



CITY OF MAPLE RIDGE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES FUNCTION REVIEW

REPORT

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January 2023



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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Land development in Maple Ridge is governed by a set of policies and regulations set out in the City's *Official Community Plan (OCP), Zoning Bylaw, Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw*, and other municipal documents. In many if not most cases, the development or re-development of individual properties require property owners to apply for and obtain various approvals from the City, as identified in the City's *Development Procedures Bylaw*. Staff in the City's Planning Department, along with those in Engineering, Parks and Recreation, and other departments, review applications for development through different regulatory processes. **These processes, the departments and sections that administer them, and the approaches taken by staff to perform their work constitute the City's development services function.**

The City of Maple Ridge seeks to position itself as a leader in the review and approval of development applications. The City understands that success in the function requires an **organizational culture that values solutions and customer service**, as well as approval processes that have **clear expectations** and **are well understood by applicants**, and are administered in a **fair, consistent and efficient** manner. To help the City achieve its aim, Council and Senior Leadership commissioned an independent review of Maple Ridge's current development services function. Neilson Strategies Inc., a local government consultancy based in British Columbia, was selected as the consultant to conduct the review.

REPORT

This *Report* presents the review of the development services function. The report begins by profiling the function as it exists in the City today. The function's legislative basis, organization and staffing model, and application review processes are described; available statistics on the numbers and types of applications as well as timelines are provided. The report then presents the consultant's assessment of the current function. Key issues in need of attention are identified, including issues related to organizational structure, approval processes, the use of information technology, staffing levels and other matters. Recommended changes for the City to consider in addressing the issues are presented in the report's final chapter.

Over the course of the study, the consultant interviewed all City staff involved in the development services function, as well as several developers and development professionals with experience in Maple Ridge and in other Lower Mainland municipalities. The consultant also conducted a considerable amount of comparative research. Development services managers in other municipalities were interviewed; relevant materials were obtained and reviewed. The consultant's identification of issues and development of recommendations were informed by all of the interviews and comparative research.



CONTEXT

The context within which the review of the development services function was commissioned is important to highlight before turning to the body of the report. The City of Maple Ridge is a high-growth community in British Columbia's Metro Vancouver Regional District. Over the next thirty years, Metro Vancouver projects that the region as a whole will experience 37% growth in population to a total of 3.8 million people. Growth in the Ridge Meadows sub-region, which is dominated by Maple Ridge, is projected to hit 40% — a figure that translates into an additional 44,200 people.¹ Close to 20,000 new dwelling units will be needed in Ridge Meadows to accommodate this growth in population. Increased density and a focus on multi-family housing will features of the future landscape.

Housing affordability is a significant challenge in the Metro Vancouver region, the Ridge Meadows sub-region and the province as a whole. Municipalities are not able on their own to solve the affordability crisis; municipalities can, however, contribute to solutions in different ways, including through efforts to streamline and accelerate development review and approve new housing supply. The Province of British Columbia has identified municipal development approval processes as a topic for review and action.² Provincial Grants have been provided to several municipalities, including Maple Ridge, through the *Local Government Development Approvals Program* to facilitate improvements. Legislated changes designed to encourage—and ultimately force—municipalities to approve more housing units, and to approve them faster, have been put forward.³

Maple Ridge Council and Senior Leadership understand the growth and affordability challenges facing the community and region. The review of the development services function is a direct response to these challenges.

¹ *Metro 2050: Regional Growth Strategy.*

² See the province's 2019 *Development Approvals Process Review: Final Report from a Province-Wide Stakeholder Consultation.*

³ See the province's *Bill 43 – 2022: Housing Supply Act*, announced in November 2022.



CHAPTER 2 CURRENT FUNCTION

This chapter profiles the City of Maple Ridge's development services function as it exists today. The function's purpose and legislative framework are outlined first. The City's departments involved in reviewing development applications are then reviewed, including information on staffing, roles and responsibilities, application volumes and timelines, application processes, information documents for applicants, and other points.

This chapter, it should be emphasized, outlines the function in its current form. Issues with the function to address, findings from the comparative research, and recommended changes for the City to consider, are presented in subsequent chapters.

PURPOSE OF THE FUNCTION

Property owners in Maple Ridge who wish to develop or re-develop their properties must proceed in compliance with the requirements set out the City's development-related policy documents and bylaws. In many cases, property owners must apply for and obtain different types of development approvals. Depending on the characteristics of and development intentions for a parcel, an owner may require one or more of the following approvals:

- an amendment to the *Official Community Plan*, required when a proposed development does not conform to the future land use designation for the property in the OCP
- an amendment to the *Zoning Bylaw* (i.e., a rezoning), which must be obtained when the proposed development is not permitted in the property's zone, or when the proposed density exceeds that which is identified for the site
- one or more development permit, required for developments that are proposed for properties situated within a designated development permit area with guidelines to address form and character concerns, or to protect the natural environment
- a development variance permit, which is required when an owner seeks to have building setback, building height, lot width, or off-street parking requirements in the *Zoning Bylaw* relaxed, timing of service requirements from the *Subdivision and Development Serving Bylaw* changed, or requirements in the *Sign Bylaw* altered
- subdivision approval, which must be obtained to change or create new lot boundaries, including through the creation of new lots from existing lots, or



through the consolidation of separate lots

The applications for these approvals are received, proposed development projects are reviewed, conditions are set, approvals are granted, and development works (where required) are set out and inspected through the City's development services function. The function exists to ensure that property development in Maple Ridge proceeds in a way that supports the City's land use and development goals, adds value to and meets the needs of the community, and protects the natural environment and the City's infrastructure systems.

Buildings

The building permit function, through which the construction and alteration of buildings is regulated, will be considered by some to form part of the broader development services function. The City of Maple Ridge, however, reviewed the building permit function in 2021 as a separate, stand-alone exercise.⁴ For the purposes of this report, therefore, the development services function does not include activities involved in the review of building permit applications, the issuance of building permits, or the inspection of buildings during construction.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Provincial Legislation

Similar to all municipalities in British Columbia, the City of Maple Ridge obtains its authority to create development policies and regulations, and to require property owners to apply for and receive approvals pursuant to the policies and regulations, from the *Local Government Act*. Part 14 of the *Act*, titled Planning and Land Use Management, outlines specific municipal powers the City may — or, in some cases, must — exercise. Part 14 also identifies constraints and requirements the City must respect in the exercise of its powers.

The range of items addressed in Part 14 is considerable. Key items that are particularly relevant to this report include:

- the authority of the City to adopt an OCP — defined in section 471(1) as "a statement of objectives and policies to guide decisions on planning and land use management" — along with requirements related to the components of the plan, and the procedures to create and adopt it
- the authority to create, and the procedures to adopt, a zoning bylaw that divides the municipality into zones, and regulates for each zone:
 - the permitted land uses, buildings and structures
 - the allowable density for land uses and buildings
 - the siting, size and dimensions of uses and permitted buildings
 - the location of uses on the land and within buildings

⁴ Neilson Strategies completed a *Building Permit Function Review* for the City in November 2021.



- the authority to enter into housing agreements for affordable and special needs housing
- the authority to require applicants to provide traffic impact studies, environmental reports, infrastructure impact reports and other development approval information requirements in support of applications to amend the *Zoning Bylaw*, or for a development permit or temporary use permit
- the authority to create development permit areas in its OCP, and to require property owners within each designated area to obtain one or more development permit prior to subdivision, construction or alteration of a building, or any alteration of land within specific types of development permit areas (e.g., natural environment, greenhouse gas reduction, and others)
- the authority to create and impose specific protections, conditions and requirements in different types of permit areas
- the authority to issue temporary use permits, within designated temporary use areas, to allow for a specified period of time a use not permitted in a zoning bylaw, and to specify conditions under which the use may occur
- the authority to issue development variance permits to vary specific provisions (other than density, use or residential tenure) of the *Zoning Bylaw*, the timing of service requirements from the *Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw* changed, or requirements in the *Sign Bylaw*
- the authority to adopt a subdivision and development servicing bylaw to impose requirements and regulate the provision of works, services and park land in order to subdivide land
- application fees that the City may, by bylaw, impose on all applications to amend the OCP, change zoning, obtain a development permit or development variance permit, subdivide properties, and obtain certain other types of approvals

Other provincial statutes and regulations dealing with highways, the natural environment, registration of lands, strata corporations, agriculture and farming set out additional authorities for and constraints on municipal action. The *Local Government Act*, however, is the primary source of authority and direction for municipalities in the development services function.

Municipal Bylaws

The *Local Government Act* provides the City the authority required to create and enforce its development policies and regulations. The actual policies and regulations, however, are contained in City of Maple Ridge bylaws that property owners must



follow to obtain the necessary development approvals. The most important bylaws include:

- *Maple Ridge Development Procedures Bylaw No. 5879* — This bylaw sets out the requirements and the process for property owners (or their authorized representatives) to submit applications to amend the OCP and *Zoning Bylaw*, and to obtain a development permit and development variance permit.⁵ Items that must be included in every type of application are outlined in the bylaw's schedules.
- *Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 7060* — The City's OCP outlines the long-term vision for growth and development in Maple Ridge. It puts forward objectives and policies on a variety of community issues, identifies future land uses, designates development permit areas and provides matching development guidelines, and includes specific area plans to guide the development of the Albion, Silver Valley, Town Centre and Hammond areas.
- *City of Maple Ridge Zoning Bylaw No. 7600* — The *Zoning Bylaw* divides Maple Ridge into a variety of agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, institutional and comprehensive development zones. Regulations are listed for each zone to address permitted uses, density, lot coverage, setbacks, building height, landscaping needs, parking requirements and other matters.
- *Maple Ridge Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw No. 4800* — This bylaw sets out the application procedure and the application requirements for subdivisions. The bylaw and its schedules set out requirements, standards and design criteria for services and utilities that must be provided in respect of subdivisions.
- *Maple Ridge Fees and Charges Bylaw No. 7575* — This bylaw identifies the fees that must be paid to the City, as part of development applications, for the processing of OCP amendment, zoning amendment, development permit, development variance permit and subdivision approval applications.

DEPARTMENTS & STAFFING

Staff in several City departments have roles and responsibilities in the review of development applications through the development services function as it exists today. Overall administration of the function, however, falls to staff in the Planning & Development Services Division. Staff in the Engineering Department (within the Engineering Services Division) play a significant role in the function, as well.

Planning & Development Services

This division is comprised of the Planning, Building and Bylaw and Licensing

⁵ Applications are also required under the bylaw for temporary commercial and industrial permits, and for heritage alteration permits.



Departments, each of which is headed by a Director who reports to the General Manager of Planning & Development Services. The development services function — which, as noted earlier, is distinct from the building permit function for the purposes of this report — is the focus of the Planning Department.

Figure 2.1 on the following page presents the Department's organization chart. As illustrated in the chart, the Department is divided into two sections:

- *Development & Environmental Services* — This section is comprised of development planning staff and environmental planning staff. Reporting to the Manger of Development & Environmental Services are ten (10) full-time development planning positions, including Planners, Planning Technicians, a Planning Assistant, and a Mapping & Graphics Technician. Three (3) full-time Planner positions, including one (1) Planner III and two (2) Planners I, are vacant at the time of writing.

The staffing complement also includes one (1) permanent part-time Clerk II, and three (3) part-time auxiliary Planner II positions. The staff in the Planner II positions are recently-retired City staff who have been brought back to help process specific applications — in most cases, applications that the staff members had managed in prior to retirement.⁶

All of the development planning positions, it is important to note, undertake the various tasks involved in processing development applications. The specific tasks vary by position; however, all positions are focused on assessing and moving the development applications through to approval.

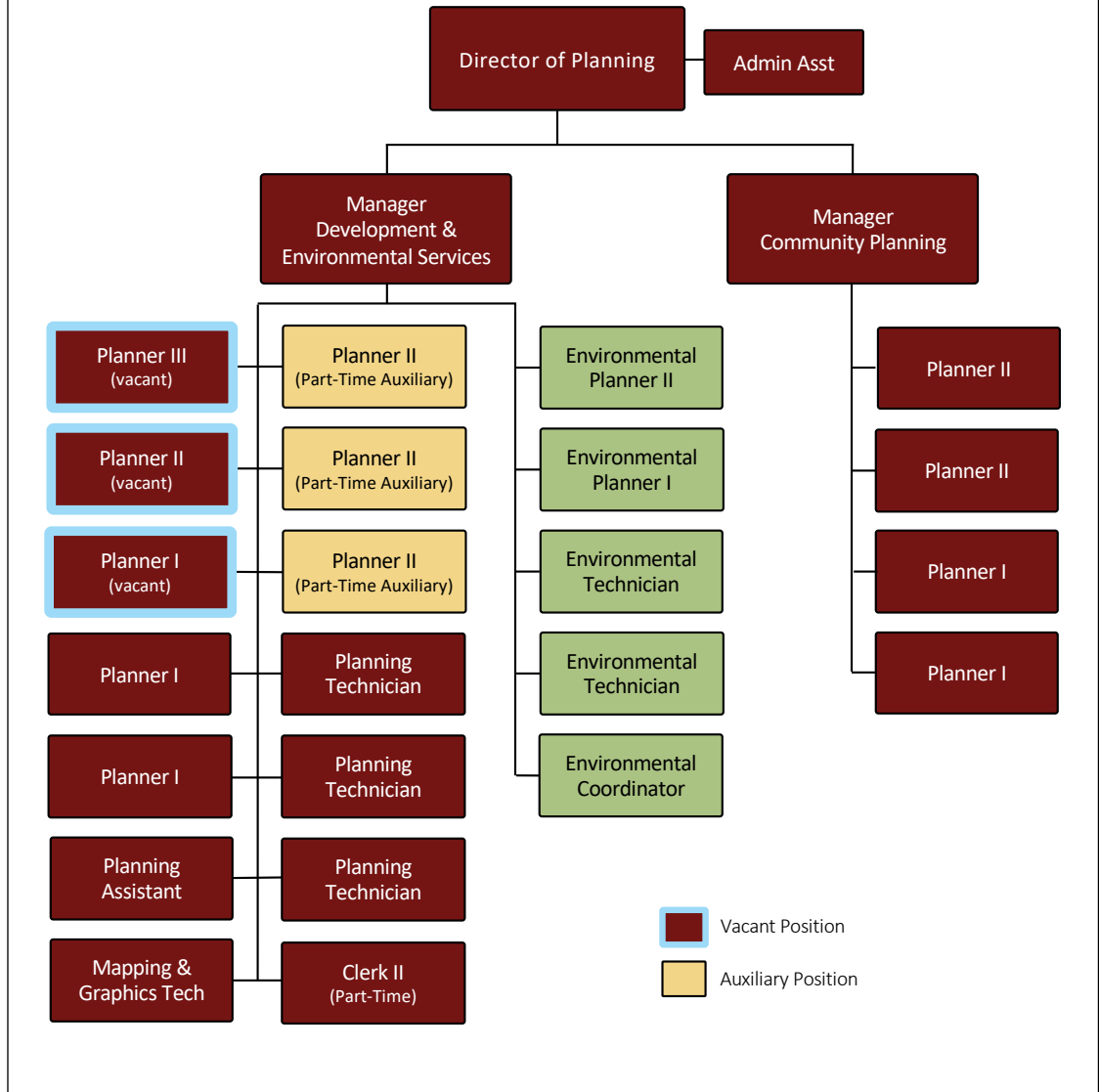
The environmental planning group consists of five (5) full-time positions, all of which report to the Manager of Development & Environmental Services. Included in the group are one (1) Environmental Planner II, one (1) Environmental Planner I, two (2) Environmental Technicians and one (1) Environmental Coordinator. The team as a whole works on environmental strategies, plans and policies, green infrastructure initiatives, the issuance and enforcement of tree permits, and the review development applications for compliance with environmental development permit area guidelines.

- *Community Planning* — This section has four (4) Planners — two (2) Planners II and two (2) Planners I — reporting to the Manager of Community Planning. All of these positions are focused primarily of planning policy matters, including review of the City's OCP, the creation of Area Plans for placement in the OCP, neighbourhood plans and other related matters. The planners provide input on development applications that may not conform to the City's planning policy direction.

⁶ The three part-time auxiliary Planner II positions combine to equal approximately 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE).



Figure 2.1
Planning Department
Current Organization Chart



Engineering Services

The Engineering Services Division is comprised of the Engineering Department and the Engineering Operations Department, both of which are headed by a Director who reports to the General Manager of Engineering Services. Engineering Services is focused on the planning, construction, maintenance, operation and replacement of City infrastructure services, including roads and transportation, water, sanitary sewers and drainage. The Division is responsible for ensuring that development in the municipality is properly serviced, and for understanding and addressing the impacts of development on existing infrastructure systems.



The Engineering Department in the Division consists of four sections, each of which is headed by a Manager. One section — Infrastructure Development — deals with land development matters that arise through the development services function. Staff in the section review development applications to:

- understand the impacts of proposed developments on municipal services
- identify, based on the requirements in the *Subdivision & Development Servicing Bylaw No. 4800*, service deficiencies as well as studies that the applicant must provide related to transportation, water, sanitary sewer and storm water management
- receive and assess off-site infrastructure design drawings and cost estimates, submitted by applicants to address the service deficiencies
- inspect the off-site works constructed by applicants, at their cost and based on the approved design drawings, to address the deficiencies
- issue Certificates of Completion and Certificates of Acceptance for the constructed off-site works

All off-site works constructed by applicants through the development services function as a condition of development approval are ultimately inherited by the City and maintained by staff in Engineering Operations.

Figure 2.2 presents an organization chart for the Engineering Department. The focus of the chart is the Infrastructure Development section; however, the full Department is shown since staff in other sections provide input and advice to Infrastructure Development on specific infrastructure impacts.

Building Department

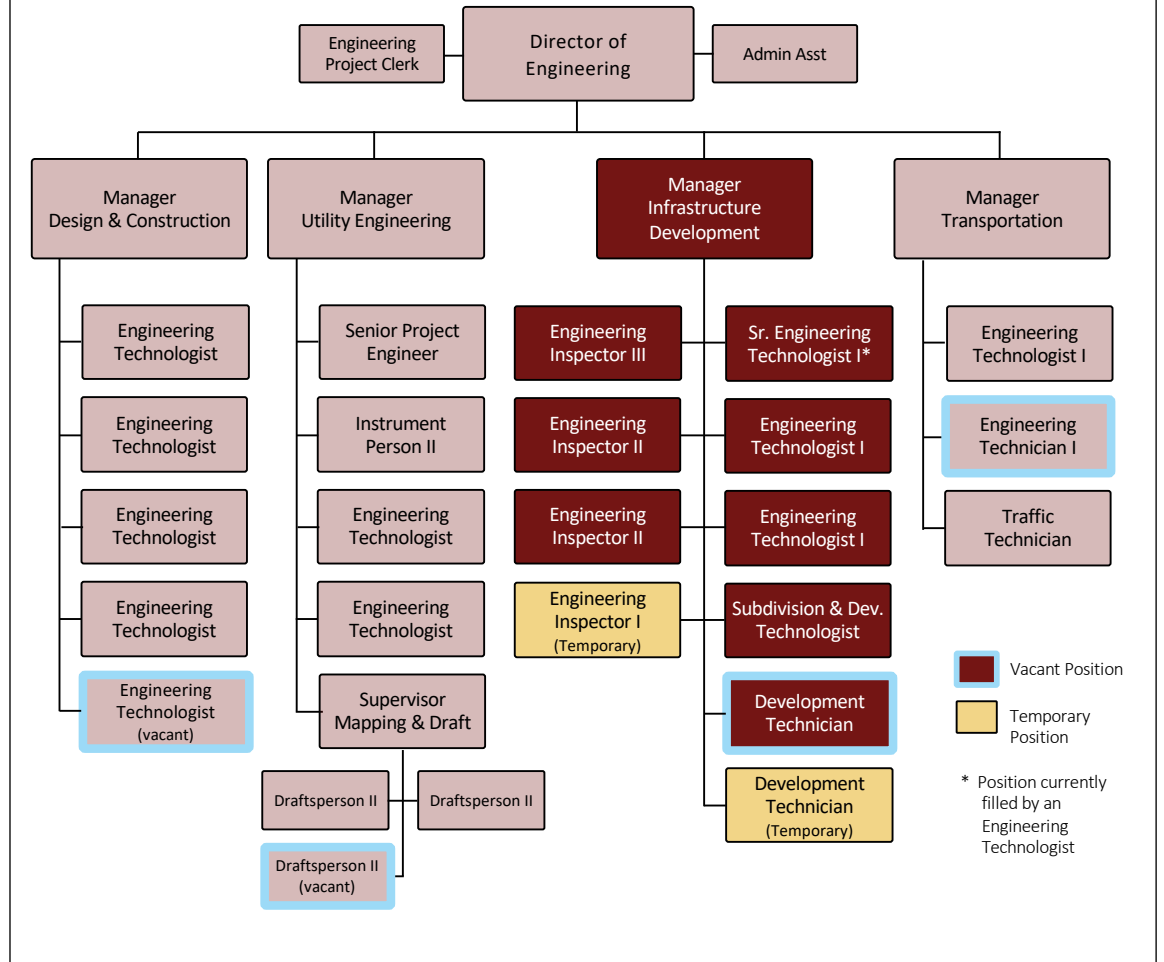
The City's Building Department is included alongside the Planning Department in the Planning and Development Services Division. The Building Department is comprised primarily of Plan Reviewers and Building Inspectors who are involved in review of building permit applications, the issuance of building permits, and the inspection of permitted construction. These activities are undertaken through the building permit function which, as noted earlier, is separate from the development services function for the purposes of this report.

In addition to Plan Reviewers and Building Inspectors, however, the Building Department is also home to Development Service Technicians (DSTs). The DSTs are attached to the Building Department, but work at the City's one-stop application centre on the main floor in City Hall. Applications for all types of land development applications, engineering applications, building applications and others are submitted by property owners (or their agents) to the one-stop centre.

There are seven (7) DST positions at the City. The City is in the process of training all DSTs to be able to receive, vet and provide information on all types of applications.



**Figure 2.2
Engineering Department
Current Organization Chart**



Other Departments

Development applications received by the Planning Department are regularly referred to staff in other City departments or work groups for comment and, in some cases, approval. Staff in other departments or groups are also invited to pre-application meetings to identify impacts, issues and opportunities aimed at helping potential applicants frame their applications. Key departments and groups involved in reviews and pre-application meetings include Community Planning, Engineering Operations, Parks, and Maple Ridge Fire & Rescue.

APPROVAL PROCESSES

Every City develops and follows processes to receive, review and approve development applications — the City of Maple Ridge is no exception. The processes required for a proposed development project will be shaped by the type and location of the project being proposed, and the number of approvals required. Proposed



developments that require a change in zoning, for example, will follow the rezoning process which involves Council and the community. In most cases, such projects will also require a development permit and subdivision approval, both of which are granted through their own separate processes which overlap with the rezoning process.

The complete lists of steps for staff to follow in the City's different approval processes are set out in the municipality's file management software system (currently the AMANDA platform). The full lists contain significant detail and are not reproduced for this report.⁷ Figure 2.3 presents, instead a simplified version of Maple Ridge's rezoning process to give a sense of how applications are considered by the City, as well an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of staff, Council, the community and applicants.

Simplified Rezoning Process

Figure 2.3 divides the rezoning process into four phases:

- *Pre-Application Phase* — The process begins prior to any formal application being submitted with a pre-application meeting. Development proponents request these meetings with the Planning Department to present and discuss their proposed developments at a conceptual level. The meetings are chaired by a Planning staff member, but typically involve staff from other departments and sections.

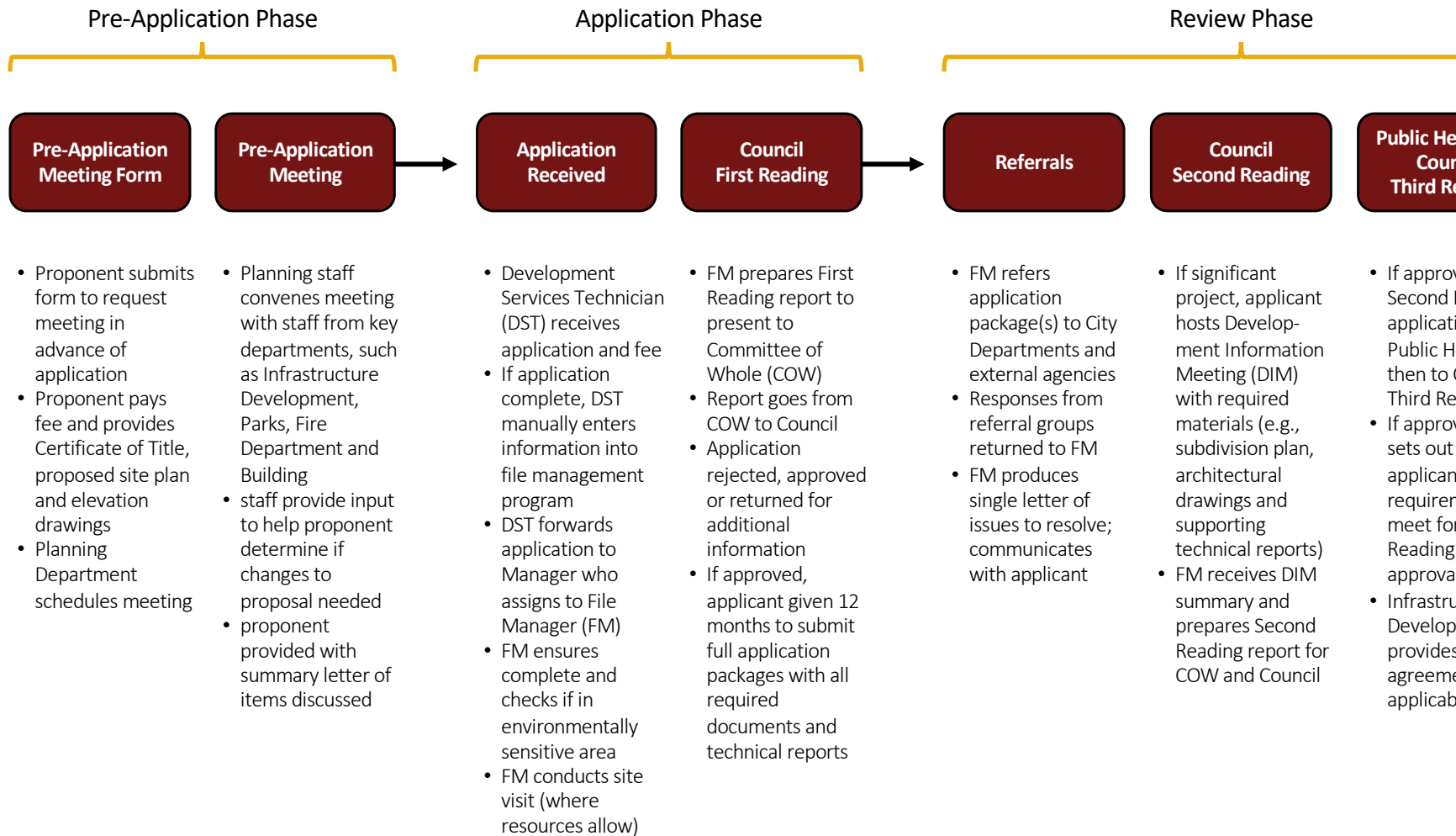
Prior to the meeting, staff attendees review the proponent's pre-application meeting request form with its description of the proposed development. Staff also review the attached site plan and elevation drawings submitted by the proponent. At the meeting, staff discuss the proposal with the proponent and identify known or potential requirements, issues and concerns. All feedback provided to the proponent is intended to help strengthen the proposal and prevent problems from arising during formal application review process. A faster and smoother approval process is the goal of the pre-application meeting.

Pre-application meetings have been a feature at the City of Maple Ridge for several years, as they have in many other places. The City has always recommended the meetings for proponents of projects that require rezoning, subdivision and/or development permits. In early 2022, however, the City made the meetings a requirement for proponents of most development proposals, including all commercial, industrial and multi-family proposals, single-family residential subdivisions with more than two lots, and developments on steep slopes, on a floodplain or near a watercourse. These

⁷ The rezoning process, for example, includes over 75 separate steps.



Figure 2.3
Simplified Current Rezoning Process





developments require a pre-application meeting as part of the rezoning process, but also as part of the subdivision and development permit processes.

- *Application Phase* — All development applications are submitted by proponents in person to the Development Services Technicians at the City's one-stop application centre. Checklists are provided online to guide applicants in assembling all materials that must be included in order for an application to be accepted as complete.

DSTs that receive the applications conduct an initial check to ensure the packages include all necessary documents. The Technicians then enter the information into the City's file management software platform (AMANDA) to create a folder that can be shared with staff across departments. The information, it should be noted, must be entered manually — the City's version of AMANDA does not allow applicants to digitally submit applications through an online portal that would automatically create the necessary file.

Once created, the application file is forwarded as a hard copy package to the Manager of Development & Environmental Planning. The Manager assigns responsibility for the application file to a Planner or Planning Technician based on existing workloads and the proposed development's level of complexity. At the City there is only stream through which applications are processed. All applications are assigned to and processed by staff in the order in which they are received.⁸ The Planner or Planning Technician who receives the file becomes the File Manager, responsible for steering the application through the approval process, and for being the primary point of contact between the applicant and the City.

One of the first tasks for the File Manager is prepare a First Reading report on the proposed rezoning. At Maple Ridge, applications for rezoning are taken to Council (through Council's Committee of the Whole) early in the application approval process prior to the submission by the applicant and the review by staff of technical reports, a complete site layout, elevation drawings and other documents.

Maple Ridge's approach to First Reading is unique among municipalities, including cities in Metro Vancouver. The approach was introduced in the early 2000's as an opportunity for Council to provide early input on all rezoning proposals prior to formal staff review, and as a way to allow applicants to gauge Council's support for the proposal prior to investing significant funds on development consultants and technical reports. In all

⁸ Certain applications that are considered by Council or Senior Leadership to be particularly important to the community may be given priority in processing. Decisions on such priorities, however, are *ad hoc* in nature, not guided by formal policy.



other municipalities, rezoning applicants are required to submit technical reports and other supporting materials with the applications, prior to appearing before Council. Initial reports to Council in other municipalities provide the results of staffs' technical analyses of the files.

- *Review Phase* — The review phase is the most time- and effort-intensive part of the process. Following Council's approval at First Reading, the File Manager notifies the applicant of the need to submit the full application package (if not already provided) with all documents and reports identified in the application checklist. The File Manager then distributes — that is, refers — the application package to the managers of other City departments and sections that have responsibility for applying Maple Ridge's policies, regulations and servicing standards to proposed land developments. The specific list of internal referrals will be determined by the nature and location of the proposed development, but will typically include Infrastructure Development, Community Planning, Environmental Planning and Parks.⁹

Public agencies outside of the City may, depending on the proposed development, also receive a copy of the application package. The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure is one example.

All internal and external referral groups will make comments on and identify requirements related to the application. All comments and requirements will be sent to the File Manager for review, consolidation and communication to the applicant. Ideally, a single letter of issues for the applicant to address is developed and provided by the File Manager.

The community and Council have important roles to play in the review phase of the rezoning process. The community has an opportunity, first, to learn about the proposed development and its implications for the City in a Development Information Meeting (DIM). DIMs are required for rezonings that propose a change in land use or the development five or more dwelling units.¹⁰ The community has an additional opportunity to provide input at the Public Hearing, which takes place at the end of the review phase.

Council's involvement in this phase occurs, first, at Second Reading, which comes on the heels of the DIM. A report by the File Manager captures all of the comments from the referral groups, summarizes the input from the DIM and provides a recommendation for Council. The report goes first to Council's COW, then to Council itself. Following Second Reading, Council

⁹ In many cases, a rezoning application will be accompanied by applications for development permits, subdivision and/or other approvals. Reviewers in referral departments will receive the materials necessary to consider the City's requirements for all applicable approvals.

¹⁰ Through the development permit process, DIMs are also required for commercial and industrial projects that do not require rezoning, but that are adjacent to residential land.



convenes and presides at the Public Hearing, then considers the application at Third Reading (no separate report is provided for Third Reading).

- *Approval Phase* — After Council approval at Third Reading, the File Manager sets out in a letter to the applicant the Final Reading requirements. At the same time, the Infrastructure Development Manager sends to the File Manager the servicing agreement and cost estimate that outlines the development servicing infrastructure that must be provided to meet the conditions set out in the Preliminary Layout Approval provided to the applicant (for subdivision approval) after Third Reading.¹¹

The File Manager submits a report to Council for Final Reading. Where applicable, the report includes development permit and/or variance permit materials required for Council to provide those approvals, as well.

Other Approval Processes

The City has a detailed process in place for the receipt, review and approval of applications for development permits; formal, written processes for development variance permit applications and applications for subdivision approval have not been created. Wherever possible, Maple Ridge (similar to all cities) receives and processes applications together. Final approvals must follow a specific order to ensure that applicants do not obtain approval to subdivide land or develop property that has not been formally rezoned to accommodate the proposed development. For the most part, however, processes proceed concurrently.

TECHNOLOGY

The departments and sections in Maple Ridge that are involved in the City's development services function currently use the AMANADA software platform to manage application files. The platform is intended to allow staff to share and provide input on application files, prompt action on the part of reviewers, generate communications to send to applicants, and track the progress of applications through the approval processes.

The current platform — and, more significantly, staffs' approach to using it — has a number of shortcomings that make it less than ideal as an application management system for the City. The current version, for example, either does not have or has not been configured to allow for the online submission of applications and materials through an applications portal. Applications submitted to the City must be entered manually into the system by DSTs. The current version is also not able to store or transmit attachments to applications — a shortcoming that makes it difficult for the City to maintain a single set of digital files. Finally, the system does not allow applicants to track their own applications. Applicants are expected, instead, to seek

¹¹ Applications for subdivision (where required) are processed concurrently with the rezoning application. Final adoption of the rezoning is a condition, however, for final subdivision approval.



updates from File Managers who, in turn, are expected to put aside their work, identify where an application sits and report back their findings.

The City was successful in 2021 in its application for funding through the provincial *Local Government Development Approvals Program* to assist in the purchase of a new development applications management software platform. A multi-disciplinary team of City staff has worked to review platform options, and is in the process of procuring the preferred system. The new system will have the potential to significantly improve information flow, sharing, retention and management, and to expedite approvals.

INFORMATION TO APPLICANTS

The processes for reviewing and approving applications for development can be quite complex, with multiple submission requirements, conditions for approval, and steps to take. Over time the degree of complexity has increased considerably in response to new regulations and expectations at the local, regional and provincial levels. To assist applicants and their consultants in understanding the processes and requirements, the City of Maple Ridge, similar to most municipalities, produces and makes available a broad range of information materials. Materials that applicants can find and download on the City's website include:

- copies of all development bylaws, including the *Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 7060*, *City of Maple Ridge Zoning Bylaw No. 7600*, *Maple Ridge Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw No. 4800*, and *Maple Ridge Development Procedures Bylaw No. 5879*
- the City's application form for all development approvals, along with supplemental forms
- twelve checklists that identify the requirements for different applications
- development permit guidelines and checklists for all permit areas
- reference documents on key information items, including application fees, community amenity contributions, DIMs, street trees, and basic regulations that apply in each zone in the City
- thirteen guides and brochures to outline (at a high level) the approval processes, and the information required in key supporting reports
- twenty checklists, guidelines and regulations specifically related to environmental planning requirements
- design and construction documents to follow in the construction of development works

APPLICATIONS AND INFORMATION REQUESTS

Application Numbers

In an effort to better understand the level of development activity in Maple Ridge, the numbers of different types of development applications received by the City were collected from the City for the past five years. Figure 2.4 presents the data.¹²

¹² Comparative data from other municipalities are presented in Chapter 3.

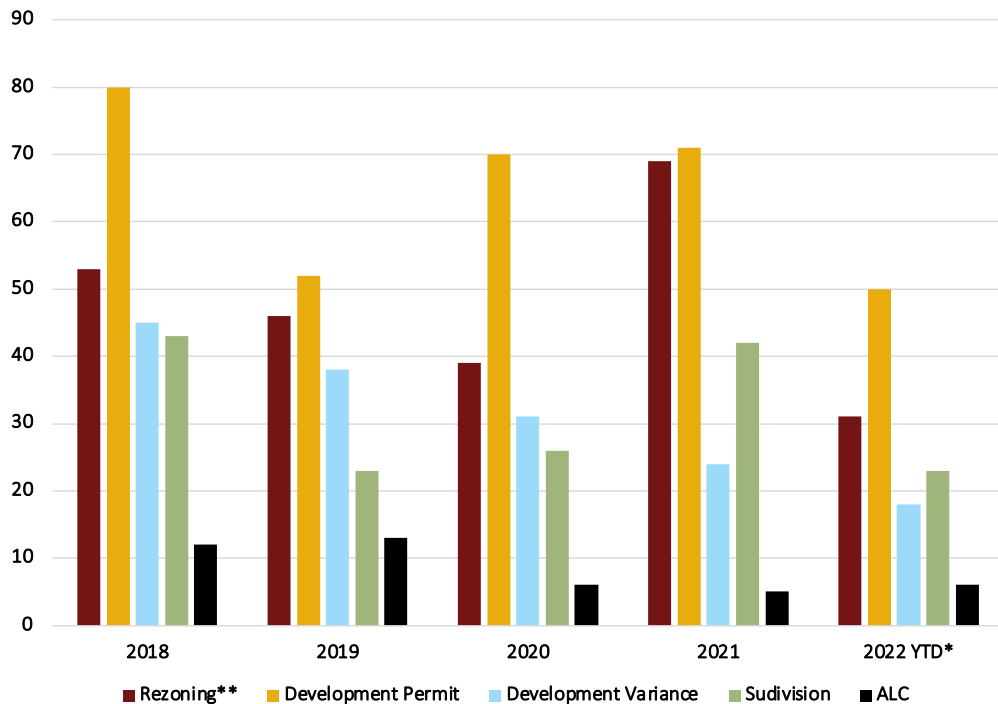


In reviewing the figure, certain limitations inherent in the data are important to highlight. It is important to note, for example, that the numbers in the figure show how many individual development applications were received by City staff each year, but provide no sense of the varying level of complexity associated with different files. It can be assumed that some of the files processed by staff over the time period were relatively simple in nature with few complicating factors. It can also be assumed, however, that other files were complex in nature, requiring the involvement of staff from several departments, and significant interaction with applicants and their professionals. The time and effort required to process applications with different levels of complexity can vary considerably.

It is also important to note that the processing of files received in one year can — and often will — extend into subsequent years. Files approved in any one year may include the files received in a previous year, but also files received and processed in the current year. The impact on City resources may be greater than that which is implied by focusing on totals received in single years.

Finally, Figure 2.4 does not show the number of building permits received by the Building Department that are referred for comment to Planners, Engineering

Figure 2.4
Development Applications Received by Type
2018 to 2022 (October)



* January to end of September, 2022

** OCP Amendments, where required, are handled as part of rezoning applications



Technicians, Engineers and others. Building permit applications that are not connected to rezonings or other applications are typically referred by the Building Department to these other staff. The need to review and provide comments on these permit applications add to the workloads of staff.

Information Requests

The City regularly receives information requests from property owners, developers, realtors and others on land use regulations that apply to, and on the development potential of, specific parcels of land in Maple Ridge. In general, requests are made by telephone or email, or in person at the application centre in City Hall. Requests are taken and, for the most part, addressed by the DSTs. When DSTs are unable to provide answers, requests are passed to the Planning Assistant in the Planning Department. Requests that cannot be answered by the Planning Assistant are elevated to the Planner of the Day (POD). The POD is a designation assigned a rotating basis to the Planning Technicians and Planners in the Department.¹³ Each day, one Technician or Planner designated as the POD will be available to take calls and answer questions at the front counter that the DSTs and Planning Assistant are not able to answer.

The POD service is intended for information requests that require the professional knowledge of a Planner (or Planning Technician), but that do not require consultation with other departments or research by the POD. Ideally, requests handled by the POD should take no more than 30 minutes.¹⁴ Persons with requests that require consultation with other departments, and/or greater time and effort on the part of Planning staff, are re-framed as land use inquiries (LUIs).

LUIs are formal requests for land use information on a particular property. They are used to provide information such as preliminary comments on engineering servicing and possible road dedication, interpretations of the *Zoning Bylaw* related to a property, watercourse setback requirements and other items. They are submitted by the property owner (or its authorized agent) using the Planning Department's *Land Use Inquiry Application Form*. A fee of \$255.00 applies.

The City records numbers of telephone and in-person information requests, as well as numbers of LUIs. Figure 2.5 presents numbers tracked by staff for recent years. The volume of requests handled by the PODs is not recorded. Anecdotally, staff report that POD requests range from five to fifty per day; a typical day sees ten.

Application Processing Times

The time it takes a city to process different types of development applications is an important metric. It is also a metric that can be defined and calculated differently across municipalities, and that must be unpacked to fully appreciate. A municipality that "starts the clock" at the time of application acceptance and keeps it running until

¹³ Several (but not all) municipalities offer the POD service.

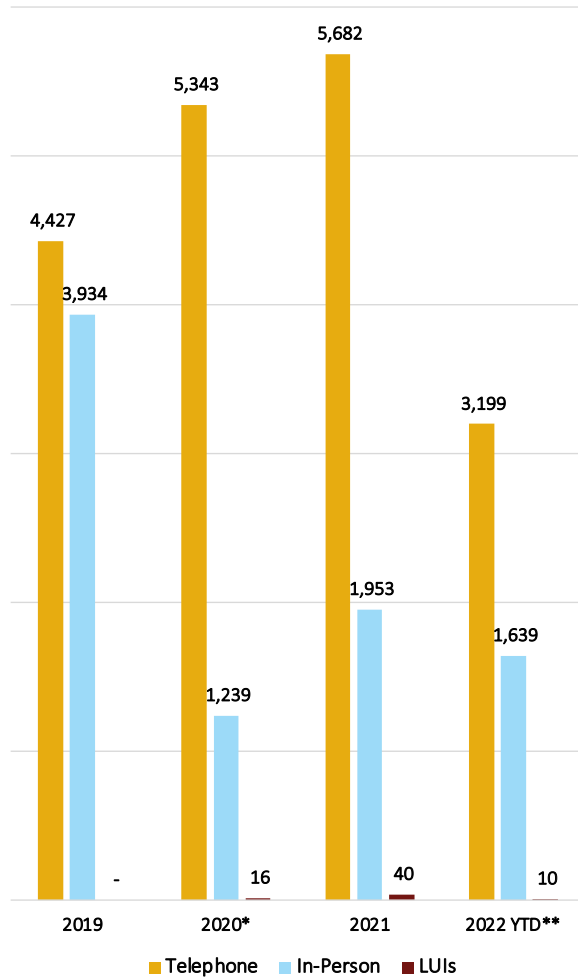
¹⁴ The reality in Maple Ridge is somewhat different, as is explored in Chapter 3.



final approval, for example, will report considerably different times than an organization that "stops the clock" for the periods of time during which the applicant is responding to staff requests for information.

In response to the consultant's request, City staff compiled processing times using data from the AMANDA file management system. The findings are presented in Figure 2.6. The times in the figure account for the period beginning with the acceptance of an application, and ending with final approval. No deductions have been made for periods during which applicants were responding to staff requests of information requirements. Applications that were processed outside of the AMANDA system through some other approach are not reflected in the data,¹⁵ nor are applications that began prior to January 1, 2019, or that at the time of writing (November 2022) remain open.

Figure 2.5
Land Use Planning Information Requests

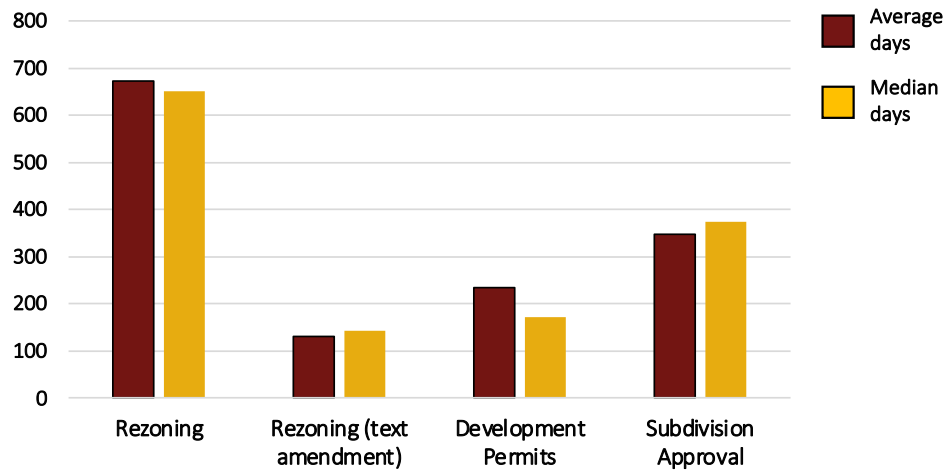


* COVID-19 forced closure of City Hall in the spring of 2020
** Telephone and In-Person from January to September; LUIs from January to end of June

¹⁵ There is considerable variability among staff in the level of reliance on and use of AMANDA in processing application files.



Figure 2.6
Application Processing Times*



* Data include all Rezoning and Subdivision applications accepted after January 1, 2019, and approved before October 1, 2022; and all Development Permits opened after January 1, 2020, and approved before October 1, 2022. Includes only files managed through AMANDA.



CHAPTER 3

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Over the course of several months, all City managers and staff involved in the development services function were interviewed by the consultant — some more than once — as were a number of developers and development professionals with experience in Maple Ridge and in other Lower Mainland municipalities. A range of materials and statistics were obtained from the City and reviewed. The consultant also undertook a considerable amount of comparative research on similar-size, high-growth municipalities in British Columbia, primarily in the Lower Mainland. Based on findings from the interviews, review of materials and comparative research, the consultant identified a set of issues that the City may wish to consider in its efforts to strengthen the function. The issues are explored in this chapter of the report under the following headings:

- Information Requests
- Council Involvement
- Delegation of Approvals
- Referral of Applications
- File Manager Model
- Application Streams
- Communications and Engagement
- Technology
- Infrastructure Development
- Environmental Services
- Organizational Culture
- Staffing Levels

All issues are outlined in detail; observations specific to Maple Ridge are presented. Recommendations on each of the issues are offered in the report's final chapter.

The issues examined, it should be emphasized, do not represent the definitive list of points raised by stakeholders and staff or identified by the consultant. In the consultant's judgement, however, the set of selected issues highlights the concerns and opportunities that are the most important for the City to address.

NATURE OF REVIEWS

Reviews are undertaken by municipalities to critically examine a part of the organization, a service or — in the case of the current exercise — a function. Questions are asked, materials are examined, and comparisons are considered in an effort to identify issues to address and changes to make. Staff who work in the function may agree that such reviews have value and as well as the potential to improve outcomes for the organization and those it serves. Staff may also, however, feel unsettled by the scrutiny that is inherent to reviews, and concerned about the



changes that may ensue. These feelings are understandable and need to be taken into account when presenting reviews and implementing recommendations.

It is also important in reviews to highlight not only the issues to address and improvements to make, but the strengths that are in place and the accomplishments that have been achieved. Consider the following strengths and accomplishments in the Maple Ridge development services function:

- *Commitment* — In interviews with the consultant, staff involved in the function exhibited a strong commitment to the community and its future development. Staff also showed significant commitment to and support for their colleagues in the function, as well as the organization as a whole.
- *Initiative* — There are several examples of individual staff finding solutions to concerns, and creating small improvements to the application review process. Individuals have created checklists and templates, collected data, undertaken comparative research on best practices, and eliminated unnecessary referrals, all in an effort to streamline the review process.
- *Pre-Application Assistance* — The decision by Maple Ridge to mandate pre-application meetings is a best practice. These meetings provide valuable feedback and guidance to prospective applicants. They can provide greater certainty to applicants and result in more complete and better quality applications.
- *Approachability* — Development community representatives interviewed for the study raised concerns related to turn-around times, requirements and file updates. Representatives did not, however, point to concerns related to the approachability of staff. On the contrary, several developers highlighted staffs' professionalism and desire to help despite challenges that complicate the review process.
- *Openness* — Staff interviewed by the consultant expressed an openness to change — change, that is, in processes, structure, organizational culture and other key elements of the workplace. Staff are excited about the prospect of certain changes already underway, namely the selection of a new file management software platform. There is a widespread openness and desire to change what is necessary to provide a consistently high level of service.

INFORMATION REQUESTS

Managing Inquiries

As illustrated in Figure 2.5, the City receives a significant number of telephone and in-person land use planning information requests each year (email requests are also received). Individuals making requests may be seeking information and/or clarification on a variety of development services topics, including:



- the status of and expected turn-around times for applications that have been submitted to the City and are under review
- application requirements, and steps to take to submit an application
- reasons for the City deciding that applications are incomplete
- fees required and how to pay them
- the development potential of, and/or development restrictions related to, a specific property, in particular one that may be available for purchase
- infrastructure needs for a property, and a sense of costs involved
- interpretations of a development bylaw or regulation

Most inquiries that come to the City are received initially by the Development Services Technicians or Planning Assistant.¹⁶ The DSTs are physically situated at the Application Centre counter in City Hall, and are the first point of contact for all in-person inquiries and most telephone inquiries. The Planning Assistant is seated behind the front counter, and is able to attend in-person inquiries, take telephone questions when requested by DSTs, and respond to emails.

Inquiries that cannot be answered by the DSTs are referred to the Planning Assistant.¹⁷ Inquiries that cannot be answered by the Planning Assistant are directed to the Planner of the Day (POD). As noted in the previous chapter, the POD designation rotates among Planning Technicians and Planners on a daily basis. The POD is physically situated on the second floor of City Hall in the Planning Department's regular workspace. Staff report that while some of the information requests referred to the POD can be addressed relatively quickly, it is not uncommon for staff in the position to continue working on more complex requests in the day(s) following their shifts.¹⁸ Some complex inquiries will be presented by the POD to colleagues for input and assistance at a weekly Friday planning meeting.

An inquiry that cannot be addressed in a reasonable amount of time by the POD, even with input from colleagues, will be treated as a Land Use Inquiry (LUI). The party that made the request for information will be asked to submit an LUI application form and pay the associated \$255.00 fee. As indicated in Figure 2.5, the number of LUIs handled by the City each year is small — exceedingly small relative to the numbers of telephone and in-person inquiries received.

Observations

The City's efforts to receive and address land use planning information requests reflect a genuine desire on the part of staff to help residents, property owners, developers, realtors, existing and prospective applicants, and other customers get

-
- ¹⁶ Inquiries that are specific to an existing application — particularly an application for a large development — may be submitted directly to the application File Manager or referral department.
- ¹⁷ There is one Planning Assistant position in the department. One Planning Technician position works spends up to half of its time as a Planning Assistant to assist with inquiries.
- ¹⁸ The department does not collect data on the PODs to track the numbers of inquiries handled, types of inquiries, time required to close inquiries, or other points. The findings cited in this section emerged from interviews with staff.



the information they need to make development-related decisions. The current method of receiving and processing such inquiries, however, could be improved to help staff manage their own time, and manage — or in some cases reset — the expectations of parties seeking information from the City. Consider the following points:

➤ **Development Services Technicians**

The DSTs were not interviewed as part of this review; they were, however, interviewed as part of the 2021 review of the Building Permit Function. In that review the observation was made that City needed to provide greater training and guidance to the DSTs to enable them to confidently manage inquiries in all areas of development, including planning and land use, infrastructure, environment and building. Changes made from the *Building Permit Function Review* placed the DSTs under a new manager in the Building Department. The DSTs now have strong guidance and leadership; technical training is an ongoing need to enable them to manage an ever-higher proportion of inquiries.

➤ **Information Resources**

The entire system of handling inquiries at the City would benefit from efforts to make additional online resources publicly available and easily accessible to persons who seek information. To be sure, the City's *Zoning Bylaw*, *OCP Bylaw* and most other information sources can be accessed online already, as can various bulletins and guidance documents. It is not easy for users, however, to find and apply the information in the various materials to an individual property. The Cities of Surrey and Coquitlam make available sophisticated digital mapping systems that can be used by individuals to get a considerable amount of information. These systems, along with others, serve to pre-empt inquiries. Their availability also makes it possible for staff to re-direct some inquiries to the online tools.

➤ **Planner of the Day**

The POD position is not unique to Maple Ridge — several (but not all) municipalities in high-growth regions make use of the POD initiative. Maple Ridge appears to be more unique, however, in its practice of having POD staff continue to work on enquiries in the day(s) following their shifts. Inquiries that follow the POD to his or her regular position, post-POD shift, occupy the staff member's time and energy that are supposed to be focused on existing application files for which he or she is responsible. The practice, which appears to be based on a desire to provide good customer service, results in poor customer service for existing applicants whose files have been assigned to the staff member. These customers face delays and frustrations.

The POD initiative is designed to enable the City to respond in a relatively quick manner to inquiries that require input from a professional planner, and that cannot be handled by front-line counter staff. The initiative is not designed as an intake point for complicated or time-consuming inquiries that, if addressed,



would impact a staff member's time available to review applications already received. Maple Ridge should consider the following types of changes to align the POD initiative with its intended purpose:

- Set a guideline to regulate the amount of time a POD will make available to address any single information request. At the City of Delta, the time limit is 30 minutes.
- Require any inquiry that in the POD's judgement will require more than 30 minutes of the POD's time to be submitted to the City as an LUI.
- Place the POD behind the front counter at the Application Centre so that he or she can interact more efficiently than at present with the DSTs and Planning Assistants, and easily attend to in-person inquiries that require the POD's input.

The City may also wish to consider restructuring the POD from a rotating, shift-based position to a permanent position for a Planning Technician or Planning I. The current approach impacts all Planners and Planning Technicians' time, and is disruptive to the department as a whole.¹⁹ The City of Kelowna has a permanent POD position held by a junior Planner who sits in the Kelowna's Application Centre. The position is back-stopped by a back-up POD that rotates among senior staff. This back-up POD is called upon only sparingly, but is useful to have in place.

➤ **Inquiries Database**

Maple Ridge does not at present have in place a database to record by property land use development inquiries that are submitted to the City, and corresponding responses that are provided. The lack of such a database makes the system both inefficient and prone to risk. In the current system, staff who are unaware of previous inquiries taken on a particular property end up answering repeat questions about the same parcel (in some cases from the same individuals who are seeking different answers). And, since staff are unaware of the answers that were given in the past by their colleagues, they risk providing contradictory or inconsistent information.

Upcoming advances in the City's application review technology platform (see later) provides an opportunity to put in place a proper inquiry tracking system.

COUNCIL INVOLVEMENT

Rezoning Process

As the elected governing body for the City of Maple Ridge, Council has an important

¹⁹ It should be emphasized that the Planners and Planning Technicians do take inquiries from existing applicants on whose files the staff are working. These inquiries would continue to be taken by these staff.



role to play in establishing the policies to guide and regulations to manage development in the community. Council also has a responsibility to receive and consider certain types of development applications, to approve the applications that Council deems to be in the community's interest, and reject applications that in Council's view are not.

Council's involvement in the development review process is a fundamental feature of our system of democratic local governance — Council's ongoing involvement is not a matter for debate. What can be considered, however, are changes to the level of Council's involvement. Consider the process for reviewing rezoning applications. As identified in Chapter 2, all applications for rezoning are presented to Council in the form of a bylaw amendment at the following points:

- *First Reading* — A staff report is prepared on the proposed development's land-use implications. The report speaks only to land use matters — it does not present information on development characteristics, servicing implications or other matters. The report is prepared prior to the applicant having provided, and prior to staff having reviewed, the necessary technical reports and drawings that are required to support any rezoning application. The report is prepared to give Council an opportunity to signal its willingness to consider the development proposal subject to the applicant providing additional information. The report is presented first to Council's Committee of the Whole, then to Council itself.
- *Second Reading* — Council receives a second staff report at Second Reading. This report captures the feedback provided by internal and external referral bodies that have reviewed the various technical reports and drawings. Anticipated servicing, transportation, community and other impacts are outlined for Council's consideration. A summary of the Development Information Meeting held by the application (where required) is also provided, as is a staff recommendation. The report is submitted for consideration first to Committee of the Whole, then to Council itself.
- *Public Hearing* — The application is referred by Council during Second Reading to Public Hearing. At the Public Hearing Council sits as a tribunal body, in place to hear the community's views on the proposed development. Staff prepare information documents and mapping.
- *Third Reading* — Council considers the application at Third Reading, which typically occurs at the first Council meeting following the Public Hearing. Conditions that must be met by the applicant within one year in order to receive final approval are set out by Council at Third Reading.
- *Final Reading* — Fourth or Final Reading of the bylaw occurs once the conditions for approval have been met. A staff report is prepared for Council's consideration.



Observations

Maple Ridge Council exercises a higher level of involvement in the rezoning process than most if not all other municipal councils, certainly in the Lower Mainland and other high-growth parts of the province. The City is unique, in particular, in its use of First Reading as an opportunity for Council to consider the merits of an application based solely on land use implications, without any information on other important impacts. In most if not all other municipalities, applications do not go to council for review until the professional staff have a clear understanding of, and are able to advise council on, the environmental, servicing, transportation, community and other anticipated impacts of a proposed project.²⁰

➤ First Reading

Maple Ridge's approach to First Reading was introduced by Council in the early 2000's as a way to give applicants a sense, prior to spending money on technical reports and drawings, of Council's willingness to support the proposed development. The initiative was also intended to bring to Council's attention all rezoning applications that come to the City, including those that in other municipalities may not be presented to Council following staff's technical review and identification of deficiencies.

These reasons may have been important in the early 2000's when development activity at the City and in the surrounding region was less significant and in many ways simpler than at present. Today, however, the approach to First Reading is problematic for at least three reasons:

- The approach is open to misuse by applicants who may seek First Reading approval not as the first step towards formal rezoning, but rather as a signal of Council support that can be used to enhance the marketability — and possibly the value — of the property.²¹
- Council has expressed frustration with the lack of information on development implications that is provided for consideration at First Reading. Council appears to be less comfortable than it may have been in earlier times to provide support without a clear understanding of what exactly is being proposed, and what it would mean for the City and the community.
- The approach to First Reading requires City staff to prepare a separate report and to present the report to Committee of the Whole, then to

²⁰ Some municipalities (e.g., Coquitlam) have a separate First Reading at which all implications will be considered, then combine Second and Third Readings. Other municipalities (e.g., Surrey) have a combined First and Second Reading at which implications are considered followed by a Third Reading. No municipalities other than Maple Ridge appear to have a separate First Reading for land use implications, followed by a separate Second Reading for the more significant implications, followed by a separate Third Reading to set out conditions for approval.

²¹ The City does not collect statistics to understand the prevalence of potential misuse.



Council. The time required for these extra steps adds to the overall processing time, and is not inconsequential.

The City should consider changing its current approach by combining First and Second Readings, as is done in many other municipalities.

➤ **Public Hearings**

For many years, municipalities have had the authority to waive public hearings for proposed amendments to a zoning bylaw in cases where the amendment is consistent with the official community plan. In 2021, Bill 26 changed the *Local Government Act* slightly to clarify and promote this authority. Bill 26 replaced the current wording which states that "a local government may waive" a public hearing, with the statement that "a local government is not required to hold" a public hearing.

Some municipalities responded to this change by amending their own Council procedure bylaws. The City of Surrey, for example, added new language:

"No public hearing is required for a proposed zoning bylaw which meets the following criteria:

- (a) it is in relation to a subdivision creating five or fewer new single family residential lots
- (b) the Official Community Plan is in effect for the area that is the subject of the zoning bylaw
- (c) it is consistent with the Official Community Plan..."

Decisions to not hold a public hearing in these types of cases help to reduce staff workload and make resources available for more complex development proposals. Maple Ridge should consider a similar approach.

DELEGATION OF APPROVALS

Delegation to Staff

Under the *Local Government Act*, the approval in Maple Ridge of certain types of development applications must come from the City's elected governing body — i.e., Council. Applications to change the *Official Community Plan* and *Zoning Bylaw*, for example, must always be made by Council.²² For certain types of applications, however, Council may choose to delegate the approval authority to a staff member, such as the Director of Planning. The provision to delegate is provided in an effort to streamline approvals and reduce the overall number of applications that compete for Council's time.

For many years, Council has had the ability under the *Act* to delegate approval authority for development permit applications. In 2021, changes to the *Local*

²² This requirement applies to all municipalities in the province.



Government Act under Bill 26 expanded Council's scope of delegation to include development variance permits for specific types of variances that are deemed to be minor in nature. Approval of development variance permits that propose to vary the following types of bylaw provisions may be delegated to staff:

- provisions related to siting, size and dimensions of buildings and permitted used in the *Zoning Bylaw*²³
- off-street parking and loading space requirements
- sign regulations
- specific screening and landscaping provisions

All delegation must be by bylaw, must set out criteria for determining what is minor, and must be accompanied by guidelines that staff must consider in making an approval decision.

Maple Ridge Council has delegated to the Director of Planning the authority to approve all development permits related to the protection of the natural environment. All other development permits and all development variance permits, however, must be approved by Council itself.

Observations

The scope of delegation for development approvals in Maple Ridge is on par with that in many other municipalities. A growing number of places, however, are expanding the range of development permits delegated to staff, and beginning to delegate approval for minor development variance permits. Examples of places include the City of Abbotsford, City of Surrey, City of North Vancouver, City of Chilliwack and the City of Burnaby. In all of these municipalities, the decision to delegate has been driven by a desire to reduce staff workload associated with the provision and delivery of reports to Council, allow Council to focus its (limited) time on significant applications, and shorten the processing time for development permits and minor development variance permits.

Maple Ridge should consider developing a more comprehensive delegation bylaw to include approval for most if not all development permits, and development variance permits wherever possible.

REFERRAL OF APPLICATIONS

Internal Referrals

Most if not all development applications received by the municipality will be referred by the File Manager in the Planning Department to staff in other departments in the City, a list of which may include:

- Environmental Services (Planning)
- Community Planning (Planning)

²³ Variances may not result in changes to density or permitted uses.



- Infrastructure Development (Engineering)
- Parks (Parks & Recreation)
- Transportation (Engineering)
- Utility Engineering (Engineering)

Staff in referral sections will review each application to determine the proposed development's degree of compliance to the development-related policies, regulations and/or technical standards set out by the City. Comments provided by staff will identify compliance gaps along with changes necessary to address the gaps. All comments are sent to the File Manager. The full list of internal referrals in any single case will vary to some degree by the nature of the development being proposed. In general, the larger and more complex a development proposal, the greater the number and range of internal referral groups.²⁴

Internal referrals are a feature of every development review process in every municipality. Planners in the Planning Department that receive and shepherd applications through the process do not have — and are not expected to have — the specialized technical knowledge required to understand and address the anticipated impacts of a proposed development on the utilities, drainage patterns, watercourses and other natural features, parks and trails, approved future land use patterns, transportation routes and other elements of a municipality. To ensure that all stated requirements are met, specialist staff members in the different referral groups need to review the applications received.

In some cities the internal referral phase of application review can be a "bottleneck" in the overall process. Delays can occur for a number of reasons, including:

- heavy workload in one or more referral group, related to the number of applications, complexity of applications and/or shortage of active staff
- outdated or incomplete standards, service plans or land use plans against which applications must be reviewed
- the need to obtain additional technical information or clarification from an applicant
- a lack of internal policies or processes to guide staff on turn-around times, and to set out expectations
- inter-departmental differences in priorities
- weak application tracking systems to prevent applications from being misplaced or forgotten
- a reliance on less experienced staff who, despite strong skills and commitment, may not be as proficient as others in reviewing applications

²⁴ Referrals to external agencies — Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, Fraser Health, Metro Vancouver, others — will also be made in many cases. The focus in this report, however is on internal referrals.



Observations

It is clear from the interviews with staff conducted for this assignment, and from the discussions with representatives from the development community, that delays are a feature of the referral phase in Maple Ridge. The magnitude of the issue is difficult to gauge accurately because the City does not accurately track through its existing AMANDA technology platform the amount of time an application sits with a referral group. Based on staff input, certain sections appear consistently able to complete their reviews and provide comments to the File Manager in relatively short order. Other sections, however, face persistent challenges to respond in a timely manner. The challenges are related to many of the reasons noted earlier, including:

- difficulty in filling vacant positions and a resulting higher work load for remaining staff
- a lack of experienced more senior staff who, by virtue of time spent on the job, tend to be able to process referrals efficiently
- the need to update service master plans and the service standards that flow from them²⁵
- poor application tracking systems that can (and do) result in applications sitting unattended for too long, and that can (and do) result in comments from referral groups being lost
- the absence of any stated expectations or internal requirements on turn-around times

Efforts to retain staff in Infrastructure Development would help considerably to reduce internal referral delays. If retention and subsequent recruitment are not successful, the City should consider filling staffing gaps, at least for the short term, with one or more contract technicians.²⁶ The City should also consider developing and implementing policies on acceptable turn-around times. Changes related to tracking systems are addressed under other issues later in the chapter.

One additional observation to note concerns the lack of uniformity among referral staff in the delivery of comments to the File Manager. In an ideal situation, all staff would be required to provide comments directly into the application folder in the City's AMANDA file management system. In Maple Ridge, staff are allowed to present their comments in any format they wish, through whichever medium they choose. Some staff input comments directly into the review folder in AMANDA. Other staff, however, put comments into a memo that is emailed as a Word or PDF document to the File Manager. Some staff put comments directly into the email that is sent.

²⁵ The City has an updated master plan for water infrastructure but not for sewer.

²⁶ This potential change would be subject to the City's *Collective Agreement* with CUPE Local 622. The consultant's review of the *Agreement* did not reveal any prohibitions on using contractors for limited periods of time, providing all qualified staff that wish to provide the service have been given the opportunity. It is worth emphasizing, as well, that the City has made use of contract Engineering Technicians in the past, and makes regular use of contract Engineering Inspectors.



This lack of uniformity in the delivery of comments by reviewers reflects the varying levels of proficiency and comfort in using the current AMANDA application review platform. Varying levels of comfort with technology exist in every organization and need to be addressed. The way to address them, however, is not to accommodate individuals' preferences for email or memos, but rather to give staff the training and practice needed to use the system properly.²⁷ Accommodation of individuals' preferences makes the review process less efficient than it could be, and serves to undermine the City's file management system and desire for a single repository of information on each application file.

FILE MANAGER MODEL

The Role

When a development application is submitted to the City, the Development Services Technicians that receives the file creates an application folder in AMANDA, along with a manual application folder. The manual folder (with a reference to the AMANDA folder) is sent to the Manager of Development and Environmental Services. The Manager assigns the file to a Planner or Planning Technician based on the proposed development's level of complexity, existing staff workloads, staff experience with similar files, and other factors.

The Planner or Planning Technician who is assigned the file takes on the role of File Manager. As the title suggests, the File Manager is the City staff member responsible for shepherding the application file through the City's review process from start to finish. In the role, the staff member is responsible for:

- introducing him- or herself (by letter) as the File Manager to the applicant, and advising of any additional submissions required to proceed through the review process
- determining which departments and sections in the City, and which agencies external to the City, need to review and provide comments on the application
- ensuring that all referrals are sent out, and that all necessary reviews are undertaken
- receiving all comments from reviewers
- bringing together the different comments from City referral departments, identifying priority needs and trade-offs, and putting forward a single response letter from the City with issues for the applicant to address²⁸

²⁷ Several staff noted in interviews with the consultant that they have never received training on the use of AMANDA.

²⁸ Trade-offs and priorities may be determined by the File Manager in consultation Development Services managers. Trade-offs involving infrastructure needs are typically determined within Engineering prior to being presented to the File Manager. Additional potential trade-offs involving services need to made in consultation with the Infrastructure Development Manager who is responsible for addressing implications of developments for City infrastructure.



- reviewing the file against the City's development planning policies and regulations (e.g., *Zoning Bylaw*, development permit guidelines)
- providing a letter to the applicant to identify requirements and issues that must be satisfied for the application to proceed
- working with the applicant and, where necessary, the referral groups to resolve issues identified
- preparing and presenting all reports, complete with recommendations, to Council and its Committee of the Whole²⁹

Throughout the process, the File Manager is the principal — if not the sole — point of contact between the City and the applicant. At the very least, all communication between the applicant and the City involves the File Manager.³⁰

The File Manager position is critical to the smooth flow of development applications through the City's review process. A good File Manager is able to ensure that the requirements and concerns from the City are brought together, balanced, communicated clearly to the applicant and understood by the applicant. A good File Manager ensures that all materials submitted by the applicant are received properly and distributed to the right referral groups. A good File Manager provides recommendations to Council that take into account the concerns and needs of the City as a whole.

Observations

The File Manager position can only work when applicants and other City staff recognize and respect the File Manager's authority. Staff across the organization, and applicants dealing with the City, need to support the File Manager as the principal point of contact.

The File Manager system works well in many cases in Maple Ridge as it does in other municipalities. At the City, however, it does not appear to be uncommon for staff in referral departments to deal directly with applicants on issues and requirements that may be important to an individual department, and/or that may be unpopular with an applicant. It is understood that, in most instances, it is the applicant who initiates contact directly to staff in the referral departments, either to better understand an issue that has been identified, or in an effort to move an application through the process faster.

Applicants — in particular, applicants seeking permission for large development projects — are under significant pressure to obtain development approval as quickly as possible. Every month that passes without approval adds to an applicant's carrying costs, and can put strain on an applicant's relationships with its contactors and

²⁹ Planning Technicians write but do not present Council reports. Presentations are made by Planners.

³⁰ In several places, including Maple Ridge, Infrastructure Development will communicate directly with a proponent's engineering consultants. All correspondence, however, includes the File Manager.



financers. In this context it is understandable that applicants may initiate contact with managers staff in referral departments. The desire for direct contact may be even more understandable in cases where the applicant has not received any updates on the status of an application, and has no ability to independently determine where in the process an application sits.³¹

Empathy for applicants aside, the City's practice of allowing applicants to bypass the File Manager and directly contact staff in referral departments undermines the File Manager model and reduces the efficiency of the overall process. The practice also relieves the File Manager of accountability related to:

- keeping applicants informed of the status of applications, and any issues that staff have identified³²
- managing trade-offs in the priorities and concerns put forward by different departments
- ensuring consistency in communications between the City and an individual applicant

The expectation that staff in referral departments will respect the role and authority of the File Manager needs to be made clear and enforced. A formal written document on the role of File Manager and expectations for other staff may be required.³³

One additional observation concerns the communication of referral department comments by the File Manager. Most Planners and Planning Technicians in the City understand that when they are serving as File Manager, they are expected not only to communicate issues and requirements from referral departments to applications, but also to bring together comments in a way that:

- recognizes trade-offs among concerns and interests raised
- resolves conflicts in the different comments
- presents a single letter and set of stipulations to meet

To fulfill this role, File Managers must exercise judgement. Some staff in the position either do not understand this aspect of the role, or do not feel able to scrutinize comments and — where necessary — reject concerns or interests that fall outside of established requirements, and/or impose expectations on applicants that the File Manager feels are inappropriate. These File Managers choose, instead, to pass on all comments presented by referral departments, without edits, to the applicants.

³¹ The City does not have an online portal that applicants can access to monitor the progress of their files.

³² Applicants interviewed by the consultant reported significantly different experiences in communications from File Managers. Some File Manager are proactive and work to keep applicants informed. Others appear to make no effort to connect.

³³ The City of Kelowna has such a document for staff; other municipalities may as well.



It is important to clarify that File Managers should always seek clarification from referral departments where necessary, and should never hesitate to seek guidance from colleagues and managers in the Planning Department in assessing comments that are provided. It is also important that File Managers explain to referral departments why certain comments may be omitted from communications with an applicant. In all cases, however, the File Manager needs to exercise judgement and present referral department comments to applicants in a way that is clear and fair.

APPLICATION STREAMS

Single Stream

All applications that are submitted to the City are received into a single stream for the purpose of review. Applications are forwarded from the DSTs to the Manager of Development and Environmental Services, then assigned to File Managers in the order in which they are received. File Managers, similarly, initiate work on their files when the files are received, and in the order in which they arrive. Since every File Manager in Maple Ridge (and in every municipality) has a workload consisting of many files at any one time, new files that are assigned to the File Manager will often be placed in a queue and not opened immediately. Individual files move out of File Managers' queues in the order which they are received.

The receipt and management of applications using a single stream is not unique to Maple Ridge, but is also not ubiquitous across municipalities. Increasingly, cities recognize that while every application is important, and while every applicant has a legitimate expectation — indeed, a right — to receive prompt and fair treatment, not every proposed development is equal in terms of value to the community. Put differently, some applications are simply more important than others, and need to be recognized as such. Separate priority application streams for the review of these files can be useful.

Staff should not be expected (or allowed) to judge on their own which files are most important and deserving of access to the priority stream. To protect the City from charges of arbitrariness or favouritism, Council and senior management need to provide guidance. As well, to make a priority stream operate as intended, Council and Senior Leadership need to ensure that resources exist and are dedicated to the stream.

Observations

The following observations emerged from the consultant's interviews with City staff:

- As a way to manage workload, provide prompt service and reduce the number of files in the review process, some staff will expedite the review of applications that are straightforward and can be processed relatively quickly.
- Managers in the Planning Department understand that some proposed developments will be viewed by elected decision-makers as high-value



projects relative to others. Managers note that while there are no formal guidelines in place to identify such projects, managers have a good sense of which ones are priority. Where possible, efforts to advance these projects in the queue are made.

- A number of staff who act as File Managers expressed the view that all applications, regardless of investment value or type of development, should receive the same treatment.

As a municipality in a rapidly-growing and expensive metropolitan area, Maple Ridge has received and will increasingly receive interest from businesses and developers who seek areas in which to invest and expand. Maple Ridge also has, similar to every municipality, housing challenges that can best be addressed through the expedited approval and construction of new housing units. The City should consider changing its approach development applications to give priority to proposed developments that bring substantial investment to the area, deal with housing needs, or promote some other priority established by Council.

➤ **Development Concierge**

One idea that has been raised and discussed in a range of municipalities, but pursued by relatively few, concerns the creation of a Development Concierge (alternatively referred to as a Business Concierge). A Development Concierge is an individual or department that works directly with applicants who are seeking approval to develop high-value projects that meet specific conditions, and that are deemed priority by the municipal council.

The Development Concierge becomes involved early in the process at the pre-application stage to identify and help the applicant understand the requirements to meet and approvals to obtain. The Concierge stays involved through the entire process, working with the File Manager as well as internal and external referral groups to ensure time-sensitive responses, to coordinate comments, and to communicate with the applicant. The Concierge also works with applicants to ensure that they provide all required studies and reports in a timely fashion, and that they respond to the city's legitimate and legal needs.

The Concierge has the authority to bring together staff from referral departments to resolve conflicts and clarify requirements. The Concierge will also, as required, bring together applicants and City staff to find solutions and overcome impasses. On a regular (e.g., monthly) basis, the Concierge briefs the Chief Administrative Officer and key General Managers of progress and issues, and seeks intervention as required.

The Development Concierge initiative does not appear to exist in a formal sense



in British Columbia.³⁴ Municipalities in Ontario and the United States, however, have experimented and — in some instances — embraced the idea. One such municipality is the Town of Halton Hills (population 63,000) within the Greater Toronto Area. Halton Hills' Business Concierge program, profiled in Figure 3.1, provides an example for Maple Ridge to consider.

TECHNOLOGY

Existing File Management Platform

The City has known for some time that the current version of its AMANDA file management platform does not meet the needs of applicants, staff or decision-makers. The current version's shortcomings, which appear to be numerous, include:

- a user interface that is not user-friendly
- the lack of an application portal to enable applicants to submit applications and associated materials online, directly into the software — a feature that would eliminate the need for DSTs to manually enter all information into the system, and save staff from having to distribute hard copies of materials to referral departments
- an inability for applicants to independently monitor through an online dashboard the progress of application files through the review process
- an inability for staff to track applications and know where they are in the review process
- an inability to accurately measure turn-around times³⁵
- an inability to store all studies, reports and other materials in the digital application folder created in AMANDA for each application by the DSTs

These shortcomings are exacerbated by differing levels of proficiency among staff in their use of the platform, a lack of training to assist staff who need guidance, and a tolerance of staff who simply choose to not use the system.

Observations

There is no doubt that the City's reliance on its current file management software platform creates additional work for staff, inhibits process transparency for applicants, requires applicants to produce and submit multiple hard copies of all materials, heightens the potential for applications or parts thereof to be lost in the system, and introduces other inefficiencies that serve only to increase turn-around

³⁴ The City of Delta has a Citizen Advocate; however, this function does not help to shepherd priority developments through the review process. In general, the idea of Development Concierge is dismissed by BC municipalities as unnecessary. Managers and decision-makers take the view that reform efforts should be focused on improving the review process for all applicants, not just ones perceived as high value. A focus on high-value, for-profit projects is considered inappropriate by some. Priority treatment for non-profit housing projects is more palatable — a sentiment that explains why cities in BC that do have some form of priority stream tend to reserve the stream for BC Housing-sponsored and other non-profit housing developments.

³⁵ The system lacks an effective "stop-start" function to adjust overall timelines to account for time an application sits with an applicant, outside of the City's control, during the review process.



Figure 3.1 Town of Halton Hills Business Concierge Program

The Business Concierge initiative at the Town of Halton Hills is run by the Manager of Investment Attraction (a former Development Planner) in the municipality's Economic Development Office. Projects that are eligible for the Halton Hills Concierge service must meet one of the following criteria:*

- > large development located in one of three specified employment areas
- > minimum of 100,000 ft² in gross floor area (by comparison, the Albion Community Hub is 20,000 ft²)
- > high profile and complex proposal
- > major employment (minimum of 100 new jobs) and assessment generator
- > major office, commercial or mixed-use development (including residential)
- > large financial investment (over \$100 million)
- > facing urgent timelines

At any one time, there are up to six (6) active projects with the Concierge (with up to 30 being tracked). The Concierge manages applications from pre-application through to construction, working along the way with the File Manager, staff in planning and referral departments, as well as with applicants to resolve issues and maintain review momentum. The Concierge helps to bridge internal silos, hold departments and applicants to account, and facilitate solutions.

The initiative, which is now two years old, was driven by the Chief Administrative Officer who continues to provide active support. The Planning and Development Engineering Departments also support the initiative, with senior managers from each group attending monthly briefings along with the CAO and others on projects under review. In all, success factors identified by Halton Hills include:

- > support from, and ongoing involvement by, the CAO
- > support from all senior managers and their staff
- > a "solutions mindset" at the municipality (bolstered by the program)
- > the Concierge's background as a Development Planner at the municipality
- > flexibility in refining and shaping the program based on lessons learned
- > adequate resources dedicated to the program

* These criteria are specific to Halton Hills. Maple Ridge would set its own criteria to match Council and community priorities.

times. There is also no doubt that a decision to replace the current platform with a newer, more user-friendly system would increase efficiency and improve the application process experience both for applicants and staff.

The City has decided to replace its current system — a decision made easier by financial assistance provided by the province under the *Local Government Development Approvals Program*. Since late-2021, an inter-departmental team of



system users, IT staff and decision-makers has been identifying needs and assessing candidate platforms. It is anticipated that the City will be in a position to proceed with the purchase and implementation in early 2023. Implementation of the new system will, in and of itself, create efficiencies and other improvements for staff and applicants. To optimize the opportunities for improvement, however, the City will need to:

- make use of any built-in or third-party vendor application portal to expedite the transition from paper-based submissions to digital submissions³⁶
- provide the necessary hardware to facilitate the review of digital files
- put in place an application monitoring dashboard — which can be expanded over time — to allow for greater transparency
- reduce as much as possible the number of discrete steps in the review process that is incorporated into the system
- formalize and publish for all staff the actual review process to follow for each type of application³⁷
- provide sufficient IT support to attend to trouble-shooting and the ongoing development of new applications³⁸
- train staff to become proficient in using the system³⁹
- require staff to use the system exclusively

COMMUNICATIONS

Dual Role

Development services functions run most smoothly when staff embrace the two roles they play in the system — namely, the roles of regulator and facilitator. As regulator, staff have a responsibility to ensure that proposed developments support the community's objectives set out in policies and regulations. In this role staff also are responsible for ensuring that proposed developments do not negatively impact the City's infrastructure systems, Maple Ridge's sensitive ecosystems and environmental features, the City's parks and trails, and other community assets. Technical standards and regulations that are in place to protect these assets are applied by staff to impose servicing and other requirements on proposed developments as conditions for approval.

As facilitator, staff recognize that the development community — broadly defined to include property owners, development professionals and developers — is critical to

³⁶ All new applications at the City of Coquitlam are now submitted digitally through Coquitlam QFile. Applications are submitted digitally at the Township of Langley using its Development Application Submission Portal. Many types of applications can also be submitted digitally to the City of Surrey.

³⁷ Many staff interviewed for the review were unaware if the City had in place any process maps, flow charts or lists of steps for all staff to follow. (The City has process charts in place for rezoning applications and development permit applications, but not others.)

³⁸ The City of Surrey has four Business Analysts (platform specialists) dedicated to its development services function.

³⁹ As noted earlier, several staff interviewed for the study reported that they have never received training on AMANDA.



the City's efforts to provide affordable housing, attract investment, build neighbourhoods, protect the environment and strengthen the economy. In the role of facilitator, staff encourage quality development, and work with applicants to address concerns and eliminate (or reduce) barriers. Staff acknowledge the risks and costs inherent in development, and embrace a solution mindset to help bring projects to fruition.

It is incumbent on staff in performing both of these roles to communicate and with the development community. Some communication will be one-way in nature, focused on the provision of user-friendly guides, bulletins and other information resources aimed at helping applicants understand the City's processes and requirements for approval. Other communication will be two-way, involving discussions and other forms of engagement.

As noted earlier in Chapter 2, the City has a considerable number and range of written materials available online for applicants and potential applicants to learn about Maple Ridge's processes and requirements. The list of materials includes:

- copies of all development bylaws, including the *Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 7060*, *City of Maple Ridge Zoning Bylaw No. 7600*, *Maple Ridge Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw No. 4800*, and *Maple Ridge Development Procedures Bylaw No. 5879*
- the City's application form for all development approvals, along with supplemental forms
- twelve checklists that identify the requirements for different applications
- development permit guidelines and checklists for all permit areas
- reference documents on key information items, including application fees, community amenity contributions, DIMs, street trees, and basic regulations that apply in each zone in the City
- thirteen guides and brochures to outline (at a high level) the approval processes, and the information required in key supporting reports
- twenty checklists, guidelines and regulations specifically related to environmental planning requirements
- bulletins and information pieces on a variety of topics (e.g., trees) to assist applicants in understanding requirements and submitting applications
- design and construction documents to follow in the construction of development works

Opportunities for two-way engagement with applicants or potential applicants are also provided by the City. The list of these opportunities includes:

- interactions between individuals making inquiries and the DSTs at the Application Centre (or, in some cases, the Planning Assistant or POD)
- pre-application meetings that bring together applicants and staff from a range of departments



- site visits of proposed development sites, conducted by the File Manager whenever possible
- outreach to the development community to gather input on proposed policy or regulatory changes
- discussions through formal industry liaison committees
- formal and informal discussions with applicants to resolve issues

Observations

It is clear that the City understands the importance of making information resources available online to applicants and potential applicants. The current number and range of resources is impressive. The organization and presentation of the materials, however, could be improved to match the levels in place in some other municipalities such as the Cities of Kelowna and Coquitlam, and the Township of Langley.

On the Township's website, all materials to guide applicants — and only those materials — are presented on one main page titled "Development". In Maple Ridge, by contrast, applicants must go first to the Planning Department section of the site to find development application forms, guides and brochures and other relevant materials listed in a side column along with a number of reference documents and City initiatives. For information on servicing, applicants must go to the Engineering Department home page find choose "Land Development" — as opposed to the more common "Infrastructure Development" or "Development Engineering" headings — to view expectations and requirements.

The City of Kelowna is similar to Langley with all relevant information in one place — "Homes & Building". Processes are outlined and important materials are provided. Navigation is intuitive.

In terms of two-way engagement, Maple Ridge's decision in early 2022 to make pre-application meetings a requirement for all but the simplest development applications was a positive step forward. The City may wish to create additional connection points with the development community, including development workshops — or, "development cafes" — to explain processes, policies and regulations to, and obtain input on changes to consider from, the development community.⁴⁰ Such workshops take time and effort to deliver. They can, however, serve as valuable opportunities to reduce potential confusion regarding City processes and requirements, and to build relationships with professionals and developers.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT SECTION

Responsibilities

The City's Infrastructure Development group is situated within the Engineering Department. The group is focused entirely on engineering and infrastructure considerations, and works exclusively in the development services function. The

⁴⁰ Some sections at the City have (and do) host workshops with the development community. An example is Environmental Planning.



group is responsible, first, for identifying off-site works and services that applicants must construct in order to address development impacts on City infrastructure; and, second, for ensuring that the works and services constructed by developers meet the City's stated construction standards prior to being inherited the City. In more specific terms, the group is responsible for:

- participating in pre-application meetings to identify potential works and service needs that proponents of proposed developments should understand prior to completing and submitting an application package
- reviewing development applications (and building permit applications) against the standards in Maple Ridge's *Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw* to identify existing servicing deficiencies, and to list studies the applicant must submit to show how the proposed development would address the deficiencies related to transportation infrastructure, water distribution systems, sanitary sewer systems and stormwater management
- reviewing the engineering drawings and construction cost estimates prepared by applicants' consultants, pursuant to requirements in the City's *Design Criteria Manual* and its *Supplementary Standard Detail Drawings*, to install necessary works
- creating servicing agreements upon acceptance of, and based on, the submitted drawings
- convening pre-construction meetings involving the City's Engineering Inspectors, the applicants (developers), contractors, and other City staff to provide guidance and address questions
- conducting inspections during construction of the works and services to ensure compliance with the approved design drawings, as well as relevant regulations and bylaws
- issuing Certificates of Acceptance one year after works and services have been deemed complete (with any identified issues addressed), and securities have been eliminated
- updating existing guidance documents, creating new documents, and participating in the technical review of City standards

The City's Infrastructure Development group, as shown earlier in Figure 2.2, includes Engineering Technologists and Technicians, and Engineering Inspectors. The group is a critical internal referral agency that reviews and provides comments on the majority of development applications, and that interacts with staff in the Planning and Building Departments regularly. Staff in the group also deal with their colleagues from Utilities Engineering and Transportation in the Engineering Department, as well



as with staff in the Operations Department. These groups are available to provide input and comments on applications that are particularly large, are complex in nature, feature unique infrastructure maintenance issues, or deviate materially from the standards in the *Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw* and related documents.

Observations

The Infrastructure Development group is comprised of hard-working, committed staff who recognize the importance of development to the community, have a desire to provide good customer service to applicants, and want to support their colleagues in the development services function. The Engineering Technologists, Technicians and Inspectors in the group are respected by their peers in Planning and Building, and by their colleagues across the Engineering Services Division. These points aside, it is clear that Infrastructure Development is facing a number of challenges.

► Staffing

Infrastructure Development faces challenges in maintaining a full staffing complement. This challenge is not unique to the group — Planning, Building and other departments at the City are facing similar issues, as are departments in other municipalities involved in development service functions. The challenge has been acute, however, in the Infrastructure Development group. At the time this report was submitted the group had only one Engineering Technician position vacant. During the writing of the report, however, the number of vacancies fluctuated and included at one point two of the group's most important positions — Senior Engineering Technologist and Engineering Technologist.⁴¹

There does not appear to be any single reason for the difficulty in retaining a full staff team. It is almost certainly the case that workload challenges, applicant expectations are contributing factors, as is the lack of supportive file management technology.

► Turn-Around Times

Infrastructure Development is responsible for ensuring that proposed developments pay for and provide properly-designed and -constructed additions to City works and services that are needed to accommodate the developments and maintain the integrity of the City's existing systems. It is important that such work not be rushed. It is also important, however, that reviews undertaken by Infrastructure Development not unreasonably delay the overall review process or development of subject lands. Unfortunately, significant delays attributable to the Infrastructure Development seem to have become common.⁴² Periodic

⁴¹ The Senior Technologist position, at the time of submission, is filled by a Technologist.

⁴² This statement is based on interviews with staff in Infrastructure Development, staff in the broader development services function, Engineering staff, and representatives of the development community. The absence of a proper application file tracking system makes it necessary to rely on anecdotal evidence.



vacancies in the group contribute to delays, as do the other factors noted earlier under staffing. The involvement of other Engineering Services teams in reviewing application files and the work of Infrastructure Development, however, is also a factor (see next point).

➤ **Intra-Divisional Consultation**

In all municipalities there is the need for staff in Infrastructure Development to consult on development applications with their colleagues in Engineering Services in charge of infrastructure planning and design, and the maintenance and operation of civil works. Consultation can be important in managing infrastructure risks and protecting a municipality's servicing needs and interests. Consultation can also, however, be a source of potential disagreement for staff who work in different engineering groups, with different mandates. Consider the following points:

- Infrastructure Development exists to help process development applications and enable applicants to develop their lands and grow the community. The group recognizes the importance of ensuring that proposed developments pay for and provide the off-site works and services necessary to develop. Similarly, the group understands clearly the need to ensure that municipal works and services constructed by applicants meet the City's standards prior to being transferred to the City. In reviewing applications and in working with applicants, however, the group is expected — and, indeed, is driven — to facilitate solutions to overcome infrastructure issues that arise. Finding ways to move applications through the review process to the point of development is central to the Infrastructure Development team's mandate.
- Other groups in the City's Engineering Department are focused on ensuring that the City's infrastructure planning and development adequately anticipate and keep ahead of new growth, and that the standards in place to identify the need for and guide the provision of off-site works and services by applicants are both fair and complete. These other Engineering groups are aware and supportive of the City's need to facilitate development, but are not primarily concerned with (or rewarded for) streamlining development processes.
- The sewer, water, roads and other teams in the Operations Department are the sections that inherit responsibility for all works and services constructed by applicants, pursuant to the City's stated requirements. These teams accept the importance of development to the City's future prosperity; however, similar to the other Engineering groups, they are not primarily concerned with or rewarded for streamlining processes. Operations is driven by the need to ensure that works and services provided by applicants do not fail or create maintenance issues for the City once inherited.



Each of these mandates is legitimate and important to the municipality. The differences in the mandates, however, have the potential to create conflict between Infrastructure Development and the other groups. To be clear, relationships in Maple Ridge are strong among section managers in most cases; where challenges arise, leaders at the Director and General Manager levels intervene to facilitate compromises that attempt to meet the broader City interest in ways that accommodate the needs and concerns that are central to each group's mandate. Nonetheless, the potential for conflict between Infrastructure Development and the other sections persists. Measures that are put in place to accommodate concerns and pre-empt conflict contribute to delays in the processing of development applications.

From the perspective of the development services function, it is critical that Infrastructure Development be able to perform its mandated role efficiently, without having to seek actual or *de facto* approval on all applications from other sections in Engineering and Operations. Infrastructure Development needs to consult professionals in these other sections, and seeks to incorporate the input obtained through such consultation into its review of development applications. It is up to Infrastructure Development, however, to exercise judgement and determine when consultation is needed, and when to invite professionals from other sections into the review process, pursuant to stated protocols. It is not up to staff in other sections to insert themselves into reviews.

Engineering Department sections such as Transportation understand that their role in the review process is that of advisor, in place to act on requests of Infrastructure Development to help review traffic impact analyses and other technical reports. Operations Department's sections, conversely, appear less ready to accept the authority of Infrastructure Development Manager to identify infrastructure requirements, and to approve infrastructure designs and constructed works. Development application review measures introduced in the past 18 months bring Operations managers together with the Infrastructure Development Manager on a bi-weekly basis to scrutinize and — where deemed necessary by Operations — add to Infrastructure Development's comments on every development application reviewed by the Infrastructure Development team. These bi-weekly meetings are promoted as an effort to ensure that Operations — the department that is responsible for the maintenance of all inherited works — is satisfied with the works being proposed, to build confidence on the part of Operations' managers in the abilities of Infrastructure Development staff, and to foster trust among colleagues. The compromise is intended to have zero impact on application review timelines; however, the accommodation of Operations can only add to overall delays, not to mention the potential for tension among colleagues.⁴³

⁴³ It is important to note that leadership in Engineering Services feels strongly that the involvement of Operations in reviewing Infrastructure Development's comments on every application is important,



From a development perspective, interactions between Infrastructure Development and other sections in Engineering and Operations need to be structured in accordance with a protocol that acknowledges the authority of the Infrastructure Development Manager in the review of development applications, and that assigns clear roles and limits to other sections in Engineering and Operations.

Figure 3.2 presents a summary of a protocol agreement based on systems in place in other municipalities.⁴⁴ Central to the agreement is the notion that referrals to Engineering and/or Operations are only made in cases in which the scope of a proposed development exceeds specified thresholds, or in which the Infrastructure Development Manager feels that others' expertise is required.⁴⁵ The vast majority of applications (e.g., 80%) that are considered more straightforward in nature are handled by Infrastructure Development without involving other teams.

➤ **Placement in Engineering Services**

The discussion on intra-divisional consultation leads to the question of whether Infrastructure Development should exist as part of Engineering Services or placed under Development Services. This question has been tackled by many other high-growth municipalities in British Columbia; different places have reached different conclusions. Municipalities such as the City of Delta, City of Coquitlam, Township of Langley, City of Port Coquitlam, District of North Vancouver, City of Kelowna, City of Nanaimo and many others have elected to place Infrastructure Development within Development Services, under the authority of the Director or General Manager (as the case may be). The City of Surrey, City of Vancouver, City of North Vancouver and others have chosen to keep the section under the authority of the head of Engineering, who is ultimately responsible for all infrastructure. The City of Abbotsford had Infrastructure Development in Development Services, but recently transferred it to Engineering.

There are strong arguments in support of each option. There are also certain success factors that are common to both options — the need for good inter-departmental communication and respect for assigned authorities being key. In the end, the "right" choice for any particular place may be determined by the

at least in the short term. The decision to involve Operations in reviews is considered to be helpful in building support for development proposals, in catching and address infrastructure needs, and in creating a strong inter-team dynamic. Operations' involvement is also considered a useful form of professional development for Infrastructure Development staff.

⁴⁴ The protocol in Figure 3.2 is a summary that would need to be expanded on and customized for Maple Ridge.

⁴⁵ A development application that proposes a unique or significant piece of infrastructure is an example of an application that would exceed thresholds and that would be referred to Engineering and/or Operations.



desired approach to development, and by the message leaders wish to send to staff and the development community. Consider the following points:

Figure 3.2
Development Application Review Process Protocol Agreement
Infrastructure Development and Engineering Services

EXAMPLE ONLY

This *Protocol Agreement* outlines the responsibilities of the Infrastructure Development Manager in the development application review process, as well as the responsibilities of Managers in the Engineering and Operations Departments.

1. The Infrastructure Development Manager is responsible (and accountable) for all decisions on service matters related to development applications.
2. The Infrastructure Development Manager will refer applications, as necessary, to managers from Engineering and Operations with authority over the planning and maintenance of the City's works and services.
3. Referrals will be made in cases where the scope of a proposed development exceeds established thresholds, or in any case in which the Infrastructure Development Manager feels that others' expertise is required. A full set of thresholds will be established to guide the Infrastructure Development Manager. Examples of thresholds are as follows:

Category	Examples of Thresholds
Utilities Planning; Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > rezonings that would result in 100+ housing units > projects with drawings that differ materially from standards of <i>Subdivision Bylaw</i> > projects that would result in City inheriting major infrastructure (e.g., trunk line, lift station)
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > rezonings expected to add 100+ peak hour trips > projects where drawings differ materially from standards of <i>Subdivision Bylaw</i> > projects that would result in City inheriting a major collector road

4. All technical recommendations provided by Engineering and Operations will be considered by the Infrastructure Development Manager and incorporated, where possible, into a single Servicing Memorandum. Explanations will be provided when recommendations are not used.
5. Engineering and Operations managers who disagree with decisions of the Infrastructure Development Manager may appeal through an internal process.



- *In Development Services* — Leaders who place Infrastructure Development in Development Services seek to emphasize a desire to facilitate development. The Infrastructure Development Manager in this structure reports and is accountable to a Director (Director of Planning in the case of Maple Ridge) who is focused on, and rewarded for, finding solutions to development issues. To be clear, infrastructure considerations remain important as they do under any structure. But infrastructure requirements, designs and approvals are determined within Development Services by the Infrastructure Development Manager, in accordance with published technical standards and criteria, and the inter-departmental protocol agreement (see Figure 3.2). Any conflicts with Engineering and Operations are handled by the Director of Planning, or by the General Manager of Planning and Development Services.
- *In Engineering Services* — In municipalities with Infrastructure Development in Engineering Services, the concerns of engineering planners and operations managers are paramount. The Infrastructure Development Manager in this structure reports through and is accountable to the Director of Engineering, and is expected to involve Engineering and Operations planners in decisions on reviews and development works more than would be the case under Development Services. The Director of Planning has no authority to direct the Infrastructure Development Manager in this structure.

If the City of Maple Ridge wishes to streamline its development application review process and communicate to the community and staff that efforts to facilitate good development are priority, the City should consider placing Infrastructure Development within the Planning Department under the authority of the Director of Planning. A strong protocol agreement, similar to the example set out in Figure 3.2, would be important to enable the change. Conversely, if the City is more concerned with minimizing risk associated with the infrastructure implications of development, the City may wish to leave Infrastructure Development in Engineering Services. A strong protocol agreement would also be important under this scenario.

As noted earlier, the needs to facilitate development and manage development-related infrastructure risk exist and must be recognized under both structural scenarios. The relative emphasis given to the each need, however, varies based on the structure in place, as does the message sent to stakeholders.

➤ **Inspection of Works**

One of the roles of Infrastructure Development is to inspect and ultimately issue Certificates of Acceptance for off-site works and services constructed by developers and transferred to the City. All municipalities are responsible for inspecting works and providing these certificates. The approaches taken by



municipalities, however, are not uniform.

In many cities, Engineering Inspectors will rely on the developers' professional engineering consultants to oversee and inspect construction at specified points of the construction process, and to provide field reports to the Engineering Inspectors for review. Inspectors may attend construction sites at key times, irrespective of the field reports and work of the consultants, to exercise direct oversight. In a small number of cities — Kelowna is an example — the Engineering Inspector position has been eliminated. That city relies on the developers' engineering consultant to inspect and ensure that the works meet prescribed the approved designs. Certificates of Acceptance are provided by the City, but are based largely on assurances provided by consulting engineers.

In the City of Maple Ridge, Engineering Inspectors are more directly involved than their counterparts in some other cities in reviewing the construction of off-site development works. The City's approach minimizes risk associated with the inheritance of development works — presumably, the reason for taking the approach. The approach also, however, relieves developers' consulting engineers of accountability and risk, and makes for a larger-than-necessary workload for Inspectors.⁴⁶ The approach also adds to the overall time required for development approvals, simply because the number of Engineering Inspectors is limited.

The City of Maple Ridge should consider a new approach that emphasizes a more limited role of compliance verification. The elimination of the Inspector position — the Kelowna approach — is not recommended. A greater reliance on the consulting engineers' field reports and assurances is suggested.

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Range of Services

Environmental Services is active in the following subject areas:

- *Environmental Policy* — Staff involved in policy are responsible for creating and revising, as necessary, development permit guidelines to regulate development in environmental development permit areas. Staff also create and amend, as necessary, environmental bylaws on the protection of watercourses, regulation of soil deposition, protection of trees, and other matters. The City's 2014 Environmental Management Strategy — *Caring For Our Nature* — and subsequent implementation reports were created by staff in environmental policy; so, too, was the City's 2021 *Green Infrastructure Strategy*.

⁴⁶ The City does not require, as a standard practice, developers' consulting engineers to provide field reports.



- *Engagement* — Staff undertake community engagement on natural environment matters. Efforts are designed to inform and educate various audiences, including neighbourhood groups and the development community, of opportunities and requirements related to protection of sensitive ecosystems and natural habitats, control of stormwater and soil erosion, and other matters. The section publishes a considerable number of information materials on a range of environmental matters and requirements. The City's Environmental Advisory Committee (citizen based) is managed by staff involved in engagement.
- *Development Review* — Staff in the section play an important role through the development services function in reviewing development permit applications (as well as building permits applications). More specifically, the section is an internal referral group that reviews applications against environmental development permit guidelines. In this capacity, staff also participate in pre-application meetings and respond to environment-related development inquiries.
- *Permits and Enforcement* — Staff issue tree permits and enforce the requirements of *Tree Protection & Management Bylaw*. Soil deposit permits are also issued and enforced by staff in the section.

The section has a staffing complement of five (5), including Planners, Technicians and a Coordinator.

Observations

Staff in the section are passionate about the environment and efforts that the City takes, and could take, to support ecosystems, natural habitats and biodiversity, and to innovate in topic areas such as green infrastructure. Staff are ambitious, as well, in their efforts to engage, educate, advocate and regulate.

Workload is high for staff in the section, as it is for staff in all parts of the development services function. To help manage workload, staff have taken steps to create referral templates, development guideline checklists and other similar tools, all of which help to increase the efficiency of development reviews. Innovations in tree permit processing allow the section to issue most permits on the day of application, on site.

A challenge facing the section is its placement in the organization. As shown earlier in Figure 2.1 (Chapter 2), Environmental Services exists alongside Development Planning in the Planning Department. All five (5) Environmental staff report to the Manager of Development and Environmental Services. This placement results in an exceedingly broad span of control — 19 staff — for the Manager, and limits the ability of the Manager to effectively lead, direct, mentor and prioritize the work of staff in the Environmental Services section. A complicating factor is the broad range of duties undertaken by the section. Development permit reviews, which are central



to the development services function and the focus of the Development Services group in which Environmental Services is situated, constitute only one part of the section's work. Other areas of activity are, arguably, better aligned with the work of different groups in the organization. Environmental strategy and policy work, for example, may fit better with the Community Planning group in the Planning Department.⁴⁷ Alternatively, Maple Ridge could consider bringing Environmental Policy together with Climate Action in a completely separate department — a move that has been taken by the District of North Vancouver, among others. The issuance and enforcement of tree permits may be better placed in Bylaw & Licensing, or in a similar group that is focused on permits and licenses.⁴⁸

If the City does not wish to assign elements of the current section to different parts of the organization, the City may need to consider creating a Manager of Environmental Services to help direct and prioritize the work of the full section. In the consultant's view, placing elements of the current section in different parts of the organization may be preferable and should be explored. Specifically, the City may wish to consider:

- leaving development application review with Development Planning
- placing environmental policy and strategy with Community Planning
- placing tree permit issuance and enforcement with Bylaws & Licensing

Staff would be moved from the section to these other parts based on existing responsibilities and qualifications. Some changes to responsibilities would likely be required to implement such changes fully. Staffing levels may need to be considered depending on Council's strategic priorities and the extent to which environmental initiatives and protections (i.e., regulations and guidelines) are featured.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

In the consultant's view, informed by the interviews with all staff and a number of development community representatives, the vast majority of staff active in the development services function recognize the importance of development to the community, and understand the need to balance their dual regulator-facilitator roles. Staff in the function are capable professionals who strive both to promote the community's interests, and to provide a high level of customer service to applicants.

This report has identified various issues with the development services function that highlight process, technological and structural challenges, as well as approaches taken by the organization. Efforts taken to address these issues will help to

⁴⁷ The City of Kelowna, among others, takes places environmental policy and strategy in Community Planning.

⁴⁸ To be clear, the development of policies and regulations on which tree permits are based would rest with Environmental Policy, as they do today. Only the issuance of permits (in excess of 600 per year), and the enforcement of bylaws, would be transferred under this scenario.



streamline the approvals process. Underlying all of the issues, however, is the deeper matter of organizational culture.

Organization culture, in simple terms, can be defined as the beliefs, values, attitudes, practices and behaviours that are accepted and rewarded in the organization. Culture strongly influences the actions and the approaches taken by managers and staff, and affects how people experience the organization. In the consultant's view, the organizational culture underlying the development services function can be characterized as cautious and risk averse, as well as inwardly-focused on the needs and concerns of individual sections (a focus that results in groups working in silos). File Managers and department managers seem overly deferential to their colleagues in other sections, and hesitant to challenge practices, push for attention or challenge comments. Staff in all parts of the function are reluctant to take any action that carries some risk of impact to City services, the environment, the urban landscape or the community. On the whole, staff and Council seem unsure of each other's motives.

The organization's culture of caution is reflected in the following practices and observations, some of which have been highlighted already:

- the approach taken to First Reading, which is designed to give Council a view of all proposals that are being presenting to staff, and staff a sense of Council's high-level support for proposals
- a reluctance to require all staff to input all review comments directly into the digital folder (software limitations notwithstanding)
- the accommodation shown to Operations managers to review all files that are sent to Infrastructure Development, and all of Infrastructure Development's referral comments
- a tendency on the part of File Managers to err on the side of caution in seeking reviews from internal referral groups — a tendency that was reported by several staff interviewed
- a tendency to impose "late hits" — that is, requirements imposed and requests for additional information made after comprehensive application review letters have been sent to applicants
- the reluctance of Engineering Inspectors to rely on consultants' field reports and assurance when reviewing the construction of development works
- the absence of enforceable time limits on internal referrals — an absence that, when combined with a reluctance on the part of Planning Department managers to apply pressure, can result in significant delays
- Planning reports that require four reviews and sign-offs in the Development Services Division alone prior to publication in Council and Committee agendas
- a reluctance to view some development applications as more important and worthy of expedited treatment than others, despite clear differences in economic and other impacts
- a City website that organizes and presents development application information in ways that are less-than-user-friendly



An organization's culture is set by its leaders — Senior Leadership in the case of Maple Ridge. To make significant changes to the culture underlying Maple Ridge's development services function, Senior Leaders will need to promote and embrace change, tolerate mistakes, reward innovation and improvement, and hold each other accountable for making change.

STAFFING LEVELS

Current Levels

Figures 1.1 and 1.2 in Chapter 1 presented the number of positions in the Planning Department and Infrastructure Development section respectively. Key information from those figures included:

- Managers — 2⁴⁹
- Planners III (Senior Planner) — 1
- Planners I and II (full-time permanent) — 4
- Planners II (part-time auxiliary) — 3
- Planning Technicians — 3
- Planning Assistants — 1
- Planning Clerks — 1
- Mapping / Data — 1
- Engineering Technologists — 4
- Engineering Technicians — 2
- Engineering Inspectors I, II and III — 4
- Environmental Planners I and II — 2
- Environmental Technicians — 2
- Environmental Coordinator — 1
- Development Services Technicians — 7

These positions add up to a total of 38; however, it needs to be remembered that not all Environmental Services positions or DST positions are fully engaged in the development services function as defined in this report. It should also be remembered that these numbers include three (3) part-time positions that, together, are equivalent to one (1) FTE. The numbers include, as well, four (4) vacant positions — three (3) in Planning and one (1) in Infrastructure Development.

Observations

All staff and all representatives of the development community interviewed for the review put forward the view that the City's development services function needs more people, and a larger number of senior experienced people. Staff feel overburdened by workloads that seem impossible to manage; applicants feel underserved both in terms of turn-around times and staff responsiveness. Infrastructure Development was highlighted as the section perceived to be most under-staffed and most challenged in its attempts to retain staff.

⁴⁹ Manager of Development & Environmental Services; Manager of Infrastructure Development.



The natural questions that arise in response to calls for added positions are:

- How many positions and what types of positions are required?
- On what factors should recommendations for additional positions be determined?

➤ **Comparative Research**

Efforts to answer these questions typically involve some level of comparative research — that is, an examination of staffing levels in other municipalities deemed comparable to Maple Ridge. Figure 3.3 presents current staffing levels in four Lower Mainland municipalities with characteristics similar to those of Maple Ridge. The figure focuses on the positions that exist in some form in all places. Missing from the figure are Engineering Inspectors, Environmental Planners, Technicians and Coordinators, and Development Services Technicians.

Figure 3.4 provides some additional context in the form of development application numbers. The figure shows total applications received each year over a four-year period, by municipality. Included in the totals are applications for:

- OCP amendments
- rezonings
- development permits (all types)
- development variance permits
- subdivisions

Figure 3.3
Current Development Services Function Staffing Levels (FTEs)
Comparable Positions

Key Positions	City of Maple Ridge	City of Chilliwack	City of Coquitlam	City of Delta	Township of Langley
Managers*	2	2	2	2	2
Senior Planners	1	1	3	3	2
Planners	4	6	11	7	6
Planners (part-time)**	1	-	-	-	-
Planning Technicians	3	-	6	3	-
Planning Assistants	1	1	5	1	-
Planning Clerks	1	2	2	1	3
Other	1	-	2	1	1
Engineering Technologists	4	3	9	4	5
Engineering Technicians	2	-	-	-	-
Total FTE	20	15	40	22	19

* Includes Managers of Development Planning and Development Engineering (Infrastructure Development).

** Three (3) Part-Time Auxiliary Planner II positions that constitute 1.0 FTE combined.



Figure 3.3 shows that while Maple Ridge has considerably fewer Senior Planners, Planners, Planning Technicians and Planning Assistants than the City of Coquitlam, Maple Ridge has as many of these positions (combined) as the City of Chilliwack, City of Delta and Township

of Langley. The figure shows, as well, that the number of Engineering Technologists in Maple Ridge is comparable to that in all places other than Coquitlam (Maple Ridge is also the only jurisdiction in the table with Engineering Technicians). Figure 3.4 shows that the number of development applications (specific types) received each year by Maple Ridge is not wildly different from the numbers in Coquitlam and Langley Township, and is lower than that received by Chilliwack.

Comparisons across municipalities are requested and conducted to provide decision-makers guidance and/or comfort in decision-making on staffing levels. Such comparisons, however, are inherently problematic and — in many cases — of questionable value. Differences in review processes, technology platforms, organizational structure, underlying land use policies and regulations, technical standards, the level of reliance on applicants, and organizational culture can limit the usefulness of comparisons. Limitations in the data also undermine their usefulness to decision-makers.⁵⁰ The data in Figure 3.4, for example, show the total numbers of applications received, but say nothing about the total numbers that remain active.

➤ **Adjustments for Maple Ridge**

In the consultant's judgement, there is no doubt that staff in Maple Ridge's development services function are unable, collectively, to manage existing workloads. If none of the issues examined in this report was addressed, additional staff positions would be needed to enable the City to accelerate its review of development applications and provide an overall higher and more consistent level of customer service. Additional staff in Infrastructure Development would be a priority under these circumstances, followed by increased numbers in development planning.

Figure 3.4
Development Applications RECEIVED
Select Types — 2018 to 2021

Municipality	2018	2019	2020	2021
City of Maple Ridge	233	172	172	211
City of Chilliwack	508	334	282	464
City of Coquitlam	153	109	144	206
City of Delta	231	101	105	122
Township of Langley	273	210	160	206

⁵⁰ It is worth noting that, as well, that while municipalities are able and willing to provide staffing and application numbers, municipalities are reluctant to provide data on turn-around times.



What would the need for additional staffing be, however, if the City made changes to address all or even most of the issues identified in the report? Consider the impacts on staffing needs from changes designed to:

- simplify, manage and expedite responses to development inquiries
- assign a dedicated Planner of the Day to allow Planners and Planning Technicians to focus on their files
- eliminate the current approach to First Reading, along with the associated work for Planners and Planning Technicians
- limit through delegation the need for Council to approve a range of development permits, and to hold certain types of public hearings — all of which add to staff workloads
- standardize and streamline referrals to and comments from internal referral groups
- standardize and simplify the role of File Manager
- introduce a Development Concierge service to remove high-value, high-profile and complex applications from the applications stream
- implement a new file management technology platform, complete with an application portal, accurate tracking system for staff and applicants, the ability to store all materials and drawings in a digital folder, clear processes for staff to follow, regular training for users
- enhanced, user-friendly information resources and guides to assist applicants (and limit their need to call on staff for assistance)
- place Infrastructure Development in the Planning Department, reporting to the Director of Planning
- increase reliance on engineering consultants, both in the preparation of drawings and inspection of works
- re-organize Environmental Services
- shift the organization's culture to one that is less risk-intolerant and more solution-focused

These types of changes that could be made to address the issues highlighted in the report would have a positive impact on staff's ability to manage application file volumes, reduce turn-around times and provide a higher level of service. The exact magnitude of positive impact would vary based on the number of changes embraced, but also on the speed of implementation. Indeed, even with the strongest will, the City would be hard-pressed to achieve major results in the short term. One major change — the introduction of a new technology platform — is still well over a year away from taking effect.

The City may need to take some action on staffing levels in the near term to help address existing workload challenges. Specific steps to consider are as follows:

- *Fill Vacancies* — The City should redouble its efforts to fill existing vacancies. It is exceedingly difficult for the City to manage workload and provide an acceptable level of service when existing positions sit empty.



It is similarly difficult for decision-makers to make the case for additional positions when existing positions have not been filled. The City's internal and external Human Resources advisors need to be encouraged to try new recruitment methods aimed at filling the vacant spots.

- *Create New Positions* — The City may wish to make the proposed dedicated Planner of the Day resource a new position. Staffing the resource with an existing Planner of Planning Technician would be better than the current situation, but would still result in taking away a much-needed resource from the current development planning complement.

The City may also wish to create a new position for the Development Concierge. Based on the lessons learned in Halton Hills, it is anticipated that the position would be exempt, but filled by a professional planner or individual with experience in development application review. One new dedicated Planner II position in the Planning Department, and one new dedicated Engineering Technologist position to support the Development Concierge initiative may be warranted as well, depending on the number of high-value projects brought to the City through the program.

- *Make Use of Contractors* — The City has brought back recently-retired Planners II to assist with application files. These individuals are employed as part-time auxiliary staff, but essentially function as contractors. The City has also made use in past situations of contract Engineering Technologists and Engineering Inspectors to help manage workloads. The City should consider making use of all of these contractors, as required, while changes to address the issues in the report are pursued.



CHAPTER 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous chapter — Chapter 3 — identified and assessed a broad range of structures for the City to consider under the following headings:

- Information Requests
- Council Involvement
- Delegation of Approvals
- Referral of Applications
- File Manager Model
- Application Streams
- Communications and Engagement
- Technology
- Infrastructure Development
- Environmental Services
- Organizational Culture
- Staffing Levels

Observations provided under the headings pointed to the specific changes for the City to consider. These changes are presented in Figure 4.1 as recommendations.



**Figure 4.1
Recommendations**

Recommendations	Comments
Information Requests	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City continue to train Development Services Technicians (DSTs) to respond to a broad range of development inquiries, and to receive all development applications. 	The Manager of Process Optimization, Training and Client Services in the Building Department is in the process of implementing training programs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City continue to expand the number and range of information documents and tools available, in an effort to enable potential applicants and others to find answers to questions without needing to submit inquiries to staff. 	None.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City develop and make publicly available a guideline to limit the amount of time the Planner of the Day (POD) is able to spend on any single information request to 30 minutes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > AND THAT the City require any inquiry that, in the judgement of the POD, will require more than 30 minutes to be submitted to the City as a Land Use Inquiry. 	None.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City restructure the POD position from a rotating, shift-based position to a permanent position for a Planning Technician. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > AND THAT the City assign the Department's Planners, on a rotating basis, to provide back-up to the POD as necessary. 	It is expected that Planners providing back-up support would be called on infrequently.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City situate the POD behind the front counter at the application centre in order to enable the POD to interact efficiently with DSTs and Planning Assistants, and to easily attend to in-person inquiries that require the POD's input. 	None.



Recommendations	Comments
Council Involvement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City combine First and Second Readings, and in so doing eliminate the current approach of taking <i>Zoning Bylaw</i> amendments to Council separately at First Reading prior to applications being considered by referral departments. 	<p>This change would put Maple Ridge in line with other Metro Vancouver municipalities.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT staff develop a report with recommendations for consideration by Council to identify cases in which no public hearing is required for a proposed amendment to the <i>Zoning Bylaw</i>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > AND THAT in formulating the policy, staff review and be guided by criteria such as those set out in other municipalities that eliminate the need for a public hearing when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the proposed amendment concerns a subdivision with a limited maximum number (e.g., five or ten) new single family residential lots – the <i>Official Community Plan</i> is in effect for the area that is subject to the amendment – the amendment is consistent with the <i>Official Community Plan</i> 	<p>These criteria are taken from the City of Surrey's approach, and have been adopted by some other municipalities.</p>
Delegation of Approvals	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City develop a report with recommendations for consideration by Council to broaden the range of development permits, and to identify minor development variance permits, that may be approved by staff. 	<p>Examples for staff to consult include those in the City of Abbotsford, City of Surrey, City of North Vancouver and City of Chilliwack.</p>
Referral of Applications	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City establish timeline expectations for referrals. 	<p>A recommended timeline can be established in the short term, then revised downward in the medium term once the new file management software platform is in place, and once the</p>



Recommendations	Comments
	other accepted recommendations in this report have been implemented.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City require all staff involved in referrals to use a common format for providing comments to File Managers. 	The common format will be included in the new file management software platform, once implemented.
File Manager Model	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City create a File Manager Guide to outline the role responsibilities of the position, and to set out expectations for File Managers to meet and others to respect, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – keeping applicants informed of the status of applications and any issues that staff have identified – managing trade-offs in the priorities and concerns put forward by referral departments prior to providing referral comments to applicants – ensuring consistency, as the principal point of contact, in communications between the City and individual applicants 	None.
Application Streams	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City create a framework document for a Development Concierge service; and that the framework include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – criteria, specific to Maple Ridge, to identify development proposals that would be overseen by the Development Concierge – placement of the Development Concierge within the City's Economic Development Department, reporting to the Director of Economic Development 	The eligibility criteria and other features of the service framework would be informed by experiences in Ontario — in particular, in Halton Hills — but would be specific to Maple Ridge.



Recommendations	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – protocols to define the relationship between the Development Concierge and File Managers, internal and external referral groups, applicants and others involved in the development services function – factors necessary for the success of the service – performance metrics against which to measure the success of the program 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City adopt and operate the Development Concierge service as a pilot project for two (2) years. > AND THAT the City evaluate the service at the end of the pilot term to determine if it should be made permanent. 	None.
Technology	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City ensure during implementation of the new file management software platform to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – make use of any built-in or third-party vendor application portal to expedite the transition from paper-based submissions to digital submissions – provide the necessary hardware to facilitate the review of digital files – put in place an application monitoring dashboard to allow for greater transparency – reduce as much as possible the number of discrete steps in the review process that is incorporated into the system – formalize and public for all staff the actual review process to follow for each type of application – provide sufficient IT support to attend to trouble-shooting and the ongoing development of new applications – train staff to become proficient in using the system – require staff to use the system exclusively in their review of files 	None.



Recommendations	Comments
Communications and Engagement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City inventory all written materials provided online to prospective development applicants to identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – information gaps – duplication between and among materials – items to eliminate 	<p>As noted in the report, there are information materials at various places on the City's website. One inventory would be useful.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City create a common template for materials to be used to present revised and new documents that are created. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > AND THAT the City, as part of a broader website renewal initiative, organized all development services function materials in a user-friendly fashion under a "Development" heading. 	<p>The City's current website is not user-friendly for development applicants and prospective applicants.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City put in place and host a set of workshops each year for the development community and other applicants to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – present information on application requirements and processes – review policy and regulatory changes, as well as initiatives – receive feedback on the City's development services function, as well as suggested changes – foster relationships between the development community and the City 	<p>Environmental Services (and others) has hosted workshops in past years. Other municipalities feature such workshops regularly.</p>
Infrastructure Development	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City set out a protocol agreement, based on the summary presented in Figure 3.2, to clarify the authority of the Manager of Infrastructure Development, and the situations in which applications will be referred by the Manager for review and recommendations to sections in Engineering and Operations. 	<p>Figure 4.2 is a summary only. The protocol for Maple Ridge must set out all thresholds and other conditions for referrals.</p>



Recommendations	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > AND THAT the City implement the protocol agreement over the course of 2023 to transition from Operations' current role in reviewing all applications, to the more selective review role envisioned by the protocol agreement. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City, later in 2023, consider placing Infrastructure Development in Planning & Development Services, reporting to and under the authority of the Director of Planning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > AND THAT the City determine the placement of Infrastructure Development based on the City's success in implementing the other recommendations in this report as measured by improvement to key aspects of the development services function, including referral and approval turn-around times. 	<p>In the consultant's view, moving Infrastructure Development to Planning & Development Services would elevate the importance of the development services function in the organization and community, and should be strongly considered.</p> <p>It is recognized that such change would take some time to implement and would need to be managed carefully. It is recognized, as well, that the time required for action on other recommendations in the report will be considerable and will occupy leaders. For these reasons, the change to Infrastructure Development may be best revisited later in 2023 once the City has made progress on other recommendations, and when the City is in a position to evaluate the impacts of other changes made. At that time, the City would be able to either confirm the value of moving Infrastructure Development, or leave the current reporting structure unchanged.</p> <p>A decision to proceed at that time could be implemented in conjunction with any broader structural changes that the organization may wish to pursue.</p>



Recommendations	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City set out a new practices and expectations to guide Engineering Inspectors in exercising a role of compliance verification related to the construction of development works and services. <li style="padding-left: 20px;">> AND THAT the practices and expectations emphasize the need for greater reliance to be placed on the field reports and sign-offs provided by applicants' engineering professionals. 	<p>Engineering Inspectors do not need to be as heavily involved as they are today in the review of development works and services constructed by applicants.</p>
Environmental Services	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City consider the structure and responsibilities of Environmental Services in the context of the potential need to establish a new Environment and Climate Action office (or department) in Maple Ridge. 	<p>In the consultant's view there is value in reorganizing Environmental Services to separate policy from development reviews. Based on evolving community needs and Council priorities, however, the City may wish to consider elevating the importance of environment and climate by creating a new Environmental and Climate Action function, possibly in its own department or office. Several other municipalities have taken (or are contemplating) a similar initiative.</p>
Organization Culture	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > None. 	<p>None.</p>
Staffing Levels	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City redouble efforts to fill existing vacancies. 	<p>It is difficult to make the case for additional positions when existing positions have not been filled.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > THAT the City add a Planning Technician or Planner I position to serve as the dedicated Planner of the Day. 	<p>None.</p>



Recommendations	Comments
> THAT the City create an exempt Development Concierge position for a two-year pilot project term.	This position would report to the Director of Economic Development.
> THAT the City monitor the need to add a Planner II position and Engineering Technologist position to provide additional capacity for files brought in through the Development Concierge service.	None.
> THAT the City make continue to make use of retired Planners and contact Engineering Technologists and Inspectors to assist with managing workload.	None.