Comox Strathcona Waste Management

Staff Report

DATE: March 18, 2025

FILE: 5360-30/SWMP

TO: Chair and Directors
Comox Strathcona Waste Management Board

FROM: James Warren
Chief Administrative Officer

Supported by James Warren
Chief Administrative Officer

J. Warren

RE: SWMP Update and Board Priorities Summary

Purpose

To provide a summary of the board input into priorities for the Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) Renewal on diversion strategies that came out of the February 27, 2025 Roundtable facilitated conversation.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

THAT the memo from Stantec Inc. titled "Comox Strathcona Waste Management Board Roundtable Prioritizing Strategies" attached as Appendix A to the staff report dated February 27, 2025, be approved as direction to identify preferred strategies and actions with the Regional Solid Waste Advisory Committee in the Solid Waste Management Plan update.

Executive Summary

Comox Strathcona Waste Management (CSWM) is updating its SWMP to address evolving community needs and regulations. The SWMP, mandated by the *Environmental Management Act*, outlines garbage, recycling and waste programs for the next decade. CSWM operates various waste facilities across the region, adapting services to meet each community's unique needs.

The CSWM Board met on February 27, 2025, to provide direction on prioritizing strategies for the SWMP update. The feedback from the board during this session will help to provide guidance to the Stantec team who is assisting staff in developing the updated SWMP. The board's priorities and strategic direction will help staff when working with the Regional Solid Waste Advisory Committee (RSWAC) to identify the preferred strategies and actions for the SWMP update. This memo provides a summary of what we heard from the Board Roundtable discussions; detailed feedback is available in the attached memo from Stantec in Appendix A.

The themes that arose from this meeting include:

1. There are concerns around cost increases and the need for clarity on their impact.
2. There is support for funding initiatives that are cost-neutral and/or have financial payback.
3. The board would like to see greater transparency in decision making and funding.
4. There is support for waste diversion, particularly recycling and composting.
5. There is support for private sector involvement for diversion services.
6. There is support for having a Convenience Level Standard (a baseline level of service) that is funded by the entire CSWM population.
7. The board sees greenhouse gas emission reductions as a secondary focus to financial and diversion considerations.
8. There is interest in understanding the impact of policy changes on different users.

The board ranked the relative importance of these themes, with cost considerations and diversion outcomes being key areas of focus.

Once the RSWAC have refined a suggested proposed suite of strategies and actions, being mindful of the input from the board on priorities, those actions will be summarized and presented to the board for consideration and approval to take for consultation to the public. The board will be able to make recommended changes to those strategies at that time prior to the list being finalized for consultation. Input from the public could also influence what is included as part of the draft SWMP Renewal to be submitted, which will also be reviewed and approved by the board before consultation in 2026 on the draft plan.

During the day's discussion some additional messaging came from the board that is important to capture and important for staff to reflect on as they bring information forward for decision making in the future through this format or in board meetings:

- Board members voiced that they would like to:
    - receive simplified information (presentations, reports, etc.) ahead of decision making to help make educated decisions when considering investments for the CSWM;
    - be sent important information to review throughout the year to stay educated on topics that are being discussed; and
    - consider alternative approaches to gather feedback when making both broad and specific decisions, such as through the use of surveys ahead of meetings, background information ahead of meetings, discussions before decision making, etc.

- Board members appreciated getting together in person. Meeting in-person helps to build connections and relationships that is often less available when meeting online.

Timing and Next Steps

April 2025

- April 2 and 3: Community to Community meeting regarding Zeballos landfill closure and future of the solid waste facilities and services in community.
- Prior to April 22: Stantec prepares memo organizing and summarizing all the proposed actions from the technical memos presented to the RSWAC and subsequently, the CSWM Board. This memo will be provided to the RSWAC in advance of the next meeting scheduled for April 22.
- April 22: RSWAC meeting facilitated by Stantec on narrowing down the actions and strategies for the plan renewal.
- April (ongoing): Onboarding communications consultant to support next two phases of the plan renewal.

May 2025

- May 29: Target setting exercise with the RSWAC to bring forward to the public as part of the fall consultation. Targets will reflect on the proposed strategies and actions and what is anticipated to be feasible to achieve.
- May (ongoing): Summary of proposed actions and strategies to be developed by Stantec.

June 2025

- June 19: Board meeting (last meeting before summer break) presentation of the proposed strategies and target(s) to take to the public during fall 2025 consultation and engagement.

July and August 2025

- July/August: Preparation of consultation materials for September including website updates, online survey, ad design, engagement material design.

September and October 2025

- September 8 to October 16: Engagement period for proposed strategies, in-person engagement in all urban and rural communities as well as online survey and webinar.

Winter 2025-2026

- December 4: RSWAC meeting to review the engagement summary report and consider any revisions to the proposed strategies and actions within the draft plan renewal.

- January 2026: Presentation of the engagement summary report to the board.
- December 2025 to February 2026: Begin to prepare a draft amended SWMP for public review to gather feedback.

Risks to the project timeline are present in that delays to the consultation scheduled in the fall, or changes to the previously agreed to scope of work, could result in delays in submission and the process extending into the 2026 municipal election period. Consultation with First Nations is ongoing and will be summarized within the final consultation report to be submitted to the province.

Prepared by:	Concurrence:	Concurrence:
S. Willie	***V. Schau***	***M. Rutten***
Sarah Willie Manager of Solid Waste Planning and Policy Development	Vivian Schau Senior Manager of CSWM Services	Marc Rutten, P.Eng. General Manager of Engineering Services

Attachments: Appendix A – CSWM Board Roundtable: Prioritizing Strategies, February 27, 2025, Stantec Inc.

Stantec Inc.
300-10220 103 Avenue NW
Edmonton AB T5J 0K4

March 14, 2025

Project/File: 133801007

Comox Strathcona Waste Management
770 Harmston Ave,
Courtenay, BC V9N 2X6

Dear Comox Strathcona Waste Management,

Reference: CSWM Board Roundtable: Prioritizing Strategies, February 27, 2025

1 Introduction

The Comox Strathcona Waste Management (CSWM) Board met on February 27, 2025, to provide direction on prioritizing strategies for the solid waste management plan (SWMP) update. The feedback from the Board during this session helps to provide guidance to the Stantec team who is assisting CSWM staff in developing the updated SWMP. The Board's priorities and strategic direction will help CSWM staff when working with the Regional Solid Waste Advisory Committee (RSWAC) to identify the preferred strategies and actions for the SWMP update. This memo provides a summary of what we heard from the Board Roundtable discussions.

The themes that arose from this meeting include:

1. There are concerns around cost increases and the need for clarity on their impact.
2. There is support for funding initiatives that are cost-neutral and/or have financial payback.
3. The Board would like to see greater transparency in decision making and funding.
4. There is support for waste diversion, particularly recycling and composting.
5. There is support for private sector involvement for diversion services.
6. There is support for having a Convenience Level Standard that is funded by the entire CSWM population.
7. The Board sees GHG emission reductions as a secondary focus to financial and diversion considerations.
8. There is interest in understanding the impact of policy changes on different users.

The following sections outline the feedback in greater detail.

2 Board Direction on Topic Areas

During the first part of the session for prioritizing SWMP strategies, the Board was presented with background information, followed by polling questions in six topic areas. For each topic area, the Board was presented with multiple statements and asked to rank their comfort level with the statement. The

intention of this part of the session was to get the Board's initial thoughts on these topics and build understanding of their comfort level. The results of these polls will help to guide the direction as CSWM staff and RSWAC identify future strategies and actions as part of the SWMP update. The six topic areas that were explored include:

1. Service cost increases
2. Financial sustainability
3. Diversion
4. Private vs. public involvement in urban diversion
5. Rural diversion funding
6. Greenhouse gas reductions

There were some overarching themes that emerged from the Board during this session.

1. Board members did not feel that they had the appropriate information to answer all of the questions.
2. Board members would have liked to discuss the topics before answering questions. This would help them understand other members perspectives and answer the questions with more confidence.
3. Some questions were too long and had multiple questions in one, making them difficult to answer.

Each topic area and the responses are presented in the following sections.

Reference: **133801007**

2.1 Service Cost Increases

The first topic was focused on whether there is a ceiling (limit) to the cost increases that the Board wants to see. This helps to provide direction on prioritizing the SWMP budget towards service cost increases. This question and the results are shown in Figure 1.

Overall, the Board felt more comfortable with minimal increase in operation budget cost (C in Figure 1), or initiatives that will recover costs (D in Figure 1). The Board felt that they needed more information for specific initiatives to make an informed decision. The Board vocalized support for using the user pay principle to increase revenue, which was previously discussed and supported by the Board, rather than increasing tax requisition.

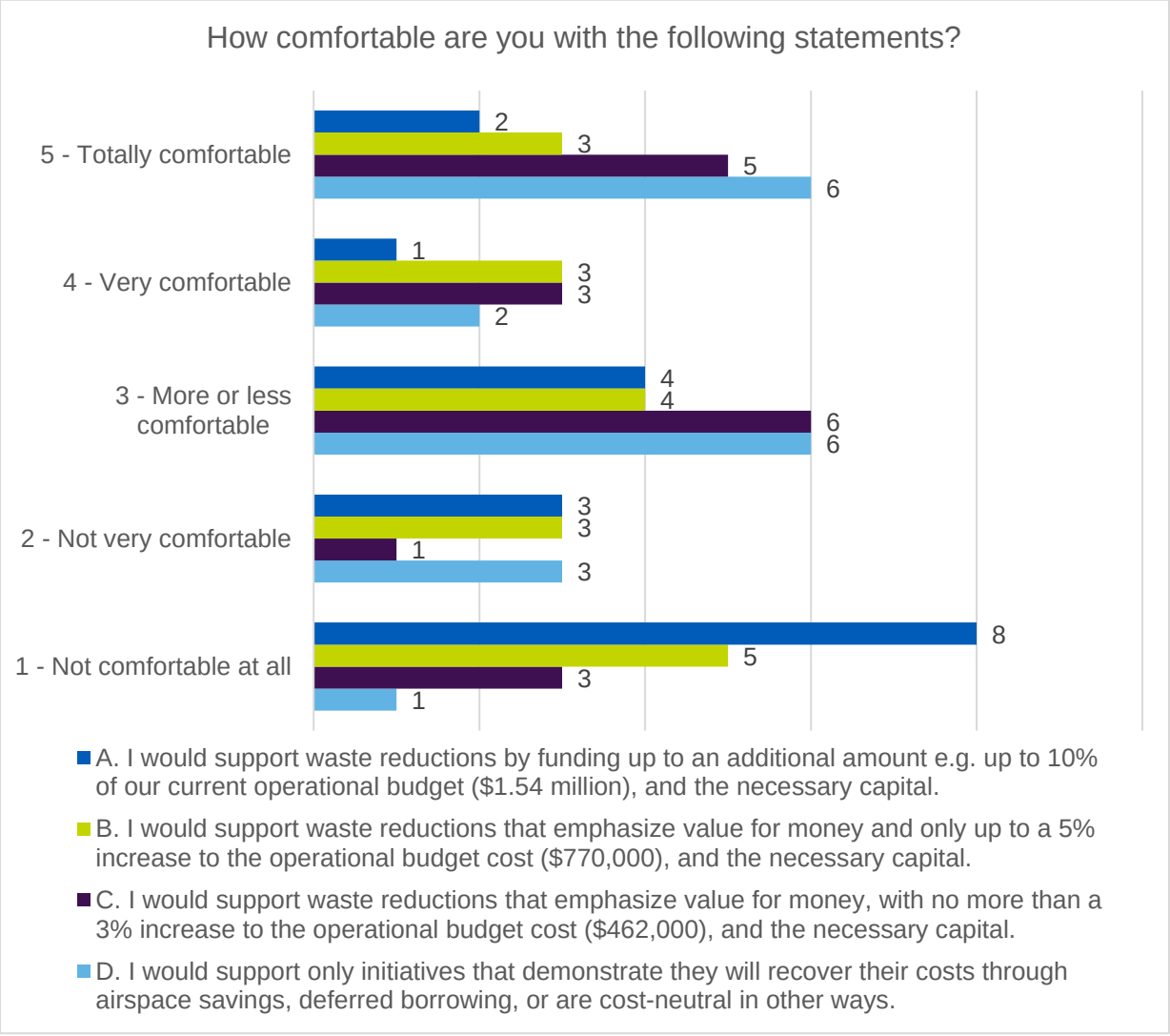


Figure 1: Board comfort levels for if there is a ceiling to the cost increases that the Board wants to see.

2.2 Financial Sustainability

The second topic was focused on whether the Board is willing to accept additional borrowing costs to fund the CSWM service. This helps to provide direction on how borrowing could be an option toward funding future initiatives. This question and the results are shown in Figure 2.

The polling results showed that Board members are more comfortable with prioritizing dept repayment and reduction, emphasizing the results in question 1, where there was more comfortable with supporting initiatives that are cost-neutral (A in Figure 2). Overall, the Board felt this question was high-level/general, making it difficult to answer and therefore it was vocalized that they needed more information. The Board felt that there was a difference in comfort level for borrowing for operations versus borrowing for assets, which is why they would like to see more information to make an informed decision.

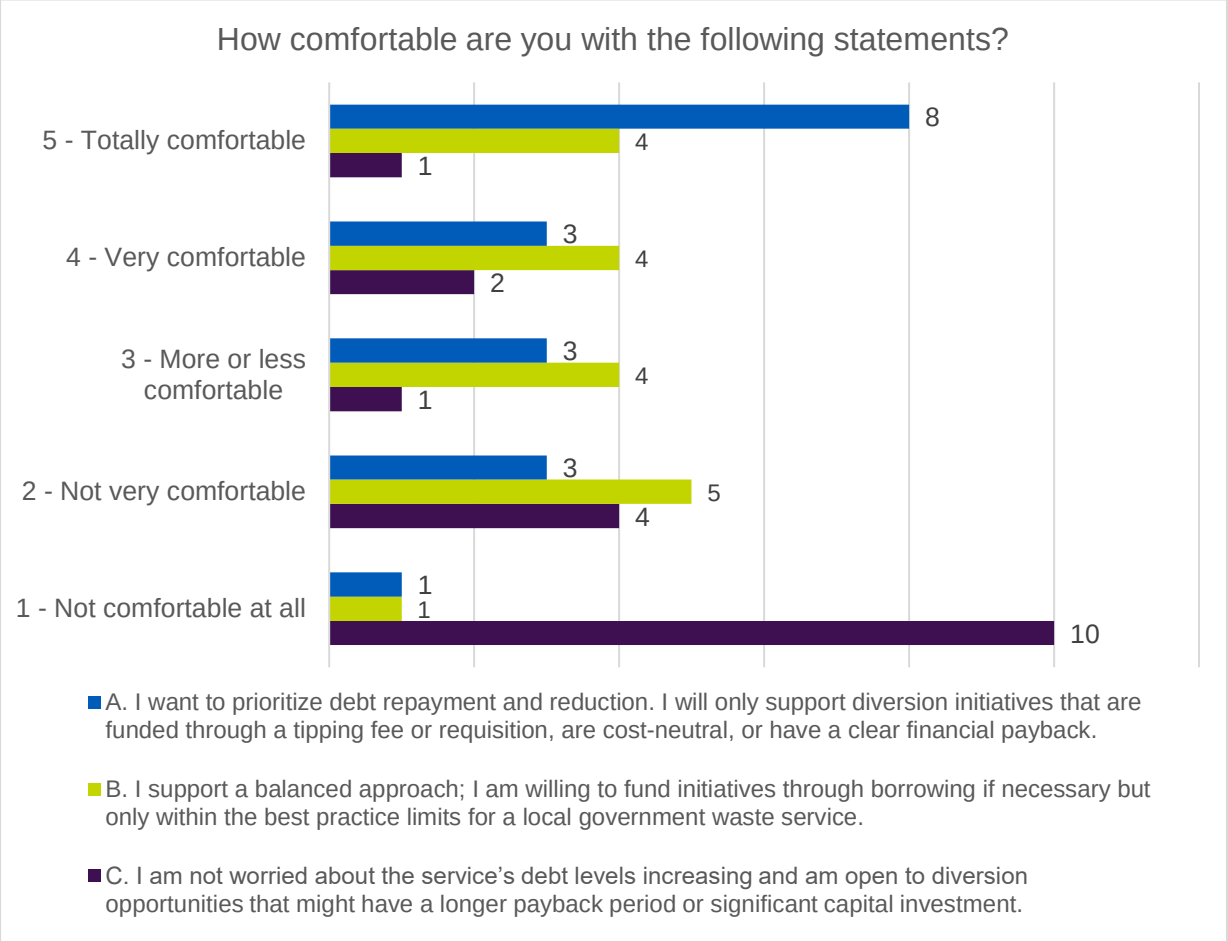


Figure 2: Board comfort levels for if the Board willing to accept additional borrowing costs to fund the service.

2.3 Diversion

The third topic was focused on how aggressively the Board wants to pursue waste diversion over the next ten years. This helps to provide direction on how important diversion is at the cost of everything else. This question and the results are shown in Figure 3.

The polling showed that Board members would like diversion to be equally weighted among other factors (B from Figure 3). This is consistent with the results in the Board priority exercise, which is described further in Section 3. Overall, the Board felt that diversion is important, but that it's a too nuanced topic to simply bring down to a few statements. The Board felt that waste diversion is very broad and too general, making it difficult to answer the questions. For example, diverting organics from the landfill versus plastics will look different, has different environmental impacts, and financial requirements, etc. The Board also acknowledged that the political environment is currently unsettled, so the answers may look different half a year or a year from now.

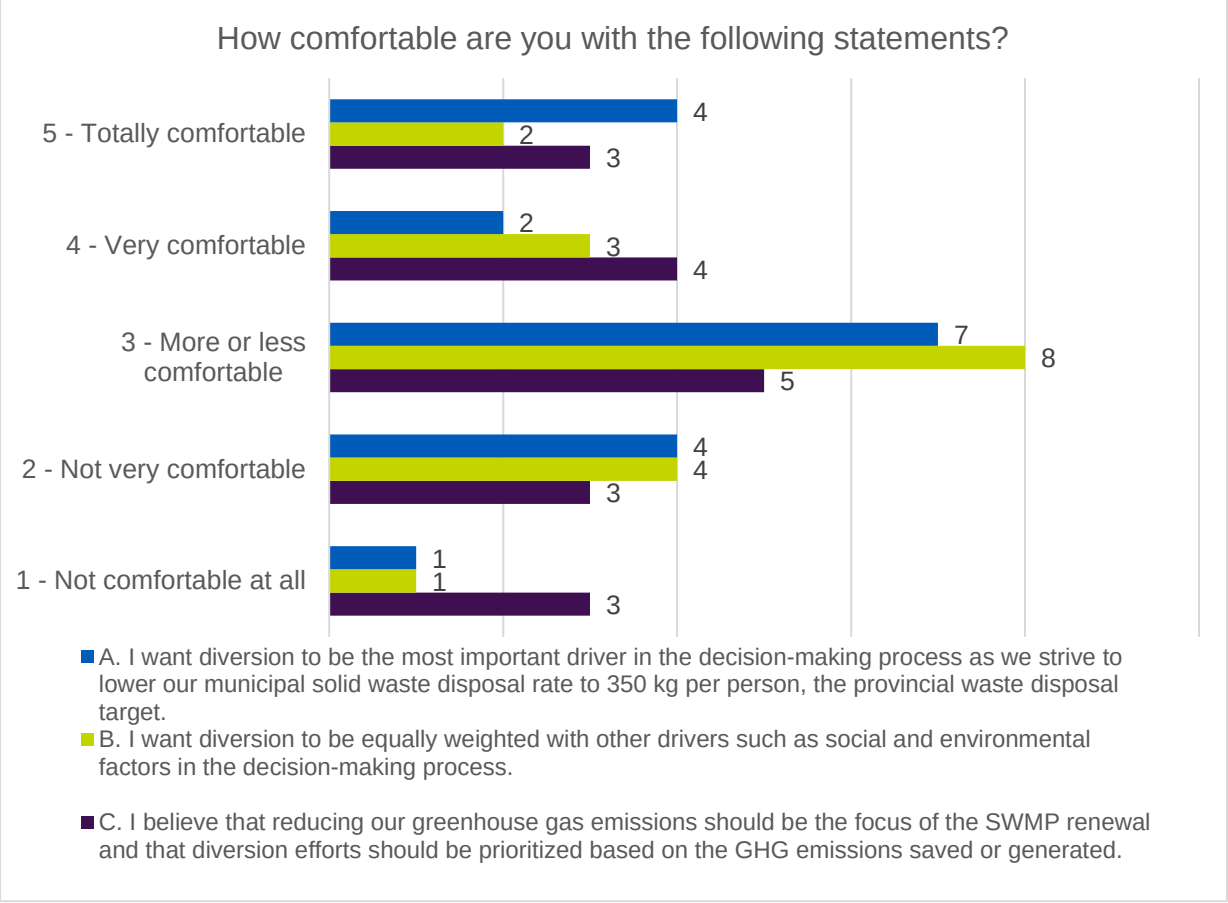


Figure 3: Board comfort levels for how aggressively the Board wants to pursue diversion over the next ten years.

2.4 Private vs. Public Involvement in Urban Diversion

The fourth topic was focused on whether investment in services within the higher population density centers should be left to the private sector. This helps to provide direction on support for private sector involvement in providing services vs. keeping services in-house. This question and the results are shown in Figure 4.

The polling showed that Board members are more comfortable with supporting private sector involvement for diversion services (A from Figure 4). The Board felt that there would be more support for this if the question did not include the reference to not providing any subsides. This aligns well with the comfort level for C from Figure 4, supporting the private sector through financial subsidies or other means, as diversion is not always a profitable service and industry. Overall, the Board voiced support for working together to provide streamlined services but felt they could answer better when this is discussed in the context of a specific project or initiative.

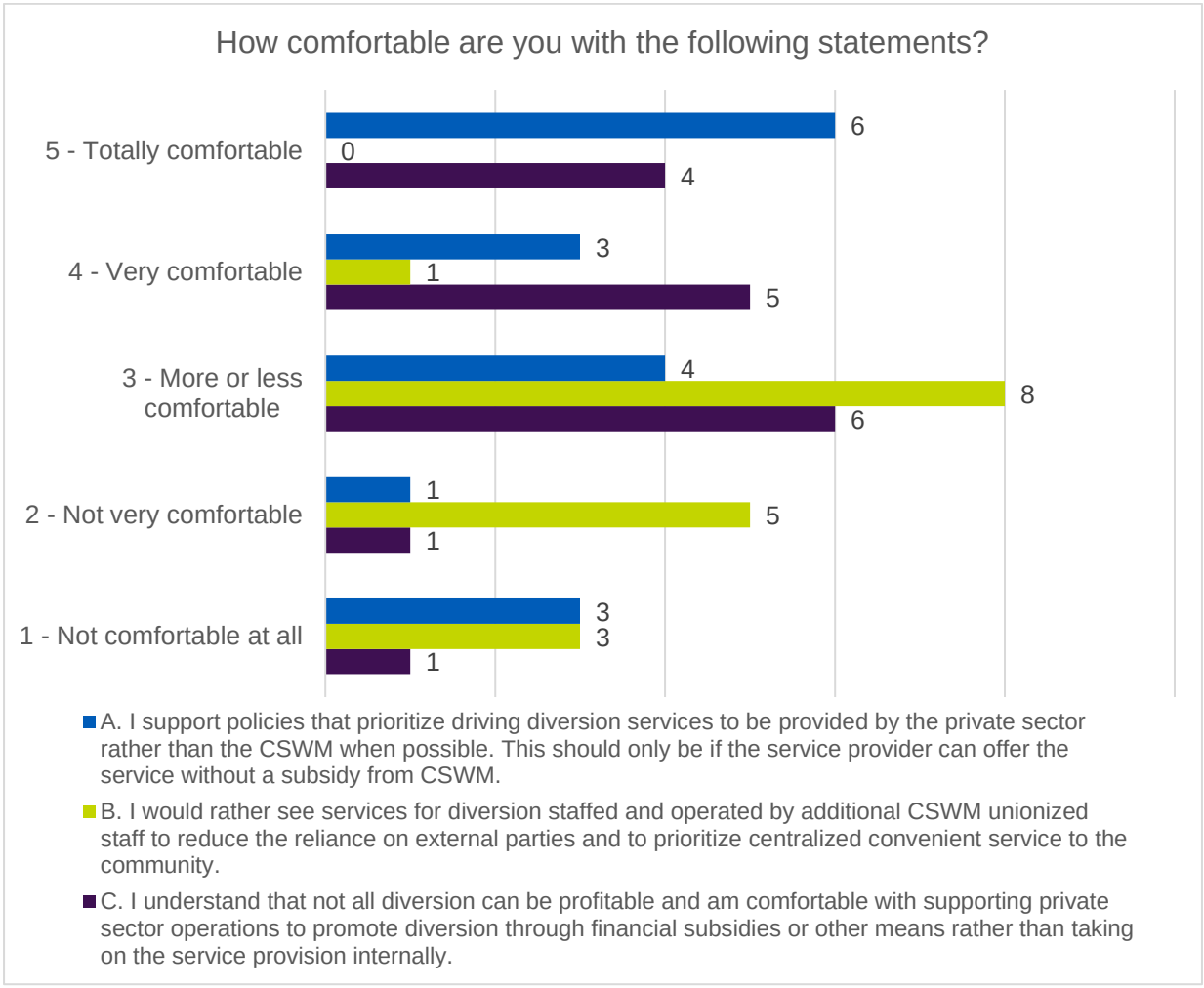


Figure 4: Board comfort levels for if the investment in services within the higher population density centers be driven to the private sector.

2.5 Rural Diversion Funding

The fifth topic was focused on where the Board prefers the funding for rural initiatives to come from. This question helps to provide direction on the broader CSWM services and funding for these services. This question and the results are shown in Figure 5.

The polling showed that Board members are more comfortable supporting a Convenience Level Standard that is funded by the entire CSWM population (C from Figure 5). Board members discussed how this inequity exists across BC and is difficult to address, but the Board discussion was leaning in the direction of having a unified model where services are paid for by the greater function. On the question of individual services compared to funding through the broad CSWM service the Board was split. It is assumed based on discussions that the split demonstrates the differing perspectives of urban and rural directors.

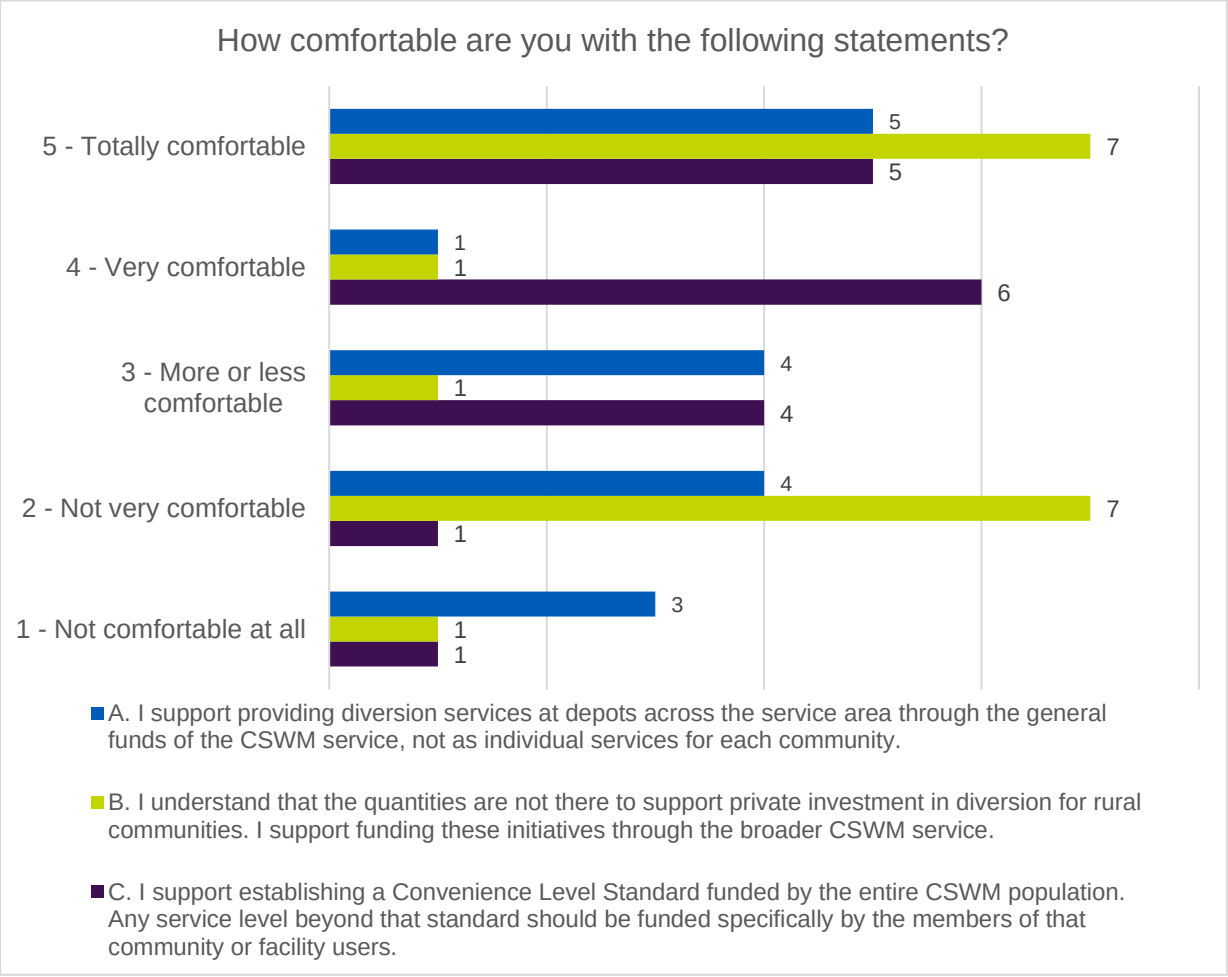


Figure 5: Board comfort levels for where the board prefers the money for rural initiatives to come from.

2.6 Greenhouse Gas Reductions

The sixth topic was focused on how important GHG emission reduction is over other factors. This helps to provide direction on how much of a priority the Board wants to give to GHG reduction efforts. This question and the results are shown in Figure 6.

The polling shows that Board members are more comfortable with GHG reductions being considered as a secondary priority to financial and diversion factors. Board members did voice that they felt more information would have helped with answering this question. The Board referenced a previous study and presentation from Stantec on GHG emissions for the CSWM, which has already helped the Board make educated decisions to tackle reducing emissions in the region through achievable initiatives. The remaining actions presented in the GHG emission report are cost prohibitive, so they felt that the CSWM has done what they can in this area. It was noted that there may be some indirect benefits of other actions, such as reducing organics going to landfill, however GHG emissions is not the direct driver of this.

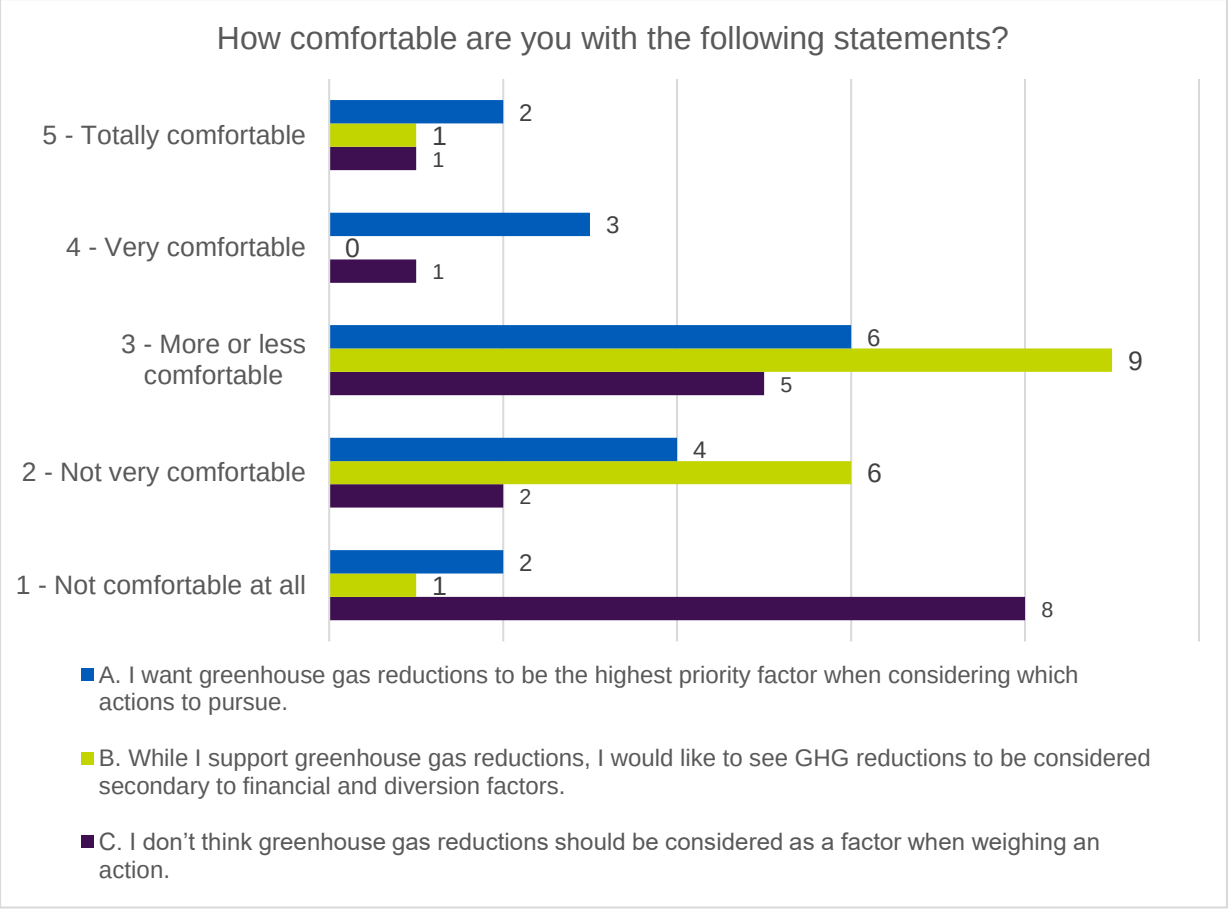


Figure 6: Board member comfort levels for how important GHG reduction is over other factors.

3 Board Direction on Priorities

Following polling and discussions for the six topic areas, the Board was asked to participate in a priority mapping exercise to provide direction in prioritizing five focus areas. Understanding the priorities of the board will help to assess each of the strategies and actions and inform what strategies and actions are included in the solid waste management plan update. The five priority areas included:

1. Financial impact
2. Operational impact
3. Environmental impact
4. Increased diversion
5. Community benefit

Figure 7 shows the results of the priorities from the Board. The highest priority is the financial impact, with nearly all votes ranking this as high. The remaining priorities are more evenly distributed with community benefit, waste diversion, and environmental impact being ranked similarly. Operational impact has the fewest votes for high importance, with most votes being medium importance. None of the priorities were voted as having low importance.

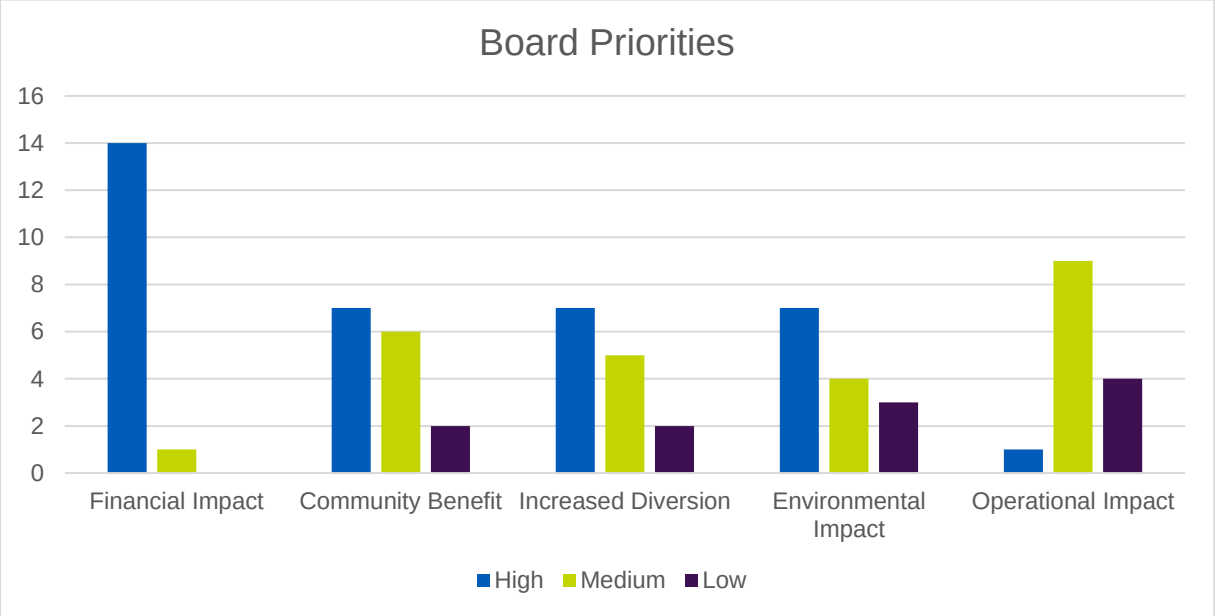


Figure 7: Board priorities for the solid waste management plan update.[1]

[1] This activity was conducted at the end of the meeting. Some Board members had to leave early, which is why the total number of responses for each priority does not equal the number of Board members.

4 Concluding Statement

This summary captures Board perspectives on key topics related to the SWMP update from the CSWM Board meeting on February 27, 2025. The Board's priorities and strategic direction provided will inform the ongoing planning process for the SWMP, including discussions with RSWAC and other stakeholders.

Regards,

Stantec Inc.