

Report

Date December 12, 2023
 Subject Supplemental Net New Staffing Request – Plan Checker

File:

PURPOSE

To consider funding for a Plan Checker position in the 2024 Operating Budget.

BACKGROUND

Building activity in North Cowichan has been increasing over time. Although permitting activity has dipped in 2023, based on housing growth projections and development application activity, it is expected to remain strong in the next 5-10 years.

Year	Permits Issued	Housing Units	Construction Value
2013	227	143	\$41.5M
2014	283	137	\$37.1M
2015	249	104	\$32.3M
2016	305	158	\$39.7M
2017	294	162	\$47.4M
2018	336	378	\$67.2M
2019	340	277	\$85.3M
2020	391	221	\$64.2M
2021	329	291	\$116.9M
2022	257	434	\$162.5M
2023 (to October 30)	184	80	\$297.5M

To help with the increased volume of building permits and building activity, Council approved a temporary Plan Checker position and amended the 2021 Budget and Financial Plan to fund the position for a two-year term in June of 2021. The two-year term for the position expired in November.

DISCUSSION

The building inspections team of the Planning and Building Department is currently staffed with a Chief Building Inspector, a Senior Building Inspector, two Building Inspectors and one administrative support person. Casual support is brought in periodically to assist with digitization of building permit files and documents and to cover vacation and other leaves.

Request Rationale

The temporary Plan Checker position was created in 2021 to assist with the intake of building permit applications and to provide additional capacity within the department for administering and reviewing building permit applications and processing to provide better service to building permit applicants and

the public. The Plan Checker position has worked well and contributed to a more efficient and effective permitting process.

With a shortage of Building Inspectors in British Columbia and many inspectors nearing retirement, the Plan Checker position was also intended to provide entry-level training in the Building Inspector field and enable the internal hiring of future Building Inspectors at North Cowichan. This has been very successful, with two Building Inspector vacancies filled internally with staff promoted from the Plan Checker position.

Summary of Duties:

Specific duties of the Plan Checker position include:

- Review all building permit application drawings for basic code compliance and relevant documentation.
- Request missing or incorrect building permit application information.
- Refer for review, the complete building permit files to the relevant Building Inspector and Planning, Engineering and Fire Departments for review and comment.
- Respond to enquiries about the BC Building Code, Building Bylaw and building-related questions and concerns.
- Respond to frequent requests for file reviews and building permit histories for specific properties.
- Vacation and leave coverage for Building Inspectors.

Qualifications for the Plan Checker position include technical and administrative education and skills, including eligibility for the Building Officials Association of BC Level 1.

Resourcing Requirements:

Based on the current collective agreement, the position's estimated cost is \$107,000, including benefits. As the position is not expected to be filled until April 2024, the cost in 2024 is expected to be \$82,400 and will be 100% funded through planning/building permit application fees.

In addition to the direct cost of wages and benefits, additional expenses of \$5,000 to \$8,000 per year are anticipated to create and maintain a workstation, training, professional memberships and other incidental costs incurred with additional staff.

Alignment with Council's Strategic Plan:

- Commitment to Services – (p. 7) – Ensure building inspection and permit services meet public expectations
- Service – Ensure open and transparent communications with the public

OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to include a Plan Checker position in the 2024 Operating Budget.
2. (Alternate Option) THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to include a temporary Plan Checker position for a two-year term in the 2024 and 2025 Operating Budgets.
3. THAT Council direct staff to bring forward the request for a Plan Checker position to a future budget process.

IMPLICATIONS

Approving the Plan Checker position would allow the department to maintain staffing for the building permitting and inspections function at the same level as it has been for the past two years. This will enable the department to maintain service levels if building activity continues as it has in recent years and to provide some resiliency for addressing potential staff turnover. Hiring for a permanent position increases the pool of prospective candidates and helps staff retention.

Renewing the position for another two-year term would allow service levels to be maintained in the shorter term. However, it would not create the structural capacity needed to manage increased building activity in the medium and long term.

If the position is not approved on a temporary or permanent basis, service levels could be maintained if building activity is similar to what has occurred in 2023 but would be negatively impacted if building activity increases to pre-2023 levels. Overtime and casual support could address temporary increases in building activity but would not be cost-effective for medium or longer-term increases.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to include a Plan Checker position in the 2024 Operating Budget.

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