

EXCHANGE



EXCHANGE is a quarterly magazine published by the Local Government Management Association (LGMA) of British Columbia. It's about sharing information, exchanging ideas on best practices, enhancing professional development and building networks. Reach us at lgma.ca.

Summer 2025

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The LGMA office is located on the traditional territories of the lək'wəḡən (Lekwungen) Peoples, also known as the X̱m̱sepsəm (Kosapsam) and Songhees Nations, whose relationships with the land continue to this day. We extend our gratitude to them and to the many Indigenous Nations on whose territories we work.

EXCHANGE

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Cover Image:
Scenic aerial view of the District of Port Hardy on Vancouver Island. Port Hardy's strategic plan is highlighted in this edition.

Photo courtesy District of Port Hardy and North Island Power & Utility

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Long-term Planning and Land Rights

This edition's *Case of Interest* highlights risks and strategies for local governments when conducting long-term infrastructure planning.



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Plotting Your Course with Strategic Planning

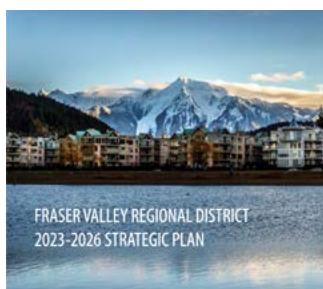
Strategic planning has never been more important. Find out why and get advice on key considerations for developing and implementing your plan.



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Engagement and Strategic Planning

Engagement is key to any strategic planning process. Communications professional Julie Rogers shares tips to help guide your approach.



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Case Studies: Inspiring Strategic Plans from B.C. Local Governments

The District of Squamish, Fraser Valley Regional District and District of Central Saanich share guidance and provide inspiration.

IN THIS ISSUE

I'm pleased to take on the role of Acting Editor for *Exchange* while Manjot Bains is on parental leave. Based on comments from LGMA members, this edition tackles the topic of strategic planning, which has become an increasingly crucial tool for local governments.



As you'll read in our feature article *Plotting Your Course with Strategic Planning*, B.C. local governments began to adopt strategic plans roughly 25 to 30 years ago as a means to navigate the expanding scope and complexity of their work. Over time, these plans have become essential for priority-setting and decision-making in the face of rising service demands, expanding responsibilities, economic uncertainty and the impact of decisions by other bodies and levels of government.

While today's strategic plans tend to be more streamlined and user-friendly than their earlier counterparts, the process to develop them continues to be complex and time-consuming.

In our feature article starting on page 8, we discuss key considerations and provide advice on developing and implementing a strategic plan. Helpful guidance on strategic plan communications can be found on page 14, followed by case studies on page 15 showcasing inspiring examples of strategic planning from three B.C. local governments.

Along with our regular features and other LGMA updates, we have a packed edition to add to your summer reading list. We hope it provides members with useful insights and resources to support their work.

If you have a question or thoughts on this issue of *Exchange*, please email us at editor@lgma.ca.

Karin Mark
Acting Editor

I live and work in the ancestral territory of the kwikwəḷəm (Kwkwetlem) First Nation.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Hello! I am honoured to write this column from the traditional territories of the lək'wəḡən (Lekwungen) Peoples, also known as the Xwəpsəm (Kosapsum) and Songhees Nations, whose relationships with the land continue to this day.



I've just returned from the breathtaking Syilx Okanagan territory in Kelowna, where we convened for our 2025 Annual Conference. Over three energizing days, delegates from across B.C. came together to learn, connect and innovate. We were privileged to hear from our keynotes, the Honourable Jody Wilson-Raybould and Alfredo Tan, and to dive into concurrent sessions led by volunteer experts sharing best practices, cutting-edge solutions and future trends in local government. On site, attendees benefited from "Ask a Mentor," pension-consulting clinics, professional headshots and more—all made possible by our fantastic sponsors and partners.

My deepest gratitude goes to Chief Robert Louie, Mayor Tom Dyas and the Honourable Brittny Anderson for kicking things off so thoughtfully. Thank you to the entire LGMA staff team for going above and beyond, to our Board of Directors for their steadfast leadership, to every session and mentor volunteer for their generous time, and to our sponsors for investing in the growth of our profession.

As summer's warmth settles in, we're mindful that the season can bring both rest and anxiety. The LGMA remains committed to highlighting mental health supports and wildfire resources—such as the BC Municipal Safety Association's Firefighters Mental Health & Wellness Toolkit at bcmsa.ca/firefighters-mental-health-wellness-toolkit—to help First Nation and local government staff carry out the vital work of protecting their communities.

The LGMA team are taking some well-earned holidays and getting organized before gearing up for a busy fall. In the meantime, please take good care of yourselves and reach out if you need anything—we're always here for you.

Candace Witkowskyj
Executive Director

BOARD & CHAPTER UPDATE

Hello everyone and welcome. I write this column from the ancestral, traditional and unceded territory of the Okanagan Nation and the Syilx People where I am proud to live and work.

It's an honour to write my first column as president following the very successful 2025 LGMA Annual Conference and Annual General Meeting. I extend my deep appreciation to the LGMA Board of Directors, staff team, volunteer speakers, sponsors and partners, and everyone else who helped make this year's conference a success.

I would like to thank the 2024-2025 President, Douglas Holmes for his thoughtful leadership over the past year. As I take on this role, I know I am on firm ground thanks to the Board.

As a long-time volunteer and member, I am proud of what we have accomplished and excited for what is yet to come. Delivering vital training and professional development, building meaningful connections and sharing best practices will support the success of our members to meet challenges and embrace opportunities as they come.

Thanks to my predecessor, board colleagues and staff, we formally launched our 2025-2030 Strategic Plan at this year's Annual Conference. These goals are ambitious and achievable because we are not starting from scratch. We're building upon a strong foundation shaped by decades of leadership, learning and service.

But to succeed, we need you.

Whether you've been a member for 20+ years or joined this year, there is a place for you in this work. I invite you to recommit to this incredible community. Let's learn together, lead together and grow together. Let's build a future where local government professionals are empowered, connected and equipped to lead with excellence.

Keri-Ann Austin
President



Meet the 2025-2026 Board of Directors



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Learn more about the LGMA Board of Directors at lgma.ca/board-of-directors.

For information on LGMA Chapter activities, visit lgma.ca/lgma-chapters.



By Chelsey Mack and Erin Hrycan
Fulton & Company LLP

CASE of INTEREST

Long-term Planning and Land Rights

The recent decision in *Watermark Developments Ltd. v Kelowna (City)*, 2024 BCSC 2188, highlights challenges local governments face with long-term strategic infrastructure planning tools, including no-build covenants. While restrictive covenants cannot indefinitely preserve lands for future infrastructure planning, there are strategies to make them more durable.

In 2009, in exchange for rezoning approval, a developer granted no-build covenants to the City of Kelowna on lands it owned near University of British Columbia Okanagan and Kelowna International Airport (the “Lands”). At that time, the City identified the Lands for possible use as part of a major transportation corridor. The contemplated corridor was later segmented into three phases. While Segments 1 and 2 were explicitly contemplated in the City’s 2040 Official Community Plan (OCP) and Transportation Master Plan, the plans did not reference Segment 3, where the Lands were located.

In 2024, the developer applied to the Court to have the covenants discharged, arguing the City had no current plans to build Segment 3 and it had been effectively abandoned. The City argued that although Segments 1 and 2 were contemplated in the 2040 Plans, it did not amount to abandonment of Segment 3. Rather, it was simply a recognition that the 20-year planning horizon did not capture Segment 3, which may still proceed in the future and could include the Lands.

The Court sided with the developer, ordering that the covenants be discharged. The Court noted that:

- Segment 3 was not mentioned in the OCP or Transportation Master Plan;
- The covenants were section 219 “no-build” covenants, as opposed to road reservation covenants; and
- Speculation that Segment 3 may require the Lands did not give the City unfettered discretion over whether the developer could use the Lands for the “long foreseeable future.”

Although the covenants were discharged, the City can still explore other avenues to acquire the Lands in the future. However, it lost the certainty that the Lands will be available if/when Segment 3 is ready to proceed.

The Court of Appeal heard this matter on an expedited basis and we await its decision with considerable interest.

This scenario demonstrates the tension local governments face when trying to preserve long-term plans for growing communities. Land is scarce and local government planning staff must forecast infrastructure needs many years, and sometimes decades, into the future.

How can a local government best preserve its long-term infrastructure planning goals?

Although strategies are necessarily fact-specific and must be tailored to the circumstances, some options may include:

1. Ideally, if planning has progressed far enough that it is feasible, register a road reservation covenant under section 44 of the Community Charter, rather than a standard “no-build” covenant.
2. When drafting covenants:
 - a. Ensure they are drafted specifically for the contemplated project;
 - b. Consider including an expiry date, which serves the dual purpose of preventing early discharge before the local government has commenced the contemplated project, while also providing City staff with a clear timeline by which planning steps should be taken; and
 - c. Consider including language that the covenant may not be modified or discharged except in accordance with section 219(9) of the *Land Title Act*.
3. If a local government suspects that the developer may be seeking to discharge the covenant, engage legal counsel early to ensure communications with the covenantor don’t compromise the local government’s legal position.
4. If a long-term project is not yet in the active planning stage, but the local government believes it may proceed in the future, include such language in long-term planning documents like the OCP.
5. Consider whether a negotiated update to the covenant can satisfy both parties — preserving the local government’s long-term planning needs, while providing the landowner with compromises that work for them.

While none of these strategies can guarantee that a section 219 covenant is unassailable, they can certainly increase a local government’s likelihood of safeguarding a covenant that preserves long-term planning projects.

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Plotting Your Course with Strategic Planning

By Karin Mark



PHOTO COURTESY DISTRICT OF PORT HARDY
Scenic Port Hardy on Vancouver
Island earned a national award for its
strategic plan.

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You can't blame local governments for feeling like they're playing "Whac-a-Mole" at times.

Just when they successfully deal with one emergency, two more pop up demanding attention and resources. Faced with rising service demands, expanding responsibilities, decisions by other levels of government, economic uncertainty and other unknowns, it's become increasingly difficult for local governments to stay on top of competing priorities.

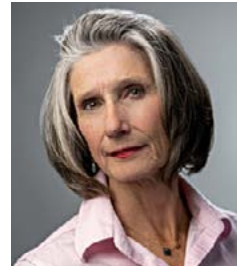
Within this challenging environment, strategic plans—policy documents that define priorities and set goals to guide decision-making—have become a go-to tool to help local governments remain on course amid numerous distractions. They started to take on increased importance in B.C. two to three decades ago, as the work of local government became more complex.

"Initially, local governments focused on water, sewer and roads. We had a fairly narrow mandate, so strategic planning wasn't really necessary," says Dianne Hunter, former Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) at the City of Fort St. John, whose career in local government spanned 42 years in five municipalities, one regional district and two provinces. "As the role of local government has expanded, so has the requirement for a clear focus and direction."

While early strategic plans were often cumbersome, rarely-used documents, today's tend to be more focused, dynamic and user-friendly. Fort St. John refined and streamlined its strategic plans over the years, eventually distilling a version of it into a brochure that it used to great effect to advocate for community interests during the construction of the Site C dam.

"The mayor packed that brochure everywhere she went. She left it behind at every meeting she attended, whether it was in Calgary, Ottawa or Victoria. It became a critical document to explain who we were," Hunter says. "She often said, 'This is our north star. Don't knock us off our north star' when meeting with industry or other levels of government."

"As the role of local government has expanded, so has the requirement for a clear focus and direction."



Dianne Hunter

Hunter became such a firm believer in the power of strategic planning that she has taken opportunities to travel to Peru's High Andes and to Sri Lanka to share her strategic planning and local government expertise with communities there.

Here in B.C., she notes, "strategic plans have become a critical document for municipalities. Without them, communities are easily derailed by issues that come up or the mandates of others."

Hunter uses the example of provincial or federal grants, which are often tempting but may not align with the local government's direction.

"If you don't have the clarity provided by a strategic plan, it can get really noisy and difficult to separate opportunities from distractions," she says. "Everybody's going in different directions and focusing too much on the short term versus the long term. It can also lead to a lot of tension and friction if people aren't on the same page, whether within the organization, within Council or within the community."

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate strategic plans tend to vary in form and scope from community to community, but generally include the organization's vision, mission, values, strategic priorities and goals. Major projects and key indicators for measurement are also commonly included.

B.C. has numerous successful examples, including the District of Port Hardy's award-winning strategic plan mentioned later in this article, and the efforts of the District of Central Saanich, District of Squamish and Fraser Valley Regional District showcased in case studies starting on page 15. Factors to consider when developing a plan are discussed below.

The Right Foundation

Before starting a new strategic plan, Hunter recommends clearly mapping out the process, timelines, required data, resources and responsibilities.

"Often where things fall down is there isn't a lot of thought about the process, including the information we will need and who will be involved," she says. "People at different levels have different roles—Council, senior management, employee groups, etc.—and those should be mapped out."

Importantly, Hunter notes, "Strategic planning should not be done off the corner of someone's desk."

Each strategic planning process should also begin with a review of the organization's vision, mission and values to ensure they are still relevant, she recommends.

As well, data collection is key at the start of the process to create a foundation of knowledge about the organization, the community, interest groups and key partners. This includes gathering internal data, reviewing plans and strategies for alignment, and conducting pre-briefings with Council and senior management—as well as collecting input from the community and engaging interest groups and partners in other sectors. (See advice on communications during strategic planning on page 14).

"If you can make the strategic planning process fairly focused and targeted, the data will speak for itself," Hunter notes.

When Port Hardy started working on a new strategic plan about five years ago, CAO Heather Nelson-Smith wanted a high-level, policy-based plan to help maximize limited resources, minimize fluctuations in Council priorities, and bring cohesion to planning and decision-making processes. She also wanted it to be simple, understandable and actionable.

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Alignment with the Official Community Plan (OCP) became a natural starting place.

“We were updating our OCP in 2020. I realized that if we were doing all this public engagement already, why not have Council look at this engagement and see how it aligned with their own priorities?” Nelson-Smith recalls.

“It was about coming back to those foundational roots and our OCP pillars—economy, social, culture and environment—and making sure all of them get equal attention.”

The resulting plan is based on a hierarchical framework. The OCP is the overarching document that informs the Council Strategic Plan (a policy document with goals based on the four OCP pillars), which in turn guides the Corporate Strategic Plan (actions based on the goals) and the annual budget (assignment of resources). (See *Tips & Tactics* on page 22 for a link to Port Hardy’s plan and framework.)

“The framework has been set out so that all four pillars are always kept together and not siloed,” Nelson-Smith explains.

Port Hardy introduced its first OCP-aligned strategic plan in 2021-2022 then built on it for the subsequent plan from 2023 to 2026. The District’s approach earned it a 2023 Willis Award for Innovation from the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators.

Beyond the framework, several aspects of Port Hardy’s process could serve as a model for others.

For example, both the OCP and corporate strategic plan are based on the four foundational pillars of government (economy, social, culture and environment), which Nelson-Smith notes could also be a starting place for other local governments.

“You can do a SWOT analysis based on the issues you have in your community, and base your strategic plan on that. It’s a holistic approach.”

Port Hardy’s process also helps it get more mileage out of its OCP engagement, she notes, saving time and resources while strengthening the alignment between the two guiding documents.

Additionally, Nelson-Smith suggests engaging all members of the senior leadership team in the plan development, to ensure a variety of perspectives and insights are represented.



**Heather
Nelson-Smith**

“It’s important to get everyone from management involved. If we hadn’t all worked together, I don’t think we’d have achieved the same effect.”

“It’s important to get everyone from management involved. If we hadn’t all worked together, I don’t think we’d have achieved the same effect,” she says.

While Port Hardy developed its strategic plan entirely in-house, the District’s Corporate Officer brought relevant expertise as a former consultant who had helped develop the OCP. The CO helped keep the process on track and ensure the plan’s goals were attainable and measurable.

For organizations without that expertise, Nelson-Smith recommends hiring an external consultant if feasible, to help not only with the significant legwork but to provide an outside lens to capture all of the desires and priorities of the community and Council and distill them into a cohesive and functional plan.

“It can be helpful to have someone external come in, guide the Council through the process and make sure those are attainable goals,” she says.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIG PICTURE

Local governments don’t work in isolation or have full control over all the issues that affect their communities. This reality should be reflected in their strategic plans, including how decisions by other communities and agencies and levels of government affect land use, utilities, transportation, climate change, the economy, housing and other matters.

“It benefits local governments to think about these issues holistically and how all the pieces fit together—or don’t—and to identify actions that could be more synergistic and impactful,” notes Raymond Kan, RPP, MCIP, Manager of Policy & Research for the Planning Institute of British Columbia.

Strategic planning provides local governments with the opportunity to engage in long-term, big-picture thinking, including considering different potential scenarios and consequences before they take action. This leads to more informed decisions, says Kan, who has seen a number of plans in his 20 years working in the public sector in B.C. and California.

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“Here’s a recent case study: I’ll call it ‘the infrastructure surprise.’ When the province introduced its new housing legislation, including small-scale multi-unit housing, policy-makers realized in real time that a lot of local governments were not prepared to address what turned out to be a deficit in infrastructure to support higher density development,” Kan says.



Raymond Kan

“It has become clear in retrospect that policy-makers did not fully appreciate the interdependencies between new housing development and pressures on existing infrastructure and amenities. An argument could be made that taking the time to do some advanced scenario planning could have anticipated these issues and would have informed a more integrated slate of legislative and funding programs.”

Strategic plans are also opportunities to bring a cohesive approach to all planning within the organization. Kan notes that local governments will often have distinct strategies for key functions but they may not relate to each other.

“You can look at it two ways. Community planning should be embedded in the broader strategic planning process, or alternatively, the community plan ought to be the strategic plan,” he says. “Community planning would benefit from a more strategic approach because there’s a lot of uncertainty and interdependencies in the work of local governments. You only sometimes get one time to get it right, and if you get it wrong, it’s going to be very costly to the taxpayer to undo or retrofit the impacts of the decision.”

That strategic approach should also include a recognition that people, businesses and services cross multiple local government borders on a daily basis.

“It’s important to embrace the connectivity and create plans that respect that there is an intermunicipal and regional connection,” says Kan, who worked in Metro Vancouver’s regional planning department for 11 years. “This goes back to the fundamentals of strategic planning. You don’t have full control over your fiefdom. The actions of other jurisdictions have a direct bearing on the success of your community. A strategic plan should be able to accommodate this level of interdependence to manage the uncertainty.”

Building relationships and maintaining a dialogue with jurisdictions that have shared borders and services can help provide advance notice of potential issues, allow parties to proactively search for win-win solutions, and minimize conflict.

FOCUSING ON WHAT’S IMPORTANT

When building a strategic plan, Hunter recommends three strategic priorities—five at most. Related goals should be broad enough to not be overly restrictive, but not so vague that they lack meaning and don’t reflect the community’s priorities.

Importantly, avoid overloading the plan. “It should not include every single wish and desire and thought, or operational items like potholes. You don’t want too many goals, too many priorities or too much detail,” she says. “The most effective strategic plan is simple, straightforward and eye-catching. You’ve got to make your point very quickly, sharply and succinctly.”

Port Hardy’s strategic plans have reflected this high-level approach since 2020, facilitating a shift toward policy-based decision-making for Council. This has helped the organization avoid diversions and stay focused on its broader priorities and goals, Nelson-Smith says.

“A lot of time we can get lost in the fact that we just need to keep the lights on, and forget the longer-term work we were considering doing,” she says. “Before our strategic plan, we found there was some inefficiency and we weren’t getting as much done. Our strategic plan has helped us stay focused and make sure we have a good service-delivery model for the community.”

Hunter notes that when a Council or Board develops its own list of priorities to be carried out over its term, these must also align with the organization’s strategic plan. If not, adjustments should be made to one or both of the documents to ensure the organization has a well-understood, defined path forward.

IMPLEMENTING AND REPORTING

It’s when you have your shiny new strategic plan in hand that the real work begins, Hunter says. Make a commitment to integrate the plan into the organization’s day-to-day work, culture and conversations. Reference it in all reports. Make it accessible online and provide print copies and brochures to leave at facilities and around the community.

“If we say in our strategic plan that these three to five things are important, then we’re going to be reporting back on them to Council in every report,” Hunter says. “The strategic plan should be directly tied to all master plans, zoning, OCP, annual budget and reports. You make your strategic plan a living document by making sure it’s always working to tie everything together.”

Continued on page 13

“We need to be intentional with monitoring how things are working and whether you are achieving the outcomes you had in mind when you set out these goals and actions.”

In Port Hardy, handouts and posters of each new strategic plan have been distributed to staff and around the community. Staff link all District work, projects and processes back to the strategic plan.

“We have copies in every office and on every Council desk, so we know exactly what the priorities are,” Nelson-Smith says. “The big question is always, ‘Where does this align with the strategic plan?’ It’s great for our Finance Director, because when projects are submitted to her, she can see if they meet or don’t meet the strategic plan.”

Kan notes the importance of implementing regular monitoring and reporting throughout the life of a strategic plan. He’s noticed a positive trend over the last 10 to 15 years of local governments infusing more data in both developing policies and monitoring their performance.

“We need to be intentional with monitoring how things are working and whether you are achieving the outcomes you had in mind when you set out these goals and actions,” he says. “It requires a lot of discipline to be really authentic about not only collecting the data and monitoring the trends but also reporting those things out to the Board or Council.”

Because Councils and Boards are busy dealing with crises week after week, Kan says it’s important that staff keep elected officials engaged in the performance of the strategic plan—including proactively starting the conversation if it’s going off course.

“There’s sometimes reluctance to open up a strategic plan again and say, ‘By the way, this assumption we made three years ago is no longer working out. We may need to tweak it,’” Kan says. “That’s part of the challenge. If we really want to develop a strategic plan that is still useful in times of uncertainty, then we need to be up-front that this is what we need to do.”

A strategic plan should not be an inflexible laundry list of actions that you tick off like a meeting agenda, he points out, nor a set of assembly instructions whereby you follow specific steps to build a chair. “A community is a complex system and should never be treated as a fully worked out design that has zero uncertainties.”

A litmus test for a strategic plan is whether it is functional as the organization goes about its daily business, Kan says.

Hunter agrees that plans sometimes need to be updated as circumstances change. “If you’re reporting and linking back your work to the strategic plan all the time, you’ll notice when things don’t fit any more or it’s too narrow.”

To monitor its strategic plan’s success, Port Hardy has initiated a biannual CAO report that is shared with the community, outlining the District’s activities and identifying successes—even small ones—and challenges related to the strategic plan goals. In addition to flagging potential problems, the biannual reports help keep the plan front and centre in the District’s day-to-day work and inform other reporting, such as the Annual Report.

Communities may also choose to establish a set timeframe for a comprehensive review, as Port Hardy has. Like other B.C. local governments, the District is updating its OCP this year to address the provincial housing mandate. Going forward, it plans to review its OCP every five years, triggering an update to the strategic plan.

While many local governments align the timing of their corporate strategic plans with new Council terms, Hunter suggests considering a mid-term timing to give the elected officials time to gel, establish their own priorities and see how they work with the broader corporate plan.

Reflecting on her years in local government, Hunter notes that the strategic planning process can be energizing and exciting for an organization, “but it can also be an energy drain. The challenge as a City Manager is always how to make it a fun and invigorating process.”

See page 14 for communications advice, page 15 for case studies showcasing strategic planning work in three B.C. communities, and page 22 for Tips & Tactics.



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Engagement and Strategic Planning

By Julie Rogers

Local government strategic plans live or die on their ability to connect with people—inside the organization and out in the community. If Council wants the plan to guide real-world decisions, communications and community engagement must be included from day one.

WHO SHOULD YOU ENGAGE?

Think bigger than the usual suspects. A solid plan listens to resident voices and:

- Indigenous governments whose rights and interests overlap with municipal boundaries,
- Invested parties such as business groups, non-profits, youth, seniors and newcomers,
- Neighbouring jurisdictions: regional districts, improvement districts and school boards, and
- Internal teams—who will actually deliver the plan.

B.C. legislation doesn't oblige a formal consultation round for strategic plans, but Section 98 of the Community Charter does require an annual public meeting on the municipal report where progress is fair game for questions.

STAGE-BY-STAGE ENGAGEMENT

Priority-setting

- **Goal:** Discover what matters most and surface blind spots.
- **Tactics:** Online “idea walls,” pop-up booths at existing events, short staff interviews and an accessible resident survey (mobile-friendly, plain language).

Stage Draft & Adoption

- **Goal:** Test draft priorities and show how input shaped them.
- **Tactics:** Release a plain-language summary, host a quick virtual Q & A and publish a redline version so people can track changes.

Implementation

- **Goal:** Keep everyone moving in the same direction.
- **Tactics:** Internal launch with department heads, FAQs for frontline staff and a short explainer video for the public.

Monitoring & Reporting

- **Goal:** Prove progress or course-correct in real time.
- **Tactics:** Interactive dashboards, quarterly e-news briefs and “story-behind-the-numbers” features spotlighting projects and people.

Shifting the organizational mindset from “announce and defend” to “listen and co-create” is important. Early engagement is cheaper than later-stage backlash.

Remember to tell people what you heard and what you did about it, even if you didn't take their advice.

Consider an annual survey to see how residents think the plan is progressing and ask if their priorities have changed. The ability to adapt as the world changes around us and our residents' priorities change is vital.

TIE IT TO THE STAFF WORK PLAN

A strategic plan without a line of sight to departmental work plans is a wish list. After Council adopts the plan, translate each priority into SMART actions (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound), assign an owner and link it to the annual budget cycle. Department directors can show how their 12-month work plan advances Council goals before their budgets get greenlit.

Publish the quarterly progress reports on the municipal website. That level of transparency builds trust and over time will improve your community engagement.

REPORTING: SHOW, DON'T JUST TELL

City of Kelowna shared an annual progress report in plain language with clear metrics and a promise to refresh annually. We all embrace the idea of transparency, but Kelowna clearly shows what that looks like. This is excellence in communications and accountability.

City of Nanaimo's progress report maps out every Council action with colour-coded status including comments on delays and next steps. It gives residents a clear and dependable pulse-check.

See links for both in *Tips & Tactics* on page 22.

FIVE FAST COMMUNICATIONS WINS

1. Use plain language and ditch the jargon. Ensure terms are inclusive. For example, “stakeholder” is no longer being used by many organizations. Try “invested parties” instead.
2. Infographics beat 40-page PDFs. Post the full plan but lead with a one-pager.
3. Pair quantitative dashboards with human-interest stories. Data builds trust; stories build hearts.
4. Schedule quarterly social posts summarizing wins and lessons learned.
5. Make feedback evergreen. Keep a comments form open year-round so ideas don't wait for the next plan.

Strategic planning isn't a season; it's a conversation. When communications pros partner with planners, finance and front-line teams, the plan becomes more than a Council wish list. It becomes the community's playbook. And that is how you turn lofty vision into real action.



CASE STUDIES:

Inspiring Strategic Plans from B.C. Local Governments

By Cynthia Lockrey

Other local governments can serve as a source of guidance and inspiration to develop or hone a strategic plan.

For the District of Squamish, strategic planning means charting a plan for the future while staying grounded in core municipal work. The Fraser Valley Regional District discusses sustainable growth with realistic, actionable goals, and the District of Central Saanich delves deep into understanding how their organization functions in order to make a better plan.

DISTRICT OF CENTRAL SAANICH: FOCUSING ON THE DETAILS

A strong strategic plan is less about the plan itself and more about taking the time to understand the baseline work of the organization as well as its strengths and opportunities.

District of Central Saanich Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), Christine Culham, believes that before you start planning for the future, you must first have a good understanding of how your organization functions and performs on existing priorities. This includes reviewing and evaluating past Council resolutions and plans to see what's been achieved, and identifying gaps and challenges.

"In 2022, we developed an Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, which Council formally endorsed," explains Culham. "Prior to this, our strategic planning was done annually and was Council's wish list of projects. With a small staff serving a community of 20,000 residents, this wasn't the best way to move forward as an organization."

She adds: "We realized that we needed to be more organized and structured in how we do our work. The first step was explaining to Council the work we do, the rationale behind our work, and the vision we wanted to achieve. We then needed to get staff and Council on the same page to ensure the work was predictable, sustainable and realistic."

Taking Time to Listen and Learn

With the election of a new Council came the requirement for a community satisfaction survey within six months, a unique requirement in Central Saanich as per a Council bylaw. This gave Council and staff the opportunity to hear from community members on their priorities for the municipality.

From there, the leadership team worked with Council to determine their objectives while aligning with community priorities. They then developed a vision statement for each priority, charting where they wanted to be in five years.

"While Council was excited to get started on developing the body of the strategic plan, we needed more time to research, learn and prepare," says Culham. "We reviewed past Council resolutions and associated plans to determine what had been achieved, work that still needed to be done, and identified plans that were now outdated."

Using this data, the municipality undertook workforce planning to understand its baseline—where they were meeting their requirements in operations and capital projects and where they were lagging. Staff then costed out the action items and required resources for each priority and goal. This included creating a workforce plan which identified 11.2 positions that needed to be filled.

After the strategic plan was approved, the workforce plan was presented to Council, and the significant research and detailed rationale resulted in each position being approved.

"We spent 2023 creating the strategic plan and taking the time to get it right," says Culham. "We felt the plan needed to be thoughtful, defensible and evidence-based. This would help us achieve our goals."



Christine Culham

Continued on page 16

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“Council has a solid understanding and appreciation for our service levels. When Council determines a new initiative is a higher priority, they realize that something needs to come off of the work plan.”

Before the strategic plan was finalized and presented to Council, an all-staff workshop was held. It provided an opportunity for staff to learn more about Council’s direction and give input on how they could move the plan forward operationally. Feedback from staff was embedded in the final plan.

“While some of the feedback may seem small, it was very impactful,” explains Culham. “For example, using the word ‘facilitate’ versus ‘manage’ when it comes to increasing public amenities that leverage resources and seek partnerships. This shift better represents the work we do.”

Planning Pays Off

Another important change was clarifying roles. Council’s role is making policy and financial decisions and setting out the priorities for the organization. Staff are the content experts who are responsible for creating a plan that they believe they can execute.

“This shift to being more strategic overall has helped us better plan and implement the work we do,” Culham says. “Our capital plan is now \$130 million over five years whereas before we went through this integrated planning process, it was \$10 million over five years. The difference is moving from a year-by-year approach to being strategic with implementing our projects over a longer period.”

Each department has work plans that guide the implementation of the overarching strategic plan. Staff have the opportunity to learn more about the progress by attending an annual open house, where they can talk to other departments about what’s been achieved throughout the year.

While Council receives quarterly project updates, the strategic plan is also top of mind at leadership and management meetings throughout the financial planning cycle. Having everyone engaged ensures that priorities and goals remain in focus.

Through research, data analysis and ongoing staff updates, Council has a clear understanding of the municipality’s resource abilities. The result: a decrease in new requests from Council that are outside of the strategic plan.

“Council has a solid understanding and appreciation for our service levels,” explains Culham. “When Council determines a new initiative is a higher priority, they realize that something needs to come off the work plan. This is key to moving forward with action items.”

Integrating with Partners

Recognizing that no municipality operates in isolation, Central Saanich proactively integrates its plans with major partners, such as First Nations, the regional district and neighbouring municipalities. For example, they coordinate transportation upgrades with watermain replacements to avoid tearing up roads twice, maximizing tax dollars.

“Having good plans allows you to better coordinate and makes everything easier,” says Culham.

Role of CAO

When asked what she sees as her role in implementing the strategic plan, Culham says she’s the project manager. Working for a small municipality means that every staff member needs to roll up their sleeves and be part of implementing the strategic plan.

“As project manager, if something’s not working, I need to be part of the solution,” explains Culham. “What that looks like is different in every situation. For example, if a team is getting frustrated, I need to act as the mediator to help develop a solution to move everyone forward. A lot of this work is change management, which can be challenging and requires a project manager to help guide the process.”

As a project manager and CAO, Culham feels another important aspect of her job is creating the least amount of stress for staff.

“As leaders, we need to think about how we create an environment where every person is valued and seen as an expert in the work they do,” Culham says. “We need to recognize that our staff have so much to contribute to the organization. When people feel valued, they perform better. We also need to create trust so people can be accountable for their actions.”

Continued on page 17

Culham says this starts with having clear policies and ensuring people feel safe. A culture that embraces creativity and provides a safe space for all voices helps ensure staff are engaged.

This is key to strengthening the overall work of the organization.

Recipe for Success

When asked what advice she'd share with other local governments in developing strategic plans, Culham says you need to believe in what you're doing and value interpersonal relationships.

"If we don't have trust amongst our team or create a safe environment for addressing problems, making decisions or championing the work we're doing, then we won't be successful," Culham stresses.

The work needs to be a priority, and the role of leaders includes supporting, understanding, being empathetic and collaborating.

"Staff's job is to advance what Council governs us to do. We're fortunate in Central Saanich to have a Council that clearly understands and respects their governance role. They bring a strong sense of community pulse and are deeply engaged in setting priorities based on what matters most to residents. That system of checks and balances is fundamental to our success—and it's one we truly value."

And most importantly, she feels staff need to be honest with Council about any delays.

"You need to have resilience built into your plan—don't be afraid to push work out," Culham advises. "It's all about being prepared, continuous improvement and admitting to mistakes. We can't be afraid to be wrong and admit that we're not perfect. We have to be honest so we can adjust course as required."

Continued on page 18

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FRASER VALLEY REGIONAL DISTRICT: BALANCING SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH

Three years into its 2023-2026 strategic plan, the Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD) has stayed on track with implementing it by having clearly defined priorities and action items.

“The most difficult part of developing a strategic plan is making sure the goals are realistic and measurable,” explains FVRD CAO Jennifer Kinneman.

While its strategic themes are wide-ranging, the ability to be nimble to meet emerging issues is a key aspect of the plan.

“You need to establish a process and an environment to assess how you’re doing and not be afraid to approach the Board or Council to ask to course-correct to address emerging needs,” adds Kinneman.



Jennifer Kinneman

The four strategic priorities for FVRD are:

- Climate and Environment,
- Growth Management,
- Indigenous Relations, and
- Wellness and Prosperity.

Plan Development

The first step in developing the organization’s strategic plan was to canvass staff on what they viewed as the regional district’s top three challenges. When the plan was being developed in 2022, the region was recovering from the 2021 atmospheric river event as well as working through a global pandemic. Getting staff feedback ensured the plan would be developed with the context of current operational challenges.

Using this initial feedback, a workshop was then held with senior staff and the Board of Directors to develop the four strategic themes.

“Once we had these themes, smaller breakout discussions helped us to develop the priorities,” Kinneman says. “It was important to align projects that were already underway or conceptualized to the bigger picture.”

She believes having the involvement of senior staff with elected officials is critical as goals need to be considered within the local environment to ensure they’re attainable.

“Without staff involvement the plan is created in a vacuum,” Kinneman cautions.

A unique challenge for regional districts is finding the balance with implementing board priorities while not losing sight of electoral area priorities as the two are not always aligned.

To ensure electoral areas remain top of mind, Kinneman is committed to holding annual strategic conversations with electoral area directors. This helps to ensure staff don’t lose sight of the needs that aren’t reflected in a regional strategic plan.

Continued on page 19

A promotional flyer for Capilano University's Local Government Programs. It features the university's logo at the top left, followed by the title 'LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS' in large blue letters. Below this, it asks if the reader is interested in improving their knowledge and skills, and lists the benefits of joining the program. It then lists five specific courses: PADM 200, 201, 202, 305, and 307. A circular badge on the right says 'Register starting in July'. At the bottom, it mentions upcoming MATI® PADM courses and provides contact information for course registration.

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Measuring Progress

Once the details of the plan are fleshed out, the next piece is to determine how to measure progress.

The FVRD has implemented Cascade through Government Frameworks®. This cloud-based tool allows staff to track the progress of work being done on the strategic plan and gives departments the ability to develop work plans that align with priorities.

“Cascade has helped us see how the work being done links to the strategic plan and identifies where we’re moving forward,” Kinneman explains. “I highly recommend local governments use an online tool to measure progress. While it’s still early for us and has taken time to get used to, it has been an eye-opening experience.”

Championing the Plan

Keeping the plan at the forefront of staff’s minds can be a challenge. This is why it’s important to have a strategic plan champion.

Recognizing it may be different for every organization, Kinneman says that at FVRD it falls to her as CAO to regularly remind everyone of the plan’s goals. She believes the plan will only be successful if everyone in the organization sees themselves having a role to play. To do this, the priorities must be broad enough and understandable that staff can see how it relates to the work they do.

She acknowledges that while there are departments, such as corporate and legislative services, that may not have action items in the plan, it doesn’t mean their work isn’t valuable. They need to know and be recognized for the key role they play in supporting the work of the organization, which in turn helps departments move the priorities forward.

Growth Management

One of FVRD’s strategic priorities is growth management. Under this priority, work is being done to end the illegal deposit of soil in rural areas. This is a long-term problem for many rural communities across B.C.

“The illegal deposit of soils is a complex issue with many organizations and provincial ministries involved in finding a way to work together to combat this activity,” Kinneman says. “It’s heartening to see the collaboration across jurisdictions. While progress is slower than we would like due to the complexity of the issues, with so many partners working together we are starting to see positive change. I’m proud of the work we’re doing.”

Indigenous Relations

Like many local governments, FVRD is looking for ways to make meaningful and authentic progress in strengthening relationships and furthering truth and reconciliation with First Nations and Indigenous communities.

The regional district has the unique experience of being located on the land of 31 First Nations and 69 Indigenous governing bodies.

Kinneman acknowledges it’s a significant task for the regional district as it continues down the path of truth and reconciliation. Respecting the individuality of each First Nation and governing body, FVRD is taking the time to determine what reconciliation means for each group, knowing it won’t be the same for everyone.

“This will be an ongoing journey that will likely extend beyond my time here, but we are committed to walking the path of reconciliation,” Kinneman says. “I truly believe relationships are key to our progress. We are taking the time to develop new relationships and strengthen existing ones. We are finding ways to work together and explore new opportunities. It is an important journey that will take time.”

Continued on page 20



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HIGHLIGHT

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Join us at The 7th BCMSA/PWABC Joint Annual Conference & Trade Show, in Whistler from October 6-8, 2025. Ticket are selling quickly so register now!

Open Enrollment Training

BCMSA hosts a variety of open enrollment health and safety training. Ensure you are compliant with WorkSafeBC regulations or work your way through our certificate programs. | www.bcmsa.ca/events/

2025 Membership Awards

We want to recognize achievements in OHS and local government across BC. Nominations are open - apply now until August 8, 2025.

Digital Credentials

BCMSA now offers secure, verifiable digital credentials to proudly showcase your training achievements and promote a culture of safety and professional excellence across BC.

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ABOUT THE BCMSA

Our primary goal is to create safer and healthier workplaces for everyone, eliminating workplace injuries and reducing safety-related financial costs.



CONNECTION TO CARE PROGRAM



BCMSA & BCACC introduce "Connection to Care," a collaborative mental health and wellness initiative aimed at fostering resilience within our local government community. The pilot program provides local government workers (CU 753004) access to free, anonymous, and confidential mental health support via a dedicated call-in service.

“When we look at the goals in our strategic plan, it’s tricky to measure progress on Indigenous relations and reconciliation. It’s not about checking boxes. We need to value the time required, relationships that need to be fostered and have awareness of the qualitative nature of our work instead of always focusing on quantitative measurements.”

Looking Forward

With only a year left in FVRD’s current strategic plan, Kinneman is looking forward to the creation of the 2027-2030 plan. Given the challenges the regional district has experienced over the last couple of years, she hopes the new Board will focus on sustainability by developing business cases for departments.

“Local governments are trying to do more, or the same, with less money and resources,” Kinneman explains.

“This isn’t sustainable. I would like to see some more forecasting and asset management to focus on our priorities for the next 10 years. Maybe there are services our communities no longer desire or can afford. Residents, staff and elected officials must have the information they need to make tough decisions.”

She would like to see a shift in thinking of strategic planning within operational constraints, looking at the business local governments are in currently and what they should be doing moving forward.

As the cost of items isn’t going down, Kinneman believes more work needs to be done on determining what’s nice to have and what services local governments need to provide to ensure sustainability moving forward.

“We need a 10-year plan to chart our course and help prepare everyone for future change and growth,” Kinneman says.

“We’re living in a state of perpetual change. Just as we need to be comfortable with this reality, so should our strategic plans.”

“At FVRD, we provide 114 services. Does the regional district need to provide all these services or can this work be done, or is it being done, by other organizations? I welcome an opportunity to focus on the things we’re doing very well and look for different ways to deliver the other services.”

This is a challenge many local governments are facing—meeting the needs of communities as they grow and evolve while being financially responsible and sustainable.

Advice for Local Governments

While each local government has a unique process in developing its strategic plan, Kinneman has some insights to consider.

She recommends staff get comfortable with having a narrow focus. Councils or Boards should be encouraged to do fewer things, do them well and achieve measurable goals instead of casting too wide of a net.

Recognizing that making goals measurable is hard work, Kinneman suggests investing time in developing fewer objectives and finding an online tool to help measure progress. Once the strategic plan is created, staff and elected officials should be prepared to alter course.

“We’re living in a state of perpetual change,” Kinneman says. “Just as we need to be comfortable with this reality, so should our strategic plans.”

Her final piece of advice is to be kind to yourself throughout the process.

“If you’re an organization that hasn’t done a strategic plan before, it will take time and several versions to be successful,” Kinneman advises. “We’ve made improvements over the last three revisions of our strategic plan and will continue to do so. Don’t strive for perfection.”

Continued on page 21

From strategic vision to practical action!

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DISTRICT OF SQUAMISH: PUTTING PEOPLE, SERVICES AND THE FUTURE FIRST

Every four years, municipalities in B.C. welcome new Councils and Boards, and each term, elected officials bring their own unique priorities and vision. The challenge for local governments is implementing this vision while still carrying out the core municipal services.

When the District of Squamish developed its 2023-2026 strategic plan, it started with educating the new Council on the Official Community Plan as well as the work that is currently underway on master plans and capital works.

“We worked with Council to find a balance between supporting their priorities while making sure the foundational municipal work continued,” Squamish CAO Linda Glenday explains. “It’s imperative that strategic plans are grounded in the Official Community Plan, which is based on extensive community input and visioning.”



Linda Glenday

The strategic plan is organized around four outcomes, including “Reliable Service Delivery,” which captures the everyday reality that 80 per cent of the organization’s work lies in the day in and day out of providing municipal services. Glenday notes it’s important that core municipal services be highlighted as a priority in the plan as it helps keep Council grounded in the services that need to be provided in addition to their emerging issues. It also helps staff see themselves, and the work they do, in the plan.

Balancing Priorities

While some organizations start their strategic plan development process with getting consensus on the focus areas, the District of Squamish took the opposite approach.

“We started with hearing from Council on their priorities,” explains Glenday. “We flipped back and forth between their specific objectives and the outcomes they wanted to achieve to ensure the objectives were truly aimed at achieving those outcomes.”

For example, when Council says they wanted to see more places for the community to gather, including trails and park spaces, and an increase in active transportation, the leadership team asked what they wanted to achieve. Instead of focusing on the tasks, Council and staff worked together to determine the desired outcome. In this case, “Connected and Livable Community.”

The District of Squamish’s strategic plan has four broad outcomes:

- Resilient People and Relationships,
- Connected and Livable Community,
- Reliable Service Delivery, and
- Prepared For the Future.

Having broad outcomes with related objectives instead of detailed priorities allowed staff to align their projects and work under the objectives. Each year, Council holds a workshop to ensure the tactics, or work underway, correspond with their objectives. It also ensures that Council is endorsing the work being done.

Tracking Success

The District of Squamish began using Envisio software to track progress on the tactics related to the strategic plan. Council receives quarterly updates from the program.

“[The software] provides a concrete plan to deliver on Council’s outcomes,” explains Glenday. “We know exactly what’s being done and it allows staff to plan work activity for the year, which is more efficient.”

The community is also provided a yearly progress update through the annual report.

“I’m proud of our annual report and the updates we share for our community,” says Glenday. “We provide an overview of each outcome, tactics as well as progress made during the year and what we will do over the remainder of Council’s term. It’s important to be transparent while celebrating our successes.”

Transparent Planning

Glenday says the benefits of having a well-thought-out strategic plan is that it focuses staff and Council on the work that needs to be done during their term, the budget required and provides detailed workplans on how it will be implemented.

“It also helps when new actions come up during Council’s term,” Glenday explains. “Our Council is comfortable with our process of workshoping new ideas with staff instead of injecting new priorities without considering the impact to the organization. Together, we work through a prioritization process where Council chooses what comes out when they want to add a new initiative or project.”

Having just gone through a wildfire, Glenday says she’s grateful Council understands there’s no slack in the organization. All municipal staff and resources are fully engaged in day-to-day work and stretched to their limits when emergencies arise.

Continued on page 22

“Our Council has been courageous in not adding anything new without first taking something out,” Glenday says. “Council has also been supportive of looking after the longer-term needs of our growing community through the asset management program and other plans aimed at investing in infrastructure. I’m impressed with their commitment to investing in infrastructure when there are so many brighter and shinier things and competing priorities.”

Looking Forward

With one year left in Council’s term, the District is looking for ways to improve how it develops its next strategic plan.

“Strategic planning in a local government context is challenging as we provide so many different services through different business units and Council has a wide range of priorities,” Glenday explains. “In this context, the advantage of having a broad strategic plan is that everyone in the organization sees themselves in it, as can the community.”

Strategic planning can be an iterative process, and Glenday acknowledges some of the shortcomings and learnings from this experience.

“Our current strategic plan is broad, less strategic and less focused. I believe it’s too much; by the time we align tactics to achieve all the work, the volume is too high to achieve it all,” she says.

“While we’ve done an incredible job so far, my goal for the next plan is to keep the scope tighter and to answer the question: how do we meet Council’s objectives while keeping it focused? I believe this is a universal challenge for all local governments based on the breadth of work we do.”

While she recognizes the challenges, Glenday says overall their strategic plan has been an incredible tool for leadership to focus the work of staff.

“We are working in alignment to support Council’s success while validating our staff’s work,” Glenday concludes. “Reporting out to community via the annual report has also been a great process. Strategic planning is such an important tool for a municipality despite the challenges.”



tips & tactics

Resources for Local Government Strategic Planning

STRATEGIC PLANS AND REPORTS REFERENCED IN ARTICLES

- District of Port Hardy: porthardy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Strategic-Plan-2023-2026.pdf.
- Fraser Valley Regional District: fvrd.ca/assets/About-the-FVRD/Documents/Strategic-Plans/2023-2026%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf.
- District of Central Saanich: centralsaanich.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/strategic_plan_2024-2027.pdf.
- District of Squamish: squamish.ca/assets/Strategic-Plan/2023-2026-Strategic-Plan-2024-update.pdf.
- City of Kelowna: council.reporting.kelowna.ca.
- City of Nanaimo: nanaimo.ca/docs/city-plan-documents/integrated-action-plan/2024-council-priority-actions---progress-report.pdf.

PLANNING RESOURCES

- Province of BC—local government planning information: www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/local-governments/planning-land-use.
- Province of BC—regional growth strategies: www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/local-governments/planning-land-use/local-government-planning/regional-growth-strategies.
- Province of BC—planning for sustainability and resilience: www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/local-governments/planning-land-use/local-government-planning/planning-for-sustainability-resilience.

ADDITIONAL READING

- Urban Development: The Logic of Making Plans by Lewis D. Hopkins. 2001, Island Press. ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/49030/1/182.pdf.

2025 Conference Highlights



**The time is now...
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2025 LGMA CONFERENCE
KELOWNA | JUNE 10-12

The 2025 LGMA Conference brought together more than 200 local government practitioners from across B.C. on the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the syilx/Okanagan people in beautiful Kelowna.

We explored current topics and trends, launched ideas and dialogue, supported local government solutions, and built and strengthened our networks over three days.

The trade show was a bustling hub of connection, featuring 30 exhibitors and their excellent products and services.



Past President Douglas Holmes with Brooke McCourt, winner of Most Impactful New Professional Award, (left) and with Patti Ferguson and LGMA time capsule (right).



Activities also included the AGM, election of the new board (see page 5), and Member Awards Ceremony (visit lgma.ca/awards).

Our sincere thanks to the participants, volunteers, presenters, special guests, on-site staff, sponsors, professional development partners and many others who made this event a success.

Time Capsule Submissions

A conference highlight was the unveiling of a special piece of LGMA history: the 1999 time capsule.

We will reveal the time capsule at the 2026 annual conference. Submit your local government's piece of history by March 31, 2026. For full details, visit lgma.ca/timecapsule.

New LGMA Strategic Plan

The LGMA's 2025-2030 strategic plan launched this summer after an immersive planning process to define the Association's vision and priorities.

The organization's approach was rooted in a commitment to involve diverse voices from across the local government community, including members, staff, Board representatives and partners.

These five goals will shape the Association's work from 2025 to 2030:

1. Excel in Training and Professional Development,
2. Foster Engagement and Connections,
3. Advance Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility,
4. Elevate Partnerships and Collaborations, and
5. Invest in Organizational Sustainability and Capacity.



Through surveys, interviews, and conference discussions, LGMA gathered valuable insights into the experiences, needs, and aspirations of local government professionals. Engagement included 19 survey responses from Board and staff, 10 key interviews with representatives from municipalities, First Nations and regional districts, and dozens of member conversations at the 2024 LGMA Annual Conference in partnership with Roots & Rivers Consulting.

This collaborative approach integrated feedback from the engagement process with forward-looking strategies to refine LGMA's goals and objectives, and address emerging challenges and opportunities, such as advancing equity, future-proofing our Association and leveraging technology. The resulting strategic plan reflects a shared vision grounded in the collective input of members, to foster meaningful connections, support professional growth, and create a resilient foundation for the years ahead.

Read the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan at lgma.ca/strategic-plan.

ASK A MENTOR



In this regular feature, your questions are answered by local government leaders who share their insights and wisdom. If you have a topic or question you would like a mentor to discuss, please email us at editor@lgma.ca.

GUEST MENTOR TERRI BRENNAN

Terri Brennan is an Executive Coordinator with 30 years of experience in local and provincial government, including the last seven years supporting the Chief Administrative Officer and Mayor at the Municipality of North Cowichan. Known for a relentless commitment to excellence and an insatiable curiosity for learning, Terri empowers individuals and teams to achieve their highest potential. She has a genuine passion for helping others succeed in their endeavours and a unique ability to adapt her approach based on the needs and preferences of those she supports.

During tough times, we know people benefit from cultivating safe spaces and building community. Why is this important in local government?

In my role as an Executive Coordinator within a municipal government, I see firsthand how creating safe spaces and fostering community strengthens both our internal teams and the broader public we serve. Creating safe spaces and fostering community is incredibly important in local government. It helps build trust, encourages people to get involved, and makes the community more resilient during tough times. This sense of security and belonging can really boost the overall well-being and stability of the community.

How can LGMA members help build community in local government?

There are several ways local governments can build community. Being transparent and sharing information openly with residents builds trust. Additionally, involving residents when possible ensures that staff and Council are aware of the community's needs and priorities, making everyone feel more connected and valued. Last year, our Council held open house and budget meetings in each of our communities to attract more public engagement.

What are some potential opportunities to cultivate safe spaces in a local government setting?

Local governments have a unique responsibility to create safe spaces—both for the public and for internal staff. This means ensuring that public areas like parks, streets, and municipal buildings are well-maintained, well-lit and accessible to all. These physical improvements help residents feel welcome, secure and included in their community.

Equally important is the creation of safe spaces within the workplace. As an Executive Coordinator I support an administrative team and work closely with our Senior Leadership Team, and we work hard to foster psychological safety and inclusion. This includes encouraging open communication, ensuring all voices are heard in meetings, and supporting wellness initiatives that prioritize mental health and work-life balance. When staff feel safe to express themselves, ask questions, and share ideas without fear of judgment, it leads to a more engaged, innovative and resilient organization.

What are some small steps that go a long way to making staff feel included?

Creating an inclusive workplace culture doesn't always require large-scale initiatives—often, it's the small, consistent actions that make the biggest difference. Regular communication that keeps staff informed and involved in organizational goals helps build trust and a sense of shared purpose. Recognizing individual and team contributions—whether through a quick thank you, a shout-out in a meeting or a staff celebration—boosts morale and reinforces a culture of appreciation.



Volunteer Spotlight

Each issue, we profile an LGMA volunteer who is making an impact in our local government communities.



VOLUNTEER ALICE JOHNSTON

Meet Alice Johnston, the Corporate Officer and Deputy Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) for the Cariboo Regional District. She loves working in local government administration and particularly enjoys the relationships that have been built with co-workers and colleagues over the years. She holds a certificate in Local Government

Administration from Capilano University. Born in Williams Lake, Alice continues to live in the area with her husband and has two adult children.

How long have you worked in local government?

I began my career in local government in 1997, following five years in the insurance industry.

What other roles have you filled in local government?

My entire local government career has been with the Cariboo Regional District. Over the years, I've held a variety of roles including Receptionist, Planning Clerk, Community Librarian, Records Management Clerk, Senior Administrative Services Clerk and Corporate Officer—before taking on the additional responsibilities of Deputy CAO.

I feel incredibly fortunate to have found a profession that values hard work, continuous learning and collaboration.

What roles have you filled as a volunteer?

Most recently, I've volunteered as a board member for the North Central Local Government Management Association (NCLGMA) chapter and as the NCLGMA representative on the LGMA Board.

Can you share a story or highlight from your experience volunteering with LGMA and with the LGMA Board?

Serving on the LGMA Board was a truly enjoyable experience filled with learning, laughter and camaraderie. It's hard to pinpoint just one story because the entire team was such a joy to work with. The friendships and mentorship opportunities that emerged from that experience were incredibly meaningful.

What is the most fulfilling part of volunteering with LGMA?

The most rewarding aspect of volunteering with the LGMA is being part of an organization so deeply committed to supporting and advancing local government professionals. From staff to board members, everyone is dedicated to making a positive impact. The energy and collaboration during planning sessions for new programs and events was truly inspiring.

What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

I love to golf, garden, read, work out, run, travel, cook, hike, spend time with my husband and family, walk our Dachshund, learn new things, cross-country ski, listen to podcasts, bike, camp, and fish.

Is there a book you read or a movie you watched recently that you loved and would recommend?

I recently read *The Covenant of Water* by Abraham Verghese, which was really good. My favourite book will always be *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls, and the next one on my list is *The Women* by Kristin Hannah. I also enjoyed watching the *White Lotus* series..

What meal or dish can you eat over and over again?

I absolutely love anything with fish sauce! Banh mi bowls or the crispy rice salad from Pinch of Yum are two of my go-to dishes—I might just make that salad tonight!

MEMBERS PAGE

MEMBER MOVEMENT

Melony Burton, CAO, Village of Belcarra (formerly Manager of Infrastructure Planning, City of Port Coquitlam)

Jennifer Mills, Manager, Legislative Services, City of Coquitlam (formerly Legislative Services Advisor, City of Port Moody)

Gerald Pinchbeck, CAO, District of Houston (formerly Manager of Communications, Cariboo Regional District)

Trevor Seibel, CAO, City of Armstrong (formerly Deputy CAO, City of West Kelowna)

Sundance Topham, CAO, City of Powell River (formerly Interim CAO, District of Lantzville)

John Thomas, CAO, Town of Lake Cowichan (formerly Acting CAO, Village of Sayward)

William Wedel, CAO, District of Vanderhoof (formerly Director of Public Works and Engineering, District of Vanderhoof)

Chantel Wiese, Manager of Corporate Services, City of Armstrong (formerly Director of Corporate Services, District of Elkford)

RETIREMENTS

Jodi Pierce, CFO, Columbia Shuswap Regional District

Paula Richardson, CAO, Village of Belcarra

2025 LGMA EVENTS & PROGRAMS

September 4-November 27
Foundations of Local Government Learning Series
Online

September 12
Indigenous Consultation & Engagement
Online

September 21
CAO Dinner
Victoria

October 1-3
Corporate Officer Forum
Penticton

October 14, 21, 28
Advanced Supervisor Essentials
Online

October 19-24
MATI® School for Statutory Approving Officers
Bayside Resort, Parksville

October 21-23
First Nations and Local Government Land Use Planning Regional Workshop
En'owkin Centre, Penticton

October 21, 28, November 4
Effective Report Writing
Online

November 5-7
Admin Professionals Conference
Richmond Convention Centre

November 5, 12, 19, 26
Coaching Essentials
Online

November 18, 25, December 2
Minute Taking
Online

November 23-28
MATI® Community Planning*
Harbour House, Salt Spring Island

2025 PARTNER EVENTS & PROGRAMS

September 22-26
Union of British Columbia Municipalities Convention
Victoria

October 6-8
BC Municipal Safety Association/Public Works Association of BC Joint Annual Conference & Trade Show
Whistler Conference Centre

October 25-29
International City/County Management Association Conference
Tampa/Hillsborough County, Florida

2026 LGMA EVENTS & PROGRAMS

February 17-19
CAO Forum
Westin Wall Centre, Richmond

Dates may change. Confirm at lgma.ca/programs-training.

* These MATI® programs are delivered in partnership with Capilano University.



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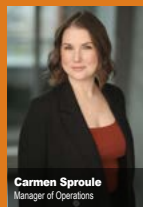
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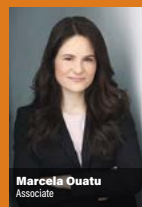
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