

# History of Regional Districts

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## Outline

- ◉ Building Public Utilities
  - Improvement Districts
  - Community Planning Areas
  - Alternate Local Governance Structures
  
- ◉ Regional District Legislation
  - Regional District Functions
  - Union of British Columbia Municipalities
  - Legislative Reform

## Building Public Utilities

- 1886: Vancouver was incorporated
- Shortly consumed by the Great Fire
- Need for bountiful water on-tap
- Vancouver Waterworks Company installed a waterline from Capilano R.
- 1891: City purchased the Vancouver Waterworks Company

## Capilano Dam and Water Intake

Vancouver Waterworks Company (1888)



Source: Metro Vancouver

## Single-Purpose Districts

- Basic needs: water & sewage disposal
- Requirement common to all communities
- Alignment of water and sewer pipes determined by natural topology (not municipal boundaries)
- Municipalities united to share in building and operating water and sewer works
- 1911: Burrard Peninsula Joint Sewerage Committee formed; subsequently the Greater Vancouver Sewerage & Drainage District
- 1924: Greater Vancouver Water District legislated

## Capilano Main – Stanley Park

Greater Vancouver Water District (1932)



## Improvement Districts

- 1920's: Privately owned & operated Okanagan Valley irrigation systems were on the verge of bankruptcy
- Farms dependent on the irrigation systems also faced failure
- Provincial legislation enabling the creation of Improvement Districts was enacted
- Improvement Districts were created mostly for unincorporated areas
- Improvement Districts covered a wide range of services:
  - Water; fire fighting; dyking; drainage; street lighting; garbage collection; hospital construction

## Community Planning Areas

- 1940's: booming economy brought development issues in unincorporated areas to the Provincial Government
- To enable the formation of community planning areas, the Provincial Government introduced:
  - 1947: Town Planning Act
  - 1957: Local Services Act

## Alternate Governance Structures

- 1946: Goldenberg public inquiry recommended continued use of existing legislative frameworks, with some amendments
- 1953: Wes Black, new Minister of Municipal Affairs at UBCM Convention:
  - "I know that municipal government will only achieve its best if we jointly attack each problem in a spirit of cooperation and mutual understanding."
- 1957: Black delivers a reorganized Municipal Act
- 1957: Black delivers the Local Services Act:
  - "The ultimate objective, however, in all cases, is local self-government, and the provisions of the LSA are only intended to be used as an interim measure."

## Alternate Governance Structures

(cont'd)

- 1957: under provisions of the recently amended Municipal Act, Minister appoints Hugo Ray to chair a Metropolitan Joint Committee
  - Directed 11 Lower Mainland municipalities to examine the establishment of a metropolitan government
  - Metropolitan government would have board of elected officials and the power to directly tax households
- Joint Committee's proposal for a Metropolitan government was strongly opposed by New Westminster and Port Coquitlam → shelved

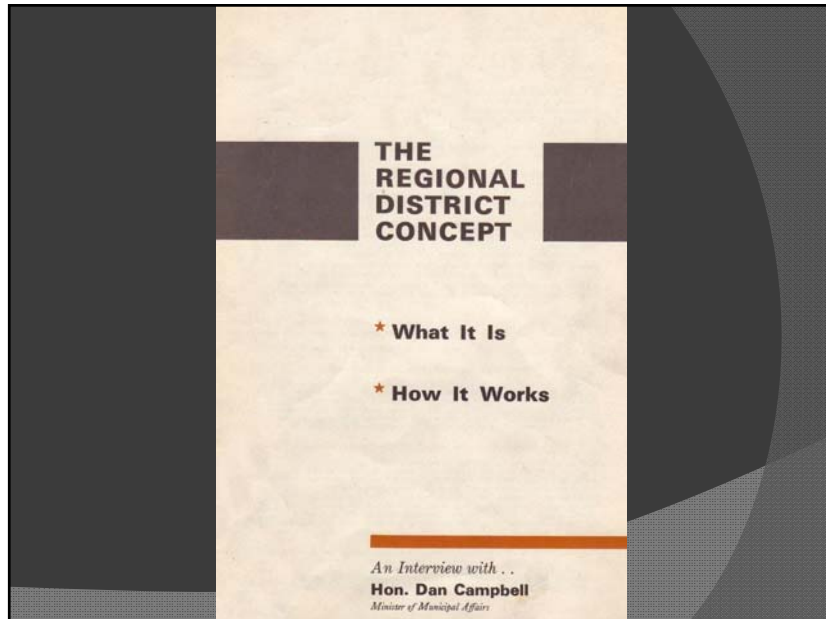
## Regional District Legislation

- 1960's: regional issues continue
  - Prince George at the time funded its own hospital, but saw patients from well beyond municipal boundaries
  - Similarly for land use planning, drinking water, waste disposal in most parts of the Province
- Hundreds of improvement districts existed, hundreds more would be needed

## Regional District Legislation

(cont'd)

- 1964: Dan Campbell new Minister of Municipal Affairs commits to finding a better approach
  - Team included Everett Brown who also worked on the Hugo Ray Commission
  - Examined models worldwide
  - Built on past successes and failures
- Determined the Regional District concept – a framework for regional government
- 1965: Regional District legislation enacted



## Framework for Regional Government

- Regional Districts are partnerships of local government, not a new level
- Each Regional District Board comprised of:
  - Municipal directors appointed by Council; and
  - Electoral area directors, directly elected.
- Functions to be included in each Regional District are uniquely determined by its own Board
- Votes and costs allocated to each member municipality / electoral area are linked to population and assessments

## Legislative Changes

- 1983: Bill Ritchie Minister of Municipal Affairs, removes planning function from Regional Districts
- 1987-89: Provincial-Municipal Committee on Decentralization
  - Collaborative effort: municipalities, Municipal Affairs, UBCM
  - Gave local government more autonomy
  - Eliminated onerous cabinet approvals, greater accountability, more clarity
  - Greater flexibility – one size does not fit all
- However, planning function not reinstated

## Legislative Changes (cont'd)

- 1993: Darlene Marzari, new Minister of Municipal Affairs, supporter of greater local autonomy
- 1993-95: work on Growth Strategies Statutes Amendment Act
  - Principle: Regional District (not the Province) must initiate growth strategies
  - Supports interactive planning: collaboration and cooperation (not hierarchical)



## Legislative Changes *(cont'd)*

- 1997 provincial government made transfer payment cuts of \$100 million plus downloading of responsibilities (arterial highways)
- Faced with outrage the province launched a highly consultative process of municipal reforms – New legislation culminating with new Local Government Act of 2000.

*Introduction  
to  
Regional Districts:  
Communities in  
Partnership*



## Conclusion & Recent issues

- Over 40 years changes largely give RDs the ability to better manage its functions and responsibilities while improving efficiency in service delivery.
- Current issues underline new efforts:
  - Provincial – regional struggle
  - The accountability issue
  - The environmental issue

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Thank you !

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