

DATE: May 4, 2026**FILE:** 3350-20**TO:** Chair and Directors
Electoral Areas Services CommitteeSupported by James Warren
Chief Administrative Officer**FROM:** James Warren
Chief Administrative Officer***J. Warren*****RE: Saratoga Beach Local Area Plan Final Phases**

Purpose

To provide an update on the Saratoga Beach Local Area Plan (LAP) project.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

This report is provided for information purposes only.

Executive Summary

- The Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) is entering the final phases of the Saratoga Beach LAP development which will provide place-specific policy guidance for land use and community change over a five to ten-year horizon.
- A final round of public engagement will happen in June 2026, beginning with the release of the LAP draft and a community open house on June 1, 2026.
- The approach, objectives, and policies in the Local Area Plan will be grounded in the results of foundational environmental and septic suitability studies, and in the public input from the community and focus groups in 2025.
- Preliminary results suggest the Saratoga Beach area faces several challenges to increasing growth and development density under the current servicing and ecological constraints without overwhelming the carrying capacity of the area.

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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

Timeline for the final phases:

April 2026	Informal referral emails sent to agencies and First Nations to support quick response to statutory referrals which will occur after first reading
May 19, 2026	Promotion of upcoming engagement opportunities at the Electoral Area open house
June 1, 2026	Draft Saratoga Beach LAP released Public Open House in the evening at Oyster River Fire Hall
June 1 – 15, 2026	Public survey available on Engage Comox Valley site to provide feedback on overall plan direction of the LAP draft
July 13, 2026	Targeted date for bringing the LAP to the Electoral Areas Services Committee (EASC)
July 14, 2026	Tentative: CVRD Board – first reading Statutory referrals and notices (Note: subsequent consideration of third reading and adoption subject to input received and any required revisions).
July 22, 2026	Tentative: Public Hearing
August 11, 2026	Tentative: Second and third reading
September 1, 2026	Tentative: Adoption

Approach:

Objectives and policies are in development for the following broad themes:

- Environment, climate change and natural hazards

- Water, sewer and rainwater management
- Protected areas and community recreation
- Transportation
- Land Uses

These objectives and policies are grounded in:

- Community feedback summarized in the What We Heard Report and provided in Spring 2025's open house, community survey and focus groups.
- Results from the Environmental Baseline Study which included a comprehensive compilation of existing natural assets, evaluation of the values associated with each identified ecological feature, and prioritization and management for their enhancement and restoration.
- Results from the Septic Suitability Analysis, which provided a functional hydrogeographic assessment of the LAP area and identified limiting factors including soil quality, drainage, and water depth to establish development density thresholds.

Taken together, these studies help define the carrying capacity of the LAP area and the risks associated with developing beyond these thresholds, while the community feedback has been used to establish values and policy directions which can be explored within the ecological and servicing limits.

Preliminary results suggest:

- The LAP area contains significant environmental features (e.g., wetlands, streams, and forested area); however, ecological function and connectivity are at risk due to fragmentation, development pressures and climate change, threatening the ecosystem services on which the existing community relies.
- The area has generally poor suitability for on-site septic systems, and greater certainty would be needed to support a higher development density pattern. Existing, higher density residential areas have likely already hit or in some cases exceeded their density potential and growth capacity under the current servicing constraints.
- Community values place a high priority on the rural character, environmental values, recreational and natural assets of Saratoga Beach area, and opportunities to strengthen local businesses, sustainable tourism, targeted housing and transportation options within the area.

Despite the "Settlement Node" designation, the Saratoga Beach area cannot likely develop to the degree contemplated in the Regional Growth Strategy without potentially exceeding the carrying capacity of the local environment. Without a

clear path to developing a community sewer system, growth in this area should be limited to the existing density pattern to manage cumulative impacts.

Key policy directions of the Local Area Plan will focus on:

- Protecting rural coastal character, natural systems, public access to the shoreline and water function
- Aligning land use with environmental thresholds, hazard exposure, and servicing limitations to not exceed carrying capacity
- Supporting housing which responds to community needs, a sustainable tourism economy and enhanced recreational and local business opportunities
- Advocating for improvements to road safety and conditions, parking and local mobility options

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.

Service 503 Electoral Area Planning Policy and Service 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 remainder of the LAP development is being conducted by staff. 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: The environmental baseline and rainwater management work will link land use direction to ecosystem function, hazards, and climate resilience.
- Community Partnerships: Engagement is scheduled to allow input and responses from residents, community groups, agencies and First Nations.

- Indigenous Relations: The LAP will consider K'ómoks First Nation interests in cultural heritage, environmental values and water supply and referrals will be sent to Nations with overlapping territory.
- Accessibility, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Engagement will use plain-language materials and multiple participation methods to 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 tourism-oriented activity 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.

As part of project initiation, CVRD met with Chief and Council in April 2025 and heard K'ómoks' concerns regarding water availability, protection of fish flows in the Oyster River, and coastal water quality. Saratoga Beach lies within the K'ómoks Area of Potential and contains significant archaeological interests. While K'ómoks expressed interest in participating in the Local Area Plan, staffing constraints limited involvement. CVRD will ensure archaeological considerations, along with water, wastewater, and baseline mapping, inform policies addressing these concerns. K'ómoks will also receive a referral during Phase 3 engagement.

Citizen/Public Relations

Ongoing engagement is available through [Engage Comox Valley](#). Promotion of June engagement opportunities will be done at the Electoral Area open house on May 19, 2026, and the draft LAP will be released on Engage Comox Valley on June 1, 2026, with an accompanying public open house and 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.