



## CITY OF VANCOUVER

### ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: April 27, 2007  
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TO: Vancouver City Council

FROM: Director of Planning in consultation with the Director of Human Resources and the Director of Budgets

SUBJECT: Major Projects Group - Permanent Positions

#### RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council approve the conversion of the following existing temporary positions to permanent positions in the cost recovered Major Projects Group in the Planning Department: Planner II - Urban Designer (#50012292); Planner II - Project Manager (#50055459); Planner II - Project Manager (#50035703), Planner I (#50017902); Planning Analyst (#50012301); and Planning Assistant (#50028002).

#### GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The General Manager of Community Services Recommends Approval of the above.

#### CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager Recommends Approval of the above.

#### CITY POLICY

City Cost Recovery Policy (1992)

## PURPOSE & SUMMARY

Based on the continuation of and increase in demand for planning services provided by Current Planning's Major Projects Group, this report recommends that six existing temporary positions be made permanent.

In addition to improving service delivery, this initiative will improve recruiting, reduce staff turnover, and increase associated program efficiencies. It is proposed all positions continue to be cost recovered, with no impact on the City's Operating Budget.

## Background

The Planning Department through its Major Projects Group, comprised of 13 professional and technical staff positions, undertakes the planning, including leading interdepartmental project teams, for major city shaping programs and projects such as the Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre expansion, East Fraserlands, Oakridge Centre, and the Vancouver General Hospital medical technology initiative. Smaller projects also undertaken, include VCC King Edward and Langara colleges. New projects which are currently being scoped include the Little Mountain Housing site and Arbutus Village redevelopment proposals.

The Major Projects Group reports through the Major Projects Steering Committee. The Group manages complex cooperative planning programs, undertakes the land use and urban design component and coordinates the involvement and negotiations with development proponents, the public, and the key contributing departments noted above. Major Project processes generate the comprehensive planning and regulatory framework required to address large development proposals - components of the framework include policy statements, official development plans, rezonings and design guidelines.

The work of the Major Projects Group, as well as contributions to this work from other departments including Engineering, Social Planning, Real Estate, Law and Parks, is fully cost recovered through contributions from the respective external development proponents (both private and public sector). Other planning programs also funded, or partially funded, by external development proponents are managed in other parts of the Department. Examples of these include Central Waterfront Hub and Rail Lands Study (including Whitecaps Stadium), Finning Lands, Granville Island and Plaza of Nations.

It is noted that while development proponents pay for these programs, it does not mean they are assured of a particular outcome. Outcomes often differ substantially from proponents' initial expectations and are ultimately based on Council decisions. What is assured is a comprehensive non-reactive process which effectively engages development proponents, community participants and the City.

During the 1990s, an average of six cost recovered major project staff positions existed in the Department. In November 2001, Council approved the conversion of three temporary to permanent positions which solidified the nucleus of the cost recovered "Major Projects Group". These positions which include a senior Planner III, a Project Planner II and a Planning Analyst, together with all temporary positions (currently ten positions) have continued to be fully funded through non-City project financing.

Strong demand for this important planning work continues. East Fraser Lands and Oakridge rezonings, and the Waterfront Hub Study work continue. Anticipated new projects could include, for example, redevelopment of the Little Mountain Housing site, the Arbutus Village mall site and the Providence Health sites (including St. Paul's and Station St. sites).

Pressure to respond to new large site development initiatives, including Olympics related projects, continues to increase. Staff recently reported a strategy to deal with major project priorities, with 'fixed deadline public projects' including Olympics sites and RAV line related development confirmed as the highest priority for application processing. Major project process and staffing implications addressed in this report, have been assessed in this priority context.

## DISCUSSION

The number of major projects/programs operating on a cost recovery basis, and therefore the number of positions, has steadily increased since 2000, and it is anticipated the demand for this work will continue. The Group currently has thirteen positions, including the three permanent positions.

Professional training and skill levels required have remained constant, and in the case of two positions, training and skill level demands have increased. The positions recommended for permanent status represent roles which have proven essential to a broad pattern of public and private residential, commercial and institutional projects and will be needed as new projects emerge.

Cost recovered planning programs are by their nature time-limited, typically resulting in the creation of temporary positions. This results in several problems including:

- reduced efficiencies on projects;
- staff turnover as staff seek longer term security;
- higher overhead costs to proponents due to repeated recruiting;
- further staff turnover through backfilling and consequential reduced efficiency in other parts of the Department or other departments where staff come from; and
- limited appeal to prospective candidates, reducing the field in competitions for temporary positions.

Major Projects' staff provide a high level of service to the public and project proponents on complex, high profile policy studies and rezonings. It is therefore important to recruit the best possible staff from a full field of applicants. Offering permanent positions improves the field of applicants. Their longer tenure and experience on the job then benefits the public, the development proponents and the City. Offering permanent positions is also beneficial in trying to compete with a very active private sector. In the last year, three major project planners (two in temporary positions) have been recruited into private sector positions.

Staff sometimes understandably take cost recovered positions as stepping stones to permanent positions then leave for a permanent opportunity when it comes up. In other cases staff in permanent positions seek more variety or to broaden their experience, and this is encouraged. They fill a temporary position while retaining the right to return to their

permanent position. In one recent case, the filling of a temporary Planner II position in the Major Projects Group resulted in five additional changes in the organization through the chain of backfilling. If the employee returns to his/her permanent position, the backfilling chain can echo back, potentially resulting in another five changes. The results of this kind of hiring are having a major negative impact on the delivery of service in the organization. In addition, significant senior staff time is applied to ongoing recruiting and training.

It is therefore proposed that six positions in the Major Projects Group be converted from temporary to permanent status:

Planner II - Urban Designer  
Planner II - Project Manager/Scoper  
Planner II - Project Manager  
Planner I - Project Manager  
Planning Analyst  
Planning Assistant III

**Urban Designer** - This position was created in November 2003 to alleviate pressure and overload for the same services previously provided on Major Projects by the Development Planning Group. The Urban Designer provides vital input on key aspects of major projects (including analysis and negotiation of built form and public realm components) and contributes to several projects at any given time.

In addition to the increase in demand for senior urban design input within the Major Projects Group, it is also anticipated that there will be demand for the services of this position from other parts of the organization - related, for example, to Olympic projects and EcoDensity initiatives. Undertaking work outside of Major Projects would be determined by Department priorities and confirmation of a cost recovery source.

**Project Managers (2 Planner IIs and 1 Planner I)** - Project Managers manage the process, undertake planning analysis and written work, and negotiate issues.

Two Project Manager (Planner II) positions were originally created in 2002 and 2004 for the East Fraser Lands and Oakridge Centre programs. The Planner I position was created in 2003 for the Form of Development public component of the Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre Expansion program. The need for the same level of planner expertise to conduct similar work will continue in up-coming programs.

Additional demand for planner expertise comes from the increasing number of major projects needing to be scoped, negotiated and reported to Council. One of the Planner II positions would share, together with the existing Planner III Group Leader, the scoping and negotiating of new projects and the reporting of new projects to Council in a timely manner. Recent examples of new projects putting extra pressure on senior level scoping resources are the Central Waterfront Hub and Rail Lands Study (including Whitecaps Stadium), Providence (St. Paul's and Station Street sites), the Little Mountain Housing site and Arbutus Village. It is anticipated more major project proposals will continue to come forward for scoping review.

**Planning Analyst and Planning Assistant** - All major projects involve significant public process and engagement with multiple stakeholders. Much of the public process, research and graphics falls to either a planning analyst or planning assistant, depending on complexity

and required experience. It has been shown to be most efficient if these assignments are shared between a planning analyst and a planning assistant. The Planning Assistant III position has contributed to five projects since originally being created in 2003 and the Planning Assistant position was created in 2004 for the Oakridge Centre program. It is proposed these two positions be made permanent for the same reasons noted above.

**Future Steps** - Following Council's consideration of the recommended conversion of positions, staff will review the duties of the Urban Designer II and Planner II (Scoper) positions to ensure they reflect future levels of responsibilities, and proceed with the conversion to permanent status of the six positions.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Major Projects Group has continuously financed all positions (currently there are thirteen positions) through fully cost recovered non-City sources in the form of payments by development proponents. It is proposed this method of financing programs and projects continue as new projects currently being scoped, and others which are the subject of enquiries, continue to emerge - resulting in no impact on the City's Operating Budget.

It is noted that Council, in 2001, approved converting three temporary to permanent positions which have subsequently been funded, together with all the temporary positions in the Group, in the manner proposed in this report. This is, therefore, not a new approach but an extension to an existing, successful funding approach.

While clearly not anticipated in the foreseeable future due to sustained and increasing demands, should demand for this type of work decline below long term historic levels, positions would ultimately be eliminated. Some flexibility to vary staffing levels is desirable and would be provided through maintaining the remainder of the positions as temporary positions (currently four positions, but this will vary depending on the scale and volume of new projects undertaken). This means the size of the Group could still shrink without impacting existing and proposed permanent positions.

## CONCLUSION

The demand for Major Projects' planning services, specializing in large, complex planning programs and projects has increased to the point where the current complement of three permanent and ten temporary positions cannot operate on a functional, efficient basis. The temporary status of a majority of the positions results in service delivery inefficiencies, backfilling chain impacts, and problems in recruiting, retaining and training staff.

It is therefore recommended that Council approve the conversion of six positions in the Major Projects Group from temporary to permanent status. It is proposed all positions in the Group continue to be fully cost recovered through contributions from development proponents, resulting in no impact on the City's Operating Budget.

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