identify any additional interests that will need to be considered.
- **Accessibility, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:** Engagement will use plain-language materials and multiple participation methods, timed to reflect seasonal residency and reduce barriers.

Strategic Considerations - Regional Growth Strategy Goals							
Housing	✓	Ecosystems, Natural Areas and Parks	✓	Local economic development	✓	Transportation	✓
Infrastructure	✓	Food Systems	✓	Public Health and Safety	✓	Climate Change	✓

The Local Area Plan provides place-specific policy direction for the Settlement Node and must align with the eight goals of the Regional Growth Strategy. The updated workplan supports this alignment as follows.

- Housing: Clarifies feasible, modest housing change through population scenarios and servicing benchmarks tied to drainage and environmental constraints.
- Ecosystems, Natural Areas and Parks: Uses environmental baseline mapping to protect sensitive ecosystems and ecological connections, and to identify park, trail, and access opportunities.
- Local Economic Development: Provides clear land use direction for a tourism-oriented settlement while recognising reliance on infrastructure capacity, environmental quality, and reliable access.
- Transportation: Identifies road safety, active transportation, and beach access issues and sets advocacy direction with responsible agencies, including the Ministry of Transportation and Transit.
- Infrastructure: Clarifies servicing constraints and feasible pathways through on-site sewage, rainwater management, and wastewater benchmarking work.
- Food Systems: Recognises agricultural land considerations and avoids policy conflict with agricultural protection objectives.
- Public Health and Safety: Links water quality, flooding, drainage, and hazard exposure to land use direction and servicing conditions.
- Climate Change: Integrates baseline, hazard, and rainwater management inputs to support adaptation and resilience.

Intergovernmental Factors

Early outreach was undertaken during the visioning phase to solicit high-level input from provincial ministries, local governments, and agencies.

An informal referral will be undertaken once a draft plan is available, seeking targeted feedback from the external agencies and local governments, such as Agricultural Land Commission, Island Health, school districts and Strathcona Regional District.

Citizen/Public Relations

Ongoing engagement is available through [Engage Comox Valley](#). The draft plan is planned to be introduced at the Electoral Area open house on May 19, 2026, and released on Engage Comox Valley with an accompanying survey. Following refinements, the public will have an opportunity to provide input at the statutory public hearing after first and second readings of the bylaw.