

**To:** David Bennett, Electoral Area Planning Department

**From:** Theresa Alexander, Planner 1

**Date:** January 17, 2025

**Subject: Preliminary Referral - West Popkum Development Application, Electoral Area D**

## INTRODUCTION

The following are preliminary staff comments by the Strategic Planning and Initiatives (SPI) department on the West Popkum Development "Site Plan" dated October 8, 2024 for Norah Properties located at 52425 Yale Road in FVRD's Electoral Area D. Staff comments are on the proposed plan's consistency with the *Fraser Valley Future 2050* Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) and potential impacts to FVRD transit services.

The RGS is enabled by the Local Government Act (LGA), provides a framework for coordinating local and provincial government planning. Section 445 of the LGA mandates that all Regional District bylaws align with the RGS.

*Fraser Valley Future 2050* covers important planning topics such as housing, transportation, economic development, and environmental concerns – all from a regional perspective and with the goal of creating healthy, compact, complete, and sustainable communities. As a 30-year vision, the primary goal of the RGS is to prevent urban sprawl by concentrating new development within the Regional Growth Boundary (RGB), which is limited to within municipal boundaries.

## PRELIMINARY COMMENTS

The following comments are organized into topic areas covered in the *Fraser Valley Future 2050* RGS. Specific policies and associated page numbers can be provided upon request and will be included in future comments included in the referral process.

### Population Growth

The RGS aims to concentrate growth within its member municipalities; however, a few existing electoral area communities are also suited to withstand more significant population growth and able to support sustainable housing development opportunities most associated with more urban areas. Popkum is one such community due to its close proximity to urban areas within the City of Chilliwack, adequate access to amenities, and existing public transit services (Route 71 Agassiz-Harrison).

The 2021 Census showed significant rates of population growth in Electoral Area D. Compared to the previous Census, Area D's population increased by 563 (37%) and the number of occupied private households increased by 189 (36%). Although a considerable rate of increase; this represents just 2% of the region's total population growth over the same five-year period.

Table 1: Change in Population and Occupied Private Dwellings, 2016 - 2021<sup>1</sup>

	Population				Occupied Private Dwellings			
	2021	2016	#	%	2021	2016	#	%
Electoral Area D	2,092	1,529	563	37%	712	524	189	36%
Popkum (DPL)	1710	1382	328	24%	553	472	81	17%
Bridal Falls (DPL)	382	147	235	160%	158	51	107	210%

The Site Plan proposes 265 dwelling units, including single-family homes, suites, and townhomes. Applying an average occupancy of 2.5 people per dwelling unit, the potential population growth associated with the proposed development is 663, which equals approximately 30% of Electoral Area D's 2021 population<sup>2</sup> and is similar to the growth experienced in Area D from 2016 to 2021<sup>3</sup>.

Table 2: Expected Population Growth Associated with Development Site Plans

	Proposed Units	Expected Population Growth
800m <sup>2</sup> lots + Suites	37 + 37	185
400m <sup>2</sup> lots + Suites	46 + 46	230
Townhomes	99	248
<b>Total</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>663</b>

### Complete Communities

As noted in relation to population growth, the proposed development is outside of the RGB; however, its close proximity to urban areas, amenities, and public transit reflects the principles of a compact and complete community.

Higher-density or large-scale development applications within the FVRD's electoral areas that are located just outside the RGB, as opposed to farther away are more likely to be consistent with the RGS and contribute to the development of compact and complete communities.

### Collaboration with Indigenous Communities

The *Fraser Valley Future 2050* RGS stresses the importance of fostering collaboration with Indigenous communities and upholding Indigenous rights. The RGS supports early and continued consultation and collaboration with key partners, which includes neighbouring Indigenous communities. This development provides an opportunity to identify shared priorities and partnership opportunities with Cheam First Nation.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, 2016 and 2021 Census of Population

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, 2016 and 2021 Census of Population

## **Collaboration with Local Government**

The RGS highlight the importance of working together with all levels of government, including neighbouring First Nations and member municipalities. The proposed development is approximately 200 metres from the City of Chilliwack's municipal boundary. Early and ongoing collaboration with the neighbouring municipality will help to prevent or mitigate the negative impacts associated with the project (during construction and following completion), as well as identify and coordinate opportunities of mutual benefit, such as traffic studies along Yale Road, where the development's main access points will be located.

## **Housing Supply, Choice, and Affordability**

The RGS contains a number of policies, which aim to increase regional housing supply, diversity, and density within urban areas. This development positively contributes to the region's housing supply, density, and diversity, helping to improve the availability and affordability of housing in the region.

The existing OCP for Electoral Area D reflects earlier development trends in the area, which consisted mainly of larger lots and single-family homes marketed towards households with higher incomes. The current OCP reflects a desire for "high-quality neighbourhood character," which had been expressed by members of the public whom participated in engagement for the development of the OCP more than five years ago.<sup>4</sup>

Today, local, provincial and federal governments generally discourage the development of low-density neighbourhoods, which are limited to single-family housing, as sprawling neighbourhoods are not in line with the principles of compact, complete, and sustainable communities. An increase in medium density housing stock (town houses and homes with suites) reflects the spirit of recent Provincial legislative changes on housing which aims to address current and future housing needs. The Province of BC has determined that when possible, addressing housing affordability challenges takes priority over maintaining neighbourhood character.

## **Rural Character**

The RGS recommends that lot sizes outside of urban centres and rural communities remain large with low residential densities, in order to protect the rural character of these more remote areas. The property being considered for development is zoned Suburban Residential, not Rural; thus, RGS policies related to protecting the rural character of neighbourhoods are less applicable to this particular development.

Further, as noted in the section on population growth, Popkum's relatively close proximity to urban areas within the City of Chilliwack, nearby amenities, and existing public transit services is more reflective of a community undergoing growth, than a rural community.

---

<sup>4</sup> Popkum – Bridal Falls Official Community Plan, Bylaw No. 1501, 2018, page 27, 28.

## **Aging and Accessibility**

The RGS emphasizes the need to plan for the region’s aging population, which is projected to continue growing significantly. By 2045, over 106,000 residents—representing 23% of the region’s population—will be over the age of 65<sup>5</sup>. Rural areas are expected to face the greatest challenges due to a higher proportion of seniors and limited resources to address these demands.

This demographic shift will have widespread implications, including increased demand for housing, health care, municipal services, and age-friendly built environments. It will also affect travel patterns, transportation mode share, transit usage, and overall accessibility. There is a pressing need to accommodate the aging population and explore opportunities for age-friendly developments.

## **Sustainable Transportation Options**

The adoption of sustainable modes of transportation, such as public transportation, walking, cycling, and electric vehicles (EV), is integral to reducing combustion energy consumption and total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

### *Electric Vehicles*

The RGS emphasizes the need to grow the adoption of electric vehicles, which requires a robust public network of charging stations and the ability for residents to charge their vehicles at home. With less access to public transit and longer driving distances, the argument could be made that policies that support the adoption of EVs are of even more imperative in rural communities.

Improvements to EV charging station networks help grow the consumer confidence needed for widespread adoption of EVs and improve the charging range needed for longer trips; however, at-home charging capabilities are also important to growing EV adoption rates, especially in more rural areas. Currently, there are two gas stations in the Popkum area but no public EV charging stations. This means there is a gap in public EV charging infrastructure available to Popkum residents, as well the many travelers along Highway 1 between Chilliwack and Hope.<sup>6</sup> Developers should consider including electric vehicle charging infrastructure in for all building types, regardless of housing tenure.

### *Public Transit*

The RGS promotes sustainable alternatives to passenger vehicles, which includes public transportation. Higher density housing supports existing and expanded transit services for Popkum and for the various communities served by the Agassiz-Harrison (AGH) transit service. The AGH transit service is provided by BC Transit, in collaboration with the FVRD.

To support greater adoption of transit and to ensure road and pedestrian safety, the FVRD and the developer should work closely with BC Transit early and throughout the planning process. BC Transit’s

---

<sup>5</sup> BC Stats, 2022 projections

<sup>6</sup> Plug Share Website, <https://www.plugshare.com>

Development Referral program provides the opportunity for BC Transit to provide comments on how development will affect existing or planned transit service and identify transit accessibility improvements.

Public transit has standards for pullouts and bus shelters and requires careful considerations for traffic management to ensure the safety of all road users and pedestrians. To support safe access to existing transit and to ensure considerations are made to support a future bus stop, land allocation and infrastructure design should be incorporated into the Site Plan in consultation with BC Transit using the referral process.

### **Traffic Management**

The RGS emphasises the safety of all road users. There is a need to consider the safety concerns and mitigate the impacts associated with an increase in road use due to the increased population, a potential new bus stop, and the influx of cars needing to enter and exit the proposed development from the main road.

The developer should be encouraged to take steps to minimize disruption to BC Transit services during the construction of the development and are encouraged to inform BC Transit of potential delays along Yale Road, to allow temporary route changes to be considered.

### **Climate Change**

The RGS contains policies to ensure that land use planning decisions take into account GHG emissions and the impact that developments have on climate change. Continued strengthening of climate policies are anticipated to meet regional climate adaptation and mitigation goals.

Compact developments with a range of transportation options and nearby amenities generate fewer emissions than more sprawling and isolated developments that are car dependent. More sustainable building practices help local governments and developers reduce GHG emissions attributed to the construction, use, and maintenance of buildings.

The OCP encourages new housing developments to contain energy efficient, low-impact buildings, which should include storm water management, water conservation, drought-resistant landscaping and minimal impervious surfaces.

### **Infrastructure Services**

The OCP includes policies to ensure sustainable increases to infrastructure and services needed to meet its growing population with considerations to quality, efficiency, cost, and reducing environmental impacts.

The proposed development may have implications for the provision of emergency services. A more detailed assessment of fire service requirements and impacts should be considered to ensure current

fire services in the area have the authorization and equipment necessary to respond to multi-family structure fires.

## **CONCLUSION**

The proposed West Popkum development site plan is largely consistent with the FVRD's *Fraser Valley Future 2050* RGS, The development has the potential to support and expand existing transit services for the area with the support and involvement of BC Transit.

The RGS recommends that growth within the FVRD's electoral areas be concentrated within existing rural communities, and encourages compact, energy efficient development that minimizes infrastructure and development costs, and which are financially self-sufficient. The OCP, proposed development Site Plan, and reports by staff generally reflect these sentiments.

Electoral Area Planning staff may want to consider amending the OCP to further support the goals of the RGS in relation this and future developments for Popkum and Bridal Falls. As more details become known about the development, and as the application process progresses, the Strategic Planning and Initiatives Department can provide a more detailed review based on specific RGS goals and policies.