

# Report

**City of Merritt**  
**REGULAR Council Meeting**  
**October 13, 2020**

**File Number: 0550-20**

**To:** Sean Smith, Chief Administrative Officer  
**From:** Don McArthur, Planning Manager  
**Date:** October 8, 2020  
**Subject:** Community Planner Position

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

**THAT Council direct staff to include a Community Planner position in the proposed 2021-2025 Financial Plan.**

**Background:**

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been a very busy year for development in Merritt and the City's Development Services department. The adoption of the new Zoning Bylaw on September 1, 2020 has further increased development demand, with numerous applications submitted in recent months.

Furthermore, staff have embarked upon the monumental task of updating City bylaws to ensure the City is development friendly and complying with modern standards and legislation. In 2021, this process of bylaw review and updating is planned to continue.

To ensure the City continues to provide excellent customer service and timely processing of applications, an additional job position in the Development Services department is required.

Currently, when development applications increase beyond manageable levels, staff work additional hours in evenings and weekends and/or contract files out to a consulting firm. The acquisition of a Community Planner would reduce consultant costs and improve the mental health of existing staff.

### Community Planner

The proposed role would be an exempt position, reporting to the Planning and Development Services Manager. While a final job description has not been completed, it is anticipated that this position would be responsible for processing development applications, reporting to Council, answering planning related inquiries from the public, overseeing the business licence application process, maintaining the GIS system, and working with the Development Services Clerk to update informational materials.

As the job description has not been completed, the position's salary has not been finalized, but is expected to be in the range of \$72,000 – 80,000, plus 30% benefit loading. A comparison with other municipalities for Planner 2 and 3 positions would be conducted to ensure the salary is commensurate with the proposed duties.

### Business Case

In 2019, the City of Merritt paid consultants the total sum of \$70,571.54 to assist with processing development applications. This high number was in part due to not having a Manager of Planning and Development services for 4.5 months in 2019. In 2020, staff anticipates that ~\$35,000 will be spent on consultant planning services.

By hiring an additional planner, the City can eliminate the need for consultant planning services for processing applications. Further, the City can free up significant additional capacity to address larger projects such as major bylaw re-writes (Subdivision servicing, Development Procedures, Development Cost Charges, Revitalization Tax Exemption). Some consultant services will still be needed for these projects, but the amount of time and costs will be significantly minimized by hiring an additional planner.

### CAO Comments

In my opinion, the City has a critical need to hire an additional planner in order to process the increasing number of applications, while maintaining excellent service. In 2020, the Development Services team has done phenomenal work to advance Council's plans, but their pace, and in particular Don's hours of work, cannot be maintained without great personal cost.

Ordinarily, staff would wait until the next budget period to make staffing requests, but in this instance, the need is dire enough that I am requesting that Council consider advance inclusion in the 2021-2025 Financial Plan, so that the City can make preparations to hire a planner who would start as early in January as possible.

Should Council determine that a new planner position is not feasible at this time, staff will need to discuss how to significantly reduce workloads, while keeping service levels as high as possible, though there will inevitably be a decrease to service levels.

**Options / discussion**

1. THAT Council direct staff to include a Community Planner position in the proposed 2021-2025 Financial Plan; or
2. THAT Council receive this report as information.

**Financial / Risk Implications:**

The additional cost of the proposed position would be partially offset by lower consultant fees.

**Others Consulted:**

Chief Administrative Officer

**Attachments:**

None.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Don McArthur**  
**Planning and Development Services Manager**