

# Bureaucracy Over Basics:

An Examination of Regional District Spending Growth



**CANADIAN FEDERATION  
OF INDEPENDENT BUSINESS**

*In business for your business.*

September 2025



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## Key takeaways:

- **Regional district spending growth, including total administrative cost growth, is outpacing population, inflation, and property taxes growth rates on average.**
- **57% of small businesses feel like they do not get good value from their regional district for the taxes they pay and over half (57%) rarely or never interact with them.**
- **The majority (53%) of small businesses do not feel like their regional districts are responsive to their business and its needs**
- **Regional districts are allocating an increasing portion of their budgets to administrative costs, with over half of regional districts increasing the proportion spent on administration from 2018-2023.**
- **The majority of regional districts' local government requisitions and development contributions are outpacing their expenditures, signaling a mismatch between what taxpayers are contributing and the services they receive.**
- **Growing public scrutiny over regional district spending highlights concerns of weak accountability, unclear governance structures, overlapping responsibilities with municipalities, and questions about board member compensation.**
- **With the closure of the Auditor General for Local Government's office in 2021, regional districts lack a standardized performance accountability system to reduce administrative bloat.**
- **Indirectly appointed board members and lack of standardized oversight mechanisms have led to taxpayers being on the hook for expanding mandates as regional districts grow.**

## Introduction

Small businesses form the backbone of local communities by generating local employment, reinvesting in the local economy, supporting community initiatives, and embodying the unique character and culture of the community they serve. Strong personal connections formed by business owners, employees, and customers make up a critical part of Canada's social fabric. The Canadian Federation of Independent business (CFIB) estimates that for every dollar spent at a small business across the country, 66 cents is recirculated in the local economy compared to 11 cents for a larger multinational.<sup>1</sup>

In today's uncertain economic climate, rising property taxes, driven largely by unsustainable government spending, have become a growing concern for B.C.'s small businesses, with 76% of owners indicating that careful and responsible management of public funds should be of the highest concern for governments.<sup>2</sup> As they navigate increasing costs across the board, higher tax bills further strain their ability to operate, invest, and grow. These pressures often result in reduced productivity and higher prices for consumers.

This report examines how spending decisions made by B.C.'s regional districts - governing bodies responsible for collecting a portion of local property taxes - are adding to the financial pressure on small firms. In particular, it highlights concerns about rising administrative costs, and a lack of consistent fiscal accountability, accessibility, and transparency. B.C.'s small businesses have expressed dissatisfaction with regional districts, with a large majority (54%) citing a lack of responsiveness to their business needs and growing frustration with increasingly bureaucratic processes.<sup>3</sup>

To shed light on the issue, CFIB has developed a regional district spending index that tracks B.C. regional districts spending habits between 2018-2023. This growth is compared against three key benchmarks: population growth, inflation, and regional district property tax increases. Given that regional districts collect taxes from small businesses, rising expenditures highlight the importance of fiscal prudence—particularly at a time when many small businesses are struggling to stay afloat. Further, this report emphasizes the lack of standardized accountability in how regional districts measure fiscal performance, as well as underscores how much administrative costs are increasingly consuming a larger share of regional district budgets. When regional districts manage spending more effectively, savings can flow back to small business owners—the backbone of their communities.



## A Background on Regional Districts

In 2025, British Columbia has 27 regional districts (Figure 1).<sup>i</sup> Modeled as federations composed of municipalities, electoral areas, and Treaty First Nations, the purpose of their creation was to help achieve regional economies of scale and provide service arrangements in response to rapid urbanization of rural areas in BC.<sup>4</sup> Previously, the province lacked an efficient way to manage issues beyond the boundaries of municipalities, leading to inadequate planning, limited service access, and a lack of equitable cost-sharing.

### Figure 1: Map of British Columbia's Regional Districts



**Source:** Government of British Columbia. (2025). British Columbia local government administrative areas [Interactive map]. ArcGIS Online.

Their mandates have since expanded under the *Local Government Act* of 2000, granting them greater autonomy to increase flexibility, reduce provincial oversight, and streamline processes.<sup>5</sup> Budgets have also grown significantly, from \$7,500 in 1965

<sup>i</sup>Regional Districts were established in 1965 by an amendment to the *Municipal Act* of 1957

to close to \$3 billion today, reflecting their growing scope and complexity.<sup>6</sup> Today, B.C. regional districts are responsible for:

- Region wide services
- Inter-municipal or sub-regional services and,
- General local governance for electoral areas and communities within them.

Due to varied geography and demographic composition, each regional district takes on different core roles. For example, Metro Vancouver focuses on delivering regional services - such as water and waste management, emergency planning, and recreational facilities - whereas Thompson-Nicola emphasizes their role as local government.<sup>7</sup> Local governance in electoral areas involves representing residents in regional district decisions on new services, permits, zoning, and serving as a main local government contact.

Regional districts do not levy taxes directly; they submit annual requisitions to member municipalities and the provincial tax surveyor (for electoral areas) based on revenue needs. These rates are imposed as a proportion of the taxpayer's property tax. Where regional districts and municipalities overlap, property owners only pay taxes to regional districts for the services they receive. As such, property tax rates vary depending on the taxpayer's location and the division of which services are provided by the regional district.

## Small Business Views on Regional Districts

In a CFIB survey conducted in July 2025, only 12% of small businesses feel they get good value from their regional district for the taxes they pay - while more than half say they don't, leaving nearly 1 in 3 to be unsure (Figure 2).<sup>8</sup> Despite growing budgets, frustrations surround long wait times for regional district administered business licenses as well as inconsistent services.

**Figure 2**

**Over half of businesses say their regional district offers poor value and responsiveness—while 1 in 3 are unsure.**



**Source:** CFIB, Your Voice Survey July 2025, July 10-24, 2025, n = 196.

**Question:** Do you feel your regional district provides good value for your business relative to the taxes you pay to them (Select one)

**Question:** Do you feel your regional district is responsive to your business and its needs? (Select one)

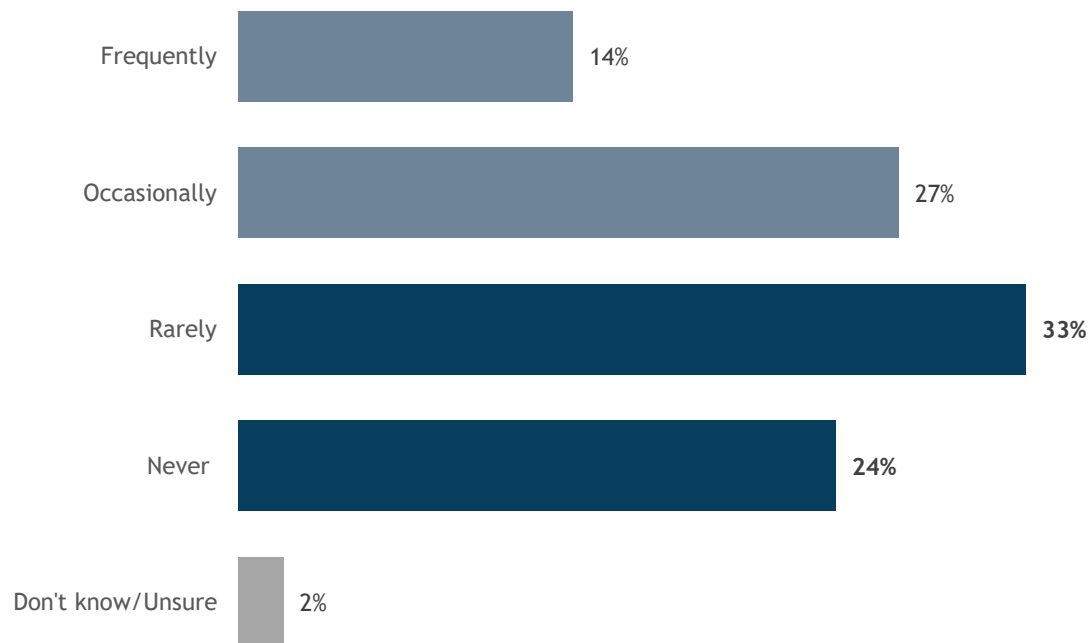
Small businesses owners do not feel like their voices are heard within regional districts, as 53% of small businesses do not feel like regional districts are responsive to their business and its needs.<sup>9</sup> This sentiment is particularly strong in electoral areas with only one representative, where small businesses expressed dissatisfaction with the limited representation and slow response time to their business needs. Small businesses report a “*lack of meaningful engagement and accountability*” with regional districts and feel like they operate with too much emphasis on bureaucracy.

Over half of small businesses rarely (33%) or never (24%) interact with their regional districts, while just 15% report frequent engagement (Figure 3).<sup>10</sup> This raises concerns about poor value for money, largely due to the lack of communication between

business owners and regional districts—leaving business owners uncertain about where their tax dollars are going.

### Figure 3

**Nearly 3 in 5 businesses report minimal interaction with their regional district, saying they either rarely (33%) or never (24%) engage.**



**Source:** CFIB, Your Voice Survey July 2025, July 10-24, 2025, n = 196.

**Question:** How often does your business interact with the regional district you operate in? (Select one)



# MEMBER VOICES

“

**“We need less bureaucracy and more doers.”**

- Transportation business in Cowichan Valley Regional District

“Inefficiencies in regional district operations are apparent and excessive. **Internal politics inhibit productivity** for workers at the regional district.”

- Construction business in Cariboo Regional District

**“We need meaningful tax relief, better services, and support for long-standing businesses that have helped shape our city.”**

- Professional Services business in Capital Regional District

“I have never had a regional district employee take **any interest** in...my business.”

- Manufacturing business in Columbia Shuswap Regional District

“We’re bearing **higher costs with fewer services**, and when we ask for help, we’re often redirected or ignored.”

- Professional Services business in Capital Regional District

“The regional district is **too management heavy** - more boots on the ground less high-priced suites in offices outside our community making decisions for our community.”

- Manufacturing business in Okanagan-Similkameen Regional District

**“Services are not provided** as they could be [by the regional district].”

- Small business in Columbia-Shuswap Regional District

”

# MEMBER VOICES

“

**“We are ignored except for the annual property tax shake down.”**

- Construction business in Cowichan Valley Regional District



**“[Our regional district] is not efficient, seemingly not fiscally responsible and in the rural areas we have limited representation.”**

- Construction business in Nanaimo Regional District

**“It is just another layer of government, more inefficiency and overlap.”**

- Retail business in Central Okanagan Regional District

**“They just keep increasing spending each year and come to me for more money every single year.”**

- Retail business in Qathet Regional District

**“It feels like the needs of developers and large projects take priority while local, long-standing businesses like mine are left to struggle alone.”**

- Professional Services business in Capital Regional District

**“The amount of property taxes paid by my business is astronomical and we have no say in the city we pay taxes in.”**

- Manufacturing business in Metro Vancouver Regional District

”

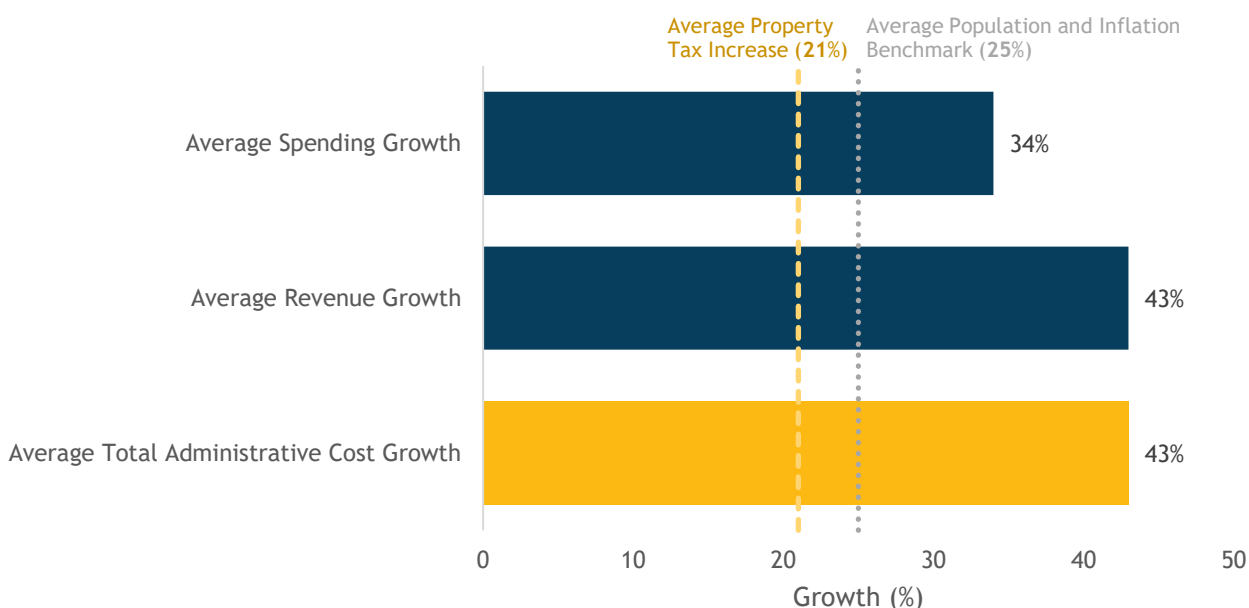


## Main findings

From 2018-2023, B.C. regional districts saw a 34% average increase in their overall spending (Figure 4). This surpasses the average growth of population, inflation, and property tax increases suggesting a broader lack of fiscal restraint by regional districts. Top spenders per capita in 2023 included Sunshine Coast, Kootenay Boundary, and Peace River (Appendix, Table A). This may be due to the absence of incorporated municipalities, requiring these regional districts to deliver more services directly. However, others with similar municipal-electoral area compositions, such as Central Okanagan, Squamish-Lillooet, and Fraser-Fort George, spend significantly less per capita. Moreover, the regional districts of Capital, Alberni-Clayoquot, North Coast, and Peace River saw their total spending increase by more than 50% from 2018-2023 (Appendix, Table B).

**Figure 4**

**On average, regional district spending, administrative costs, and revenues outpaced population, inflation, and property tax growth (2018-2023)**



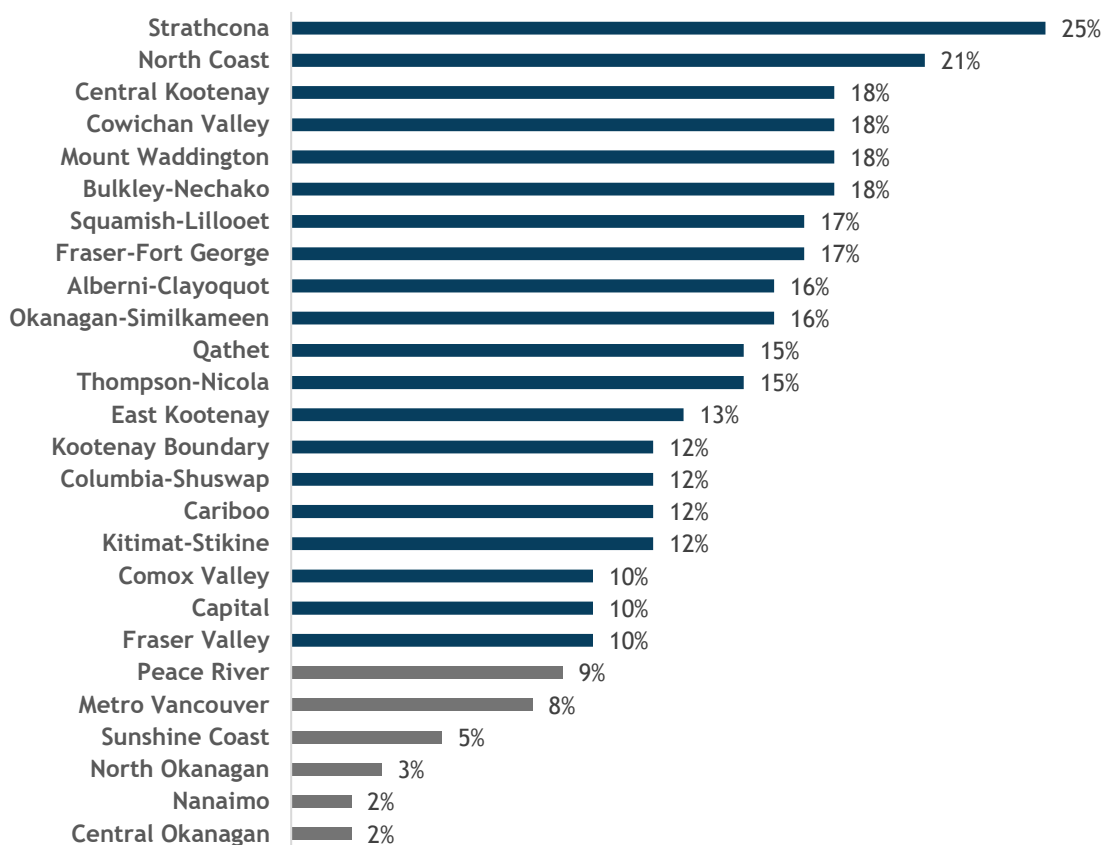
Source: Government of BC: Regional District Expenses - Schedule 902 (2018, 2023), Regional District Revenues - Schedule 901 (2018, 2023)

On average, regional districts revenue growth from 2018-2023 was 43%. In more than half (54%) of regional districts, spending is growing faster than the money brought in from property taxes and new developments (Appendix, Table C). This raises concerns about long-term financial sustainability and adds pressure to small business property owners.

Over the same five-year period, regional districts saw expenses for “General Government Services,”<sup>ii</sup> which includes costs for the overall administrative and strategic support of local government operations,<sup>11</sup> increase by an average of 43%. These costs concern board remuneration, legislative operational expenses, and overall central administration. Top spenders included the regional districts of Sunshine Coast and Capital, with administrative costs doubling over 5 years. Although general government services made up a relatively small portion of total budgets among regional districts, the proportion allocated to administration costs saw increases over the five-year period, with 54% of regional districts reporting an increase (Table 1). In 2023, a significant majority (81%) of regional districts spent 10% or more of their expenditures on administrative costs (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Percentage of Total Expenditures Spent on Administrative Costs in 2023**

**81% of regional districts spent 10% or more of their total spending on administrative costs in 2023.**



Source: Government of BC: Regional District Expenses - Schedule 902 (2023)

<sup>ii</sup> This report will refer to “General Government services” as administrative costs.

In 2023, regional districts varied in their per capita administrative costs. Central Kootenay, Cowichan Valley, and Kootenay Boundary saw the highest administrative costs per capita in 2023. The Central Okanagan regional district controlled its spending to only cost \$5.12 per person on general government services, while also only spending 2% on this type of expense.

**Table 1: 2023 Snapshot: Regional District's Administrative Costs**

Regional District	Administrative Costs per Capita (\$)	Percentage of Expenditures Spent on Admin & Growth since 2018	Population Size
Central Kootenay	172.0	18% (-0.1)	67,365
Cowichan Valley	145.0	18% (-0.4)	94,447
Kootenay Boundary	129.1	12% (+2.7)	35,206
Mount Waddington	123.0	18% (+6.0)	11,410
Strathcona	100.0	25% (+4.9)	51,229
qathet	96.7	15% (-6.2)	22,833
Comox Valley	90.4	10% (+0.3)	77,948
Bulkley-Nechako	90.1	18% (-0.9)	39,459
Peace River	88.1	9% (-4.8)	66,118
Alberni-Clayoquot	86.9	16% (+2.3)	35,857
Columbia-Shuswap	86.6	12% (-0.2)	61,793
North Coast	81.1	21% (-2.8)	19,082
Okanagan-Similkameen	79.9	16% (+2.0)	94,105
Squamish-Lillooet	76.2	17% (-1.2)	56,204
Sunshine Coast	74.5	5% (+1.6)	34,020
Cariboo	73.2	12% (+4.5)	66,480
Fraser-Fort George	72.3	17% (+1.3)	104,471
East Kootenay	70.7	13% (+0.9)	71,504
Kitimat-Stikine	70.0	12% (-1.7)	40,697
Capital	60.9	10% (+2.0)	453,035
Thompson-Nicola	50.3	15% (+4.0)	156,165
Metro Vancouver	23.5	8% (+0.7)	2,981,246
North Okanagan	17.2	3% (-0.7)	98,671
Nanaimo	15.0	2% (-1.9)	183,039
Fraser Valley	11.7	10% (-2.0)	353,116
Central Okanagan	5.1	2% (+0.8)	246,737

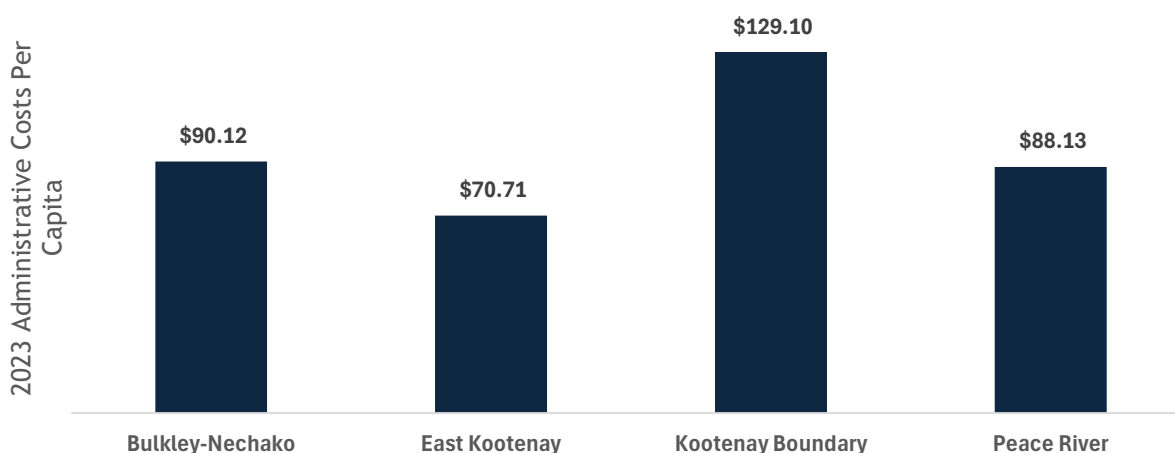
Source: Government of BC: Regional District Expenses - Schedule 902 (2023), BC Government Population Estimates (2023)

Notably, there is only a very small correlation between administrative cost efficiency and population size, suggesting that regional districts of any size can make tough, strategic spending decisions regardless of the scope of their mandate or the size of

services they provide. This means that as population size gets bigger, administrative costs per capita tend to go down, but not universally due to the weak correlation. Since regional districts exist to achieve economies of scale and efficiency, controlling administrative spending, a cost within their control, should be a priority to maximize taxpayer savings. For example, Peace River, Kootenay Boundary, East Kootenay, and Bulkley-Nechako all have eight member municipalities with four to seven electoral areas, yet very different administrative costs per capita in 2023 (Figure 7). Despite service provision size being similar, East Kootenay was able to control their administrative spending. Although there are concerns about duplicating services and paying twice for services provided by both the regional district and the municipality - some regional districts appear to manage their spending more effectively, as seen with regional districts of similar size and member municipality numbers, helping keep overall spending and property taxes sustainable for small businesses. This suggests that service overlap, if existent, does not necessarily lead to higher costs and can be effectively managed by regional districts.

**Figure 7:**

**Regional Districts with eight member municipalities have distinct administrative costs per capita despite similar population and membership size.**



Regional District	Number of Electoral Areas	2023 Administrative Costs per capita (\$)	2023 Percentage of Expenditures spent on Admin Costs	Population
Bulkley-Nechako	7	90.12	18%	39,459
East Kootenay	6	70.71	13%	71,504
Kootenay Boundary	5	129.10	12%	35,206
Peace River	4	88.13	9%	66,118

Source: Government of BC: Regional District Expenses - Schedule 902 (2023), BC Government Population Estimates (2023)



On average from 2018-2023, the total administrative costs in regional districts grew faster than key benchmarks:

- 14/26 (54%) of regional districts saw their total administrative costs outpace the combined growth of population and inflation
- 16/26 (62%) of regional districts saw their total administrative costs outpace the growth of their property tax increases
- 13/26 (50%) of regional districts saw their total administrative costs outpace all key benchmarks

**Table 3: Regional District's Administrative Cost Growth & Key Benchmarks (2018-2023)**

Regional District	Total Administrative Cost Growth	Outpacing Population & Inflation by	Outpacing Property Tax Increases by
Sunshine Coast	112%	88%	101%
Capital	108%	81%	99%
Alberni-Clayoquot	91%	65%	65%
Mount Waddington	90%	72%	77%
Cariboo	85%	65%	87%
Strathcona	75%	50%	28%
Thompson-Nicola	61%	35%	83%
Okanagan-Similkameen	54%	31%	48%
Kootenay Boundary	54%	30%	48%
Central Okanagan	52%	19%	31%
Comox Valley	51%	24%	41%
Metro Vancouver	50%	20%	-61%
East Kootenay	48%	20%	18%
North Coast	38%	20%	31%
Columbia-Shuswap	34%	5%	-1%
Central Kootenay	29%	4%	13%
Cowichan Valley	28%	5%	4%
Fraser-Fort George	28%	7%	30%
Kitimat-Stikine	26%	4%	5%
Squamish-Lillooet	22%	-12%	-38%
Bulkley-Nechako	14%	-4%	0%
Qathet	6%	-19%	-58%
Fraser Valley	4%	-22%	-29%
Peace River	3%	-15%	3%
North Okanagan	-11%	-38%	-3%
Nanaimo	-23%	-50%	-47%

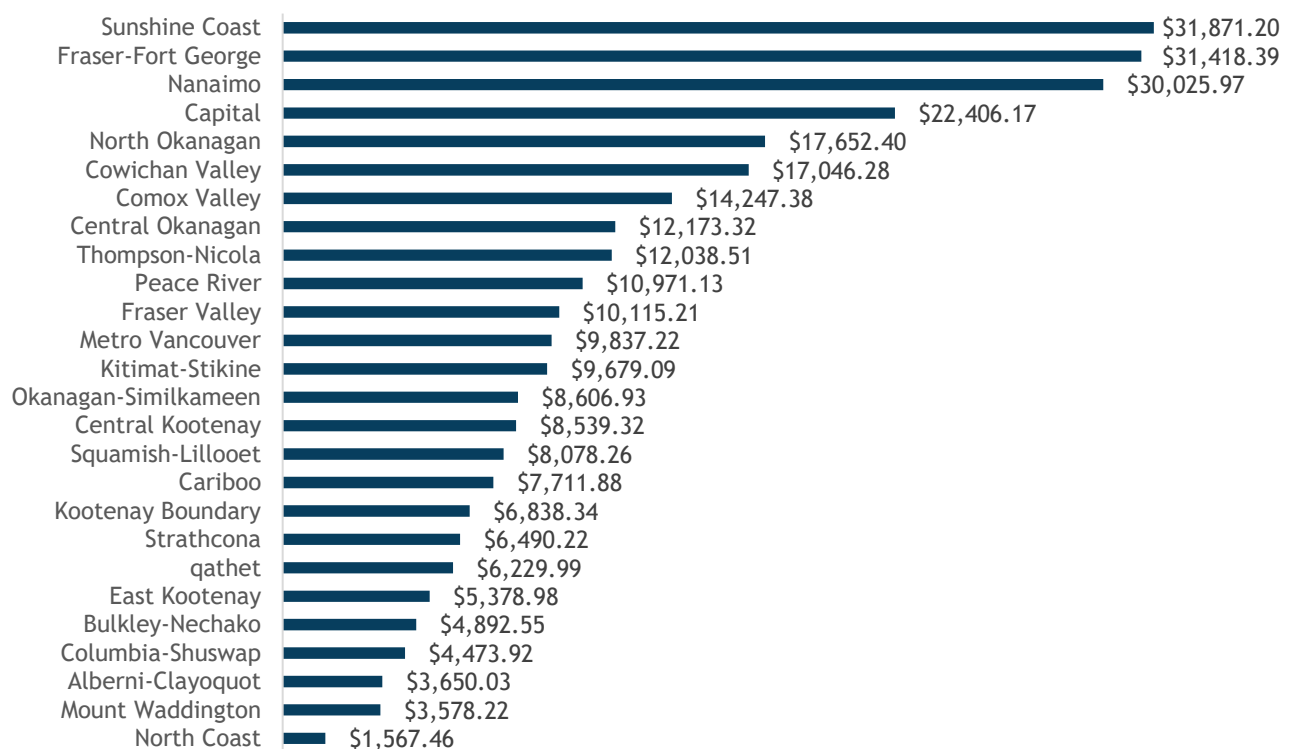
Source: Authors calculations derived from BC Government Regional District Expense Reports, (2018, 2023), BC Stats Consumer Price Index (2025), BC Population Estimates (2025), and BCA Property Assessment Roll Totals (2018, 2023)

The consistent trend of administrative spending outpacing key indicators of controlled fiscal prudence raises concerns about the level of financial and performance oversight within regional districts. While small businesses are constantly forced to find ways to reduce costs, regional districts continue to expand their administrative spending. This is especially concerning given that their primary mandate is to deliver core services, not grow bureaucracy.

From 2018-2023, rising total spending drove faster growth in property tax increases for businesses. During this period, 8 of the 26 regional districts raised business property taxes by more than 25%. In 2023, the average small business paid \$11,731 in property tax to their regional district. The most expensive regional districts for small businesses are Sunshine Coast, Fraser-Fort George, Nanaimo, and Capital Regional District, all having to pay over \$20,000 in property taxes solely to the regional district (Figure 8). For businesses within municipalities, municipal taxes are added on top of these costs, furthering the cost of doing business.

**Figure 8: Average business property tax payment to regional districts per annum**

**On average, a small business pays \$11,731 in property taxes to their regional districts. Small businesses in municipalities must also pay municipal taxes.**



**Source:** Authors calculations derived from 2023 BC Assessment Property Class 6 (Commercial Properties) assessments, BC Government Regional District Tax Rates (See Methodology)



## Spotlight on Metro Vancouver

As the largest regional district, Metro Vancouver's (MVRD) spending habits deserve scrutiny. Serving 21 municipalities, one electoral area, and one treaty First Nation, MVRD's mandate is extremely large and complex, ranging from managing utility services, to parks, to affordable housing. From 2018-2023, its overall expenditures grew by 38%, with total administrative costs growing by 50%. Notably, MVRD saw only 0.7% in growth in the proportion of their budget on administrative costs over the 5 years, going from spending 7.8% of their budget on administration in 2018 to 8.5% in 2023. MVRD's administrative costs per capita saw 34% growth in the same period, outpacing both the provincial inflation growth and population growth, by 4%. Alongside significant spending from 2018 to 2023, property taxes in the region rose sharply, highlighting a possible disconnect between tax requisitions and actual service delivery.

While Metro Vancouver did not rank among the most inefficient regional districts, it remains one to watch. In 2025, the region faced heightened scrutiny marked by an external governance review and rising property taxes tied to the North Shore wastewater treatment plant.<sup>12,13</sup> North Shore residents are being forced to pay fees of approximately \$590 extra per year for the next 30 years.<sup>14</sup> Metro Vancouver property owners are set to pay anywhere from 20.9% to 41% more for their share of regional district expenses within their property tax bill.<sup>15</sup> In July 2025, MVRD has paused its planned narrowed-in review of the plant until its legal dispute with its former contractor is resolved, with no change expected before the 2027 trial.<sup>16</sup> The delay has drawn sharp criticism from officials, who accuse the regional district of avoiding accountability and urge taxpayers to press the provincial government for immediate action.

With ongoing governance challenges, now is the time for MVRD leadership to prioritize efficiency, as highlighted by CFIB survey results. Small businesses want governments to be responsible with their tax money as they can't absorb higher property taxes caused by regional district spending on governance restructuring and bureaucracy. Instead, MVRD should prioritize cost-cutting, streamline administrative operations, and align budgeting with sustainable benchmarks to keep tax increases predictable and manageable.

## Lack of Accountability and Oversight in Regional Districts

Regional districts operate with significant flexibility and independence, which has contributed to the lack of a consistent system to ensure accountability and oversight in the delivery of core services to taxpayers. Concerns have been raised surrounding regional district inefficiencies, including potential service duplication with

municipalities and the financial strain of managing many diverse local governments within a single regional structure. Administrative cost's continual growth is worrisome with this in mind.

Beginning in 2013, an Auditor General for Local Government Auditor (AGLG) held office to conduct performance audits of the operations of local governments, including regional districts. These audits provided local governments with objective information and advice relevant to holding them accountable to their communities for the achievement of value for money in their operations.<sup>17</sup> The BC government stopped its operations in March of 2021 due to pressure from municipalities, citing costing concerns and too big of a jurisdiction for one officer.<sup>18</sup> The minister of municipal affairs has rejected recent calls from some B.C. councillors to restore the AGLG citing there is “sufficient oversight” to catch financial abuse at the regional level<sup>19</sup>

In recent years, regional districts have faced increased media scrutiny amid concerns over fiscal mismanagement, expanding mandates, and limited accountability. Notably, Metro Vancouver has been at the forefront of these discussions, drawing criticism for significant property tax hikes, costly director expenses, and major infrastructure projects—such as the North Shore wastewater treatment plant—running drastically over its initial cost estimates and schedule.<sup>20</sup> Excessive staff compensation has also been a concern, with the Metro Vancouver Chief Administrative Officer's salary revealed to be greater than the Premier and Prime Minister's combined salaries in 2023.<sup>21</sup> In just three years, the bureaucracy at MVRD had realized a 38% increase in compensation, according to their 2023 Statement of Financial Information.<sup>22</sup> Vancouver Mayor Ken Sim went so far as to boycott council meetings to draw attention to transparency concerns,<sup>23</sup> while Port Coquitlam Mayor Brad West has called for comprehensive reform of the regional district—advocating for fewer meetings, lower stipend rates, and capped remuneration.<sup>24</sup> Local councillors penned an open letter to the provincial Auditor General to investigate matters further. Following a request for an audit by the Premier of BC, the district commissioned an independent governance review conducted by Deloitte.<sup>25</sup> The report, costing \$100,000, identified governance and structure as key contributors to inefficiency and overspending, recommending committee restructuring.<sup>26</sup>

Metro Vancouver is not the only regional district with similar grievances relating to their spending habits. In Kelowna, city councillors have highlighted the excessive size of their meeting stipends within the regional district of Central Okanagan, which was met with them being removed from the board in 2025.<sup>27</sup> In 2021, the Thompson-Nicola Regional District learned that the former Chief Administrative Officer charged more than \$500,000 to his work credit card over a 5-year period, with taxpayers paying for excursions to lavish restaurants, coffee shops, and champagne rooms.<sup>28</sup> This prompted

a forensic audit by BDO Canada costing \$500,000, substantially more than the original estimate of \$75,000, due to its continual expansion of audit scope and timeline.<sup>29</sup> This does not include broader staff, legal, or communication costs.

Governance challenges, bureaucratic conflicts, and inconsistent spending practices make the report's findings of rapidly growing administrative costs deeply concerning. Without proper oversight, administrative spending could continue to bloat unchecked, resulting in taxpayers having to foot the bill. As federations governed by their member municipalities, regional districts must exercise fiscal responsibility and avoid becoming an additional financial burden for taxpayers, especially small businesses, by adding another layer of government costs.

### Accountability benchmarks

To assess the existing accountability and transparency mechanisms within regional districts, this report examined the presence of governance committees and analyzed the proportion of board directors who are directly elected compared to those who are appointed, frequently as elected councillors representing their municipalities or as part of a Treaty First Nation governing body.

Regional districts are governed by a board of directors consisting of one directly elected director from each electoral area, along with one or more directors appointed by the elected council of each municipality and Treaty First Nation based on their population size. They have standing, select, and advisory committees to manage the specific issues and needs of their jurisdictions.

Directly elected officials on regional district boards represent the rural electoral areas within their boundaries. Only 8 out of 26 regional districts have a majority of directly elected board members, primarily due to their rural composition (Table 4). The remaining districts are largely governed by appointed, indirectly elected officials from their member municipalities, resulting in weaker public accountability in their decision-making and oversight roles.

This highlights particular concern for electoral area residents, amid growing frustration over flawed democratic processes.<sup>30</sup>

*“Regional districts are very good in terms of flexibility for providing services, but they’re seriously flawed in democracy for the electoral areas. They treat us like five-year-olds,”* said Julien Fell, a former electoral area director within the Regional District of Nanaimo to Chek News.

Former electoral area directors have described deep frustration during their tenure, saying larger municipalities often overpowered their voices - even on issues directly impacting their voter base.<sup>31</sup>

**Table 4: Regional District's Existing Accountability Mechanisms**

Regional District	Percentage of Directly Elected Board Members	Governance Committee? (as of June 2025)
Metro Vancouver	2%	Yes
Capital	13%	Yes
Central Okanagan	15%	No
Strathcona	29%	No
Comox Valley	30%	No
Fraser Valley	33%	No
Peace River	33%	No
North Okanagan	36%	No
Squamish-Lillooet	36%	No
Nanaimo	37%	No
Thompson-Nicola	37%	Yes
Kootenay-Boundary	38%	Yes
East Kootenay	40%	Yes
North Coast	40%	No
Alberni-Clayoquot	43%	Yes
Mount Waddington	44%	No
Okanagan-Similkameen	45%	Yes
Bulkley-Nechako	47%	No
Fraser-Fort George	50%	No
Kitimat-Stikine	50%	No
Central Kootenay	55%	No
Sunshine Coast	56%	No
Cowichan Valley	56%	Yes
Columbia-Shuswap	58%	No
Cariboo	71%	No
qathet	71%	No

Source: Author's calculations derived from BC Regional District's home webpages (2025)

As of June 2025, 27% of regional districts have formal governance committees<sup>iii</sup> as one of their regular meeting committees according to their respective regional district websites (Table 4). Six out of the 14 districts whose spending outpaced all key

<sup>iii</sup> For this report, a governance committee is defined as a formal board committee that provides oversight of the regional district's boundaries, spending, and decision-making to ensure operations align with its mandate, upholding transparency and accountability.



benchmarks discussed earlier have governance committees. This raises questions about whether these committees are effective or further complicate the administrative burden of regional districts.

For example, Thompson-Nicola regional district's boundary review committee was recently dissolved after failing to determine a clear scope for review.<sup>32</sup> There's a risk this pattern could repeat across other regional districts due to a lack of clear direction—raising concerns about whether governance committees can operate effectively for taxpayers.

Regional districts operate with a high degree of autonomy and flexibility, but with little oversight to keep their spending in check. Due to limited provincial oversight, regional districts rely on costly self-led reviews and governance committees—leaving taxpayers to cover the bill. Small businesses face tough financial decisions every day, and when regional districts fail to implement similar accountability measures, it raises serious concerns especially when spending is outpacing sustainable benchmarks.

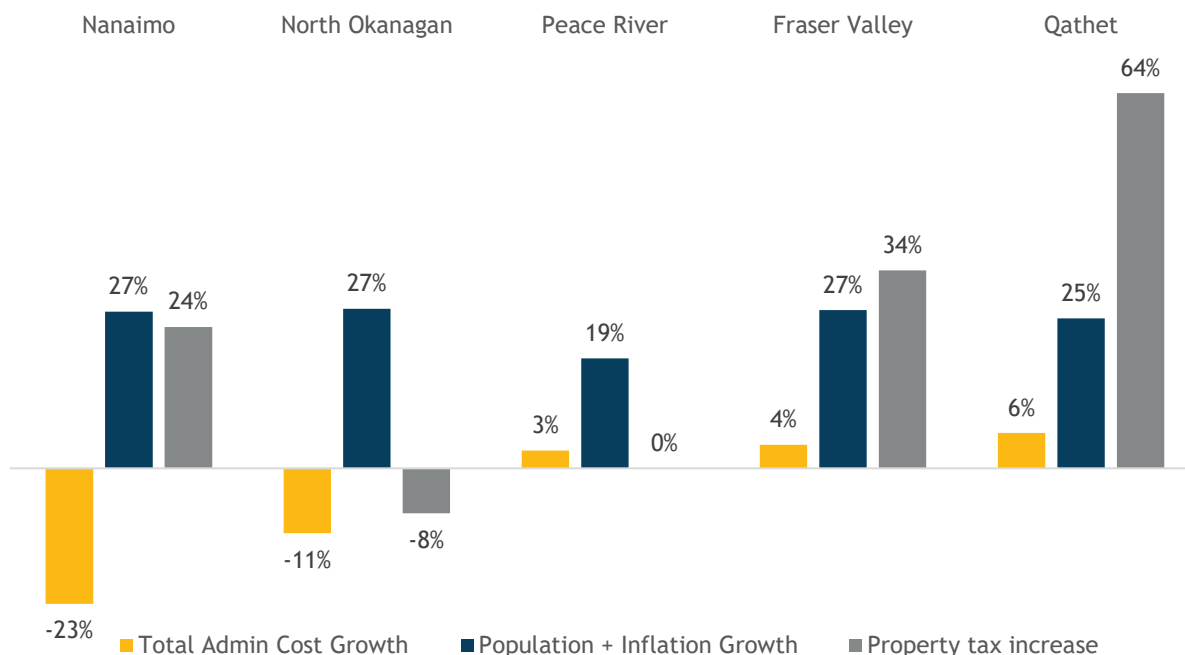
CFIB urges local governments to ensure oversight mechanisms that already exist within regional districts (ex. governance committees, internal reviews) are streamlined with clear metrics to properly measure performance while controlling for excess spending. Accountability is essential but should be maintained in a way that doesn't break the bank for taxpayers.

## Top and Bottom Performers

Closer analysis of the most and least efficient regional districts reveals clear trends. Efficiency was assessed based on the rate of total administrative cost growth in comparison with the key indicators of fiscal sustainability (see *Methodology* for more details). The top five most efficient regional districts saw negative, or very miniscule, growth in administrative spending over the five-year period—meaning their internal costs declined despite inflation, population growth, and rising property taxes. This reflects a high level of fiscal discipline and strong cost control. In contrast, the bottom five districts experienced administrative spending increases that far outpaced growth in population, inflation, and property taxes, indicating weaker spending controls and raising concerns about internal efficiency.

Most efficient:

**Figure 9: Top 5 Regional Districts by Administrative Cost Growth Efficiency**

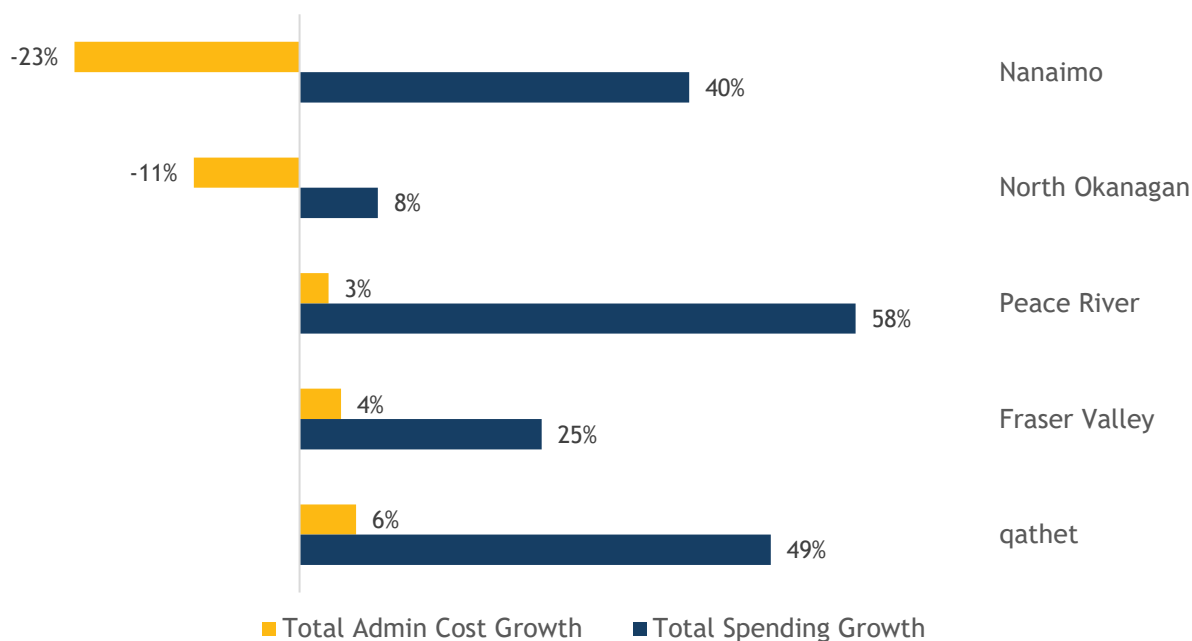


Source: Authors calculations derived from BC Government Regional District Expense Reports, (2018, 2023), Population Estimates, and BCA Property Assessment Roll Totals (2018, 2023)

The most efficient regional districts are Nanaimo, North Okanagan, Peace River, Fraser Valley, and qathet (Figure 9). Their administrative cost growth did not outpace population, inflation, and property tax increases between 2018-2023. The majority do not have governance committees, which could contribute to less administrative costs being spent on its operations and meetings. Further, their revenue growth from tax requisitions and development contributions was larger than their spending growth, signalling a prioritization of fiscal management and controlled allocation of funds (Appendix, Table C).

Looking at the most efficient regional districts' general spending habits, administrative costs only grew (if at all) slightly, while total expenditures (which include services, capital projects, infrastructure, etc.) grew significantly more (Figure 10). This implies that these regional districts expanded their overall mandate, investments, and operations without a proportionate growth in internal overhead. This signals a strong cost containment on the administrative side.

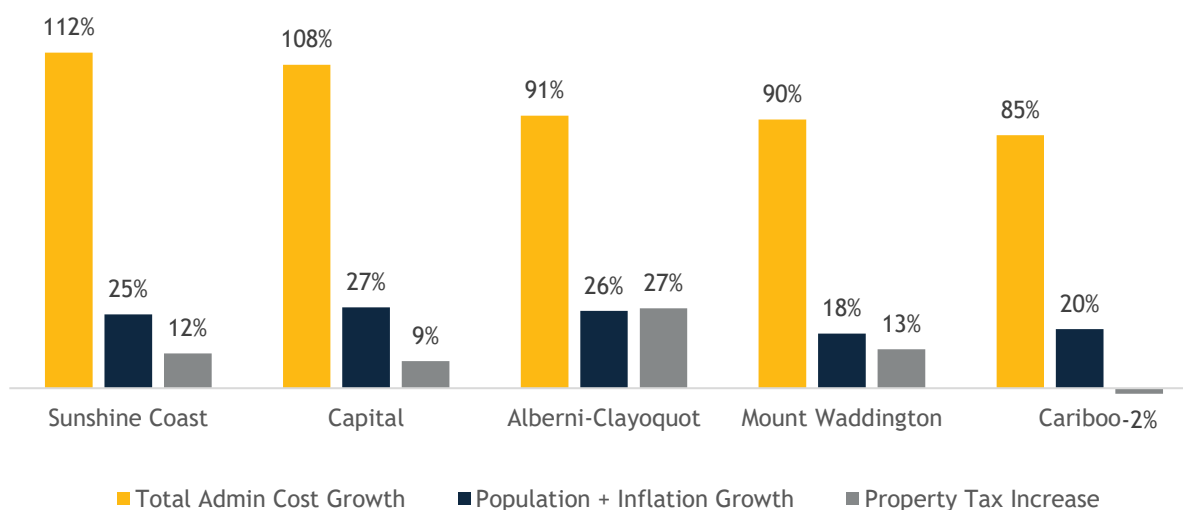
**Figure 10: Top 5 Regional Districts by Administrative Cost Growth Efficiency Compared to Total Spending Growth**



Source: Authors calculations derived from BC Government Regional District Expense Reports, (2018, 2023)

Least efficient:

**Figure 11: Bottom 5 Regional Districts by Administrative Cost Growth Efficiency**



Source: Authors calculations derived from BC Government Regional District Expense Reports, (2018, 2023), Population Estimates, and BCA Property Assessment Roll Totals (2018, 2023)

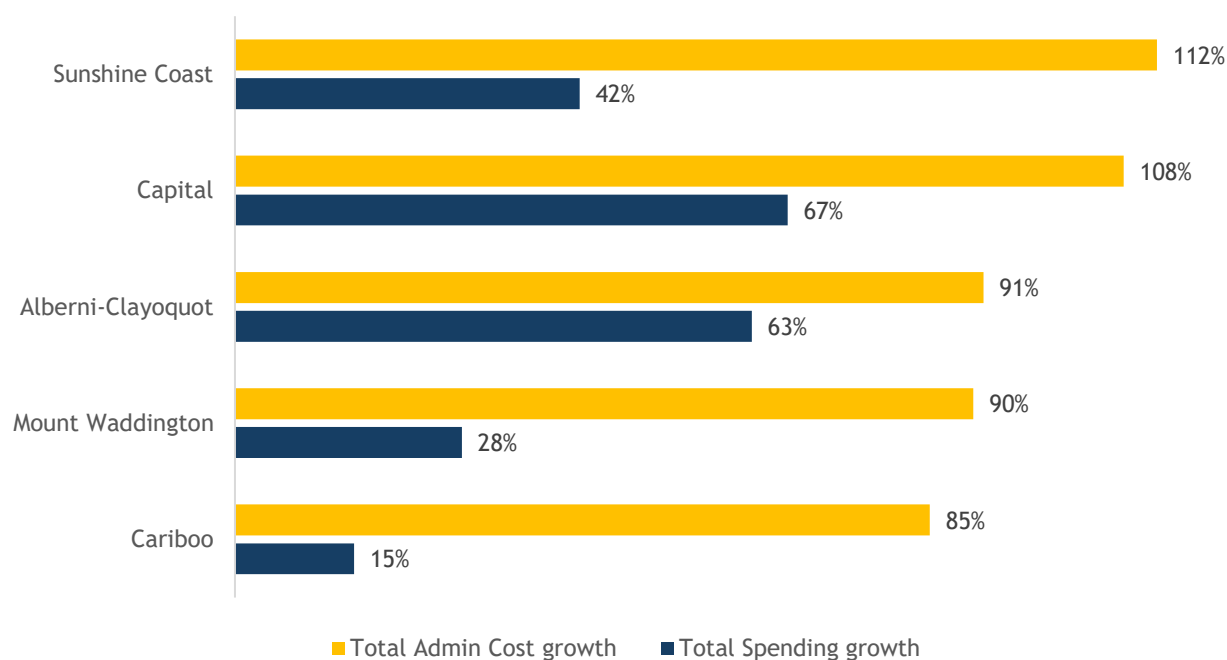
The least efficient regional districts are Sunshine Coast, Capital, Alberni-Clayoquot, Mount Waddington, and Cariboo (Figure 11). Three of these have governance

committees, alongside all their administrative spending growth greatly outpacing the key benchmarks of population and inflation combined, as well as property tax increases. Their administrative spending also largely outpaced growth in tax requisition revenue.

When comparing total expenditure growth to administrative cost growth, the bottom five regional districts all show administrative costs rapidly outpacing overall spending (Figure 12). This mismatch suggests potential inefficiencies, where internal overhead is expanding disproportionately to actual service delivery. As a result, taxpayers—especially small businesses—may end up bearing the burden of rising administrative expenses without corresponding benefits.

**Figure 12**

**Bottom 5 Regional Districts by Administrative Cost Growth Efficiency Compared to Total Spending Growth**



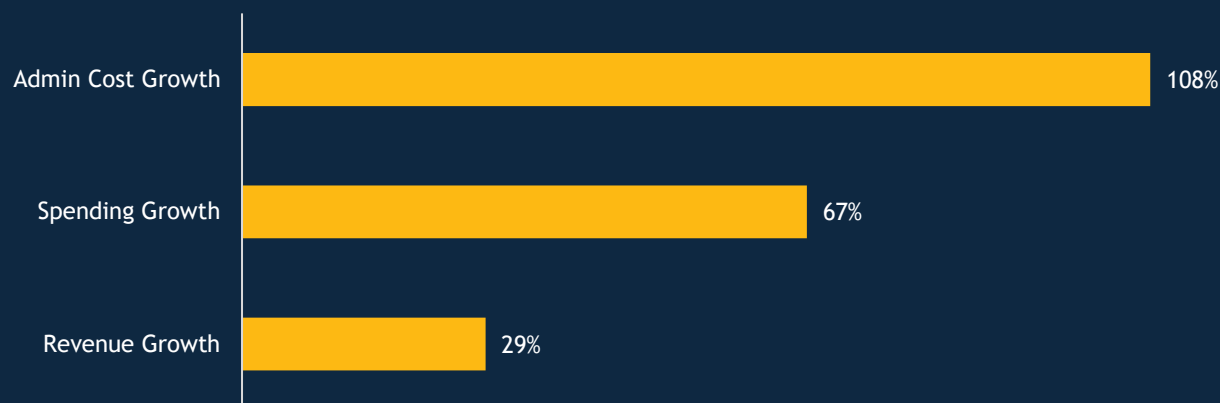
**Source:** Authors calculations derived from BC Government Regional District Expense Reports, (2018, 2023)

Four out of the five most efficient regional districts do not offer per meeting stipends to their boards of directors, while three out of the five least efficient do, along with many other regional districts in the analysis. This could be relevant for further analysis in regional districts where administrative costs are skyrocketing and in need of cost pullbacks.



### Spotlight on Capital Regional District:

**Figure 13: Capital Regional District Budget Growth 2018-2023**



Source: Authors calculations derived from BC Government Regional District Expense and Revenue Reports, (2018, 2023)

The Capital Regional District (CRD) stands out as one of B.C.'s least efficient regional districts for administrative spending. Serving 460,000 residents, it employs over 1,000 staff—nearly eight times the workforce of the similarly populated Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD).<sup>33</sup> For comparison, Metro Vancouver serves more than six times the population with only twice the staff.<sup>34</sup> While the CRD's broader mandate and urban context partly explain higher staffing—especially with its expansion into social, health, and community-based programs—the scale of its workforce far exceeds what population and service levels alone would justify. The CRD's administrative costs have doubled in just five years (Figure X), underscoring the need for closer scrutiny. Valuable as its services are, overhead reductions should be a priority to ensure taxpayer dollars are used efficiently without sacrificing service quality.

The CRD recently approved a provisional \$872 million budget for 2025—up \$95 million from the previous year.<sup>35</sup> This includes a \$42.3 million increase in the operating budget and a projected \$38 hike in property taxes for an average property owner. While the board briefly considered cuts, they opted instead to defer costs, keeping program spending intact. Nearly \$50 million of this spending—over half of all salary and benefit costs—are tied to general government services alone. In 2023, CRD spent 10% of total expenditures on administrative costs, up 2% from 2018 (Figure 5). Compared to other regional districts, they allocate a smaller share of their overall budget to administrative costs, ranking 19/26. However, given the size of their budget, its total cost remains significant.

The CRD's annual report attributed the rise in general government services expenses to increased cost pressures, citing an inflation rate of 3.7% for the year.<sup>36</sup> It also

pointed to a significant \$25.9 million in general government spending tied to housing grants through the Rapid Housing Initiative.<sup>37</sup> However, even with this one-time disbursement excluded, the Capital Regional District still ranks at the bottom in terms of spending efficiency. The CRD administrative costs per capita growth from 2018-2023 are largely outpacing the key benchmarks (Figure 13).

**Figure 13: 2018-2023 Capital Regional District Administrative Cost Growth and Key Benchmarks**

Administrative Cost Growth	Outpaced Population + Inflation?	Amount Over Population & Inflation	Outpaced Property Tax Increase?	Amount over Property Tax Increase
108%	Yes	81%	Yes	99%

Source: Authors calculations derived from BC Government Regional District Expense Reports, (2018, 2023), Population Estimates, and BCA Property Assessment Roll Totals (2018, 2023)

Moving forward, the Capital Regional District must refocus its work on delivering core services, finding areas for cost savings, and eliminating administrative bloat in pursuit of lowering property taxes, ultimately putting money back in the pockets of small business owners.

## Recommendations

To ensure regional districts take steps to better control their spending, CFIB recommends the following:

- 1. Align spending growth, especially administrative related costs, to population, inflation, and property tax increases:** Ensure taxation on small businesses remains reasonable, affordable, and predictable—especially during uncertain economic times.
- 2. Prioritize small business needs in regional district spending:** Ensure that rising expenditures deliver tangible benefits for small businesses—such as quicker turnaround times for business licensing in unincorporated areas and more efficient, business-friendly services across the board.
- 3. Ensure internal oversight mechanisms (e.g. governance committees) are streamlined with clear KPIs and measurable impact:** Prioritize core service delivery over excessive spending on audits, restructuring, or governance review bodies to save taxpayers from higher taxes in the long-term.
- 4. Enact provincial oversight within regional districts when necessary:** Reinstate an auditor general for local governments on a contractual, as-needed



basis for all districts, funded provincially to distribute the fiscal burden more equitably across local governments.

5. **Promote accessibility and transparency of regional district spending for small businesses:** Develop clear, accessible guides that show small businesses exactly how their property taxes are being spent within the regional district. By breaking down the numbers in a straightforward way, these tools empower business owners to speak up—whether they want more investment in certain areas or push for savings elsewhere—ultimately improving accountability and public trust in how tax dollars are used. An example is in the Thompson-Nicola regional district (Figure A in Appendix).<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

Comparing regional district spending is not an easy comparison, as each deliver services different in scale, type, and volume. Nevertheless, when it comes to administrative costs adding on to tax increases, all regional districts need to play a role in ensuring their governance doesn't add burdensome costs to its taxpayers.

Small businesses are dealing with large amounts of debt, inflationary pressures, rising interest rates, and an uncertain economic landscape. From the report's findings, it is clear to recognize habits of steep spending carried out by regional districts without oversight. With most districts outpacing key sustainable benchmarks, regional districts need to be held accountable. Governments should control their own spending to keep property taxes low and provide financial relief for small businesses.

## About the Author



Molly MacCormack is the Public Policy and Advocacy Intern for CFIB, based in Vancouver, British Columbia. Molly holds a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Political Science and Master of Management (MM) from the University of British Columbia.

## About the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) is Canada's largest association of small and medium-sized businesses with 100,000 members across every industry and region. CFIB is dedicated to increasing business owners' chances of success by driving policy change at all levels of government, providing expert advice and tools, and negotiating exclusive savings.

## Methodology

Only regional districts with 2023 populations exceeding 10,000 were included in this analysis.

Regional district spending was assessed using key indicators of comparison - population growth, inflation, and property tax increases - from 2018 to 2023. Each district experienced different rates of population and property tax growth over the five-year period.<sup>39,40</sup> The provincial inflation rate was consistent at 18% across all districts.<sup>41</sup>

Property tax growth is averaged, as it was calculated by dividing the total assessed value of all businesses in a regional district by the number of businesses in a regional district,<sup>42</sup> then multiplied by the regional district's specific tax rate.<sup>43</sup> Business properties are referring to commercial properties classified by BC Assessment as "Class 6".<sup>44</sup> This benchmark represents the growth of how much a small business on average had to pay in property taxes to their regional district from 2018-2023.

$$\frac{\text{Total Assessed Value of Businesses in Regional District}}{\text{Total Number of Businesses in Regional District}} \times \text{Regional District Tax Rate}$$

To create a more realistic benchmark for evaluating spending growth, population growth and inflation rates are combined for select comparisons. This approach accounts for both increased demand for services and rising costs, providing a fuller picture of the factors that could naturally influence spending changes within regional districts.

This paper presents findings from CFIB's Your Voice Survey, an online survey completed by 2,090 CFIB members between July 10-24, 2025. The survey has a margin of error of ±2.14 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

## Appendix

**Table A: B.C. Regional District Spending**

Regional District	2023 Expenditure per Capita (\$)	2023 Expenditures (in Thousands \$)
Sunshine Coast	1,585.9	53,954
Kootenay Boundary	1,068.2	37,608
Peace River	972.0	64,268
Central Kootenay	948.9	63,922
Comox Valley	934.5	72,846
Cowichan Valley	819.1	77,366
Columbia-Shuswap	746.1	46,106
Mount Waddington	667.7	7,618
Nanaimo	643.9	117,864
qathet	631.0	14,407
Cariboo	612.2	40,697
Capital	608.7	275,771
Kitimat-Stikine	584.2	23,774
Alberni-Clayoquot	551.1	19,762
East Kootenay	534.6	38,228
North Okanagan	515.0	50,814
Okanagan-Similkameen	510.3	48,023
Bulkley-Nechako	493.3	19,464
Squamish-Lillooet	455.3	25,588
Fraser-Fort George	417.2	43,588
Strathcona	396.5	20,311
North Coast	391.6	7,472
Thompson-Nicola	332.8	51,974
Metro Vancouver	277.4	826,854
Central Okanagan	233.4	57,595
Fraser Valley	117.2	41,389

Source: Government of BC, Regional Districts Expenses: Schedule 902 (2023)

**Table B: B.C. Regional District Expenditures: 2023 Snapshot and 5-Year Growth**

Regional District	2023 Expenditure per Capita (\$)	2023 Expenditures (in Thousands \$)	Expenditure Growth since 2018
Sunshine Coast	1,585.9	53,954	42%
Kootenay Boundary	1,068.2	37,608	20%
Peace River	972.0	64,268	58%
Central Kootenay	948.9	63,922	30%

Comox Valley	934.5	72,846	46%
Cowichan Valley	819.1	77,366	31%
Columbia-Shuswap	746.1	46,106	36%
Mount Waddington	667.7	7,618	28%
Nanaimo	643.9	117,864	40%
qathet	631.0	14,407	49%
Cariboo	612.2	40,697	15%
Capital	608.7	275,771	67%
Kitimat-Stikine	584.2	23,774	44%
Alberni-Clayoquot	551.1	19,762	63%
East Kootenay	534.6	38,228	38%
North Okanagan	515.0	50,814	8%
Okanagan-Similkameen	510.3	48,023	34%
Bulkley-Nechako	493.3	19,464	20%
Squamish-Lillooet	455.3	25,588	31%
Fraser-Fort George	417.2	43,588	18%
Strathcona	396.5	20,311	40%
North Coast	391.6	7,472	57%
Thompson-Nicola	332.8	51,974	18%
Metro Vancouver	277.4	826,854	38%
Central Okanagan	233.4	57,595	-2%
Fraser Valley	117.2	41,389	25%

Source: Government of BC, Regional Districts Expenses: Schedule 902 (2018, 2023)

**Table C: 2018-2023 B.C. Regional District Revenue Growth**

Regional District	Revenue Growth	Total Spending Growth	Tax Requisition & New Development Growth
North Coast	91%	57%	35%
qathet	91%	49%	67%
East Kootenay	86%	38%	32%
Strathcona	68%	40%	36%
Alberni-Clayoquot	67%	63%	29%
Metro Vancouver	55%	38%	183%
Sunshine Coast	52%	42%	47%
Columbia-Shuswap	47%	36%	25%
Fraser Valley	46%	25%	53%
Central Kootenay	45%	30%	43%
Peace River	42%	58%	38%
Cowichan Valley	42%	31%	40%
North Okanagan	41%	8%	22%
Mount Waddington	37%	28%	20%

Okanagan-Similkameen	34%	34%	25%
Comox Valley	33%	46%	19%
Nanaimo	32%	40%	37%
Fraser-Fort George	30%	18%	14%
Bulkley-Nechako	30%	20%	34%
Capital	29%	67%	31%
Cariboo	29%	15%	25%
Squamish-Lillooet	28%	31%	67%
Kootenay Boundary	23%	20%	34%
Kitimat-Stikine	22%	44%	22%
Central Okanagan	11%	-2%	12%
Thompson-Nicola	4%	18%	6%

Source: Government of BC, Regional Districts Revenue: Schedule 901 (2018, 2023)

**Table D: B.C. Regional Districts Key Growth Benchmarks**

Regional District	Population & Inflation Growth	Regional District Business Property Tax Increase Growth
Alberni-Clayoquot	26%	27%
Bulkley-Nechako	18%	14%
Capital	27%	9%
Cariboo	20%	-2%
Central Kootenay	25%	16%
Central Okanagan	33%	20%
Columbia-Shuswap	29%	35%
Comox Valley	27%	10%
Cowichan Valley	23%	24%
East Kootenay	28%	30%
Fraser Valley	27%	34%
Fraser-Fort George	21%	-2%
Kitimat-Stikine	23%	22%
Kootenay Boundary	23%	6%
Metro Vancouver	30%	111%
Mount Waddington	18%	13%
Nanaimo	26%	24%
North Coast	18%	7%
North Okanagan	27%	-8%
Okanagan-Similkameen	23%	6%
Peace River	18%	0%
qathet	25%	64%
Squamish-Lillooet	33%	59%
Strathcona	24%	46%



<b>Sunshine Coast</b>	25%	12%
<b>Thompson-Nicola</b>	25%	-22%

Source: Authors calculations derived from Population Estimates, BC Stats Consumer Price Index (2025) and BCA Property Assessment Roll Totals (2018, 2023)

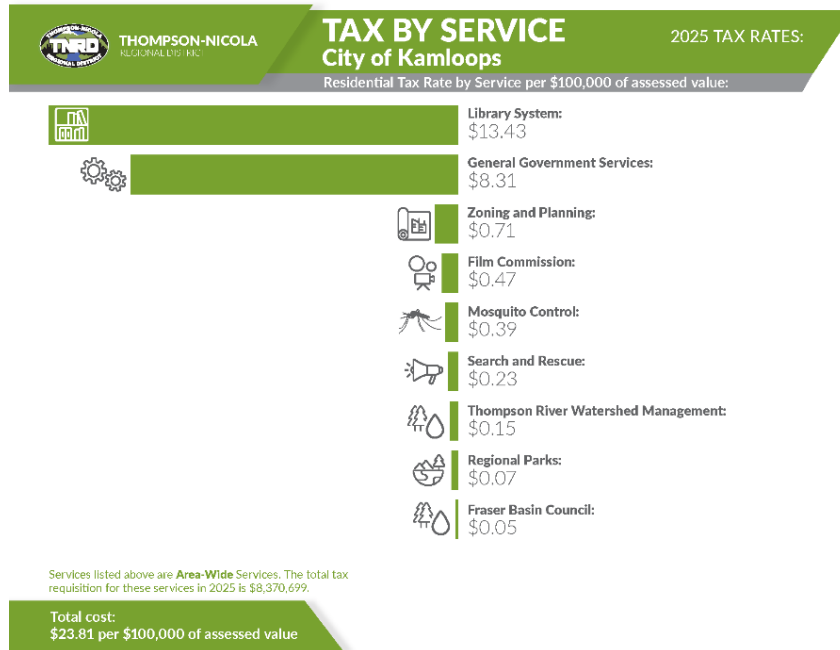
**Table E: BC Regional Districts member municipalities and electoral areas**

Regional District	Number of Municipalities	Number of Electoral Areas
<b>Metro Vancouver</b>	21	1
Capital	13	3
<b>Thompson-Nicola</b>	11	10
Central Kootenay	9	11
Bulkley-Nechako	8	7
East Kootenay	8	6
Kootenay Boundary	8	5
Peace River	8	4
Fraser Valley	6	8
North Okanagan	6	5
Okanagan-Similkameen	6	9
Kitimat-Stikine	5	5
North Coast	5	4
Strathcona	5	4
Cariboo	4	12
Central Okanagan	4	2
Columbia-Shuswap	4	7
Cowichan Valley	4	9
Fraser-Fort George	4	7
Mount Waddington	4	4
Nanaimo	4	7
Squamish-Lillooet	4	4
Alberni-Clayoquot	3	6
Comox Valley	3	3
Sunshine Coast	3	5
qathet	1	5

Source: Civic Info BC Municipal Directory (2025)

### Figure A: Thompson-Nicola Property Tax Transparency Initiative

After the forensic audit of 2021, one of Thompson-Nicola's review's recommendations included improving the transparency of their property tax breakdown - due to inaccessibility being a key issue as they had 21 separate budgets. Now, their regional district website has dropdown menu options that breakdown property tax rates for each Electoral Area and Member Municipality through infographics. This initiative won the regional district a governance award at the most recent UBCM.



## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> CFIB, October Your Voice survey, October 10 - Nov 7, 2024, n = 3,003. Question: Please indicate the level of priority you would like the government to place on the following issues. (Select all that apply)

<sup>3</sup> CFIB, July Your Voice survey, July 10-24, 2025, n = 270. Question: How often does your business interact with the regional district you operate in?

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<sup>8</sup> CFIB, July Your Voice survey, July 10-24, 2025, n = 197. Question: Do you feel your regional district provides good value for your business relative to the taxes you pay to them?

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<sup>10</sup> CFIB, July Your Voice survey, July 10-24, 2025, n = 270. Question: How often does your business interact with the regional district you operate in?

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