

CITY OF VANCOUVER

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT



Report Date: February 28, 2006  
Author: Chris Warren  
Phone No.: 604.871.6033  
RTS No.: 05206  
VanRIMS No.: 05-1000-20  
Meeting Date: March 23, 2006

TO: Standing Committee on City Services and Budgets

FROM: Co-Director of Development Services - Operations & Client Services

SUBJECT: Permit Processing - Completion of Resources Strategy

**RECOMMENDATION**

- A. THAT Council receive for INFORMATION the report on the establishment of four regular full-time positions in Development Services, thereby finalizing the permit processing resources strategy originally reported and approved in March 2005. The estimated prorated cost of these four positions is \$145,450 (\$290,900 annually), including fringe benefits, plus a one time cost of \$20,000 for furniture, equipment and supplies, with a start date of July 1, 2006. Approval and funding to be deferred to the 2006 Interim Operating Budget.
- B. THAT Council request the Co-Director of Development Services - Operations and Client Services, to report back within eighteen months on the customer service progress made as a result of the additional staff allocated to the permitting process.

**GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS**

The General Manager of the Community Services Group notes that with all but one of the new positions filled, service improvements are now measurable and the expectation is that they will continue to grow. The final four positions requested for Development Services, three of which will be dedicated to providing service to applicants unfamiliar with our system, are required to complete the strategy and to best realize the improvements anticipated. With regard to the Regulation Review, the General Manager believes that the focus, structure and strategy now in place will lay the groundwork for changes which will have significant positive impact on the applicants who are the least familiar with the permitting system.

## **CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS**

The City Manager recommends approval of Recommendations A and B.

## **COUNCIL POLICY**

All changes in level of service are to be reported to Council.

## **SUMMARY**

In March, 2005, Council approved 13.5 new positions for five departments involved in the permitting process. All but one of the positions has been filled, although the successful candidate for one other has not begun work in her new position as yet. For those positions which have been filled for the longest period of time, improvements have already been identified, including increased quality of service, more expedient processing, customized service to novice applicants, an increased number of facilitated projects and more prompt project reviews. This report recommends the final approval of four positions in Development Services which were identified and discussed in March, 2005. These positions were identified as the second "phase" of recruitment because of the service disruption which would have been likely with the hiring of all the positions at once. These positions complete the permitting process resources strategy and are required for all the service improvement goals to become a reality. The positions are: 1 exempt Project Facilitator III, 1 Customer Service Representative and 2 Customer Service Specialists.

At the same time as requesting new positions in 2005, staff recommended that a process be identified for reviewing the City's extensive regulations. A structure, focus and strategy have now been identified for moving forward and these will be reported by the Co-Director of Development Services - Policy & Regulations in May.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to confirm and finalize the requirement for four additional positions in the Development Services Department. The report will also outline progress to date on the hiring and work outcomes of 13.5 previously approved permit processing positions in five departments and will briefly outline work to date on the regulatory review.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Permitting Resources**

In March of 2005, as part of the 2005 Operating Budget, Council approved a number of positions in Legal Services, Planning, Real Estate, Engineering Services and Development Services. These positions, all related to permit processing, were approved in order to more effectively address increased complexity, workload and community/applicant demand. The breakdown of these positions, by department, is as follows:

Legal Services	1 Solicitor .5 Legal Assistant
Planning	1 Development Planner
Real Estate	1 Property Negotiator
Engineering	1 Assistant City Surveyor 3 Engineering Assistants
Development Services	3 Development Assistants 1 Project Facilitator I 1 Customer Service Specialist 1 Enquiry Centre Officer

Four additional positions in Development Services were discussed, with final approval targeted for late 2005, pending a report back which was to include results of service improvements related to additional staff. The four positions identified were: one Project Facilitator III (renamed to Project Facilitation Manager), two Customer Service Specialists and one Customer Service Representative. The estimated annual cost for these positions is \$290,900 (prorated for 2006 at \$145,450) with additional one time costs in 2006 of \$20,000 for computers, furniture, equipment and supplies. The Corporate Services, March, 2005 report on the "2005 Operating Budget: Interim Estimates" recommended that Council establish these positions.

Appendix A from the March, 2005 report is attached as Appendix A in this report as well, serving as a reminder of the anticipated service improvements for all positions and as an outline of the challenges each position was meant to address. Added to this appendix is information regarding progress on both the service quality and processing time goals which had been anticipated. The four Development Services Department positions recommended in this report are included in the appendix and are also described briefly below.

It should be noted that three of these four positions are specifically directed toward novice applicants, as were two of the six previously approved positions for Development Services. The department has made significant strides over the past few years in improving service to the larger, more complex projects. More direct attention is required to meet the needs of the novice - usually one-time - applicant who tends to be either small-business owners seeking to occupy or expand in existing buildings, or homeowners wishing to alter their dwellings. These are the people who are frequently overwhelmed with the number of regulations and the complexity and timing of the permitting process. Significant staff resources, service improvement initiatives and the regulation review will all be focused on these customers and others having difficulty interpreting the permitting system.

The position of Project Facilitation Manager is to provide training and supervision of support staff and junior facilitation staff, and will manage or supervise the most complex and contentious social service and housing projects. (In a way, this position will also deal with the novice applicant, as so many of the "developers" are not-for-profit organizations who may only ever develop one project.) The position will provide expert service to the controversial projects, among others, and will direct the sometimes difficult public consultation processes which are often a significant component of these projects.

The Customer Service Representative will work closely with the Customer Service Specialist in the Enquiry Centre, to identify novice applicants at first contact and provide expert information, screening and streaming of these applicants. It is expected that this position

will be instrumental in processing more applications "over the counter" thereby reducing processing times for some projects.

The two Customer Service Specialists (CSS's) in the Processing Centre will, like the already approved CSS in the Enquiry Centre, provide specialized service to novice applicants or others having difficulty with the permitting process or regulations. These positions will also provide on-going training and documentation, customer information workshops and will handle some complaints.

The specific cost breakdown for the four positions is as follows:

1 Project Facilitator III	\$92,000
1 Customer Service Representative	\$55,900
2 Customer Service Specialists	<u>\$143,000</u>
	\$290,900
1 time costs for equipment	\$20,000

#### Regulation Review

The March, 2005 report to Council included the request for Council approval of a consultant to assist in identifying an appropriate process and structure to continually assess both new and existing regulations with regard to their impact on complexity, processing times and resource requirements. At that time, it was concluded that there must be a significant attempt to reduce conflicting, redundant or obsolete regulations and to continually review proposed new regulations in light of staff resources to administer and enforce them effectively. Not to do so would perpetuate the need for more resources just to maintain the status quo.

#### DISCUSSION

Given the need for the positions approved in March, 2005, all involved departments moved as quickly as possible to hire new staff, but as is often the case, recruitment proved difficult due to issues such as finding people with appropriate skills, GVRD classification procedures and internal turnover. One position is still outstanding (Development Planner) and the Enquiry Centre Officer position has been filled, but the successful candidate has been unable to begin the work as yet. All other positions have been filled for at least five months, some for as long as ten months.

#### SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS TO DATE

While most of the staff who are in the new positions are still in learning mode, measurable progress has been made, and for the 11.5 positions which have been filled and where work has begun, service improvements have occurred; are described below and are itemized in Appendix A. Remaining service improvement goals are expected to be met as the two positions still outstanding are put in place and as all the new staff become more familiar with their roles.

Engineering Services reports that the two Engineering Assistant (EAIII) positions in their Development Services group have been filled by the incumbents from the previous temporary positions, and are working full time on development reviews and related construction site coordination. In addition, the half EA IV position re-allocated to development reviews is now taking on complex applications and is expected to lead priority reviews such as the RAV stations and other expedited project applications. The result of these changes is a significant reduction in the Development Permit backlog in the office, from an average of about twenty-five projects - before the temporary EAIII's were created - to fewer than five. The group is now able to consistently meet Development Permit Board, Director of Planning and single-family dwelling schedules without extensions from Project Facilitators. The reviews are more comprehensive and are typically completed about one week earlier than before. The additional EAIV in the Parking Branch is receiving training on complex applications, and improvements in turnaround time in that branch are being achieved.

The Solicitor hired by Legal Services began work at the beginning of August, 2005. While it is still premature to report on any specific time reductions in dealing with legal agreements, Legal Services staff reports that the new solicitor has already been assigned fifty-eight files. Staff in Development Services reports that they believe that, despite the loss to illness of one of the Legal Services staff normally assigned to the permitting process, there is still an improvement in service quality.

The new Property Negotiator has allowed Real Estate to allocate one experienced, senior staff member full-time to Heritage projects. Additional senior staff time is also now available when required. However, the number of Heritage projects has almost doubled in the past year; therefore while the additional position has stopped processing times from going up, it has not yet resulted in the anticipated reduction in times. Real Estate Services, Planning and Development Services are working together to identify and implement more expedient review strategies so that processing times will still be reduced, even with the greatly increased volume.

In Development Services, the two Development Assistants in the Processing Centre-Development (PC-D) have taken on 80-90 projects of medium complexity, often with sensitive public involvement issues. In addition to processing their own applications, the Development Assistants also team up with technical staff (Project Coordinators) on more complex projects where they are responsible for the notification and public involvement processes, allowing the lead Project Coordinators to concentrate on the technical aspects of the work. Over time, this is expected to free up time for the Project Coordinators which will improve processing times.

Related to this, several of the new positions were expected to have a positive impact on the processing times of Development Permit applications; the Enquiry Centre Officer in the Enquiry Centre, fast-tracking "conditional" houses; the Project Facilitator who would take on the coordination/facilitation of projects normally led by Project Coordinators; and the two Development Assistants as described above. Noting that changes take time, the expected impact is now beginning to be noticeable. For instance, processing times for some categories of Development Permits are enjoying the shortest processing times we've seen in eighteen months.

The position of Development Assistant - Administration was filled with two successive temporary staff from March, 2005 and then filled permanently in December. This position is

meant to achieve an increase in timeliness of service to the applicants using Project Facilitators; to provide timely responses to public inquiries and to increase the capacity of the Project Facilitators to lead significant public processes. This has certainly been achieved, with the Development Assistant having worked on over nineteen projects; handling over one hundred (100) inquiries for twelve of these projects, recorded for analysis and reporting purposes over two hundred (200) responses to notification; and worked with Project Facilitators to organize eight large public meetings.

The Development Assistant's most recent work involved preparing a detailed analysis of the Heritage Incentive Density Bonus program to be used by both the Heritage Project Facilitator and Planning's Heritage Group in their assessment of the success of the program.

The Customer Service Specialist has begun training of other Enquiry Centre staff in how best to address the needs of novice applicants, intake procedures, processing of permits over the counter and license clearances. The incumbent has also begun developing a method for monitoring the numbers, types and complexity of applicants she serves directly. She has also been assisting Property Use Inspectors, District Building Inspectors and other staff on the best course of action to rectify by-law infractions. In addition, she has been monitoring the first point of contact (front counter) for applicants and has been able to more expertly direct many people to appropriate departments or to even send them away to collect additional information prior to entering the permitting process. As a result, applicants have not waited needlessly in line; nor have they had the experience of going to the wrong person or department for their needs. Many expressions of thanks for this service have already been heard. For the period of September, 2005 to the end of February, 2006, the CSS handled 1060 inquiries and "processed" 400 of these personally. For these projects, among other things, the CSS was able to issue permits, give clearances for Business Licenses, was able to assess project viability or was able to provide comprehensive information allowing customers to successfully engage in the permit application process.

The position of Project Facilitator 1 has been in place for the last eight months and is currently processing 15 projects which, prior to this position being approved, would not have been assigned a Project Facilitator. These projects include: residential developments in highly sensitive neighbourhood areas, elementary and high school projects, heritage revitalization, City-initiated developments and sustainability workshops. In addition, the Project Facilitator has worked on several highly controversial projects which have involved public open houses, large notification areas and multiple levels of government.

The Assistant City Surveyor position was filled externally in October, 2005 and training and orientation continues. The new staff member has now been exposed to the development/building process including the role of Development Permit Board. He has taken responsibility for a number of projects and immediate benefits have been realized, particularly during a period in the fall of 2005 when a significant number of rezoning enactments were processed. This productivity will continue to increase through the learning period.

The Development Planner position in the Planning Department underwent significant classification discussions with the GVRD. Since completion of those discussions, the competition process has revealed that, given the booming development industry, the City is not able to offer a compensation package attractive enough to professionals qualified at this senior level. This, coupled with the cost of living in Vancouver, has also undermined the

potential for recruitment from elsewhere. Planning staff are currently reviewing how best to fill this position.

The Enquiry Centre Officer position was filled by mid-2005, but the successful candidate then was offered another position in the department. The recruitment process was completed for a second time, but the workload and staffing vacancies at the Enquiry counter have not allowed the successful candidate to assume her new role as yet.

#### REGULATION REVIEW

The budget was available within Community Services for hiring a consultant to assist in developing strategies for reviewing existing regulations and proposed regulations. The subsequent Request for Proposals for consultant services was, however, unsuccessful. Consequently, with the services of an external facilitator, the General Manager of Community Services and relevant senior managers have developed a recommended strategy for undertaking the regulatory review of City by-laws dealing with property use, development and building. This strategy includes components for dealing with both existing and proposed regulations and with regard to existing regulations, will focus its attention on changes which will have the greatest impact on the novice applicant and small projects. A report to Council devoted to this topic is currently being developed by the Co-Director of Development Services - Policy & Regulations, in consultation with a number of Directors of other involved departments. This report should come before Council within the next two months.

#### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The annual cost of the four positions is \$290,900, with an estimated prorated cost of \$145,450, including fringe benefits. In addition, there are one time costs for 2006 in the amount of \$20,000, for furniture, equipment and supplies. Approval and funding is to be deferred to the 2006 Interim Operating Budget.

#### CONCLUSION

In March 2005, Council approved the establishment of 13.5 positions in five departments, all with job functions directly and substantially related to permit processing. All but two of these positions have now been filled and recruitment has been finalized for these. Many of the new staff have been in their positions for too short a time to report on full service improvements expected, however, solid strides have already been made in most areas. This report seeks approval for the final four positions in the permitting process resources strategy originally reported in March. The report also informs Council of a forthcoming report on a proposed strategy for an on-going regulatory review.

\* \* \* \* \*

## New Permit Processing Positions, Challenges Addressed and Service Improvements Anticipated/Met

Department	Position	Function	Challenge to be Addressed	Year	Service Improvement Goals			
					Service Quality	Met?	Processing Time	Met?
Development Services	Development Assistant - Administration Group	Assist Project Facilitators with public meetings, neighbourhood notification, timely response to queries	Increased involvement from the participating public	2005	Increase in timeliness of service to applicants using PFs; timely response to resident queries; increase in public involvement capacity	Yes	N/A	N/A
	2 Development Assistants - Processing Centre - Development	Customer service assistance; permit processing	Service and timelines related to complexity and volumes	2005	Additional service to Development Permit applicants; reduction of workload of exiting Project Coordinators; reduction of backlog; some fast-tracking	Yes	Along with other positions, will contribute to the reduction in Development Permit processing times by 2 weeks, from an average in 2004 of 13 weeks	Times for some project types down by approximately one week.
	Project Facilitator I	Provide Project Facilitation services to complex "Director of Planning" projects	Increased involvement from the participating public; service and timelines related to complexity and volumes	2005	Additional service to 20-30 projects per year; reduction of workload of exiting Project Coordinators; reduction of backlog	Yes	Reduce processing times for 20-30 complex projects by 2 weeks. Along with other positions, will contribute to the reduction in other Development Permit processing times by 2 weeks, from an average in 2004 of 13 weeks.	Times for some project types down by approximately one week.
	Customer Service Specialist - Enquiry Centre	Provide timely and comprehensive service to novice applicants; provide on-going training and direction to other staff re customer service.	Knowledge and competency of applicants; service and timelines related to complexity and volumes	2005	Specialized, dedicated service to novice business applicants/prospective applicants	Yes	To fast track projects where possible; possible reduction in timelines by 6 weeks, from an average in 2004 of 13 weeks.	Yes, where feasible.
	Enquiry Centre Officer	To fast track single family "conditional" permits; provide one-stop, integrated service	Knowledge and competency of applicants; service and timelines related to complexity/ volumes	2005	Specialized, dedicated service to applicants with home renovations, additions and alterations - often novice applicants	No	Double this existing service (approximately 200 additional applications); reduce processing time for these by 6-8 weeks	No, position not yet begun.



Department	Position	Function	Challenge to be Addressed	Year	Service Improvement Goals			
					Service Quality	Met?	Processing Time	Met?
	Project Facilitator III	Manage and facilitate contentious social service and housing projects; training and supervision	Increased involvement from the participating public	2006	Specialized, expert facilitation service to contentious social service and housing projects	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Customer Service Representative	Identify novice applicants at first contact; provide technical expertise at front counter; screen and stream applications	Knowledge and competency of applicants; service and timelines related to complexity and volumes	2006	Improved service to novice applicants through expert information and streaming; increase in number of projects processed "over-the-counter"	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2 Customer Service Specialists - Processing Centre	Specialized service to applicants having difficulty; on-going training and documentation; information workshops to customers; complaint management	Knowledge and competency of applicants; staff turnover, training and performance	2006	Increase and improve information to applicants through training and info workshops; more timely assistance to applicants in need	N/A	N/A	N/A
Engineering Services	2 Engineering Assistant III - Development Services Branch	Review permit applications for Engineering concerns; provide service to applicants regarding Engineering requirements	Service and timelines related to complexity and volumes	2005	Provide prompt Engineering reviews of Development and Building applications. To retain existing staff	Yes	To keep pace with existing demand; contribute to reduction in processing times estimated by Development Services	Yes
	Engineering Assistant IV - Parking Branch	Review permit applications for Engineering concerns; provide service to applicants regarding Engineering requirements	Service and timelines related to complexity and volumes	2005	Provide prompt Engineering reviews of Development and Building applications. To retain existing staff	Yes	To keep pace with existing demand; contribute to reduction in processing times estimated by Development Services	Yes

Department	Position	Function	Challenge to be Addressed	Year	Service Improvement Goals			
					Service Quality	Met?	Processing Time	Met?
	Surveyor II (Assistant City Surveyor - exempt)	Provide advice, review and direction on land tenure matters, legal agreements and street and lane dedications	Service and timelines related to complexity and volumes	2005	Provide prompt Engineering reviews of Development and Building applications	Yes	To keep pace with existing demand; contribute to reduction in processing times estimated by Development Services	Yes
Planning	Development Planner III	Urban design review of Development permit applications; assess design ramifications of density increases	Service and timelines related to complexity and volumes	2005	Improved timelines in review and negotiation of urban design in development applications	No	To keep pace with existing demand; contribute to reduction in processing times estimated by Development Services	No, position not yet filled.
Legal Services	Solicitor III	Provide legal advice to staff and applicants; prepare legal agreements	Service and timelines related to complexity and volumes	2005	Improve service to complex projects requiring legal agreements	Yes	Reduce processing times (from decision to issuance) for those projects requiring legal agreements - up to 4-6 weeks. (Current timeless are variable)	Not enough data yet.
	.5 Legal Assistant I	Assist Solicitor III	Service and timelines related to complexity and volumes	2005	Improve service to complex projects requiring legal agreements	Yes	Contribute to reduction in processing times generated by Solicitor III	Yes
Real Estate Services	Property Negotiator II	Provide necessary analysis and financial negotiations for heritage, amenity and housing bonus applications	Service and timelines related to complexity and volumes	2005	Provide prompt and fair economic analyses (pro forma) for Heritage projects in particular	Yes	Reduce processing times for Heritage projects by 2-4 weeks, from a current estimate of 24 weeks	No