REGIONAL DISTRICT SERVICE LEVELS

➤ **How are service and service level adjustments made?**

During open houses and through surveys, some of the issues identified by residents were regarding the level of service provided by RDOS. In some cases it was more than required, in others too low, and in some instances, there was a desire for a service that was not currently available. This *Toolkit* references some of the RDOS services that were identified by residents as not meeting expectations, and offers options for adjusting service levels. It is not intended to recommend any specific solutions, but rather to identify that there are tools and options available through the regional district to respond to residents' service level concerns, where there is sufficient support from residents. In some instances these changes could be initiated by residents through service petitions or requests to the RDOS; others could be explored directly by the RDOS, particularly in response to Board direction. Notably the services and service levels referenced in this *Toolkit* are not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather are examples of service level issues and the range of opportunities and processes to address them. The service concerns identified by residents through the governance forums represented a wide range of topics; this toolkit draws on just a few examples to illustrate how service levels can be adjusted.

In the previous phase of this study the *Fact Sheets* referenced each of the services provided by the RDOS, including existing service levels, boundaries, and costs, but did not reference the options for expanding, reducing or adjusting those service levels. In unincorporated areas of the province, it is generally acknowledged that the number and level of services is going to be lower than that provided within a municipality. Many people locate in unincorporated areas specifically because they are not interested in receiving, and

perhaps more importantly, paying for, higher service levels.

However, some communities or neighbourhoods are developed to suburban or even urban standards, particularly ones located on the fringe of municipalities, and there is often a demand for services beyond the "rural" services or level of services that was originally contemplated for regional districts to provide. These communities are often not prepared to become municipalities, but are developed to higher densities, with greater service needs and expectations than rural areas.

Regional districts are flexible government structures that can provide different services and service levels to specific areas. Unlike in a municipality, each service, including the associated cost, must be approved by the electors who will pay for that service. Unified community support and willingness to pay is therefore a prerequisite to establish a service in electoral areas, or in a community within an electoral area. Another unique aspect of regional district services is that the cost of each separate service must be fully recovered from the revenues and taxes collected for that specific service. There is no borrowing between services, where revenues from one service (e.g. building permits) could be used to help pay for costs in a different service (e.g. fire protection). In a municipality the total revenues and costs are lumped into one overall tax rate. In regional districts, revenues and costs of each service are accounted for separately.

This *Toolkit* references three of the most commonly reported regional district service issues as identified by residents of Area "D" through the survey and governance forums – bylaw enforcement, fire protection and solid waste. A separate *Toolkit* on Provincial Services references roads and policing services.

➤ Bylaw Enforcement

In the surveys and governance forums, concern regarding the lack of bylaw enforcement was a consistent theme. While perhaps most strongly heard from Okanagan Falls residents, this was one of the few issues expressed in communities throughout Area "D."

Bylaw enforcement is any action taken to ensure compliance with the RDOS bylaws. This may include everything from educating the public about the regulations, conducting inspections, encouraging voluntary compliance, and seeking consequences such as tickets (bylaw notices) or potentially court action for repeated or prolonged contraventions.

Bylaw enforcement itself is not a service of the RDOS. Instead bylaw enforcement is a component of multiple services, including:
- animal control (in 7 electoral areas)
- planning (zoning bylaw enforcement – all electoral areas)
- noise (5 electoral areas), and
- unsightly premises (6 electoral areas).

Notably there are some areas that the RDOS does not have the authority to enforce, such as uses of the roads (which are not owned by the RDOS). This can include parking, abandoning vehicles at the side of the road, speed limits, traffic signs, etc.

In Electoral Area "D," as with most communities, bylaw enforcement is complaint-driven. This is supplemented by infractions identified by inspectors and staff while in the field (e.g. building without a permit, health and safety violations). A key challenge in enforcement is the cost. Proceeding to court, and the collection of unpaid fines or tickets are time consuming and costly for local governments, and some bylaws are notoriously difficult to enforce. Achieving voluntary compliance is therefore the primary objective. Policies regarding the level of enforcement, and whether to proceed with legal action are Board decisions.

Each bylaw or service has its own complaint policy. For instance, in Area "D" all untidy or unsightly premises complaints must be submitted in writing on the appropriate form, and complainants must be willing to appear as a

witness in the event the matter proceeds to the courts. For the RDOS to investigate the matter, a total of three unrelated complaints must be submitted for the same property. Context is also considered by the bylaw enforcement officer, so the condition of the surrounding properties is part of the determination as to whether a property is untidy or unsightly. There are no policies requiring multiple complaints for animal control, noise and zoning issues in order to be investigated.

The RDOS uses a Bylaw Notice system, where bylaw notices (tickets) can be issued by the regional district for various bylaw infractions. The notices can be paid, or disputed through a bylaw adjudication process in the City of Kelowna. Properties that violate the untidy and unsightly premises bylaw can also be ordered to be cleaned up by the Board, and if the work is not done, the RDOS can complete the work and register the costs as overdue property taxes.

Increasing enforcement personnel is an option for the RDOS. The RDOS Bylaw enforcement department currently has 75 active files. A greater number of enforcement officers would enable more timely responses to complaints, facilitate ongoing communication with violators and enhance the ability to resolve concerns. Increases to this department would need to be funded by taxes collected from the electoral areas that participate in the various regulatory services. If enforcement on all issues is desired, then the cost of any additional personnel could be shared across the electoral planning budget, noise bylaw, and untidy and unsightly premises (with approval by the directors in the participating areas). However, if Area "D" wanted a bylaw enforcement officer dedicated to enforcement of just Area "D," or just on specific bylaws, such as unsightly premises (for instance), then the cost of the additional staff would be recovered specifically from that area.

Enforcement is also a component of dog control. Because dog control is an existing service provided in all but one electoral area, increases to the budget for enforcement of that service would require the agreement of all the participating electoral areas, and an adjustment to the current dog control contract (which extends to 2020). Enforcement could be focused on one specific area at a time, so long as the campaign then rotated its focus to areas within each of the electoral areas. Conversely, a separate animal control function

could be created to deliver enhanced enforcement levels to all or a portion of Area "D" through establishment of a separate service area.

Cost Impacts:

Increased bylaw enforcement would come at a higher cost to residents. As noted above, the increased level of service could be provided in a specific service area set up for that purpose (e.g. Okanagan Falls), or over a broader area (all of Area D, or all of the participating electoral areas). Costs will depend on the additional resources required and the benefitting areas. An estimate of the costs of an added full-time bylaw enforcement officer (contract or employee) is approximately $80,000. Figure 1 provides an indication of the impact on taxes if that increased officer was shared by all electoral areas, or focussed specifically on Area "D," and a third option shows the cost impact if that same officer was shared only in the Okanagan Falls, Skaha Estates and Kaleden area. Note that the areas are just examples, and not any indication of a proposed or recommended service area.

➤ **Fire Protection**

Many residents during the survey and open house seemed alarmed that areas outside the established fire service areas did not receive fire protection. Notably all areas receive response from the Ministry of Forests to wildfires. However, beyond that level of service, these areas, and their homes and structures, are not served by a local fire department or fire brigade.

There are different reasons for desiring fire protection. One is to save buildings (and rescue people) in the event of fire. This requires a high level of fire service. The second is to reduce the threat of the spread of fire, in which case a slower response time may be acceptable, and existing departments that are located a further distance away may be potential service providers. Another reason for fire protection is to reduce the cost of fire insurance. Insurance companies rely on the Fire Underwriters Survey (FUS), which provides standards for evaluating the level of fire risk and firefighting capability based on the adequacy of water supplies, fire departments, fire service communications, fire safety and prevention codes and other aspects of a community's fire defenses.

Figure 1
Cost of Additional Bylaw Enforcement on Typical Residence
2015

Area for Cost Sharing	Tax Req.[1]	Res. Rate	Owing[2]
All Electoral Areas	$80,000	0.0160	$5.21
Area "D"	$80,000	0.0527	$17.12
OK Falls, Skaha Estates & Kaleden	$80,000	0.0704	$22.88

1 Tax requisition amount excludes 5.25% Surveyor of Taxes fee

2 Impact is calculated on a home assessed at $325,000

To reduce fire insurance costs, fairly high FUS standards are required that are costly for rural communities to meet, with respect to types of equipment, response times, and what is often the most challenging – the number of volunteers. Even where volunteer fire departments exist, many areas served by those departments do not qualify for "fully protected" insurance status, and therefore do not get significant reductions on insurance prices.

With sufficient interest, community support and volunteers, the RDOS can establish a fire service through the creation of a volunteer fire department, or an area can also receive service from an existing department through a service agreement. For instance, the RDOS has agreements with the City of Penticton to provide fire service in adjacent unincorporated areas outside of the City boundaries (i.e. in Area "F"), and does the same with the Town of Princeton for areas surrounding that municipality. Service agreements with existing departments help reduce the capital cost burden of creating and equipping a new fire department, as well as recruiting sufficient volunteers to train and staff the department.

If fire service is desired, residents can initiate a petition to the RDOS for the service. A feasibility study is then completed to determine the most cost effective way of delivering the service. Topics of water supply, equipment, personnel, firehalls, access, etc. are all considered at that stage. The RDOS does have a process for establishing a fire department, including a checklist, on its website at http://www.rdosmaps.bc.ca/min_bylaws/finance/FireProtection/StepsinEstablishingaLocalFireDepartment.pdf. Information provided by the BC Fire

Commissioner's office on establishing a department is also included on the RDOS website http://www.rdos.bc.ca/pdf/finance/fire/Establishing_FireDepartment.pdf.
Ultimately, for a fire service to be established, approval must be obtained from by the electors who will benefit from and pay for the service (through alternate approval process, petition, or referendum). Notably the last time a volunteer fire department was proposed in Area "D" was at Apex, culminating in a referendum in 2007. That service would have cost $2.24 per $1,000 of assessed value (in 2007 dollars), including the cost of borrowing $1.3 million. That level of service was expected to reduce fire insurance costs for residents by an estimated 50% (semi-protected status), with potential to achieve "fully protected" insurance status (for further insurance reductions) if the VFD reached specific training requirements and the community was able to maintain at least 15 volunteers year-round. The referendum to approve the service in 2007 was not successful.

The process for increased levels of fire service is similar. Typically increased service levels comes with an increase in equipment or personnel. Cost increases (over incremental levels or established service costs) to fund higher levels of service require approval by electors.

Cost Impacts:

The cost of fire protection services depends upon the service area. Those who can be serviced by adjacent volunteer fire departments will likely find it cheaper to use the existing department than to create a separate volunteer department. Fire service can be quite expensive, and does not always come with guarantees of insurance rate reductions. There are significant capital costs in acquiring the equipment needed to serve the community, particularly if a fire hall is also needed. Ongoing operating costs include vehicle and building maintenance and training. Ultimately the cost to residents will depend upon the assessed values of the properties that will be sharing in the service.

The Kaleden and Okanagan Falls volunteer departments have operating costs that range from $250,000 to $350,000 per year. The Willowbrook VFD is smaller and has a much lower operating cost (approximately $57,000), but the amount is shared by fewer properties. The chart below shows

what the communities of Okanagan Falls and Kaleden pay in taxes for their fire services (based on a home with the assessed value of $325,000). Note that these departments have been in place for many years, so while rates include some upgrades, reserves, etc. they are no longer paying the capital requirements for the creation of a new fire hall or the significant start-up costs for acquiring multiple fire vehicles and equipment.

Figure 2
Cost of Fire Protection on Typical Residence 2015

Service	Tax Req.[1]	Res. Rate	Owing[2]
Kaleden VFD	$218,129	0.6873	$223
OK Falls VFD	$293,243	0.3812	$124
Willowbrook VFD	$50,154	0.8722	$283
2007 Apex proposal	*$236,361*	*2.2379*	*$727*

1 Tax requisition amount excludes 5.25% Surveyor of Taxes fee

2 Impact is calculated on a home assessed at $325,000

➤ Garbage Services

Open houses revealed concerns regarding both illegal dumping of wastes and the limited hours of operation of the landfill in Okanagan Falls. In addition, some residents in some parts of Area "D" indicated that the garbage and recycling collection service they receive is in excess of what is required (i.e. they did not require curbside collection, yard waste collection or as frequent service as currently provided).

The Okanagan Falls landfill is a centre for demolition, land clearing and construction waste recycling. The RDOS encourages residents to use the Campbell River landfill for residential waste (located approximately 30 km north of the Okanagan Falls landfill), which is where the garbage collected curbside is disposed. This is due in part to its more convenient hours (open 8:30 am to 4:45 pm daily) relative to Okanagan Falls, which is currently only open Monday to Friday, from 10 am to 2 pm. Although encouraged to use the Campbell Mountain landfill, residents are able to use Okanagan Falls landfill to drop off all types of garbage and recycling, with the notable exception of food waste. The elimination of food waste has been a successful means of eliminating the bear problem at the landfill. The Okanagan

Falls landfill still accepts household appliances such as fridges and stoves, mattresses, propane tanks, yard waste, and has bins to recycle cardboard, glass, paper, blue bag containers, batteries and electronics.

The Okanagan Falls landfill has not been open Saturdays since 2012 (and even then only one Saturday a month), however residents identified the hours, and in particular the lack of weekend hours, as a concern. Residents suggested a potential link between the limited landfill hours and the amount of illegal dumping in that part of the electoral area.

Regarding the level of curbside pick-up, the RDOS has two different service areas within Area "D," and provides consistent service levels across both service areas. It is difficult (and indeed, more costly) to provide custom service arrangements by area or neighbourhood. Some changes could be available through different user fees (number of bags, frequency), but changes to the structure (i.e. providing residents with options) would have to be negotiated with the contractor, and built into the fee structure. Alternatively, an area could be excluded from the service boundary altogether, and instead homeowners could remove their garbage themselves, or arrange for private service. Exclusion would be difficult for the RDOS to do on an individual property-by-property basis, but could be possible if a wider neighbourhood petitioned the RDOS to be removed from the service area.

Cost Impacts:

There may be cost impacts to altering the hours of operation at the Okanagan Falls landfill. The RDOS could choose to change hours, rather than adding hours (e.g. the landfill could be closed on a different day of the week and open on Saturdays instead). The cost of adding an additional four hour shift (which is the minimum permitted) on Saturdays to the current schedule would be $3,900 for once a month service, or approximately $16,900 for every Saturday. Costs of the landfill operations are currently recovered through tipping fees. Initially the RDOS discontinued the Saturday program because the volume of garbage received was not sufficient to fund the additional shift. If the change in shifts results in a reduced amount of revenue, a slight increase in tipping fees may be required to compensate for the added cost.

Conversely, there may just need to be greater communication to ensure residents are aware of the hours, and the fact that residential materials are accepted, with the exception of food waste. The concern regarding illegal dumping may be related to the fact that people are not aware of the hours or accepted materials at Okanagan Falls, or reluctance to take materials to the Campbell Mountain landfill. The costs of illegal dumping, although relatively minor thus far, may negate some of the savings achieved by not having weekend hours at the landfill.

With regards to the different curbside collection service levels, there are some options for changing the structure of services to provide an option for less frequent service, or to remove a neighbourhood from receiving service at all. Changes to the service level (i.e. collection every second week for some properties) may have little impact on the contractor's cost, depending if the changes involve individual properties or larger neighbourhoods. If larger areas are removed from the service, the costs would be reduced for those owners (not including the costs of removing waste privately), but may not significantly reduce the overall contract costs. If the contract does not have a corresponding reduction, then the cost per property may rise slightly in response to the removal of some of the customers.