



28 January 2008

Honourable Gordon Campbell
Premier of British Columbia
PO Box 9041 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Campbell,

Re: Regional Planning and Governance and Smart Growth in Support of Sustainability in B.C.

We congratulate you and your government on the strong measures you are taking to address the challenges of climate change for government as well as for communities, including the recent transit announcements for the Lower Mainland. These recent initiatives, which are aimed at alternative energy, energy conservation, building standards, transportation and other climate change priorities, demonstrate that the status quo in how we conduct business in the province is no longer acceptable and it is time for strong and decisive action to achieve sustainability. This includes the way in which we build our urban areas, where over 80% of British Columbians now live. Land use is clearly of fundamental importance if we are to become a truly sustainable society and leave a healthy planet for our children. Effective regional planning and governance for these urban areas, in particular, is therefore crucial to meeting sustainability goals.

Smart Growth BC is well aware of your interest and history in promoting livable and sustainable municipalities and regions. We would like to work with you to ensure that governance mechanisms for our urbanized areas, both for individual communities and for regional agglomerations of communities, is effective at instituting sustainability, and that local governments in B.C. at the regional district and municipal levels have the tools, expertise, resources and motivation that they need to be sustainable.

To this end, we have attached our recently adopted policy statement on local and regional planning and governance that we believe reflects our mutual interest in promoting smart growth and sustainability in B.C. We would enjoy the opportunity to meet with you and your key ministers and staff to present these policies, to explain how these approaches are fundamental to moving B.C.'s sustainability agenda forward, and to discuss how Smart Growth BC and the Province can work together as key partners in implementing these progressive and necessary governance policies.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for more information at 604-915-5234.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Cheeying Ho in black ink.

Cheeying Ho, Executive Director

Handwritten signature of Charlotte Ciok in black ink.

Charlotte Ciok, President

Copy: Louise Comeau, Executive Director, Public Outreach and Community Engagement, Climate Action Secretariat

Alan Osborne, Executive Director, Intergovernmental Relations and Planning Division, Ministry of Community Services

Dale Wall, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Community Services

Creating more livable communities

314 – 402 West Pender Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6B 1T6

T 604.915.5234 F 604.915.5236 W www.smartgrowth.bc.ca

Smart Growth BC's policies provide positions on land use and development that follow smart growth principles, and are the framework through which we encourage good land use decision-making. This Regional Planning and Governance Policy describes the issues with the current governance structure for regional planning, and offers concrete strategies that will result in more sustainable and effective planning and development.

1. Issues with the Current Planning and Governance Framework

Due to its many clear benefits, smart growth has become a well-established planning practice throughout North America. These benefits include creating highly livable, complete, compact communities that support walking, cycling and transit while preserving farmland, green space and the environment. They also mean promoting a strong local economy, which depends on the health of the community. As the severe consequences of global issues, such as peak oil and climate change, and local issues, such as housing affordability, homelessness and traffic gridlock, become increasingly important, the need to institutionalize smart growth principles in British Columbia communities has become more urgent than ever before. Other jurisdictions in North America are already requiring smart growth planning for local governments such as the states of Maryland, Oregon and Wisconsin.

In BC, transportation contributes to one-third of GHG emissions, which is well above the national average. While efforts are being made to reduce GHG emissions from fuels through increased efficiency and carbon content, efforts to reduce distances driven have yet to be effective. The reason British Columbians are driving increasing longer distances is because in most cases there is no option due to our past and current development patterns. The only effective way to significantly reduce our driving and personal transportation GHG emissions is by changing the way we develop our communities so that we don't need to drive to access all of our daily needs. We need to use our land more efficiently, create more compact, denser, mixed-use communities that support walking, cycling and transit use; in other words, we need to pursue smart growth strategies more aggressively.

However, in order to pursue smart growth strategies more aggressively, there needs to be more effective regional planning powers and governance structures so there is better coordination at a regional level to achieve the kind of growth that supports sustainability principles.

Land use planning is the fundamental building block of sustainable development. Transportation planning must be done in the context of comprehensive land use planning that ensures complete, compact and vibrant communities where a healthy green infrastructure and mixed-use development prevail. To date, the implementation of policies and practices that promote smart growth and sustainable communities in B.C. has been inconsistent at best. Currently, many communities permit land use densities and mixes that are well below those needed to promote a sense of community, and the private automobile is the only practical way to get around these communities, resulting in increasing car ownership and kilometres driven across the province. These communities often lack basic infrastructure to promote walking, cycling and transit, such as sidewalks, bike lanes and transit shelters. In cities, towns and villages across BC, little progress has been made to provide affordable housing, especially for workers and middle income earners. Sprawl continues unabated in many communities, new construction is often built to minimum building code standards and, in many areas, house and lot sizes are getting larger, all leading to increasing energy consumption. Municipal infrastructure is still typically conventional in design, requiring additional natural resources and imposing higher impacts on the environment. All of these factors are significantly impeding our ability to reduce greenhouse gases and to meet the Province's climate change goals.

An analysis of the underlying causes of the slow pace of adopting smart growth principles points to our current regional planning and governance structures in British Columbia. While there is adequate empowering legislation under Part 25 of the *Local Government Act* that enables municipalities and regional districts to implement effective regional smart growth planning, the emphasis is clearly on voluntary coordination and planning measures. Section 849(2) of the Act reads largely like a smart growth platform. However, the lack of specific targets for certain fundamental land use conditions in all regions in B.C. and the lack of compliance mechanisms significantly weakens the potential power of Regional Growth Strategies. For example, although Regional Growth Strategies (RGSs) were intended to support sustainability and municipal Official Community Plans (OCPs) were intended to support an RGS through Regional Context Statement (RCS), in practice there has been a lack of effective mechanisms in place to ensure compliance with the intent of Local Government Act's provisions.

Therefore, Smart Growth BC recommends the implementation of mechanisms that create:

- (i) mandatory growth management measures and targets
- (ii) specific regional planning authority for regional districts
- (iii) a specific mandate for regional districts to govern in their areas of jurisdiction
- (iv) a separate oversight body that ensures effective governance at the regional district level

2. Regional Planning and Governance Strategies to Promote Smart Growth and Sustainability

To promote smart growth and sustainability at the local and regional level, there are a number of measures that the Province should mandate. These include mandatory regional growth strategies, tying funding programs to regional sustainability planning, and instituting a system of targets for urban development. Therefore, in the interest of reforming regional planning, governance and current growth management approaches to bring them in line with sustainability principles, Smart Growth BC submits the following recommendations:

- Planning should be done at the municipal and regional levels. All Regional Districts should be required to develop regional growth strategies to create sustainable regions. Municipal governments should then undertake the more detailed context-sensitive planning for communities and neighbourhoods.
- Regional Districts should be assigned responsibility for very specific regional planning powers. In urban areas, regional government guidance of land use patterns and intra-regional transportation and infrastructure systems is the most efficient way to manage development at a regional scale. Provincial funding should be available and support only plans that are fully consistent with sustainability principles that flow from a regional vision, based on provincially-defined outcomes.
- Regional Districts must have the responsibility for regional transportation planning and to tie it to land use planning, much like the U.S. Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) model, where senior government funding for transportation is dependent on MPOs preparing acceptable transportation plans that support appropriate land use patterns and alternative transportation modes.
- Regional Districts should be required to have a governance structure that is representative, effective and accountable to citizens. In being representative, it needs to acknowledge a basic principle that municipalities can best make local decisions, but regional coordination and oversight is required to protect the common interests of all those within the agglomeration. Meaningful public engagement in land use decisions is an essential element of accountability and representation.
- While the Province should not have direct control over local or regional land use planning, it should play a critical role in the creation of "smart growth" legislation, regulations, targets and financial incentives that lead local governments to make planning decisions that support sustainability. Provincial and federal funding to promote smart community planning must be directly related to measurable performance on sustainable social, economic and environmental targets. These targets

must be based on key indicators, such as land use density, urban containment boundaries, facilities to support walking, cycling and transit, the ratio of local employment to the number of employed residents and housing affordability. For example, there are a number of simple targets that the Province can require all urban regions to meet as sustainability benchmarks, which will dramatically change land development practices, such as the requirement that:

- All Regional Growth Strategies and OCPs adopt urban servicing areas (growth boundaries) that contain a 25 year supply of land for development at minimum prescribed densities (e.g. at least 40 units per hectare for residential);
 - These urban growth boundaries can only be expanded during a formal review of a RGS with adequate and meaningful public consultation;
 - Before new greenfield development may occur in an urban region, a municipality or Regional District must have attained certain minimum densities, e.g. 30 units per hectare in existing built areas;
 - All new development must be located within 400m of transit and/or 1 km of a commercial centre;
 - All local governments must meet Provincial Government greenhouse gas emission reduction targets; and
 - The annual municipal reporting required under Section 98 of the *Community Charter* should be expanded to include regional districts and a variety of sustainability indicators.
- To avoid redundancy and reduce the resources required by local governments to acquire the data needed to track key sustainability indicators, efforts should be made, in partnership with the Union of B.C. Municipalities and other key stakeholders, to establish common provincial indicators and to provide local governments with the data that they require for monitoring and policy feedback purposes.
 - The provincial government should develop a wide range of incentives that are adaptable to urban, suburban and rural contexts and recognize differences in available local resources due to imbalances in property tax bases. Incentives must include provincial-level mechanisms, such as tax shifting measures based on reducing negative environmental impact, transit subsidies and distance based insurance. Incentives must also apply to local-level mechanisms, such as enabling density gradient development cost charges and density bonusing for green buildings and smart growth development. (For more information, see Smart Growth BC's report: *Innovative Infrastructure Financing Mechanisms for Smart Growth*, available at www.smartgrowth.bc.ca)

3. The Role of Oversight

While some local governments have embraced smart growth principles and are moving towards sustainability in their plans and practices, the reliance on voluntary agreement and conformance with Regional Growth Strategies has been, and will continue to be, insufficient to ensure that the majority of local governments consistently implement smart growth principles to achieve sustainability and climate change goals. Even with more effective planning and governance powers at the Regional District level, there needs to be an oversight body to ensure that Regional Districts are complying with the authority given to them. For example, UBCM could establish an independent body with wide-ranging representation to play an oversight role for Regional Districts, and the administration of local government funding would be tied to application of effective municipal planning that supports regional planning.

This oversight body should ensure that Regional Districts undertake and review regional plans every five years and sustainability indicators are monitored and reported on annually.

Regional Smart Growth Planning and Governance Model

