

PROVINCIAL ISSUES

The ad hoc and temporary nature of integrated teams makes them an unreliable approach to regional policing.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government create common governance and funding models to ensure consistent standards of policing for all municipalities, including those policed by the RCMP.

Submitted by the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce and Abbotsford Chamber of Commerce

Supported by the Duncan-Cowichan Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce, the Terrace Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Westside Board of Trade, and the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce

The Policy Review Committee supports this resolution

60. SUPPORTING B.C.'S GROWTH AND ECONOMY: MODERNIZATION OF REGIONAL DISTRICTS

Opening Statement

Regional governments play an important role in our communities by delivering regional services where a regional service is appropriate and providing local level governance and service for unincorporated areas within its boundaries. As urban centres grow and municipalities' residents and businesses increasingly become inter-dependent, the importance of regional services increases, both in terms of type and complexity, e.g. transportation infrastructure, air-quality management, and sewage. However, regional governments can be rendered unable to act without voluntary buy-in from the municipalities. Without effective regional governance and service delivery, businesses experience increased costs - in terms of dollars, time and energy – to operate in more than one municipality and services are duplicated and inefficient or not provided at all.

Background

In 2003, municipal governance was modernized with the *Community Charter*, which set out principles for municipal-provincial relations and gave municipalities' direct authority and accountability in regards to governing their respective municipalities.

Regional districts were created in 1966, and were intended to manage issues that transcended municipal borders and to be the local government for the 95 percent of the provincial land area that was outside of municipal boundaries. The *Local Government Act* describes the Corporate Power to make agreements respecting a wide array of services, regulation and property. In practice, regional districts provide services through authority derived from the *Local Government Act*, letters patent and - since the late 1980s - through Service Establishment Bylaws.

The purpose of regional districts is three-fold:

1. they are regional governments that deliver regional services,
2. they are inter-municipal and provide a political and administrative framework for the delivery of services on a partnership basis, and
3. they can offer local government services for unincorporated areas.

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This policy resolution focusses specifically on the first, regional districts' ability to effectively and efficiently deliver regional services, particularly in urban settings.

Today, there are 162 municipalities in BC, plus 29 regional districts. Since regional districts were implemented, the municipal landscape has changed: the population has dramatically increased and urban areas have expanded. Most regional districts inhabit primarily unincorporated rural areas (electoral areas). However, some are in urban areas where the municipalities are largely adjacent and things have changed. For example, Greater Victoria area has 13 municipalities (the majority of the Capital Regional District, minus the Gulf Islands) and Metro Vancouver has 21 municipalities.

The Capital Regional District (CRD) and Metro Vancouver have been in the past considered regional district anomalies because of their highly-populated urban areas. In these two districts, the regional governments primarily provide fully regional services like water supply and air quality management. In contrast, less populated regional districts are more focused on providing local services like planning, and fire protection. Both the CRD and Metro Vancouver share regional problems typical of growing urban settings, including transportation, homelessness, water and wastewater management, policing and fire protection, property taxation and land use.

Today, CRD and Metro Vancouver are no longer anomalies. Areas of B.C. are growing and other regional districts are quickly finding themselves in the same/similar predicament as the CRD and Metro Vancouver, including the Regional District of Central Okanagan, Regional District of Nanaimo, Regional District of Fraser-Fort George and North Okanagan Regional District.

The current legislation allows specific municipalities to opt in and out of services and requires any changes to be accepted by a weighted majority of the parties. This sets the stage for at best inaction, if not conflict, with municipalities acting against regional interests thereby rendering the regional district unable to act, such as what was seen in the CRD's 50-year path to sewage treatment.

There are also many large and small areas where the regional district model does not meet the needs of taxpayers. For example, Section 375 of the *Local Government Act* does not specify or provide any information on the scope or type of public consultation during the development of financial plans. As such, it is left up to the regional district how much – or how little – taxpayers are consulted.

The regional district enabling legislation requires modernization to keep our economy strong and to maintain – if not further enhance – the quality of life of which British Columbians are so proud. Although there have been incremental changes to the governing legislation for regional districts over the past 50 years, it is time for a comprehensive review to align regional governance with B.C.'s growing communities.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government modernize regional district-related legislation by providing:

1. A clear mandate for certain regional districts that should have sole responsibilities for some specific municipal services;
2. Transparency, such that regional districts are transparent in regards to taxation, ensuring citizens and businesses alike are aware of how much they are paying and for what; and
3. Governance in the public interest, such that regional districts have the authority to act in the best interests of the region and to deliver their mandate.

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Submitted by the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce

Supported by Kelowna Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce, the Prince George Chamber of Commerce, the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade

The Policy Review Committee supports this resolution

61. SUPPORTING THE LABOUR NEEDS OF TODAY AND TOMORROW - B.C. PROVINCIAL NOMINEE PROGRAM

Opening Statement

While immigration is a federal matter, provinces and territories have received a growing role in the selection of immigrants over the past two decades by way of bilateral agreements with the federal government. These bilateral agreements create Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs) under which each provincial government has an annual nomination limit for the selection of foreign applicants best suited for that specific province/territory. Such applicants, if nominated, are provided expedited processing of their work permit and permanent residency applications. In some provinces, such as B.C., the PNP allotments are continually over-subscribed, while in others it is under used. Further, the majority of settlement tends to be in large urban cores, which can lead to the stagnation/decline of rural areas and ongoing difficulty attracting workers to smaller centres.

Background

Two key factors will determine long-term growth in B.C.'s economy: productivity performance, and the extent to which the labour force expands over time. The hurdles to achieving long-term growth include an ageing population, a low natural birth rate, and intense global competition for talent. A 2016 report found that B.C. will need an extra 20,000 to 32,000 skilled workers annually between 2017 and 2025 to fill projected job vacancies. As the natural birth rate—the lowest in Canada—declines, increasingly employers must look to foreign sources to expand the talent pool. In fact, in the not-too-distant future, immigration will be the only source of significant population growth.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) handles large volumes of permanent and temporary resident applications across its extensive global processing network. The process of managing immigration files includes protecting the health, safety and security of Canadians. In collaboration with partners in the Public Safety portfolio as well as the Department of Justice and Health Canada, IRCC works to identify applicants who could pose security or health risks to Canadians. IRCC also works in partnership with other countries to mitigate risks and protect Canada from international threats.

Every foreign worker must obtain a work permit to legally work in Canada. The process by which a work permit is issued involves a complex employment confirmation scheme involving Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and IRCC.

As a general rule, an IRCC visa and immigration officer is not authorized to issue a work permit to a foreign worker unless, in the opinion of the officer, there are insufficient Canadians or permanent residents who can fill the potential position.

Involvement of ESDC is a convenient way for visa and immigration officers to determine whether the employment of the foreign worker is justified given current labour market conditions. With a confirmation of a valid job offer and a favourable opinion known as the "labour market impact assessment" (LMIA) from ESDC – provided security and medical qualifications have been met - the visa and immigration officer will then issue a work permit to the foreign worker. The process generally requires consultation