

Report

Date March 4, 2026
Subject Development Services Function Review

File:

PURPOSE

To present the Development Services Function Review (DSFR) report prepared by Neilson Strategies Inc. for approval by Council. A presentation by project consultant, Neilson Strategies Inc., will be provided.

BACKGROUND

The DSFR report has been prepared as a core component of the Council-endorsed Development Approval Process Review (DAPR) initiative. The DAPR initiative seeks to enhance North Cowichan's development services function through a comprehensive evaluation of current practices, service delivery models, and organizational structure. Its overarching purpose is to identify opportunities to improve efficiency, consistency, and responsiveness across the full development lifecycle—from early enquiry through application intake, technical review, approvals, and post-approval processes.

To support this work, North Cowichan retained Neilson Strategies Inc., and the project was delivered with grant funding from the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM), which supports local governments undertaking process improvement and modernization projects related to development approvals. The consultant team was tasked with conducting an objective, evidence-based assessment of the municipality's development services function and providing actionable recommendations to guide future improvements.

Preparation of the DSFR report involved a comprehensive review of how development services currently operate. This included a detailed examination of existing bylaws, procedures, workflows, staffing structures, and performance expectations. The consultant team also reviewed internal process-mapping work previously completed by staff, which provided valuable insight into current bottlenecks and areas of duplication across departments. In addition, the review incorporated extensive staff interviews and engagement sessions with development industry stakeholders to capture diverse perspectives and real-world experiences with the development services system.

DISCUSSION

The DSFR report identifies a range of opportunities to streamline development approvals and strengthen overall service delivery. These include modernizing intake and referral processes, improving cross-departmental coordination, enhancing communication and transparency with applicants, and introducing clearer performance expectations and service standards. The report also highlights structural and organizational improvements—such as realigning departmental responsibilities and modernizing supporting technologies—that will enable North Cowichan to better meet growing service demands and support North Cowichan's long-term strategic objectives. Collectively, the recommendations provide a roadmap for modernizing the development services function and improving the user experience for applicants, staff, and the broader community.

Implementation and Resourcing Needs

The DSFR report proposes a sequenced, multi-year implementation framework that organizes recommendations into short-, medium-, and long-term phases. This phasing structure acknowledges the breadth of the recommended changes and the need to align implementation with available staff capacity, financial resources, and North Cowichan's annual business planning process.

Short-Term (Year 1): Foundational Improvements

The first phase focuses on lower-cost, high-impact improvements that lay the groundwork for broader system modernization. Key actions in this phase include the formation of department-level process-mapping teams to document and standardize existing workflows, alongside targeted organizational realignments to improve coordination and clarify roles within the development services function. These foundational steps are critical for ensuring that clear processes and aligned staff responsibilities support subsequent technology and policy updates.

Medium-Term (Year 2): Technology and Workflow Modernization

The second phase centers on modernizing digital tools, application materials, and public-facing resources. This includes enhancements to forms, guides, checklists, and procedural documentation, as well as improvements to internal tracking and workflow systems. These initiatives will require more substantial investment in both capital funding and staff resourcing. Advancing this phase will position North Cowichan to streamline application handling, improve transparency for applicants, and support performance measurement across the development review process.

Long-Term (Year 3+): System Modernization and Continuous Improvement

The longer-term phase shifts toward comprehensive system updates and sustained continuous improvement measures. This includes major bylaw modernization—such as procedures, standards, templates, and refinements to delegation—and the institutionalization of performance reporting tools. These initiatives are intended to ensure that development services operate efficiently, transparently, and consistently over the long term, and that North Cowichan maintains the capacity to adapt to future regulatory, technological, and growth-related demands.

Many of the actions outlined in the DSFR report are not currently budgeted. Advancing them will require incremental decision-making through North Cowichan's annual business planning and priority-setting processes. Given the complexity and scope of the recommendations, implementation will necessarily occur over multiple years. It will depend on the establishment of a formal implementation plan, supported by dedicated staff capacity and financial resources.

Business Plan Integration and Next Steps

The DSFR report represents a comprehensive set of strategic improvements intended to modernize and strengthen the development services function at North Cowichan. These recommendations are designed to be implemented progressively over several years, recognizing the need to balance organizational capacity, resource availability, and alignment with corporate priorities.

To support this approach, staff recommend that Council direct staff to prepare a detailed implementation plan that sequences DSFR recommendations into a coherent, staged work program. Integration of this plan into the annual business plan process will enable staff to identify priority initiatives each year, assess resource implications, and bring forward funding requests and staffing requirements for Council's consideration. This approach ensures that DSFR implementation is structured, transparent, and aligned with broader municipal objectives.

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) is anticipated to play a key role in guiding future implementation, providing cross-departmental oversight, and monitoring progress annually. By linking DSFR activities to business plan reporting cycles, SLT can ensure that implementation remains on track, accountability is clear, and adjustments can be made as operational needs evolve.

By embedding DSFR implementation into ongoing business planning and governance processes, North Cowichan will be well-positioned to achieve meaningful, long-term improvements in development services, enhance applicant experience, and better support community growth and housing objectives.

OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** THAT Council:
 - a. Receives the Development Services Function Review report dated December 2025, for information;
 - b. Endorses the recommendation framework outlined in the report; and,
 - c. Directs staff to develop an implementation plan and bring forward required investments through the annual business planning process.

2. THAT Council directs staff to work with the consultant, Neilson Strategies Inc., to include the following revisions to the Development Services Function Review report:
 - a. *[Council to identify areas to be revised]*
 - This option would require additional resources beyond current project obligations.

IMPLICATIONS

Resourcing: Many DSFR recommendations will require additional resource needs, which will be brought forward through future business planning and budgeting processes.

Strategic Alignment: The implementation framework directly supports Council's strategic priorities for good governance and service excellence, as well as the departmental business plans.

Infrastructure: Servicing capacity remains the dominant limiting factor for the advancement of development proposals. Without corresponding infrastructure investments, process improvements alone will have a limited impact.

Transparency & Accountability: Implementing the DSFR recommendations will improve predictability for applicants and enhance public understanding of development processes.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council:

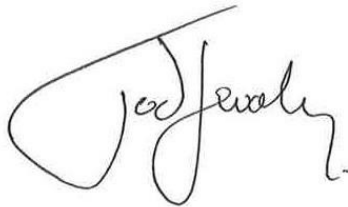
- a. Receives the Development Services Function Review report dated December 2025, for information;
- b. Endorses the recommendation framework outlined in the report; and,
- c. Directs staff to develop an implementation plan and bring forward required investments through the annual business planning process.

Report prepared by:



George Farkas
General Manager, Planning, Development and Community Services

Approved to be forwarded to Council:



Ted Swabey
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment:

- (1) Municipality of North Cowichan – DSFR Report