

CITY OF NANAIMO

BUSINESS CASE – Planning & Development Department: Assistant Manager, Current Planning

CURRENT OVERVIEW

The Current Planning section is responsible for administering development related bylaws including the Zoning Bylaw, Development Procedures and Notification Bylaw, Parking Bylaw, and Sign Bylaw, as well as various development related policies, to ensure alignment with Council’s priorities and provincial legislation. The Section is responsible for processing development-related applications including Official Community Plan amendments, rezonings, temporary use permits, sign permits, covenant amendments, development permits and development variance permits and ensuring that development adheres to applicable Development Permit Area Guidelines and supports the implementation of City Plan: Nanaimo ReImagined. Current Planning staff respond to public inquiries and information requests and are responsible for administration of the Board of Variance and Design Advisory Panel. They also review applications from external agencies related to liquor and cannabis licences, telecommunications facilities, and development within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and review business license applications for compliance with applicable bylaws. As well, Current Planning provides professional advice and guidance on planning regulatory and policy issues to Council, internal departments, community, business sector and other interested organizations.

The Current Planning section is overseen by the Manager, Current Planning and consists of the following FTEs:

- Planner (4)
- Planning Assistant (2)
- Steno (1)

Of note, the work of Current Planning staff has been directly impacted by recent substantial Provincial legislative changes such as Bills 16, 44, 46 & 47, which have required a rapid response and reprioritization of initiatives, as well as immediate and forthcoming major bylaw amendments and process adjustments. This has added significantly to the Current Planning section’s workload and has highlighted the need for additional support to coordinate the Section’s work in support of City’s development approvals mandate, including the Provincial Housing Target Order.

BUSINESS ISSUE

The framework for local government land use regulation and associated development approvals is set out in the Local Government Act. Land development in the City of Nanaimo is governed by a set of policies and regulations set out in the City’s land use bylaws and plans. Property owners who wish to develop or redevelop their land must apply for and obtain various types of approval based on the policies and regulations contained in the land use bylaws and plans.

These applications are reviewed against relevant City policies and regulations and applicable provincial and federal regulations by staff in the Planning & Development Department through the development approval process. The increasing complexity and scale of development applications pose challenges to staff in their efforts to consistently meet approval timelines targets. The pace of development and demand for housing in Nanaimo are expected to remain strong for the foreseeable future and ongoing development process improvements are needed to ensure approvals processes are effective and efficient in the face of internal and external resource limitations and changing development context and demands.

In June 2023, the City engaged Neilson Strategies Inc., in collaboration with Leftside Partners Inc., to conduct a holistic review of development approval processes. One of the recommendations in that review was to create an Assistant Manager of Current Planning. This recommendation, as well as others, was endorsed by Council at the Regular Council Meeting on 2024-JUL-22.

With current Planner positions working near or at capacity, it limits the ability of the Manager, Current Planning from delegating resulting in:

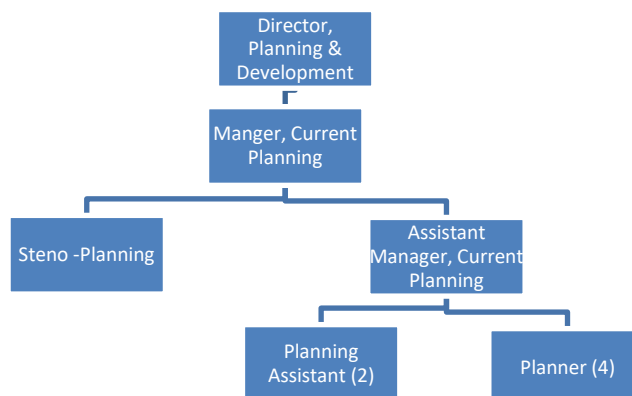
- Reduction of strategic planning by the Manager, Current Planning
- Reduction in capacity to mentor staff and coordinate timely resolutions when issues arise in the development approval process.
- Reduction in identifying opportunities for proactive policy improvements.
- Reduction in ability of staff to provide higher service levels.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

The Assistant Manager, Current Planning would help oversee and coordinate consistent and timely process for development application reviews and provide additional resources as required to manage the City's Current Planning section effectively and efficiently.

Increased capacity is anticipated to:

- Add a more experienced planner to the review process to assign and guide planners' review of files, lead review of complex projects and support the review and approval of comprehensive letters and reports.
- Enhance the section's ability to engage applicants and to coordinate efforts internally across sections and divisions.
- Add capacity at a senior level to initiate and manage policy initiatives, oversee the implementation of changes to the development approval review process, and oversee other planning projects.
- Address capacity to oversee and provide leadership to staff in the day-to-day operations.
- Add capacity to assist in the smooth flow of a development proposal through various approval steps to enhance communication, coordination and customer experience.
- Support the ability for the Manager, Current Planning to respond to issues of concern, strategically plan, and provide expert advice, effectively.
- Add capacity and agility to adjust bylaws and processes to meet Council's policy priorities, the policy priorities of senior levels of government and the needs of the development industry.



OPTIONS

Option #1 – Assistant Manager, Current Planning Position

Create a permanent full-time Assistant Manager, Current Planning position reporting to the Manager, Current Planning.

Benefits:

- Increase capacity of the Current Planning section to meet current and future expectations and demands.
- Provide support to the Manager, Current Planning to allow for more strategic initiatives and mentoring and training of staff.
- Provide additional coverage of the Current Planning section in the absence of the Manager, Current Planning and allow staff opportunity to grow into a leadership role which supports staff retention and succession planning.
- Increase capacity for relationship building as a staff contact with applicants, stakeholders and external agencies.

Weaknesses:

- Permanent increase to operating budget.

Financial Analysis:

- Position is anticipated to be at a management level 5, with an annual salary of \$120,080 plus benefits. 2025 budget impact including benefits is estimated at \$109,100 based on an April 1st start, 2026 budget impact is estimated at \$153,600.
- Additional annual costs are anticipated at \$6,150 for membership dues, professional development, phone charges and computer charges.
- One-time costs upon the creation of the position are projected at \$2,800. This includes the purchase of computer, chair and smart phone.

Estimated Impact – Based on Draft Financial Plan

	2025	2026
Budget Increase	\$118,050	\$160,000
Projected Property Tax Increase	0.08%	0.03%

Option #2 – Status Quo

Continue with the current organizational structure.

Benefits:

- No impact to operating budget.

Weaknesses:

- Service levels will remain status quo and there will be little to no ability to undertake additional projects.
- Projects will continue to take longer than desired to execute and complete.
- It will be challenging to maintain a proactive and strategic direction for the Current Planning section. Does not provide ability for department to make proactive improvements.

- Slower response times for current planning support and advice to City departments and the public.
- Does not provide opportunity for staff retention and growth/succession planning.

RECOMMENDATION

Option #1 is recommended.