

THE CORPORATION OF THE  
**CITY OF WHITE ROCK**  
**CORPORATE REPORT**



**DATE:** March 8, 2021

**TO:** Finance and Audit Committee

**FROM:** Carl Isaak, Director, Planning and Development Services

**SUBJECT:** Planning Technician Budget Request

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**RECOMMENDATION**

THAT the Finance and Audit Committee approve hiring a regular full-time Planning Technician, with redirected funding and reserves used for 2021 and funding for 2022 and future years through taxation revenue.

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This corporate report identifies staff's intention to proceed with hiring a full-time Planning Technician.

Council has directed staff to manage the delivery of services efficiently and effectively, while also making progress on substantial City-building initiatives, including the Official Community Plan Review, the preparation of a Housing Needs Report, and an update to the Zoning Bylaw.

Due to the on-going high volume of daily operational demands on the Planning team (i.e. responding to abundant technical public/internal inquiries, application file management, etc.), these long-term strategic tasks would be more effectively delivered by adding a Planning Technician enable the Planning team to make progress on Council's Strategic Priorities, while also advancing process improvements that will benefit existing and future White Rock residents.

**PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION**

Not applicable.

**INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

Planning services provided by the City of White Rock include managing day-to-day inquiries, advancing development applications, working towards the satisfaction of Council priorities, and upholding other operational duties such as liaising and supporting the efforts of a variety of City committees. The Planning team is comprised of a Manager of Planning, a Planner, and a Planning and Development Assistant; the Director of Planning and Development Services also supports the work of the team including leadership in the advancement of long range planning activities (e.g., Official Community Plan Review, Zoning Bylaw Update, etc.).

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, there was some uncertainty as to whether the effects of the lockdown would result in a decline in development applications (i.e. variances, rezoning, subdivision, liquor licence referrals, development permits, etc.) and interest in property

information due to a general economic decline, and consequently whether day-to-day operational requirements for the Planning team, as well as the progress toward Council's related Strategic Priorities, could continue to be met effectively with a single Planner, Manager and the Director of Planning. Staff had also been in the process of bringing an amendment to the Planning Procedures Bylaw that would potentially reduce the number of rezoning applications in queue by giving Council an opportunity to deny applications at an early stage if they were considered to be fundamentally not approvable. During the initial budget preparation, these factors were still undetermined and there were no requests made for additional resources.

Since the initial budget preparation, it has been evident that the level of development applications and other operational demands on the Planning team have not declined, and the transition to online Public Information Meetings for development applications requires a higher level of staff involvement than in-person meetings due to the technical requirements.

There are currently 40 planning proposals representing 68 individual applications under review; some proposals are made up of concurrent applications (e.g., rezoning and subdivision). These applications commonly begin with several iterations of internal review and revision prior to receipt, at which point the Planner assigned to the file (i.e., either the Manager or the Planner) undertakes a technical circulation to internal City departments, the RCMP, Surrey School District and in some cases the City of Surrey. The assigned Planner then begins the process of preparing the application for presentation to the public (e.g., preparing mapping, running test meetings with applicants, preparing notification letters and mail outs, etc.). Subsequent to the circulation of the file, and the public information meeting (PIM), the Planner is responsible for working with department representatives, the applicant, the applicant's consultants, and the public to resolve issues and ultimately bring forward a recommendation for consideration by the City's Land Use and Planning Committee (LUPC) and Council. The process, albeit providing excellent opportunities for public awareness and engagement, requires a considerable amount of management and coordination by the Planner. Generally, time spent managing development applications consumes between 60 and 70 percent of the work week of the Manager and the Planner. This file management activity does not include responding to general inquiries from realtors and the public, or discussing application proposals with property owners, many of which do not proceed to an actual application.

Further, the City's Planning team receives roughly three to five general planning calls per day and five to 10 general emails per day. On average, it takes 10 to 15 minutes to address a phone enquiry and 10 to 20 minutes to address an email; frequently there are follow up calls and emails, with many initial enquiries evolving into more substantive segments of the day. There are roughly 10 to 15 calls received by the Department line daily and these can take between five and 10 minutes to address. Collectively, the general enquiries managed by the Planner and the Planning and Development Assistant consume roughly 30% of their work week. When this time is added to supporting the advancement of development files, there is limited time to support professional development, administrative tasks and process improvements that would increase the efficiency of the application management process.

The position best suited to the needs of the team is one of a Planning Technician (see Appendix A for job description). A Planning Technician would be responsible for managing the bulk of day-to-day inquiries while assisting with a handful of less complex planning applications (Development Variance Permits, less complex subdivision applications, liquor/cannabis licence referrals, etc.), freeing up the capacity of the Manager and Planner to direct time towards the completion of the Official Community Plan Review, the Housing Needs Report and the Zoning Bylaw Update. The Technician would also support the Manager and Planner in organizing file

materials such as development signs, mapping, and public-facing resources that can be time-consuming but do not require the level of knowledge of a Planner or Manager.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The annual salary for a full-time Planning Technician (including benefits) would be between \$88,000 and \$104,800.

The 2021 budget for the Planning and Development Services Department has allocated \$40,000 towards general consulting services, as well as an additional \$30,000 for consulting services specifically related to the Zoning Bylaw Update. Staff propose to use \$60,000 of this existing budget to hire a Planning Technician for 2021, which would require a maximum of an additional \$44,800 from the operating contingency.

If Council were to resolve to hire the position full time, then the 2021 - 2025 Financial Plan would also have to be modified to incorporate the increase in 2022 which would add approximately 0.45% to the 2022 tax rate increase, raising that increase to a required 4.82% in 2022.

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Not applicable.

### **COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

Not applicable.

### **INTERDEPARTMENTAL INVOLVEMENT/IMPLICATIONS**

Financial Services and Human Resources have provided input for this report.

### **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

Not applicable.

### **ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

Council has directed the Planning and Development Services Department to undertake an update to the Official Community Plan, to prepare a Housing Needs Report, and to update the Zoning Bylaw. Council has also established, as a “top priority,” the need to manage the delivery of City services efficiently and effectively. The ability to deliver on these objectives is highly dependent on having the in-house resourcing capacity to make progress on each task while managing the day-to-day operations of the Department. Hiring a Planning Technician would allow the Manager of Planning to direct time towards the completion of the Official Community Plan review, the Housing Needs Report and the Zoning Bylaw Update. This would in turn free up some of the time of the Director of Planning and Development Services to assist with other important initiatives including the implementation of the Energy Step Code, a process of Bylaw Adjudication, the advancement of CAC-funded projects, and other initiatives that will benefit the way White Rock conducts business now and into the future.

### **OPTIONS / RISKS / ALTERNATIVES**

The following options are available for Council's consideration:

1. Direct staff to continue to operate with existing staff resources, and request that a report be brought forward on the impacts to service levels and/or the advancement of Council's Strategic Priorities, being reflective of maintaining existing staff resources; or
2. Direct staff to include a twelve (12) month temporary full-time Planning Technician position in 2021 to 2025 Financial Plan using redirected funding and reserves in 2021, and not funding the position on a permanent basis. Recruiting for a temporary position may not yield the best pool of candidates as it may be less attractive to candidates with an existing full-time position.

### **CONCLUSION**

Due to the on-going high volume of daily operational demands on the Planning team and limited staff resources, long-term strategic tasks including the Official Community Plan Review, the preparation of a Housing Needs Report, and an update to the Zoning Bylaw have been impacted. It is recommended that a Planning Technician be hired to enable the City's Planning team to make progress on Council's Strategic Priorities while also advancing process improvements that will benefit existing and future White Rock residents. While the re-allocation of funds necessary to enable this position in 2021 does not formally require the endorsement of Council, staff are bringing this forward so that Council is aware of the future impact on taxation revenues in 2022, if this position is approved on a regular full-time basis.

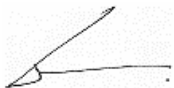
Respectfully submitted,



Carl Isaak, MCIP, RPP  
Director, Planning and Development Services

### **Comments from the Chief Administrative Officer**

I concur with the recommendations of this corporate report.



Guillermo Ferrero  
Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix A: Planning Technician Job Classification