



REGIONAL DISTRICT of NORTH OKANAGAN

MEDIA RELEASE – April 13, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Regional Growth Strategy Youth and Age-Friendly Surveys a Success!

COLDSTREAM, BC – “The Regional District of North Okanagan is undertaking the development of a Regional Growth Strategy that will provide a vision for the Region until 2031. Community input is critically important in identifying and refining goals, strategies and outcomes that the community would like to see occur within the region in the future.

In order to develop an understanding of youth and seniors’ views and opinions it was decided to conduct a two surveys, one for residents over 55 and another for youth under 25 years of age.

The Regional District of North Okanagan recognizes that young people are important and valued members of our communities. Their values, priorities and opinions will assist in the development of a Regional Growth Strategy that responds to community needs. The North Okanagan also recognizes the importance of our seniors as a growing demographic within our communities.

These surveys provided a valuable glimpse into what both the young and older do, what they like, what they need, what concerns them and what they want for the future. It also provides an insight into some of the issues that younger and older people find important, and some ideas on how the Regional Growth Strategy and the broader community might be able to respond to those issues.

The Youth Survey

The Regional District of North Okanagan received 85 surveys between September 15th, 2009 and December 31st, 2009. These surveys provided some perspective on the issues that youth face their communities and what they value within the region. Within all responses, there were four clear themes:

- 1. Natural Amenities and Environmental Concerns:** Youth considered the natural beauty and environmental amenities the defining attribute of the North Okanagan. A strong environmental awareness appears to be present in the youth that commented, with a strong desire for the development of eco-friendly communities over the next 20 years.
- 2. More Youth Activities/Opportunities:** This was considered one of the most significant issues that must be addressed, although the Regional Growth Strategy has not dealt with these issues directly.

3. **Small, Friendly Compact, Complete Communities:** One of the most quoted attributes about the North Okanagan was the small size of the communities and friendly nature of the residents. Many respondents expressed a desire for the North Okanagan stay the same and retain a small town character.
4. **Better Jobs and More Affordable Housing Options:** The lack of employment opportunities, the need for more transportation options and few affordable housing options relate to social issues that may limit the ability of youth to stay in the community.

The Seniors' Survey

A total of 303 Age-Friendly Surveys were received between September 15th, 2009 to November 30th, 2009. The survey was aimed at residents over 55 years and residents from all North Okanagan communities responded. From the responses, there were four important themes:

1. **Affordable, Accessible and Appropriate Housing:** This was the most significant barrier to developing an age-friendly community. Affordable housing concerns extended beyond seniors demand, affecting younger residents.
2. **A Lack of Transportation Options** beyond the automobile: Transit service is limited outside of the City of Vernon, the hours of operation are limited to daytime hours and active transportation infrastructure is lacking or in disrepair.
3. **Healthy and Reasonably Mobile Seniors** are generally pleased to be living in the North Okanagan because it is a relatively small communities which offers both a relaxed pace of life, and yet provides a variety of means for social participation and activities.
4. **Age-friendly Aspects** of the North Okanagan include its many parks and trails which offer opportunities for exercise and socialization, its seniors' clubs, organizations and centres and its public library system. In general, healthy and active seniors, feel very included and respected in their communities, and feel that their contributions to their communities are adequately recognized.

The Regional Growth Strategy process has reached the half way point and we have received over 575 comments, including the results of a growth issues survey, three open houses and the age-friendly and youth surveys. Get informed and get involved by checking out the Regional Growth Strategy website at www.rdno.ca/rgs and provide your comments. You can also find the complete survey reports on the website.”

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