

SUPPORTING COMMENTS

Good Morning. I thought that I would begin by introducing the other members of our panel here today. They are all familiar faces to you. I am pleased that we have all of our Task Force representatives here today. With me at the front is President Gimse, Director Terry Raymond, Director Eileen Benedict from the Bulkley-Nechako Regional District, and Mayor Terry Lake of Kamloops.

We also have with us, Gary Paget who is the Acting Assistant Deputy Minister with the Ministry of Community Services. Both Gary Paget and our Executive Director, Gary Maclsaac have been doing the leg work on this file to date.

Our panel is going to give you an update of our work to date for about a half hour or so this morning. We can respond to questions and then Gord McIntosh will lead us through some follow-up discussions for the remainder of the session.

SLIDE ONE:

Before we get into the activities of the RD Task Force I thought it would be helpful to take a couple of minutes and explain how we got to this point here today.

Here is the resolution that was adopted at the 2007 Convention:

“Therefore be it resolved that UBCM petition the province of BC to carry on with instituting a Community Charter for Regional Districts, with any restructuring of regional districts put on hold until after the Community Charter’s fully implemented unless due process and consultation with local government and citizens has been undertaken.”

As all of you will recall who were present at convention there was certainly a view around the convention halls and in the sessions that there needs to be work done on the present regional district model.

SLIDE TWO:

In October 2007 a UBCM delegation met with Minister Chong to advance this issue. The Minister was emphatic at the time that no Community Charter for regional districts would be forthcoming. However the Minister did indicate the Ministry would be willing to look at areas where regional districts lacked powers.

We were also informed at the time that there were three separate processes underway with respect to Regional Districts. They involved the Comox-Strathcona, the Okanagan Governance Study, and a single tier municipal governance study in the northwest corner of the province.

Our next meeting with the minister occurred at the November 2007 Executive session. This was once again a topic for discussion with the Minister. At the November Executive meeting

Minister Chong reiterated that a charter would not be forthcoming but spoke in broad terms about a series of meetings to identify issues.

In the discussion that ensued amongst Executive, it was agreed that the Minister had opened the door to discussion. This was viewed from a “cup half-full” perspective and it was agreed that we should move forward with discussions.

Executive was faced with the reality that if we insist that only a regional district charter will do, that nothing would end up happening and the concerns of the membership will not be addressed. So in the end, Executive formed the Regional District Task Force that you see here today, with the explicit aim of engaging the province in these discussions.

President Gimse appointed members from Executive to serve on the task force. In a moment of weakness I agreed to serve as the Committee Chair.

SLIDE THREE:

I should begin by noting that both Dale Wall and Gary Paget have attended all of our meetings to date. We are very pleased with this as our Task Force is adamant that the Province needs be a full participant in any review process. The process needs to be a collaborative effort where solutions are identified and brought forward together.

In addition, it is important to note that President Gimse has established a Task Force that reflects the reality that the issues facing Regional Districts are not just electoral area issues or municipal issues. They are both.

Regional Districts are multi-faceted – they do a variety of things. In many cases they act as regional service providers, when they were created 40 years ago they were envisioned to serve as a framework where partnerships would be encouraged, and they also serve as the local government for rural areas.

SLIDE FOUR:

As mentioned earlier in this presentation, there is concern among our membership that there are problems with the Regional District model. Having said that, most people would also agree that the challenges are more pronounced in some Regional Districts than others. Also, while there are certainly common issues facing Regional Districts, there are also differences depending on where you are in the Province.

So our Task Force began our work by identifying and clarifying the problem statements. In addition we wanted to ensure that there is a common understanding with the Province on the challenges facing RD's.

We came up with five areas. They are as follows:

- I. Conflict between Regional Districts Shareholders;

2. Structures;
3. Growth Management and Climate Change;
4. Provincial – Regional District Interface; and
5. First Nations

I will speak about each one of these in the next few slides.

SLIDE FIVE:

I. Conflict between regional district shareholders

Described another way this could be referred to as a municipal-rural issue. It manifests itself in a number of ways:

- land use planning;
- service delivery;
- disagreement over boundary extensions;
- cost-sharing for electoral area planning;
- “free rider” issues

Conflict of this nature can detract from good governance parties and can also spillover into a wide variety of other local government issues.

It can also spill over into requests for the Minister to become involved to resolve these conflicts.

I think that all of us can point to specific examples from this list within our own Regional Districts

SLIDE SIX:

One of our early discussions at the Task Force involved a conversation around the two traditional roles of local governments. One is to govern at a local level and the second is to facilitate the local delivery of what would otherwise be Provincial services in non-incorporated areas.

Both the *Community Charter* and *Local Government Act* contain powers delegated by the Province. The *Community Charter* was developed with the view that municipal governments exist to govern locally and has more autonomy. In comparison, Regional Districts are federations of

municipalities and electoral areas. This means they are a means for serving the interests of their members and the Province to the extent that the Province determines the overall structure and mandates a basis set of functions.

The Regional District structure in British Columbia was formed in the late 1960's. Since that time, the population as well as public expectations of local governments have grown significantly. A structure that is over 40 years old may need to be adapted to meeting the modern challenges of local government service delivery.

SLIDE SEVEN:

3. Growth Management and Climate Change

The challenges of rapid growth population growth and climate change demand action by all governments. Key issues are compact urban form, air and water quality. The issues play out at the regional scale and the local scale in terms of rapid growth spilling over from municipalities into rural areas. It also has different implications for different regions, depending on whether they are growing, declining or stable.

SLIDE EIGHT:

4. Provincial – Regional District Interface

This title is a fancy way of saying that the Province and Regional Districts are bumping into each other all over the place.

The Province has responsibilities to citizens of British Columbia as a whole while local governments are responsible to local citizens of communities and regions. Increasingly there is conflict in areas where Provincial and local government objectives clash. Examples often occur in the economic development field (eg: ski hills, resorts), but is certainly not exclusive to this. Other examples could be independent power production projects, wildfire prevention programs, or gravel extraction.

In some instances these interface issues were traditionally exclusively in the provincial sphere but in other cases they were not. The clash is emerging most often through the desire of the rural area to have a say in the licensing or regulation of these activities. From the Provincial perspective, local governments are choosing when they wish to become involved in the regulation of these activities. From a local government perspective the wishes of the local community are not being adequately considered as these operations extend into unincorporated areas.

SLIDE NINE:

5. First Nations

The recent ratification of formal treaties will in some instances result in the transfer of land in Regional Districts, possibly added pressures as First Nation economic development plans roll out, and in some instances the addition of First Nations representatives on Regional Boards.

Also, the emerging of the New Relationship will result in further challenges to the First Nations – Regional District Framework.

SLIDE TEN:

We also thought it would be important to identify the Principles that we would use to guide us through any Regional District review.

The principles that we should follow in understanding any sort of review are some of the same principles identified in the Community Charter but extended to include intergovernmental principles to reflect the fact that these were designed with municipalities in mind and which do not acknowledge that there needs to be principles which relate to relationships between municipalities and regional governance institutions.

These include the following:

- Respect for local government autonomy.
- Respect for Provincial Jurisdiction.
- Accountability to citizens.
- Respect for regional differences: it is accepted that this is a diverse Province and that different regions may need different solutions.
- Flexibility to provide critical services at various scales; the context for local governments is complex and changing. The regional district system has to have the ability to deal with issues at various scales: local; sub-regional, regional and extra-regional.
- Respectful relations between local governments: Relationships between all local governments should be based on respect and characterized by openness, dialogue, respect for interests and the use of alternative dispute resolution tools to deal with irreconcilable differences.

SLIDE ELEVEN:

The Task Force and Provincial officials spent a considerable amount of time discussing options that could be worked on to address the problem statements.

In doing so we considered a continuum of options ranging from a tweaking of existing Regional Districts tools to an overhaul of Regional Districts altogether. There were pros and cons with all options and depending on your point of view they may be too little or too much.

The Task Force and Provincial officials have agreed to investigate further a targeted review of 3 key issues. These targeted areas would include:

1. Electoral Area Governance;
2. Crown – Regional District interface, and
3. Fringe planning and servicing issues.

Inherent in this discussion was the recognition that there needs to be a range of potential solutions for each targeted area, ranging from tweaking to structural change. The group identified this approach in recognition of the diversity of our Regional Districts. A solution for one area may be totally inappropriate in another area.

SLIDE TWELVE:

It is proposed that each of these issues/sub-issues be examined by the Task Force through a disciplined, facilitated process.

The objective of the exercise would be to think about how the original design of the regional district system reflected the issues as they were at that time (ie the mid-1960's), and how the principles underpinning the overall design of regional districts were applied to each issue. The process would review the issues in light of the way regional districts were designed, and how they have evolved since that time.

The approach is designed to get back to the heart of the purpose of regional districts. The idea is that, by starting at the time regional districts were created, the Task Force can access how they are positioned now to address the issues, in light of the many external changes that have occurred over the past 40 years.

In this way the Task Force can look ahead to the changes needed for regional districts to address the issues over the next 40 years. Out of this we might achieve a common understanding of the views of municipalities, electoral area directors and the Province, which can lead to consensus of moving forward.

The approach would be to work through the following questions, for each individual issue/sub-issue in turn.

1. What was the situation like in 1965, before the incorporation of regional districts?
2. What did the designers of the system do to tackle the issue at the time?
3. What adjustments have been made, and what do we have now?
4. What has the regional district system accomplished to date?
5. What are the challenges we face today and in the future?

6. What options do we have to make the regional district system work better in the future?

SLIDE THIRTEEN:

Our group has agreed that the best way to proceed is for the Province and UBCM to agree on a collaborative process. This will involve engaging the services of an outside consultant who will be supported by staff resources from both UBCM and the Ministry of Community Services. This is the same approach that UBCM and the Province have used for many projects over the years and it has proven to be successful. A good example of a similar process was the way in which the Regional District Toolkit was developed.

With regard to timing the Task Force is of the view that we don't want to rush this process towards the 2008 Convention. Our discussion has recognized that the process needs to be run correctly and this takes time.

Of course there are also a couple of important events happening in the upcoming months as well with local government elections this fall and a provincial election next May.

Our Task Force also recognizes that this is an issue of importance and interests of all our membership. Our early discussions identify the need to have a mechanism that will provide a means whereby everyone can contribute their views. We also believe that it would be valuable to have targeted focus groups and input from all regions of the Province. Finally we believe there needs to be a structure that will allow for input and advice from both elected officials and staff.

SLIDE FOURTEEN:

In conclusion I want to take a moment to reiterate some of the earlier slides in this presentation.

First of all the composition of our Task Force reflects the reality that the issues facing Regional Districts are important to both electoral areas and municipalities. Ultimately, the solutions to problems facing Regional Districts must be acceptable to all of the partners in the Regional District Structure.

We have made the point earlier that one of the objectives of creating this Task Force was to engage the Province in the process. We are pleased to have Dale Wall and Gary Paget participating. Our successes at UBCM have come through collaborative efforts and we want to continue this practice. Ultimately we will need support from the Province for any proposed changes to Regional Districts.

We also want to point out that the Minister has stated on several occasions that no Charter for Regional Districts will be forthcoming. So rather than draw a line on the sand, the UBCM Executive has opted to move forward with this process.

All of the members of our Task force have been around local government for a few years now and we can all recall past attempts to identify problems or issues facing Regional Districts. So we are strong in our resolve that we don't want to re-hash past exercises. Instead we want to ensure that there is an analytical component to our work. We don't just want to identify problems, we want to work towards solutions.

We will be undertaking a targeted review of three issues: Electoral Area Governance, Crown-Regional District interface, and fringe planning and servicing issues. Each issue will undoubtedly have sub-issues that will need to be looked at. For example, the Crown-Regional District Interface issue could involve looking at gravel extraction; or resort development just to name a couple.

This will not be a process done in isolation, we will need to consult along the way.

Finally, we aren't going to rush this process. We are cognizant that are real issues out there and they need to be addressed. However, we want to ensure that we are consultative along the way, and also that we devote sufficient time and energy to the analytical piece as we identify solutions.