

# Perspectives

A REGIONAL DISTRICT OF NANAIMO PUBLICATION

## Community Survey Results – RDN Operational & Efficiency Review

In early 2014, the Regional District of Nanaimo engaged Ipsos Reid to complete a community survey by telephone. This survey and its results are a key component of the Operational and Efficiency Review we are conducting to examine our operations and look for efficiencies. Our thanks to all of the residents in the RDN's Electoral Areas and member municipalities who took the time to participate.

In addition to providing the RDN with community feedback on the services it provides, the community survey is part of an internal review of RDN departments and procedures aimed at service improvement, efficiency and effectiveness.

This newsletter provides an overview of what we learned through the community survey. **Our goals were to find out how satisfied residents are with RDN governance and services**, determine the public's perception of value for taxes, identify how residents would prefer us to fund our services, and assess public perception of the quality of life in the RDN.

Overall, citizens expressed positive views of the Regional District. While there are issues that citizens would like to see receive greater attention, the predominantly positive tone suggests the survey results should be viewed in a favourable context.



Full survey results are available on the RDN website at [www.rdn.bc.ca](http://www.rdn.bc.ca)

## Quality of Life

Nearly all residents who were surveyed speak positively about the quality of life in the RDN. **In total, 96 per cent rate the overall quality of life in the RDN as either very good (38 per cent) or good (58 per cent).** These perceptions vary by community. In Lantzville and in Electoral Area B, 99 per cent of residents surveyed said their quality of life is very good or good, while in Nanaimo, Qualicum Beach and Electoral Area E, combined very good/good responses totalled 97 per cent. Electoral Area F residents are the least likely to rate their quality of life as very good or good (88 per cent).

**When asked how the quality of life in the RDN has changed over the past three years,** 64 per cent of citizens say it has stayed the same. Another 17 per cent of citizens think the quality of life has worsened while 15 per cent say it has improved. Lantzville and Qualicum Beach residents are the most likely to report an improving quality of life (24 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively), while those living in Electoral Area C, Electoral Area A, Electoral Area B, and Electoral Area F are the most likely to feel the quality of life has worsened over the past three years (29 per cent, 27 per cent, 26 per cent, and 24 per cent, respectively).

**Citizens who feel the quality of life has improved attribute this to a number of different factors,** including "more projects/activities in town", "good/better downtown area", "improved/better city image", "economic growth/development", and "preservation of parks/trails/recreation".

**Four-in-ten of those who feel the quality of life in the RDN has worsened over the past three years attribute this to the economy,**

mentioning factors such as "fewer/less job opportunities", "cost/higher cost of living", "poor economy", and "poor wage rate".

**In some cases, dissatisfaction with services contributes to perceptions of a worsening quality of life** – specific mentions include "lack of responsiveness from RDN staff" (six per cent), "poor infrastructure/road maintenance" (six per cent), "less service" (six per cent), "lack of forward thinking/delays on RDN development/growth" (four per cent), and "too much bureaucracy" (four per cent).



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[www.rdn.bc.ca](http://www.rdn.bc.ca)

## Citizen Satisfaction – Services



Three-quarters (74 per cent) of citizens who completed the survey are satisfied with the overall level and quality of services provided by the RDN, including 15 per cent who say they are very satisfied.

Overall satisfaction is higher among those living in Electoral Area G (79 per cent), Electoral Area E (78 per cent), and Nanaimo (76 per cent). Residents of Electoral Area F are the least likely to say they are satisfied with the overall level and quality of services (61 per cent).

Satisfaction varies by age. While 86 per cent of 18-to-34-year-olds are satisfied with the overall level and quality of services, only 69 per cent of those who are aged 55 years or older and 75 per cent of 35-to-54-year-olds are satisfied.

Citizens were also asked to rate their satisfaction with a variety of different services, grouped into two broad categories.

**Of the services that were asked to all respondents, residents are most satisfied with “parks, trails, and other green space”** (89 per cent satisfied, 53 per cent very satisfied).

The majority of residents are also satisfied with:

- “Cost and accessibility to regional landfill and transfer station” (68 per cent satisfied, 26 per cent “very satisfied”);
- “Recreational programs” (66 per cent satisfied, 26 per cent “very satisfied” – note that residents of Nanaimo, Lantzville, and Electoral Area C were not asked about this service);

- “Communication with residents” (63 per cent satisfied, 17 per cent “very satisfied”); and,
- “Waste water treatment” (57 per cent satisfied, 23 per cent “very satisfied”).

In comparison, only one-third (32 per cent) are satisfied with public transit. A sizeable minority of respondents (36 per cent) is dissatisfied with this service.

### SERVICES QUESTIONS ASKED TO ALL RESPONDENTS

Of the services that were asked only to those living in Electoral Areas, respondents are most satisfied with:

- “Garbage pickup from your residence” (83 per cent satisfied, 54 per cent “very satisfied”);
- “Recycling pickup from your residence” (83 per cent satisfied, 54 per cent “very satisfied”); and,
- “Fire protection services” (77 per cent satisfied, 38 per cent “very satisfied” – note that residents of Electoral Area B were not asked about this service).

#### Less than one-half are satisfied with:

- “Emergency planning/preparedness” (48 per cent satisfied, 17 per cent dissatisfied, 30 per cent do not know enough about the service – note that residents of Lantzville were also asked about this service);
- “Land use and community planning” (45 per cent satisfied, 37 per cent dissatisfied, 15 per cent do not know enough about the service – note that residents of Electoral Area B were not asked about this service);
- “Bylaw enforcement and building inspection” (43 per cent satisfied, 33 per cent dissatisfied, 17 per cent do not know enough about the service); and,
- “Drinking water quality” (41 per cent satisfied, 12 per cent dissatisfied, 26 per cent not applicable, 16 per cent have their own well or septic system).

Citizens were also asked whether these services should be expanded, reduced, or kept the same. **In total, 59 per cent of residents would like to see public transit services expanded.**

A slight majority (54 per cent) would also like to see communication with residents expanded.

**Interestingly, 51 per cent would like to see expanded “parks, trails, and other green space” despite other survey findings showing that residents are already highly satisfied with this service.**

## Citizen Satisfaction – RDN Board and Administration



Overall, residents surveyed are satisfied with how the “Regional District government, including Board and Administration as a whole” is providing services to the community, with 12 per cent reporting they are very satisfied.

Satisfaction with “Regional District government, including Board and Administration as a whole” is highest among those living in Parksville (85 per cent) and Qualicum Beach (84 per cent), followed by those living in Lantzville (77 per cent), Nanaimo (76 per cent), and Electoral Area G (72 per cent). Only 56 per cent of those living in Electoral Area H are satisfied with RDN government as a whole.

When residents were asked about the Board and Administration separately, satisfaction ratings proved slightly lower. Of those surveyed, 62 per cent are satisfied with the Board, excluding Administration, and 10 per cent are very satisfied. Sixty-three per cent are satisfied with Administration, excluding the Board, and 12 per cent are very satisfied.

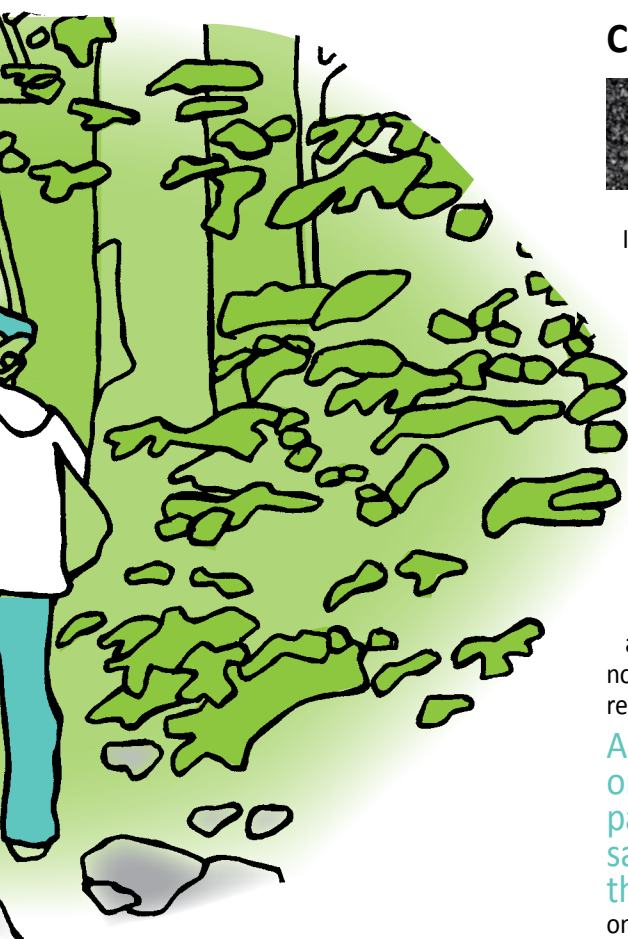


## Communication



When asked about the kinds of information they would like to receive from the RDN, seven per cent of residents mention community updates/what’s new, and six per cent mention RDN taxes/property taxes/budget. Nearly half of the respondents (48 per cent) indicate they have no pressing information needs.

**Twenty-five per cent of citizens identify the newspaper as the best method for the RDN to communicate information to them, while 22 per cent prefer to get information by mail.** Other communication methods residents identified include email (19 per cent) and newsletters, pamphlets, flyers or brochures (13 per cent).



## Customer Service



In the last 12 months, 36 per cent of citizens say they personally contacted or dealt with the RDN or one of its employees. **When asked to provide the main reason for contacting the RDN, seven per cent mention garbage/recycling collection.** Other reasons include transportation/public transit (three per cent), bylaws (three per cent), building permit (three per cent), and water leak/ outage (three per cent). Of note, six-in-ten (60 per cent) are unable to recall the reason they contacted the RDN.

**Among those who contacted or dealt with the RDN in the past 12 months, 80 per cent are satisfied with the overall service they received,** including more than one-half (56 per cent) responding that they are very satisfied. Citizens are most satisfied with staff's courteousness (92 per cent satisfied, 72 per cent very satisfied).

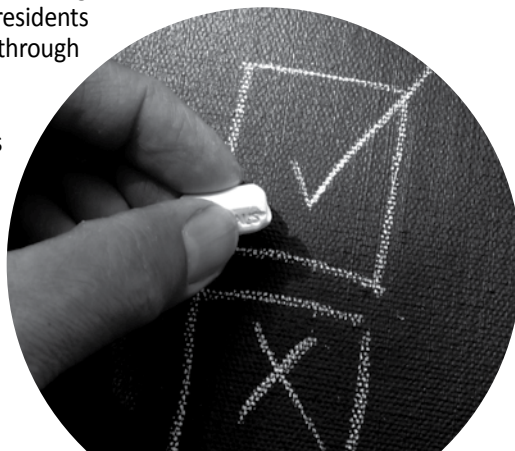
### Citizens are also satisfied with:

- "Staff's helpfulness" (86 per cent satisfied, 59 per cent very satisfied);
- Staff's knowledge (86 per cent satisfied, 54 per cent very satisfied);
- The speed and timeliness of service (86 per cent satisfied, 53 per cent very satisfied); and,
- The ease of reaching staff (86 per cent satisfied, 49 per cent very satisfied).

## Preferred communication channels vary by age.

Younger residents generally show greater interest in electronic methods and older residents lean towards traditional paper methods.

The RDN currently communicates with residents through our website, [www.rdn.bc.ca](http://www.rdn.bc.ca), through newsletters including *Perspectives*, *Electoral Area Updates*, *WaterNews* and the *Zero Waste Newsletter*. (Not all newsletters are distributed in all areas of the Region). We also communicate with residents through direct mail and through social media (including regular updates on Facebook and Twitter, as well as use of YouTube and Instagram for special projects).



## Financial Planning



**Three-quarters (74 per cent) of citizens think they receive good value for the taxes they pay to the RDN, including 11 per cent who say they receive very good value.**

Residents of Parksville are the most likely to rate their value for taxes highly (87 per cent very good or fairly good value), followed by those living in Qualicum Beach (83 per cent), Electoral Area G (79 per cent), and Nanaimo (74 per cent). Conversely, only 62 per cent of those living in Electoral Area C and 62 per cent of those living in Electoral Area F say they receive good value for their taxes.

To manage the increased cost of maintaining current service levels and infrastructure, **51 per cent of survey participants would prefer the RDN to increase user fees compared to 18 per cent who opt for increased taxes and 13 who would prefer service cuts.**

Of the 51 per cent who have a preference for increases in user fees, 30 per cent would prefer to increase user fees in order to increase or expand services, while 21 per cent prefer to increase user fees in order to maintain services at current levels.

Of the residents who would opt for increased taxes, 14 per cent have a preference of increasing taxes in order to increase or expand services while four per cent prefer to maintain services at current levels.

**Overall, 44 per cent of residents are willing to pay more (either by increased user fees or increased taxes) so that services can be increased or expanded.**

An additional 25 per cent are willing to pay more (either by increased user fees or increased taxes) so that services can be maintained at current levels.

Fewer residents express an interest in cutting services. Specifically, seven per cent suggest cuts in services in order to maintain current tax levels and five per cent suggest cuts in services in order to decrease taxes.

When given a choice between increased taxes or reductions in community grants, 51 per cent of those surveyed opt to reduce grants compared to 38 per cent who would rather increase taxes.

## Public Issue Agenda



Services and transportation top the list of issues that survey respondents see as most relevant to RDN residents.

**One-quarter of citizens who responded to the survey (23 per cent) identify services as the most important issue facing their area.** This includes mentions of water, clean water and water quality (eight per cent), garbage and recycling services (four per cent), incinerator/incinerator at Duke Point (three per cent), and maintenance/upgrading of infrastructure (three per cent). Meanwhile, 22 per cent highlight transportation-related issues as key, including topics such as public transit (seven per cent), ferry service/cost (four per cent), road maintenance/repairs (four per cent), transportation in general (three per cent), and roads or streets (three per cent). Other top-of-mind local issues include growth and development (12 per cent), the economy (12 per cent), education (12 per cent), the environment (12 per cent), and taxation/spending (11 per cent).

### CNG Buses

The Regional District of Nanaimo Transit System celebrated a significant milestone at the beginning of March, with the introduction of 25 **Compressed Natural Gas** Buses to the RDN Transit fleet. These state-of-the-art new buses mark a whole new way of thinking about public transportation.

Compared to diesel, the primary benefit of CNG buses is lower and more stable fuel prices. Additional benefits include quieter engines and simplified emission systems. The introduction of CNG buses into the RDN Transit fleet is resulting in lower fuel costs, lower infrastructure costs than the RDN would incur if it expanded its fleet using diesel buses, and air quality improvements from reduced emissions. In the 2014-2018 Strategic Plan, the Regional District of Nanaimo Board of Directors has made a commitment to regional resilience, and having a transit fleet that provides these kinds of benefits is an important part of that commitment.

To support the new CNG technology, BC Transit has constructed a CNG fueling facility within the RDN Transit yard. This represents a significant step towards implementation of the RDN Board's Strategic Plan. The RDN Board's strategic goals and actions for Transportation Services acknowledge that the transportation sector produces the largest share of emissions in the region, and emphasize the need to ensure the use of alternative fuels for vehicles.

The RDN is proud to be the first BC Transit community with a CNG fleet, and appreciates the support of the Province of British Columbia, FortisBC and BC Transit. Their commitment to introducing this landmark fleet and fueling facility is making it possible for RDN residents to enjoy the long-term benefits of CNG technology.



### Vancouver Island Rail Trail

The RDN is currently working with Koers & Associates Engineering to design our first section of Rail Trail within the Esquimalt and Nanaimo railway corridor. Thanks to \$2.6 million in funding support through the Federal Government's Gas Tax Fund, the first sections of trail will total approximately 10km and will connect the City of Parksville with Coombs and French Creek.

**Trail planning and design may take up to a year, wrapping up in January 2015. A phased construction process for the trail will follow, likely beginning in the summer of 2015.**

The E&N Trail is fast growing across the island as other regional districts and municipalities complete sections piece by piece. To date, the Capital Regional District, the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the City of Nanaimo and the District of Lantzville have all completed some rail with trail.

*RDN Parks staff are available to answer questions about the Vancouver Island Rail Trail project, and may be reached at (250) 248-3252 or 1-888-828-2069.*

### E&N Rail-With-Trail History

In 2009, the RDN undertook an E&N Rail-with-Trail feasibility study to assess potential trail development along the rail corridor within Electoral Areas A, E, F, G, and H and the municipalities of Lantzville, Parksville and Qualicum Beach; the City of Nanaimo was not addressed as it had completed a separate study. The study assessed the degree of difficulty to develop trail and identified a cost per metre for development. Overall, about 83 kilometres of feasible rail trail corridor was identified in the RDN, not including Nanaimo, at an estimated total cost to develop of approximately \$28.7 million.

Around the same time as the feasibility study, the RDN partnered with the Capital Regional District, Cowichan Valley Regional District, Comox Valley Regional District, the Island Corridor Foundation and Southern Railway to develop Rail-with-Trail design guidelines, including separate design guidelines for rural, suburban and urban areas. The guidelines were adopted by all parties in June, 2009 and address all aspects of trail development.

