City of White Rock

Needs Assessment Report

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Needs Assessment Report – City of White Rock City Hall

1. Introduction

The City of White Rock is undertaking a rapid Needs Assessment to determine the current and future space requirements for its City Hall facility. The purpose of this report is to provide an evidence-based framework to guide future decision-making related to the potential redevelopment or relocation of administrative and civic services.

White Rock City Hall has served as the administrative centre for the community since its construction in 1963. While the building has been maintained and adapted over the years, it no longer meets the needs of a growing and evolving municipality. Physical limitations, a fragmented internal layout, and an absence of modern building systems have contributed to inefficiencies in service delivery and staff operations. In addition, the broader context of shifting work practices, accessibility requirements, and climate-conscious design have introduced new pressures on civic infrastructure across Canada.

This Needs Assessment establishes a baseline understanding of existing staff conditions and provides space planning scenarios to evaluate future options. It also reviews relevant industry standards and offers insights from comparable municipalities to ensure the City's planning efforts are aligned with best practices and regional norms.

The findings presented herein are intended to support long-term capital planning and ensure that any future investment in civic infrastructure is reflective of the City's strategic goals, operational needs, and community expectations.

2. Industry Standards and Trends

Across Canada, municipalities are re-evaluating the design, functionality, and sustainability of their civic facilities. Several key space planning and infrastructure standards have emerged, informed by architectural best practices, post-pandemic workplace trends, and a growing emphasis on accessibility and energy efficiency.

2.1 Space Per Employee

Industry norms for municipal office space typically range between 150 and 250 square feet per full-time employee (FTE), inclusive of workstations, circulation space, shared meeting rooms, and support areas. Higher figures are associated with enclosed office environments or hybrid models that preserve workstation flexibility. (*Source: Colliers Project Leaders, "Office Space Standards: A Planning Guide," 2022; CSA Z8000-18 – Canadian Health Care Facilities*)

2.2 Meeting Rooms and Collaboration Space

A minimum ratio of 1 meeting room per 10 to 15 staff is increasingly common, with a blend of enclosed boardrooms, small huddle spaces, and hybrid-enabled meeting rooms.

Municipalities are also incorporating informal gathering zones to support cross-departmental collaboration and staff well-being. (*Source: City of Langley Civic Facility Needs Assessment, 2020; Gensler Workplace Research, 2021*)

2.3 Storage and Support Areas

While the need for physical file storage has declined due to digital records management, municipalities continue to require secure document storage, equipment space, and department-specific supply areas. Industry guidance typically allocates 8–10% of the gross floor area for general and secure storage. (*Source: City of St. Albert Civic Space Master Plan, 2019; CSA Z317.13-17 – General Requirements for Storage in Institutional Buildings*)

2.4 Hybrid Work and Desk Sharing

Flexible work arrangements are influencing civic building design. Many municipalities now plan for 1.2–1.5 FTEs per workstation, assuming rotational occupancy due to hybrid work policies. While this can reduce overall footprint requirements, it requires more investment in shared spaces, lockers, and booking systems. (*Source: CBRE "Workplace Strategy and Office Utilization," 2021; FCM Municipal Workplace Trends, 2022*)

2.5 Accessibility and Sustainability

Modern civic facilities are expected to meet or exceed provincial building codes for accessibility. Furthermore, many new civic buildings are being designed to LEED Gold, Passive House, or Zero Carbon Building standards, contributing to long-term operational cost savings and climate goals. Space planning must account for mechanical systems, air quality infrastructure, and renewable energy systems. (*Source: Canada Green Building Council; FCM Green Municipal Fund Case Studies; CSA B651-18 – Accessible Design for the Built Environment*)

3.0 Jurisdictional Review

To inform space planning for the future White Rock City Hall, data was gathered from several comparable municipalities across the Lower Mainland and Metro Vancouver. This review was previously completed by City staff and considered 2016 Census population figures — the most recent standardized municipal-level data available at the time of analysis — alongside current City Hall building sizes and direct staff commentary. Although population and staffing levels may have changed since 2016, the space-related challenges and lessons observed in these communities remain highly relevant.

Interviews with peer municipalities revealed the following key insights:

- **Langley City** (2016 population ~26,000) operates out of a 12,000 sq. ft. facility which staff describe as "completely inadequate." Since moving in nearly two decades ago, the staff complement has doubled, resulting in severe overcrowding and a patchwork of makeshift cubicles. The building was well designed initially, but

lacked space to grow — a condition now impacting staff morale and operational efficiency.

- **Port Moody** (population ~33,500) has 25,000 sq. ft. allocated to City Hall but currently lacks sufficient space for approximately 100 employees. According to staff, several positions that should be housed at City Hall are located elsewhere due to capacity issues. Their internal target for an appropriate facility size is closer to 32,000 sq. ft., indicating a functional shortfall of 7,000 sq. ft. in their current footprint.
- **West Vancouver** (population ~42,500) is undertaking a major civic facilities renewal. Once complete, they will have a combined 53,000 sq. ft. of City Hall space, including a newly constructed 20,000 sq. ft. building (with secure basement storage) and a 33,000 sq. ft. retained heritage structure. This hybrid approach reflects a long-term view of growth, redundancy, and secure storage needs.
- **Pitt Meadows** (population ~18,500) operates a smaller facility (11,400 sq. ft.), but has not reported the same level of spatial pressure. However, its smaller organizational size and service model make it a useful lower-bound reference rather than a direct comparator.

3.1 Key Takeaways

These municipal case studies highlight the risks of underbuilding. Even well-designed facilities like Langley's have become functionally obsolete due to population growth, staffing increases, and expanding civic responsibilities. Port Moody and West Vancouver illustrate how space shortfalls can lead to fragmented operations and the eventual need for costly expansions.

Most notably, municipalities that planned only for immediate needs found themselves quickly constrained. By contrast, those designing with longer-term flexibility and surplus capacity in mind are better positioned to manage growth, support staff, and maintain service continuity.

4.0 Cross-Departmental Themes

The staff engagement process revealed consistent and cross-cutting challenges across nearly every department. While the nature of each role and function varies, common themes emerged related to space quality, operational inefficiencies, collaboration, storage, and staff safety. Many of these issues are amplified by the current distribution of City staff across multiple buildings—each with its own limitations in terms of layout, capacity, and condition.

Facility	Square Footage	Notes
City Hall	12,000	Executive, Finance, Corporate Admin, HR, Planning
Annex	3,500	IT, Bylaw, Parking
Operations Centre	1,950	Engineering (30% of total 6,500sf)
Community Centre	200	Directors office
Council Chambers	1,100	Located in Community Centre
	18,750	

The table above summarizes the current facility footprint used to house administrative staff. This distributed model reflects a legacy of reactive adaptation rather than strategic facility planning and results in duplicated services, reduced collaboration, and limitations in public service delivery.

4.1 Inadequate Public Interface and Customer Experience

Departments that interact regularly with the public expressed concern over the fragmented and inconsistent experience residents face when entering City Hall. There is no centralized public counter, signage is unclear, and services are spread across multiple levels and departments.

Staff identified the need for:

- A centralized front counter with dedicated client service reps
- Public self-service kiosks and accessible terminals
- A single location for all financial transactions, reducing confusion and improving cash handling protocols
- Queuing space and waiting areas that are safe, welcoming, and functional
- A balance between security and service such as dimmable glass barriers or breakout rooms for escalated situations

4.2 Fragmented Layout and Departmental Separation

Several departments are physically divided across floors or buildings, affecting collaboration, supervision, and morale. Shared staff members are forced to navigate between locations, and leadership teams lack adequate space for team meetings.

Staff called for:

- Co-location of teams with frequent operational overlap (e.g., Planning & Engineering, HR & Finance)
- Design that supports organic collaboration — such as open work areas, shared huddle rooms, and central plan review tables

- Consolidation of departments that are currently split between upstairs/downstairs or annexed locations

4.3 Storage and Specialized Equipment Needs

Nearly every department described insufficient or unsafe storage:

- Overflowing file boxes create physical hazards in Planning and Payroll
- Hanging file systems are needed for large-format archival documents
- Finance and HR need locked, access-controlled rooms for confidential materials
- Corporate Admin requires dedicated storage for election materials and equipment, with strict security protocols
- Bylaw enforcement requires specialized holding for items such as impounded bikes and (on rare occasions) animals
- IT department requires access-controlled storage for servers, decommissioned hardware, and plotters, along with secure loading zones for large equipment delivery.

Storage needs are not just purely logistical — they're about risk management, compliance, and employee safety.

4.4 Meeting Space Deficiencies

Staff meetings, public appointments, committee sessions, and project workshops all compete for a limited number of undersized rooms. Most departments lack access to appropriate space for private, collaborative, or hybrid meetings.

Recommendations included:

- Multiple small breakout rooms for one-on-one or de-escalation purposes
- A 25–30 person training room that can double as a staff workshop or public meeting space
- Technology-enabled hybrid meeting rooms
- Access to meeting space without crossing through sensitive or secure zones

4.5 Flexibility and Growth

Workforce expansion is anticipated across multiple departments, but so too is a shift toward hybrid, shared, or visiting staff. Designing for flexibility, rather than strictly growth, was a recurring theme.

Staff emphasized the need for:

- Hoteling stations for interns, consultants, and co-op placements
- Modular layouts that allow space to be reconfigured as programs evolve
- Built-in expansion capacity for departments expected to grow

4.6 Wellness and Workplace Culture

Employees expressed appreciation for amenities that contribute to workplace satisfaction and retention. Current offerings are minimal and, in some cases, inadequate.

Desired amenities include:

- A gym and showers
- Quiet/prayer/meditation rooms
- Informal lounge seating for staff to gather or decompress
- Outdoor patios for both public and staff use — building on the popularity of the existing picnic table area at the rear of City Hall

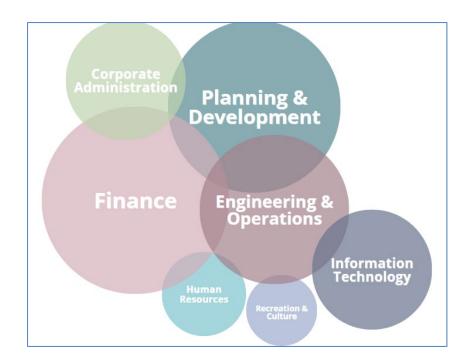## 4.7 Collaboration and Cross-Functional Integration

While each department has unique roles and responsibilities, the Needs Assessment revealed a high degree of day-to-day interaction and operational overlap between several divisions. These relationships point to the importance of physical proximity, shared spaces, and intentional adjacencies in the layout of a future facility. Staff suggested clearer pathways to integrate space and workflow between divisions.

Examples include:

- Planning and Engineering sharing counter space, permitting processes, and development reviews
- HR and Finance working together on payroll, training, and onboarding
- Corporate Admin and Council support needing uninterrupted access to the Council Chambers and meeting prep zones
- IT does not require physical adjacency to other departments, however, its collaboration with all divisions depends on functional access to shared training and support areas

The diagram below illustrates some of the key spatial relationships and functional intersections between departments, based on staff feedback during the engagement process.

Current Spatial Relationships by Department

Design should support these relationships through physical adjacency, shared spaces, and intentional circulation between teams.

5.0 Space Planning Scenarios

Based on staff interviews and operational data, it is evident that the City's current facilities are limiting—not supporting—organizational capacity. Several known hires are currently deferred due to space constraints. For this reason, the Needs Assessment has framed the scenarios as follows:

- **Scenario A** - reflects the City's present staffing and space requirements if all known and approved positions were filled.

- **Scenario B** - includes anticipated departmental growth over the next 5–10 years and allows for internal flexibility.

- **Scenario C** - provides for long-term expansion and possible co-location of additional services or partners.

These scenarios are based on departmental interviews, growth projections, operational workflows, and comparative benchmarks from other municipalities.

These space planning scenarios are based on a detailed modeling of programmed space

needs by office type, scaled against three staffing projections: current levels (including deferred hires, 0% growth), 10-15% growth, and 20%+ growth. Finally, space modeling includes a 25% circulation factor to account for internal hallways and flow areas, alongside an additional 8% explicitly allocated for general and departmental storage, separate from circulation.

Current Spatial Needs by Department

Department	Division	Exec Office	Large Office	Standard Office	Cubicle
Corp Admin			2	0	6
Engineering			1	3	7
Planning & Development Services	Planning		2	2	2
	Building		1	0	9
	Bylaw		0	0	4
	Parking		0	1	4
Human Resources			1	1	4
Finance	Finance		1	5	10
	Payroll		0	2	1
IT			1	1	6
Recreation & Culture			1	0	0
Administration		2	1	0	1
HR / Facilities				1	
FTE Totals		**2**	**11**	**16**	**54**

+7 potential new staff identified

Note: While additional space requirements for the White Rock Archives (1,000 sq. ft.) and a potential Daycare facility (3,500 sq. ft.) were identified during consultations, these are excluded from all three scenarios below. Their inclusion is contingent on future partnership decisions and site-specific feasibility.

5.1 Scenario A: Baseline Build-out (Current staffing + deferred hires)

This scenario reflects the minimum functional requirement for the City to support current staffing levels and organizational structure, inclusive of positions that are currently deferred due to space limitations. It is best suited as a foundational build-out scenario and may lend itself to a phased development approach.

It includes:

- Right-sized offices and workstations for current staff across all departments

- Reduced meeting and breakout space compared to other scenarios
- Continued reliance on some off-site or shared amenities
- Limited flexibility for internal reorganization or growth
- Minimal capacity for future program expansion

Estimated Space Range: ~24,500 sq. ft. (*Assumes tighter workstation ratios and modest shared space allocations*)

5.2 Scenario B: Moderate Growth (+10-15% staffing)

This scenario provides additional space to accommodate near-term growth projections and improved functionality across all departments. It is intended to support the City's core services while providing greater flexibility for interdepartmental collaboration and evolving work models.

It includes:

- A blend of open-plan workstations and private offices
- Centralized customer service and financial transaction areas
- Standard meeting and breakout room allocations (e.g., 4 rooms at 300 sq. ft. each)
- Adequate support spaces for print/copy/mail, storage, and secure files
- Public-facing spaces sized for consistent resident interaction

Total Estimated Area: ~25,500 sq. ft. (*Based on detailed program table; excludes Archives and Daycare*)

5.3 Scenario C: Long-term Capacity (+20% staffing)

This scenario anticipates full departmental growth, interagency collaboration, and long-term service delivery needs. It provides the greatest flexibility and resilience for future changes in staffing, co-location of public services, and potential regional partnerships.

It includes:

- Full staffing growth projections across all departments
- Additional hoteling stations for hybrid, seasonal, or contract roles
- Expanded and diverse meeting and training spaces
- Greater emphasis on staff wellness infrastructure (e.g., gym, showers, lounges)
- Enhanced public service counters, queueing areas, and breakout space
- Expanded secure storage for specialized equipment and records

Estimated Space Range: ~27,500 sq. ft. (*Excludes Archives and Daycare; assumes inclusion of staff amenities and larger shared-use space*)

6.0 Recommendation and Conclusion

The Needs Assessment confirms that the current White Rock City Hall no longer meets the spatial, functional, or operational requirements of a modern municipal administration. Feedback across all departments reveals recurring issues related to overcrowding, lack of acoustic and physical privacy, storage overflow, dispersed teams, and insufficient meeting and public-facing space.

Lessons from peer municipalities such as Langley and Port Moody underscore the importance of designing for future flexibility, rather than simply addressing current needs. Both communities report significant operational challenges stemming from undersized City Halls built to accommodate their populations and service levels of 15 to 20 years ago. White Rock has a valuable opportunity to avoid these costly retrofit scenarios by planning proactively from the outset.

The updated program-based model, reflected in both the space scenarios and visual chart in Section 5, confirms that a Moderate Growth target of approximately 26,000 sq. ft. is both appropriate and achievable. This footprint balances today's confirmed needs with 10-15% future growth while remaining within the range of comparator municipalities and industry standards.

6.1 Comparison to Industry Standards (Section 2 Alignment)

As outlined in Section 2, current best practices for municipal office space recommend:

- 150–250 sq. ft. per full-time employee (FTE), inclusive of shared space and circulation
- Ratios of 1 meeting room per 10–15 staff
- 8–10% of total floor area allocated to storage
- Additional considerations for hybrid work and co-located public service delivery

Based on the space program in Section 5:

- With approximately 99 office-based staff accommodated (2 executive offices, 12 large offices, 18 standard offices, 67 open plan), the Moderate Growth scenario results in a total gross floor area of 25,636 sq. ft., or approximately **203 sq. ft. per FTE** when including deferred hires, excluding Council Chambers and Public Space.
- Storage has been allocated at 8% of gross floor area, consistent with industry norms for departmental and secure storage space. This includes allowances for file storage, IT equipment, and specialty uses such as elections and bylaw evidence.
- The plan includes 12 meeting and breakout spaces, which exceeds the benchmark of 1 room per 10–15 FTEs. This reflects the City's high degree of interdepartmental coordination and frequent public engagement obligations.

This comparison indicates that the **Moderate Growth Scenario (~25,500 sq. ft.)** is appropriately sized, and offers a responsible, scalable baseline that reflects both functional needs and benchmarking against other municipalities. The current plan strikes a practical balance between operational need, industry benchmarks, and feedback from peer communities — ensuring that White Rock City Hall will remain functional, adaptable, and fiscally responsible over the long term.

Recommended Approach

It is recommended that the City:

- Adopt the Moderate Growth scenario as the design and budget baseline, while allowing for modular expansion if necessary.
- Advance a centralized customer service model that consolidates front counters and financial transactions into a single public interface.
- Prioritize staff safety and workplace wellness, integrating physical security, acoustic control, and staff amenities.
- Incorporate departmental adjacencies and cross-functional collaboration in the spatial layout.
- Design for long-term flexibility, including hoteling desks, modular work areas, and secure storage systems.
- Incorporate lessons from peer municipalities, recognizing that underbuilding has led to fragmentation, overcrowding, and costly retrofits in communities such as Langley and Port Moody.

While the proposed Moderate Growth scenario totals approximately 25,636 square feet, this represents only a 25% increase over the 18,750 square feet currently used across five separate locations. Importantly, the existing space is fragmented, inefficient, and often not purpose-built—resulting in duplicated functions, constrained workflows, and poor adaptability. The recommended footprint consolidates services, addresses long-standing functional gaps, and enables a more efficient use of space overall. In this context, the Moderate Growth scenario should be viewed not as an expansion, but as a right-sizing of municipal infrastructure to support modern service delivery and long-term operational resilience.

APPENDIX A

Spatial Requirement Scenario Breakdown

Space Type	Size per Unit	FTEs - Current	Moderate Growth	Long-term Capacity	Total SF - Current	Moderate Growth	Long-term Capacity
Public Lobby/Event Space	2000	1			2,000	2,000	2,000
Executive Office	200	2	2	2	400	400	400
Large Office	150	11	12	13	1,650	1,800	1,950
Standard Office	100	16	18	19	1,600	1,800	1,900
Open Plan Office	100	54	59	65	5,400	5,900	6,500
Deferred Hires	100	7	8	8	700	800	800
Breakout Room	75	8	9	10	600	675	750
Meeting Room	300	4	4	5	1,200	1,200	1,500
Mail/Copy Room	200	4	4	5	800	800	1,000
Council Chambers	3500	1			3,500	3,500	3,500
Corporate Admin/ Reception	400	1			400	400	400
Server Room							
Telecom Closets							
Training Room							
Subtotal					18,250	19,275	20,700
Circulation (25%) and Storage (8%) - 33%					6,023	6,361	6,831
Total					24,273	25,636	27,531
White Rock Archives	1000	1			1,000	1,000	1,000
Daycare	3500	1			3,500	3,500	3,500
Retail/Cafeteria	2000	1			2,000	2,000	2,000
Amenities Subtotal					6,500	6,500	6,500
Potential Total SF					30,773	32,136	34,031