

Strait Talk, May 2009

The SCRD consists of 8 areas: 3 municipalities, Sechelt, Gibsons, and the Sechelt Indian Government District, and 5 rural areas from Pender Harbour to West Howe Sound. One of the biggest challenges from the beginnings of Regional Districts has been figuring out how these 8 communities with their different priorities can work together effectively. Although in recent years a few important recreation projects have been mostly region wide, our collaborative efforts have been few and far between. In my view, we are missing an opportunity.

Being almost totally surrounded by water and accessible only by boat, the boundaries of the Sunshine Coast are very clear, providing a unique opportunity for a collaborative and integrated approach. Historically, we have found that difficult, assuming that preservation of the individuality and autonomy of each community requires doing everything separately. But the whole point of the Regional District system is to get everyone around the same table to explore collective responses to common concerns, keeping in mind and respecting each area's specific needs and perspectives.

The SCRD's Vision Statement calls the Sunshine Coast "a community of communities." That vision includes a commitment to honour the distinct character of each of them...a micro version of what we learned in socials as the "Canadian Mosaic." While each of us lives and pays taxes in one part of the Coast, we are actually very fluid. We circulate throughout the Coast for work, recreation, shopping, visiting, even schooling. What happens in one area affects all the rest. So how could we be more collaborative? We have already agreed on a few specific regional projects. One example is the Transportation Study we are just getting started. Another is the formation of a Regional Agriculture Advisory Committee. But what can knit these pieces together? Just as our communities are connected, so are these issues and the solutions to the problems we face.

One approach that offers that integration is a Regional Growth Strategy, a provincially recognized and funded planning process. The beauty of the RGS is that it is our process. It involves the whole community and is all about dialogue. We decide together on the what and the how and nothing gets written into the plan without mutual consent. And if the word "Growth" puts some of us off, we can even reframe the concept by calling it something else...Coastal Vision, Sustainability Initiative, or ???

I've been asked why we should embark on such a planning process. What is the value? My answer is simple: either we collectively imagine the future we want and figure out how we get ourselves there, or an unforeseen future will take us by surprise. We have a choice. We can gamble on the future or we can collaborate, make some collective decisions about our direction and pull together towards it.

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