CITY OF GRAND FORKS

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION & APPROVALS PROCESS REVIEW

STAGE 1 REPORT: EXISTING CONDITIONS

DECEMBER 2022

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GLOSSARY

GIS – Geographic Information Systems

IT – Information Technology

LGDAPR – Local Government Development Approvals Process Review. The funding program for the OMNII project, managed by the Union of BC Municipalities

OCP – Official Community Plan

OMNII – Optimized Municipal Network of Integrated Information. The terminology used for the City of Grand Forks review and revision of development approvals processes

UBCM – Union of BC Municipalities

USL – Urban Systems Ltd. The consultant the City of Grand Forks has hired to work with City staff on the OMNII project

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The City of Grand Forks (City), like many of the communities in the Kootenays and the Boundary region, is facing increasing development and service demand pressures. The City is at an exciting stage of recovery with a steady increase in development since 2016. A 120% increase in the number of building permits issued since 2016 represents the change to the City prior to the 2018 flood event, and particularly the subsequent and ongoing recovery efforts. The 2021 Census data presents a population growth rate of 1.6% since 2016; however the statistical data from building permits, real estate, planning and development indicate that Grand Forks may stabilize in terms of growth while increasing in terms of development complexity. This anticipated change underscores the importance of a modernized development approvals process for the City.

The City received funding from the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) Local Government Development Approvals Process Review (LGDAPR) program to conduct a review of its Development Applications & Approvals Processes[1] (the Review). The Review is intended to help make the City's development applications and approvals processes simpler and more efficient for the benefit of the public and staff, and facilitate the sharing of information, processes, and IT solutions amongst regional partners to help support more efficient and effective development processes in the region.

Stage 1 focuses on reviewing existing conditions of the development process in Grand Forks through engagement and research, and provides a set of recommended actions which can be found in Appendix A of this report. Stage 2 will build on the recommended actions through the development of procedures, policies, and informative documents for the public. The third stage of the project focuses on the implementation of software and digital practices that will be simple, user friendly, and ultimately encourage the uptake of these new practices by staff from all departments and the public. The software solutions that will be provided to the City will be the culmination of process analysis, engagement, and recommendations from Stages 1 & 2.

When a development application and approval process is clear, transparent, and focuses on client and community needs, it is often more efficient to administer. Additionally, it helps ensure compliance with local government regulations and policies. Conversely, an inefficient system with jurisdictional overlaps, ad hoc requirements, and unclear mandates can create confusion, generate delays, and add to the cost of planning, design, and construction, all of which may discourage development.

The guiding principles behind the UBCM funded LGDAPR program and this project are:

	Achieves Outcomes in the Public Interest	The approvals process is set up to support development that is strategically aligned with adopted community plans, supports community values, is strategically aligned with the public interest and results in high-quality built environments.

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[1] The Development Approvals Process Review means Development Applications & Approvals Process Review (the Review) as not all applications are approved.

	Certainty	The requirements, timeframes and costs of development approvals are clearly outlined and communicated in advance or as early as possible in the application process.
	Transparent	Decisions during the approval process are documented and communicated in a clear and timely manner.
	Collaborative	Local governments and applicants work collaboratively to achieve desired outcomes. Where public involvement is appropriate, the process seeks public input early in the process and in an informed manner.
	Flexible	The process achieves consistency while providing some flexibility to respond to unique opportunities and encourages innovation.
	Timeliness	The development approval process occurs on timeframes that are appropriate to the level of complexity of the application and that all parties acknowledge their responsibility to provide required information in a timely manner.

GOAL AND PURPOSE

The goal of this review is to identify areas where processes can be improved and streamlined by understanding the current development landscape and provide recommendations for consideration and improvement. The process aims to identify and create efficiencies in the processes and determine specifically how all departments involved in the development approval process coordinate and communicate at various stages of these processes.

The purpose of this review is to assess the current development application review process, including identifying additional opportunities for streamlining, clarifying language, and reducing the need for amendments and variances. Efforts taken by the City to examine and improve its approval process efficiency, as well as its regulatory requirements and fee structure, will make it easier for developments to proceed in a way that meets the interests of the community by better aligning with the vision and objectives set out in the Official Community Plan and other strategic planning documents.

Who is this work for?

This work is being undertaken to help improve development applications & approvals processes and identify opportunities to reduce the administrative burden on the City by creating processing efficiencies. Efforts taken by the City to examine and improve its application and approval process efficiency, as well as its regulatory requirements and fee structure, will benefit private developers, planning staff, and the community. Streamlined and effective development applications and approvals processes may help increase housing availability and affordability, availability of industrial space, and commercial hubs that improve community resilience and support a community that will grow in alignment with the City's Official Community Plan (OCP), and thereby help serve the needs of the entire community.

How will this work be used?

This work will be used to inform the next stages in the project which will implement regulatory and process refinements to development applications & approvals processes and facilitate a streamlined process for the different types of development that support the community's development goals. Strategies and shareable tangible tools for enhancing approvals practices will also be shared by Grand Forks with regional partners to facilitate collaboration and standardization of development practices among local governments..

OUR APPROACH

This process review represents Stage 1 of a three-phase project that has been funded by the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM). The overall project will undertake a review of current development practices in Grand Forks, make suggestions to optimize bylaws, policies and explanatory documents, and implement a development process management system tailored to the needs of Grand Forks.

The project includes several smaller stages of work over a one-year period. Each phase of work will build on the perspectives, insights, and learnings gleaned through the previous phase. This approach focuses on internal change management as well as using existing software tools and software to streamline the workflows for the City's needs. This staged approach provides opportunity for those involved to contribute to each phase of the work. It will support a truly customized framework that includes streamlined and efficient processes and associated procedures that will integrate into daily operations. This work will be done in alignment within the City's capacity and resources and will be supported with digital solutions.

STAGE 1   Initial Capacity Building and Gap Analysis

The first stage was designed to take stock of existing development bylaws, policies, and practices to identify gaps and needs at the local and regional levels. A high-level review of existing Grand Forks development documents was done to assess compliance, information management gaps, and identify priorities for updating or replacing development application and approval documents in the future. Interviews with Grand Forks employees, the development community, referral agencies, and community stakeholders helped inform the gap analysis.

STAGE 2   Optimization of Bylaws, Policies, Manuals, Forms, and Communication Materials

The second stage will involve drafting application materials; processes and procedures with consideration for software integration; development of level of service targets; and suggest updates to bylaws and policy, which will build on and potentially run concurrent to the progress of Stage 1. Stage 2 will seek to engage City staff to provide recommendations that will be specifically tailored to the needs of Grand Forks rather than an "off the shelf" solution.

STAGE 3   Software Development and Integration

The third stage will involve coordination between Urban Systems and Grand Forks staff to use existing systems and software that will streamline the development application process. Based on assessment results from prior stages, recommendations will be made to mark the best path forward, Urban Systems will then work with the City to develop and implement the appropriate solution.

Order of Phases

Fall 2022
Stage 1: Initial Capacity Building and Gap Analysis

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Fall 2022 - Winter 2023
Stage 2: Optimization of Bylaws, Policies, Manuals, Forms, and Communication Materials

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Winter 2023 - Summer 2023
Stage 3: Software Development and Integration

The following summarizes the steps involved in the Stage 1 review process and the foundation for the recommendations in this report. This document will ultimately act as content for consideration and further discussion before finalizing the Development Approvals Framework - the foundation from which the approvals process will ultimately be updated.

DEVELOPMENT APPROVAL FRAMEWORK TASKS

✔ Reviewed relevant procedural bylaws from an operational and legal perspective.

✔ Reviewed the City's development approval policies and processes for accepting, reviewing, and approving various development applications and associated permits.

✔ Held workshops and engagement with City staff to confirm the processes, discuss any gaps in information and determine what was working well and where staff felt opportunities to improve the processes existed. It was decided by City staff to not focus too intently and spend too much capacity on forensically reviewing the current state, but instead focusing on the "ideal" state with a go-forward, vision-oriented approach per the Official Community Plan.

✔ Interviewed the development community and gleaned input through development process- focused discussions.

✔ Completed a best-practice review related to municipal approval processes and digital options. Reference to best practices that are most applicable to the City are included throughout this summary document.

✔ Reviewed information technology capabilities and systems currently used and the role of these technologies within the development approval structure.

✔ Reviewed the City's development and approval policies and processes for accepting, reviewing, and approving various development applications and associated permits.

✔ Provided high level action items/recommendations for process improvements including streamlining opportunities based on best practices. These recommendations are found throughout this document.

REVIEW AND RESEARCH

The consulting team reviewed the City's current development processes, forms, brochures, and bylaws. The team reviewed some development application reports, meetings, and correspondence with applicants and referral agencies to better understand the needs of the City. The consulting team also conducted comparative research with other similar sized local and regional municipalities to understand applicable best practices, and also appropriate comparable rates for development application fees.

INTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

The consultants conducted various interviews and workshops with City staff to understand development application intake, processing, and staff capacity. This included the Chief Administrative Officer, Corporate Officer/IT Manager, Manager of Engineering, Development and Planning, Manager of Building & Bylaw Services, Manager of Utilities, Finance staff, Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief, and frontline staff. It was decided by the City that Council engagement will be scheduled at a governance level regarding any policy or bylaw recommendations emerging from the review rather than keeping Council engagement at any potential policy/bylaw approval stages. In addition, the project team contacted development stakeholders to request interviews. A total of 8 developer interviews were conducted over the phone.

PROVINCIAL CONTEXT

HOMES FOR BC: PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT'S 30 POINT PLAN FOR HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

As noted in this report, the Province of British Columbia (BC) recognizes that local governments are strategic partners in delivering affordable housing and that municipalities are on the front lines of the housing crisis. The Province of BC is committed to empowering and supporting local governments' efforts to accelerate the construction of the housing that communities need. The development application & approval process plays an important role in supporting the realization of the community's development vision and ensuring that local interests are met including an adequate supply of safe, well-serviced and aesthetically pleasing development. However, complicated application and approval processes can result in lengthy timelines that may negatively impact the provision and affordability of housing.

DEVELOPMENT APPROVALS PROCESS REVIEW

In 2019, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MAH) completed the third stage of the Province-wide Development Approvals Process Review (DAPR). The DAPR was initiated to better understand the challenges facing development approvals across BC as part of a broader effort to identify barriers to creating additional affordable housing units. Consultation with rural, suburban, and urban local governments, and various non-government stakeholders provided a good overview of the diverse challenges impacting development application and approval processes. This engagement allowed MAH to assess the common challenges in development application processes in BC, outline the qualities of effective and efficient processes, and identify opportunities to improve development applications and approvals processes across the Province.

The Province-wide DAPR identified a number of internal issues that local governments in BC face in their application processes including:

- Incomplete or poor-quality submissions by proponents;
- Increased complexity of requirements;
- Inconsistent development permit guidelines; and,
- Contradictory advice from different departments.

Other application process challenges identified by the development industry include:

- Lack of transparency on the status of development applications; and,
- Lack of consistency of development requirements between adjacent local governments.

The Development Applications & Approvals Framework review will assess these issues in Grand Forks and seeks to develop solutions to help facilitate development process improvements.

BILL 26 – MUNICIPAL STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT (NO.2) 2021

Bill 26: Municipal Statutes Amendment Act (No. 2) 2021, was given Royal Assent on November 25th, 2021. Of relevance to Grand Forks' Development Applications & Approvals Process Review, the Bill proposes amendments to various sections in the Local Government Act and Community Charter including:

- Removal of the default requirement to hold public hearings for zoning bylaw amendments that are consistent with the Official Community Plan (OCP);
- Allowing for delegation of decisions on "minor" development variance permits; and,
- Enabling local governments to determine specific notice methods for public notice requirements.

Changes regarding public hearings, delegation of development variance permits, and public notice applicable to development applications are considered as part of this review. Adoption of a standard process will be optional under the proposed legislation and includes notice relating to a variety of financial and procedural bylaws.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Between 2016 and 2021, the permanent population of the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary increased by an estimated 5.4 per cent, which is lower than the provincial population growth rate of 7.6 per cent over the same period. However, Grand Forks saw a far lower growth trend of approximately 1.6 percent growth between 2016 and 2021. Demographic data indicates an overall trend in the community towards the aging of the population.

Growth in Grand Forks has been consistent when measured over course of the last two decades. However, there has been a recent surge in housing starts since 2018 when Grand Forks experienced a flood event which damaged hundreds of homes in the North Ruckle neighbourhood. The table below shows an excerpt of the historical Building Permit data between 2014 and 2021. The highlighted data includes the number of Building Permits, construction value, and various types of development per year.

Table 1: Building Permit Data (2014 – 2021)

	Total BP Applications	Total Construction Value	Single Family	Suites/ Apartments	Residential Renovation/ Addition
2014	51	$ 3,871,816	7	0	16
2015	43	$ 1,546,368	1	0	15
2016	44	$ 2,536,774	9	0	18
2017	109	$ 3,762,202	12	24	27
2018	210	$ 9,339,982	8	4	33
2019	104	$ 20,107,335	12	57*	25
2020	88	$ 6,083,967	11	7	24
2021	104	$ 12,282,926	17	12	30

*57 units developed under 1 Building Permit

The amount of development increased significantly since 2014. As population has seen only a small increase during the same period, the majority of the rise of Building Permit applications can be attributed to the aftermath of the 2018 flood event. In 2014 there were 51 total Building Permit applications, with a total construction value of $3,871,816, and in 2018 the number of Building Permit applications peaked in number at 210, with $9,339,982 in value. Applications have remained high in post-flood Grand Forks with 104 applications in 2021 with a total construction value of $12,282,926. The number of applications may remain higher than the pre-flood average until the effects on individuals affected by the 2018 flood have been resolved. Without significant growth pressures following flood re-development, the number of Building Permit applications may return to pre-flood levels. The following statistics help to illustrate these trends:

- BC Assessment data shows that the typical assessed value of a single family home increased 33% from 2021 to 2022, from $273,000 to $363,000.

- The City has over 1,800 housing units, 75% of which are single family homes; and, 60% of that housing stock was built prior to 1980.
- For 2020, 2021, and 2022 the City processed 20, 24, & 31 Planning files respectively.
- A 2020 Regional District of Kootenay Boundary (RDKB) Housing Needs Report projected an expected decrease in demand of -267[2] housing units by 2031. However, this report did not anticipate the movement from urban to rural areas triggered by the pandemic, and future trends are uncertain. Future census data will provide greater context to the housing demand that Grand Forks will experience, as studies undertaken prior to or early on in the pandemic may predict demographic shifts that do not align with the trends that many small communities are experiencing.

The increased post-flood development pressures coupled with an aging housing stock, combined with development challenges, are stretching the limited capacity of the City's Development Services, Building Inspection services, and Public Works services. Pressure also comes from the development community which seeks certainty with respect to application timelines and outcomes, resulting in City staff having to manage expectations and discontent from applicants.

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[2] 2020 RDKB Housing Needs Report

Figure 1: Grand Forks Population Growth 2001 to 2021
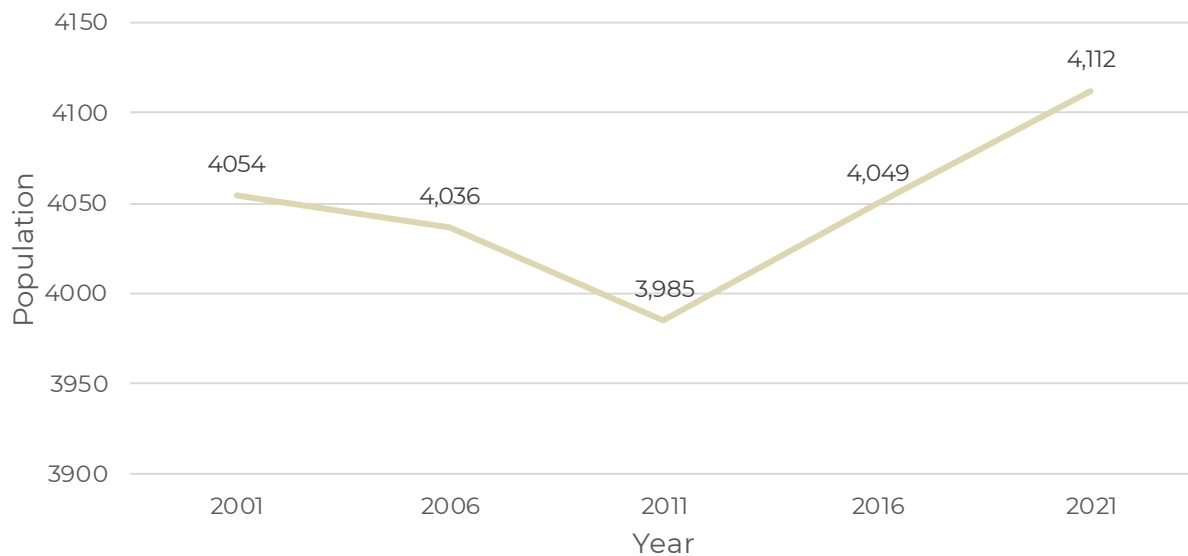
Population data from Statistics Canada for the City of Grand Forks shows a population growth over the past two decades of 1.43%, much of which has been experienced in the last 5 years. Development pressures from modest community growth have been complicated by flood recovery development-related pressures, which may feel similar to a high-growth community.

Issues arising in the development applications and approvals review process must be considered in the context of population increases and the aftermath of the 2018 flooding. The following factors have shaped the development environment in Grand Forks today. These include:

- Increasing complexity of development applications with out-of-date policies and procedures;

- Increased housing costs and lack of affordable housing;

- Increase in development activity;

- Limited infrastructure capacity and limited funds for asset management, upgrades, and the extension of infrastructure to service properties with new development;

- Limited staff capacity;

- First-time or inexperienced applicants;

- Applicants who do not source experienced project teams;

- Rapidly rising costs of infrastructure requirements;

- Demand for additional services, community amenities, and institutional development; and,

- Inflation and labour shortages.

2018 FLOOD EVENT

In May 2018 Grand Forks experienced the worst flood in its modern history as the Kettle and Granby rivers exceeded a 200-year flood level. Across the region 1500 buildings were evacuated and over 500 were damaged. The most impacted neighbourhood was North Ruckle, with many residents living in hotels, temporary shelters, or other living arrangements for lengthy periods of time following the flood event.

The impact of the 2018 flood has put a strain on the amount of time City staff have to provide support to residents most acutely impacted. The increase in applications has limited the level of long-term planning projects that staff hope to focus on, as well as the ability to process development applications within a timeline that residents had come to expect prior to the flood. The aftermath of the flood is felt by City staff on a daily basis through inquiries, applications, and land use considerations. The long-term effects of the flood include an increase of housing related development applications that Planning staff continue to manage alongside their current planning applications.

PLANNING AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

To understand the policy and regulatory context of the review, the Urban Systems Ltd (USL) team reviewed key City of Grand Forks documents that influence the municipality's development applications and approvals processes. Documents reviewed included relevant strategic documents, internal procedures, application forms, bylaws, and communication materials.

City of Grand Forks Strategic Plan

The City of Grand Forks' Strategic Plan that was adopted on September 29, 2022 guides corporate management and decision-making. The purpose of the objectives is to focus and coordinate resources. The vision for the strategic plan is:

"The City of Grand Forks is committed to providing quality governance and excellent services that enhance and advance the quality of life for our community"

Strategic priorities relevant to the OMNII project at the initiation of the process:

1) Emerging City: We create amazing opportunities for developing the City
2) Community Service: We provide opportunities to create the best Grand Forks
3) Economy: We attract and retain sustainable businesses that provide a strong economic future
4) Public Service: We provide outstanding service to provide best value to the community
   a. The OMNII project is specifically referenced under Public Service, with the priority of "Conducting a Formal Review of the City of Grand Forks Development Services Processes and Procedures."

Official Community Plan (2022)

The City of Grand Forks completed an update of its Official Community Plan (OCP) in 2022. The plan provides a framework of goals, objectives, and policies to guide decisions on future planning and land management.

Through the creation of the OCP, the City identified four guiding principles to help preserve and enhance the livable, sustainable community that the residents of Grand Forks currently enjoy. Those guiding principles include:

1) Integrate Natural Systems
2) Enhance Our Great Neighbourhoods
3) Maintain a Thriving Local Economy
4) Connect the City

A series of goals have been defined which support each of the four guiding principles. The following goals align with the aims of Grand Forks' Optimized Municipal Network of Integrated Information (OMNII) to:

- Encourage a variety of housing types to provide affordable housing options for residents of all ages and abilities
- Reduce the impact of high-disturbance businesses on surrounding neighbourhoods
- Ensure citizens have connection to the necessary utilities and infrastructure (clean water, sewer system and storm water system) for a high-quality of life and health

Grand Forks' OCP envisions a strengthened community with enough land for businesses, agriculture, parks, environmental areas, community amenities and housing. The OCP also demonstrates a strong commitment to the natural environment.

The City's land use policies encourage new development within the downtown core to support the continued economic growth and vitality of the area. The introduction of a number of development permit areas in the OCP including Greater Downtown Infill, Historic Market District, and Community Hubs emphasizes the City's desire to support responsible growth and development.

Planning and Regulatory Documents

A review of relevant bylaws, policies, and procedures and consultation with Grand Forks staff have highlighted a number of regulatory documents that require updates in order to best serve the public and streamline the development application process. The highest priority documents identified for review are the following:

I.   Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 2089, 2022
   - The City of Grand Forks Official Community Plan Bylaw was adopted in 2022. The OCP sets out a community vision and provides direction to the community through a set of Guiding Principles, with the intent of being implemented through subsequent goals and

policies within the document. As is the case with many complex documents, when put into daily use there are small updates required to meet the intent and on-the-ground realities that exist in Grand Forks that could not have been foreseen when developing the document. Planning staff have indicated that the mapping will require updates as some properties have designations that do not reflect the science nor community vision.

II.   Zoning Bylaw No. 2039, 2018

- The City of Grand Forks Zoning Bylaw was adopted in 2018. Common variances to the Zoning Bylaw within the City of Grand Forks deal with height restrictions, secondary suites, and setbacks. Following the recent adoption of a new Official Community Plan in Grand Forks, Planning staff have indicated that the existing Zoning Bylaw is no longer in alignment with the OCP. Grand Forks staff are documenting instances in the Zoning Bylaw which often require Development Variance Permit applications, are not consistent with the OCP, or do not align with best practice. An update to and holistic rewrite of the Grand Forks Zoning Bylaw is of the highest priority.

III.   Planning Procedures and Fees Bylaw No. 1669, 2001

- The City of Grand Forks Planning Procedures and Fees Bylaw was adopted in 2001. This bylaw identifies the fees and charges associated with subdivision applications, OCP and zoning amendments, public hearings, development permits, development variance permits, temporary use permits and board of variance applications. As part of this development approvals framework process a high-level comparative review was conducted between some similar, or peer, communities within British Columbia who had recently (within ten years) updated their respective bylaws. The results of this fees and best practices review are shared below in the fee comparison Section. A review and comparison of Planning application fees has shown that Grand Forks has the lowest fees among comparable communities in BC. Staff time and overall cost of processing applications is not adequately reflected in the fees currently being charged to applicants. A review and update of the fees is recommended to capture the processing costs and to align with fees being charged in comparable communities.

IV.   Development Cost Charge Bylaw

- The City of Grand Forks Development Cost Charge Bylaw was adopted in 1994. The City's DCC Bylaw sets out charges for various development types in Grand Forks, such as single family, 2 family & semi-detached, multiple family, mobile home parks, commercial, industrial, and institutional land uses. This bylaw sets out charges for highways, storm drainage, sanitary sewer, water, and open space. Due to the evolving infrastructure constraints in Grand Forks today and the increase in construction costs, there is an opportunity for the City to update the DCC Bylaw to better reflect Grand Forks' capital program in an equitable way.

V.   Development Approvals Information & Procedures Bylaw

- The City of Grand Forks does not currently have a Development Approvals Information & Procedures Bylaw. One is currently under development as a part of this project. Planning staff have received legal advice to develop and present Council with a bylaw that seeks to outline specific application processes, delegation authorities, application requirements, requirements for complete applications, and public notification requirements. The input of these items into a comprehensive bylaw will assist all parties involved in the development application process to clearly understand the requirements for a timely and complete review of an application.

  As a result of *Bill 26: Municipal Statutes Amendment Act (No. 2) 2021*, the City may wish to explore with Council opportunities to streamline development application review processes by removing the default public hearing requirements for *Zoning Bylaw* Amendments that are consistent with the OCP and allow staff to delegate decisions on minor development variance permits. The City may wish to also update this bylaw to update public notification processes to include online notices.

It should be noted that **best practices** for reviewing and processing development applications in a municipal setting is through the utilization of a Development Procedures Manual. A Development Procedures Manual is an internal document that is used to help guide staff during the various types of development, permit, subdivision applications and amendments to the OCP or *Zoning Bylaw*. An internal manual allows for a consistent process and detailed steps for staff to follow during application review, from a pre-application meeting with the prospective applicant, all the way to up to issuance of permits.

Other **best practices** for development application review are the use of public facing materials such as brochures and guides for prospective applicants to follow that are consistent with any Council Policies, a Development Procedures Manual, and clearly aligned and linked to the Development Approvals Information & Procedures Bylaw(s).

GRAND FORKS BYLAW AMENDMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Guiding Principle: It was decided by the Grand Forks staff team to not comprehensively review all current bylaws and processes as many need full rewrites or substantial amendments. This is aligned with the Grand Forks vision of being go-forward and future-looking in their work. The following table identifies preliminary areas for further investigation as recommendations for bylaw review and amendment.

Table 2: Bylaw Inconsistency and General Issues Matrix

Bylaw	Considerations for Fostering Consistency
General Bylaw Notes	• Collaborate with Corporate Services on a tracking methodology for noting on-going and future bylaw inconsistencies, gaps, and areas for continuous improvement. This can be accomplished with a shared Excel spreadsheet for ease of use, tracking and sharing. • Prioritize a list of the most relevant bylaws to put on a schedule for regular reviews and updates, reflecting these within the Five-Year Financial Plan.
Official Community Plan Bylaw	• Amend Official Community Plan to reference and enable the implementation of a Development Approvals Information & Procedures Bylaw. • Create application forms that create a Development Permit Area Guidelines checklist for applicants. At present, applicants have to create their own or consolidate the Guidelines for themselves.
Zoning Bylaw	• Based on community need and staff discussion, begin a full review and holistic rewrite of the Zoning Bylaw. • Focus on plain language, user-friendliness, and visual references for zones. • Review Zoning with respect to key pressure points: infill housing (secondary suites, accessory dwelling units, multi-family housing); commercial and industrial development; manufactured housing; riparian areas/floodplain development; Comprehensive Developments).
Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw	• Based on community need and staff discussion, begin a full review and holistic rewrite of the Subdivision, Development and Servicing Bylaw either concurrent to or immediately following the Zoning Bylaw project. • Ensure Zones are reflected in the Servicing Requirements section of this bylaw. • Focus on plain language, user-friendliness, and visual references for servicing requirements.
Planning Procedures and Fees Bylaw	• Rescind and replace with a Development Approvals Information & Procedures Bylaw following its creation.

Bylaw	Considerations for Fostering Consistency
Fees and Charges Bylaw	• Remove all fees from other bylaws and consolidate within this bylaw for ease of use by applicants, staff, and those amending the bylaw. • Discussion with staff during the DAPR/OMNII Stage 1 Process indicates that all fees should be fully reviewed and updated at the completion of and subsequent to the project.

Regional District of Kootenay Boundary Housing Needs Report (2020)

A housing needs assessment was prepared for the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary in 2020, with research and analysis taking place in Electoral Areas and communities including Grand Forks. From 2019 to 2031 the anticipated number of housing units in Grand Forks is expected to decrease by 267[3] units, an expected loss which has been magnified due to the impact of the 2018 flooding event.

In order to encourage a well-balanced mixture of housing types, tenure options and prices that will strive to meet the accommodation needs of all socio-economic groups and promote initiatives to supply affordable forms of housing, the City requires a simplified and straightforward application process. The processes for conducting, reviewing, and approving development applications has a direct impact on the speed at which housing can be constructed to meet the needs of a growing population. An efficient development applications & approvals process will aid the City in meeting these goals by helping to streamline internal reviews and approvals and by simplifying the process for the development community.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION FEES

Several peer communities were identified for a high-level comparative review of their respective development fees and charges. These communities included Castlegar (2020), Tofino (2021), Pemberton (2021), Revelstoke (2022), and Peachland (2020). These five peer communities with the recently updated fees were selected for further cross-comparisons through a scenario-based exercise.

To accurately gauge the development fees in each community, a series of four hypothetical development scenarios were developed and included specific characteristics such as parcel size, dwelling units or development floor area (as applicable), development types, affordable units, development variance permits, rezoning, etc.

It should be noted that third party professional review (environmental, legal, engineering, etc.) costs were not built into these scenarios. The development scenarios do not include affordable housing, or account

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[3] 2020 RDKB Housing Needs Report

for third party fees or advertising costs associated with the application. The updated fees relative to the peer communities referenced for this high-level review are shown in Figure 3.

Scenario 1: Freehold Subdivision (no strata)

Applications and Fees Required: Preliminary Layout Review Application, Fee per Lot Subdivided from Parent Property

In Scenario 1, the fees for a 20-lot single-family freehold subdivision are calculated. Notably, Grand Forks charges a subdivision application fee of $2,000 at a rate of $100 per lot. Totalling $2,000, the overall charges for subdivision in Grand Forks are low and could be raised to help cover the cost of staff time and keep pace with comparable communities.

Scenario 2: Multi-Family Residential

Applications and Fees Required: Zoning Bylaw Amendment, Downtown Development Permit, Public Hearing

The characteristics of Scenario 2 is a 25-unit multi-family residential development on a 1-acre site, located within a Downtown Development Permit Area (DPA). The fees in Grand Forks, which include applications for a Zoning Amendment, and a District DPA, total $1,200 and are significantly lower than comparable communities. Fees for Zoning Bylaw Amendments total $1,000 and fees for a District DPA total $200. In the City of Grand Forks, the cost of a public hearing is included in the application fee. This portion of the application fee is refundable if a public hearing is not required for the application.

Scenario 3: Comprehensive Development

Applications and Fees Required: Official Community Plan Amendment, Zoning Bylaw Amendment, Preliminary Layout Review Application, Fee per Lot Subdivided from Parent Property, Hazardous Slopes and Watercourse Development Permit, Wetlands and Wildlife Development Permit, Public Hearing

The characteristics of Scenario 3 includes a 225-unit multi-family & single-family residential development over 105 lots in an area of approximately 27 acres, located within a hazardous slopes and watercourse, wetlands and wildlife development permit area. The combined Official Community Plan Amendment fee and Zoning Bylaw Amendment application totals $1,200. Fees for a subdivision application total $10,500 ($100 per parcel for subdivisions involving the creation of three or more lots). The DP fee totals $400 for a total comprehensive development application fee of $12,100. Pemberton has the highest fees due to the cost of an OCP Amendment which requires an additional $250 fee per additional lot over the first ten units, this accounts for the majority of the $72,950 hypothetical fee.

Scenario 4: Industrial Development

The Industrial development scenario includes a 1250 sq. m. industrial project on a 0.84-acre site located within a Wildlife DPA. The total application fee of $1,550 includes the cost of a Zoning Bylaw Amendment at $1,000, a DP at $200, and a Development Variance Permit at $350.
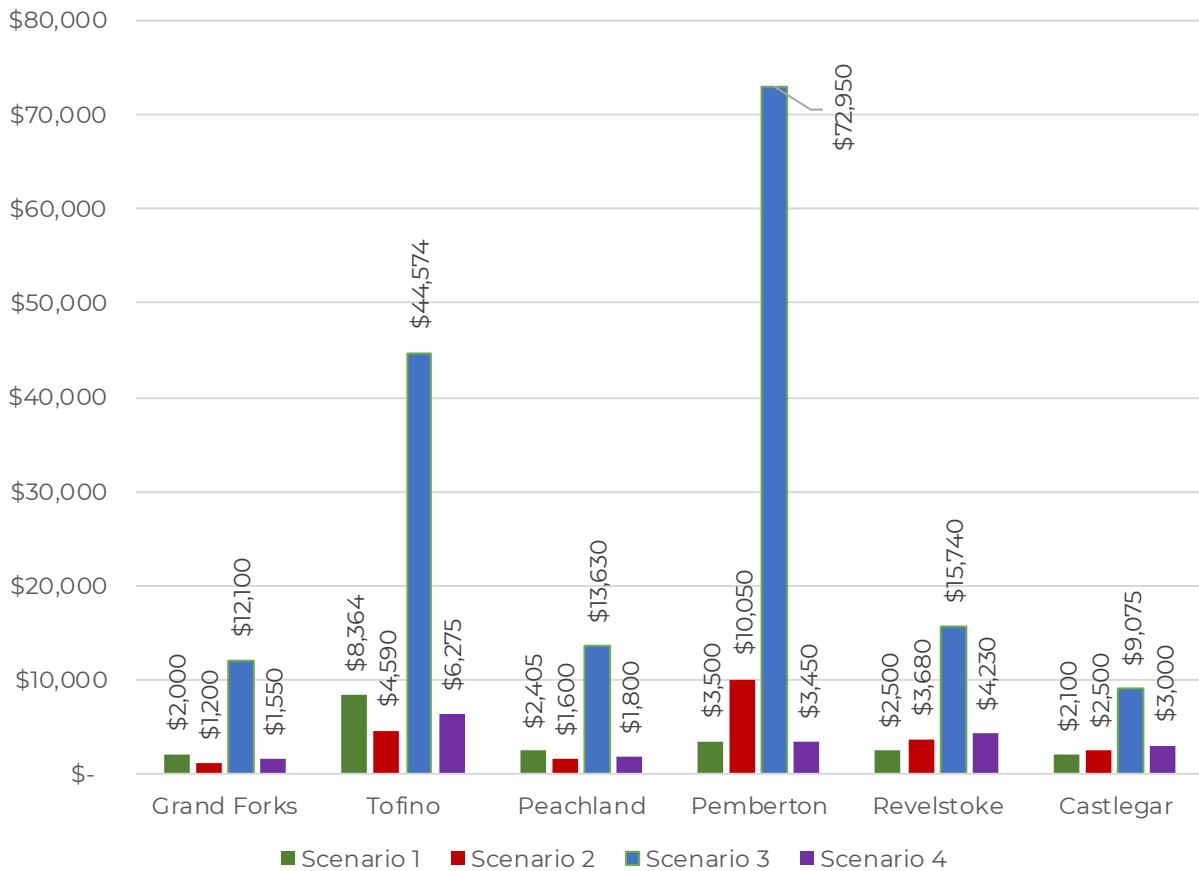
Figure 2: Development Scenario Cost Comparison

Figure 3: Comparative Development Approvals Fees

	Grand Forks	Tofino (2021)	Peachland (2020)	Pemberton (2021)	Revelstoke (2022)	Castlegar (2020)
Scenario 1: *Freehold Subdivision (no strata)*	$2,000	▲ $8,364	▲ $2,405	▲ $3,500	▲ $2,500	▲ $2,100
Scenario 2: *Downtown Multi-Family Residential*	$1,200	▲ $4,590	▲ $1,600	▲ $10,500	▲ $3, 680	▲ $2,500
Scenario 3: *Comprehensive Development (multi- and single-family residential)*	$12,100	▲ $44,574	▲ $13,630	▲ $72,950	▲ $15,740	▼ $9,075
Scenario 4: *Commercial /Industrial*	$1,500	▲ $6,275	▲ $1,800	▲ $3,450	▲ $4,230	▲ $3,000

APPLICATION MATERIALS & PROCESS

COMMUNICATIONS MATERIALS

There are few clear communications materials available to developers within Grand Forks. The Development, Engineering and Planning Department services page of the Grand Forks website provides three brochures on development permits, subdivision, and development cost charges which are dated and do not provide applicants with complete information that would facilitate a "self-serve" approach.

The Grand Forks webpage has application forms available. Members of the development community that were interviewed stated they felt the forms were difficult to find, and also that the forms were out of date. Detailed procedure- based materials are not available for many application processes. There is work to be done to create materials that clearly outline City and applicant roles and responsibilities, timelines, expectations, and all required documentation. There are few readily available statistics online for helping investors make decisions related to development (e.g. number of Planning files over time).

Communications materials may include anticipated timelines and other items to provide assurance or increased comfort for those pursuing development within Grand Forks.

Note: Communications materials and manuals that reflect the updated processes and procedures that will occur as part of this work will be created in future phases, particularly Stage 2.

Development permit guides and planning "portals" that share property information, zoning, permits and licensing information, applicable bylaws, and other mapping (business directories, trail maps, utilities, street maps, flood plains, etc.) were identified as **best practice** throughout our review. Portals vary in effectiveness, however having a central location and digestible materials easily located was a theme across the Province. The City does not yet have a public facing GIS system, and the development of the system will be a part of subsequent stages.

APPLICATION AND INTAKE

Application forms should indicate the information required to consider an application to be complete, including but not limited to: existing and proposed uses, associated fees due, appearing before staff and/or Council, variance requests (Development Variance Permit), and in some cases, more detailed information with check boxes to indicate what is and what is not included with the application submission.

The following application forms were reviewed:

- Zoning Amendment
- Development Permit
- Temporary Use Permit

- Subdivision
- OCP Amendment
- Development Variance Permit

It should be noted that at this time applications are received through a variety of communication points including at the front desk of City Hall, with various City staff in different departments via email or in-person. Application fees are collected at the time of the application submission; however, applications are often not reviewed for completeness prior to submission.

Updates to the application forms will be required to reflect updated procedures, bylaws, emerging fee updates, and other related procedural requirements.

Accepting only complete applications was a trend found in the **best practice** review. Often these submissions were done through an online submission system. These platforms and systems varied from community to community but were mostly consistent in only receiving complete applications.

Current Approval Roles and Structure

Understanding the organizational context in which the process exists was a focus of this phase of work. Departments involved in various aspects of the approvals process and tracking are described below, those that work more directly through the review process are shown in the Development Review Organizational Structure (Figure 6).

DEVELOPMENT APPROVALS

Development approval processes vary between different types of applications and permits. However, they generally follow the same trajectory with some applications being more complex than others. If the correct information is provided up-front, it maximizes the efficiency of the process. The roles are ordered based on the involvement of the respective departments below.

FRONT DESK
SUPPORT

The City's municipal reception is the "face" of application submissions. Front desk support is provided by one primary administrative role. These individuals receive applications and process payments related to development approvals and building permits, however they do not currently review or otherwise process development applications.

DEVELOPMENT
SERVICES TEAMS

The Planning team is responsible for leading planning and development. However, the department also leads a range of plans for land use and other City initiatives. Building Inspection and Bylaw Services does not currently reside within this Department. The work being undertaken as part of the development approvals process review is being led by the Planning Team.

This team now includes the Manager of Development & Engineering, the Manager of Strategic Initiatives/Flood Recovery, and one full-time Planner. One full-time dedicated building inspector and one part-time building inspector are closely tied to Planning but not presently integrated in the Planning Department. Building Inspection and Bylaw Services are often the implementors of development files once they are approved by either Planners or Council, so there are close linkages between these services. These teams lead the development approvals processes.

In recent years the Planning Services team has been active in creating and revising the City's key planning framework documents, including the *Official Community Plan (2022),* and undertaking other strategic planning initiatives including flood recovery work. The recent increase in applications directly affects the development approvals process. The staff positions working most closely with development approvals and permits are summarized in Figure 5.

UTILITIES

Utilities supports the Manager of Development and Engineering in reviewing applications to ensure that all development approvals comply with the Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw and other applicable master plans, bylaws and regulations.

The department is responsible for information on servicing for the community and the quality control and assurance of development. The department is also involved in assessing applications from an infrastructure capacity perspective and responding to development

referrals. The Department also has GIS capacity and is responsible for maintaining GIS data. Closely related, the Public Works team is also responsible for the maintenance of public assets and asset management within the City.

FINANCE

The City's finance team maintains and communicates financial information to the public, Council, and staff. This work includes collecting and tracking financial securities related to development and works and services.

The finance team is involved with fee intake through the front desk staff who directly collect and issue receipts with fees being determined by the project planner. Following application intake the finance team may receive development referrals for applications with financial implications for the City.

FIRE RESCUE

Grand Forks Fire Rescue works with other departments within the City to review development applications and building plans to ensure a high degree of safety in new developments. This work includes being part of the referral process, as well as regularly scheduled business inspections that safeguard buildings following completion of construction.

The descriptions above outline the roles most closely aligned with the City's development approvals. It should be noted that staff from protective services, other public programs, Corporate Administration, and the City's Information Technology service play various supporting roles as well. Representatives from all departments were involved through two all-staff workshops as part of this process. The themes we heard through these interviews are provided in the What We Heard section of this report.

Various departments and staff, Council, and referral agencies are involved throughout this process. Opportunities to improve the process are outlined in Appendix A of this report and generally relate to: mandating pre-application meetings, accepting only complete applications, fast-tracking applications that align with strategic priorities, shifting the hosting responsibilities of any requested public open houses related to development applications to the applicant or development team (in-lieu of City staff), and considering updates presented as part of Bill 26 if desired by Council.

Three different examples of the rezoning process that align with the OCP are shown below. The City's current process (Figure 4), the recommended process (Figure 5), and a hybrid approach (Figure 6) which introduces some steps from current process into the recommended process based on feedback that best practice should be adapted to the context of Grand Forks. An example of steps that are blended in the hybrid process is the ability for Council to give 1st and 2nd reading during the same Council meeting. It

should be noted that the recommended process shows 1st and 2nd reading in separate meetings so that Council has the ability to give only 1st reading if it is determined that a more cautious approach to the application is required, or if further information is needed prior to scheduling a public hearing. Council has the ability to make judgements on what approvals (if any), and what information can be requested of an applicant during the application process as they see fit, subject to the details available for each individual application.

Figure 4: Current Rezoning Process, City of Grand Forks
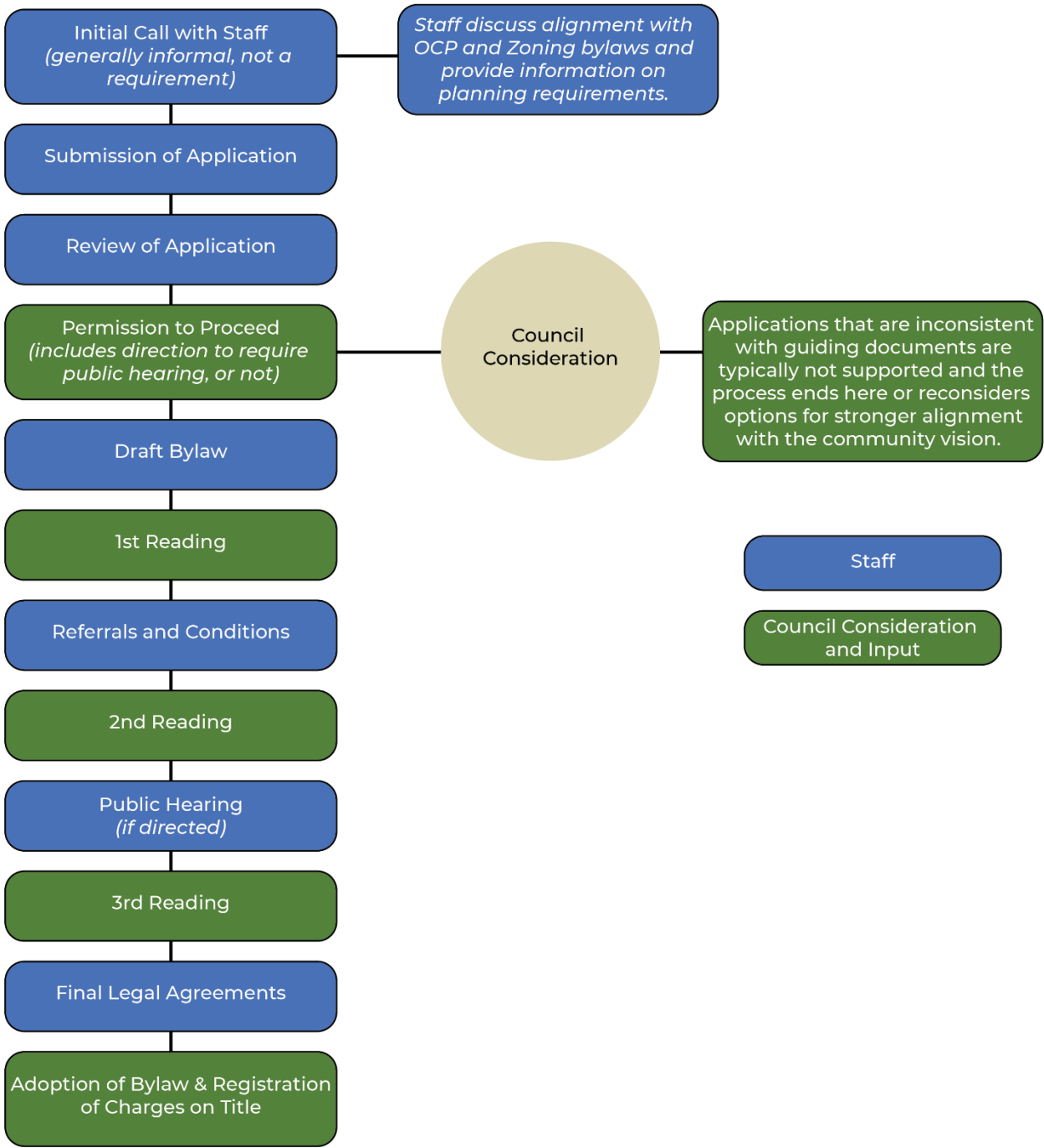
Figure 5: Summary of Ideal Rezoning Process (Example), City of Grand Forks

Pre-Application Meeting

Staff discuss alignment with OCP and Zoning bylaws and provide information on planning requirements.

Submission of Application

Staff

Review of Application

Council Consideration and Input

For Information only Email to Council

Draft Bylaw

Referrals and Conditions

1st and 2nd Reading

Public Hearing
(if directed)

3rd Reading

Final Legal Agreements

Adoption of Bylaw & Registration of Charges on Title

Figure 6: Hybrid Rezoning Process (Example), City of Grand Forks

DEVELOPMENT REVIEW ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The positions within Engineering, Development, and Planning that work most closely with the development approvals process (Planning Services) are shown to the right. A more detailed organizational chart can be found in Figure 6.
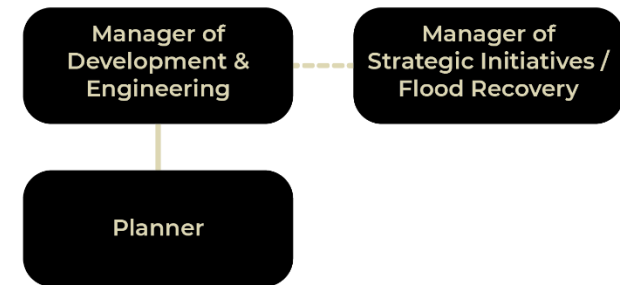
Figure 7: Development, Engineering & Planning Department Structure

GRAND FORKS ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE
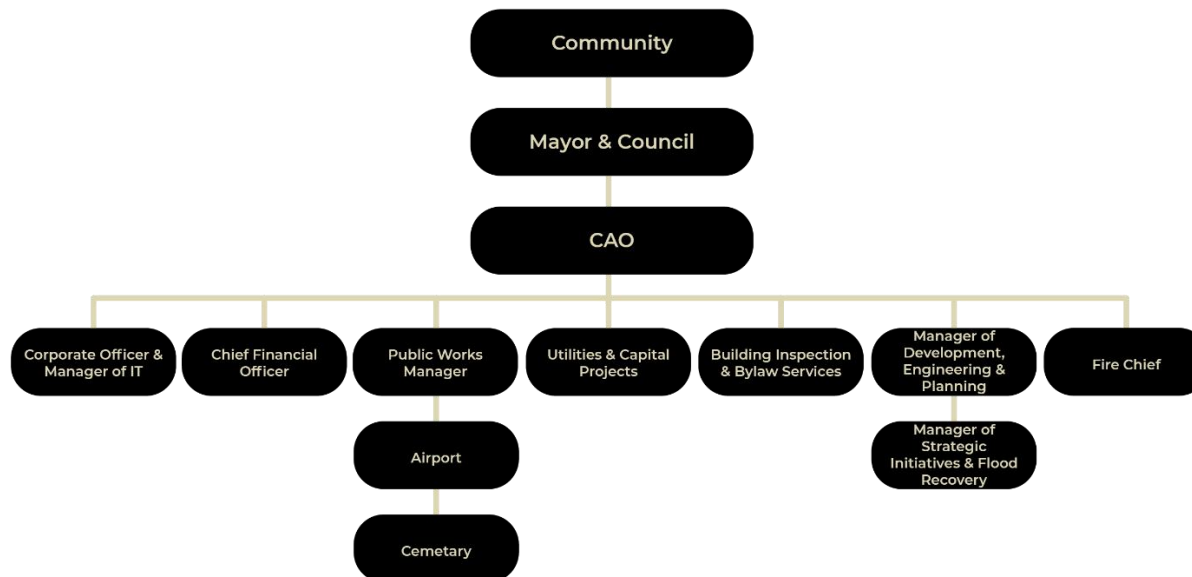
Figure 8: Organizational Structure

GRAND FORKS GENERALIZED APPLICATION PROCESS

Guiding Principle: Focus on simplifying complex processes: simplicity and clarity is key to success in development processes.

Key

🟩	File Initiation
🟦	Standard Process
🟪	Go Forward or Back to Applicant Stages
🟥	Council
⬛	Post Decision Administration
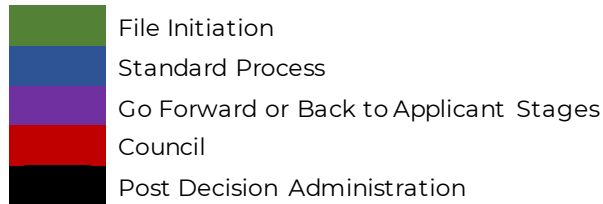
Figure 9: Generalized Ideal Application Process from Staff Workshop #2

WHAT WE HEARD

To better understand the current issues and opportunities in the development applications and approvals process, a series of solution-oriented interviews were conducted with community stakeholders. These stakeholders included members of staff, referral agencies, and individuals from the development community. In addition to the interviews, an online survey was created and sent out to local developers as an alternative means to provide input. Indigenous engagement will be initiated once scope and procedures have been confirmed by staff.

Input from stakeholders who interact with the development applications and approvals process on a regular basis included:

Development Community	City of Grand Forks Staff	Referral Agencies
➢ 16 emails sent out ➢ Online survey provided ➢ 8 interviews	➢ 12 staff engaged ➢ 2 staff workshops	➢ 23 emails sent out ➢ 3 respondents (BC Assessment, Interior Health, Ministry of Agriculture and Food) ➢ On-going engagement into Stage 2 (MOTI engagement date to be determined)

The engagement process provided valuable insight into experiences regarding the development application and approval process. Discussions covered the development application, review, and approval process from initial submissions through to public hearings, approvals, permitting, and ongoing IT/GIS solutions. It was determined by the City that Council engagement will be scheduled at a governance level regarding any policy or bylaw recommendations emerging from the review rather than engaging Council at any potential policy/bylaw approval stages. This engagement plan ensures that Council will have had an opportunity to review and make recommendations for any policies or bylaws that stemming from the OMNII process prior to approval stages.

SURVEY

An online survey (Appendix B) was released in tandem with an email to the development community with an interview request in order to gain further information on the perceived state of development within Grand Forks. The development community was more responsive to giving verbal feedback over the phone about development processes, and as a result no surveys were completed. The survey was developed to be anonymous and sought responses about the positive aspects of the development

application process as well as areas where improvements could be made. The questions put forward in the survey were similar in nature to the conversations that the consultant had with the development community. Please see this link to view the survey.

OVERALL ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Key takeaways from the engagement include:

Referrals

- Grand Forks staff sends complete and comprehensive referrals.
- Staff has the opportunity to build relationships with referral agencies and explore the ability to interact as more than referral and referral reply type of transaction.
- There is desire from external agencies to be involved at the outset of long-term planning projects rather than near the end.

Process

- Ensure the Development Approvals Information & Procedures Bylaw aligns with best practice and legislative requirements.
- Align public hearing procedures and question period with legislative requirements and best practices.
- Explore the opportunities provided by Bill 26 to delegate minor development variance permit applications to staff and not require public hearings for Zoning Amendment applications that align with existing OCP land use designations unless requested by Council at first reading.
- Desire for the ability to submit applications in digital format.

Communications

- The desire for additional consistency and clarity of approval timelines, application timeframes, and associated benchmarks.
- Desire for fees and charges to be clearly articulated early on in the process to avoid surprises.
- The lack of consistency in development standards and procedures across the region and need to encourage sharing bylaws, and procedures where appropriate.
- Desire for additional and clearer guides, brochures and website information about the application process, fees, and application requirements.
- Desire for more clearly communicated anticipated processing times and application expectations.
- Desire to keep the small-town, personalized approach to customer service versus a highly automated IT approach; however, some IT efficiencies should be explored.
- The importance of trust and strong relationships between developers, their agents, and City staff to implement an efficient process.

- Respondents had either a somewhat clear or not so clear understanding of the required documents to be submitted early in the development application process.

- Staff was friendly, polite, and available to answer questions. Applicants felt they received great customer service.

- Desire for additional information and education materials as well as staff's insight on the unique development needs of a parcel to clarify approval expectation and ensure that applicants prepare complete applications.

- The City should consider hosting regular meetings with the development community or information sessions to discuss topics of interest, changes in City regulations, and general enforcement of regulations to maintain industry relationships and promote information sharing. As many developers in the Grand Forks area are from other regions, virtual sessions could be considered.

Policy and Regulations

- Concerns for clarity and ease of understanding of City bylaws and regulations (particularly regarding height restrictions, secondary suites, and setbacks in the Zoning Bylaw)

- Update equivalents of Fees and Charges Bylaw and Planning Procedures Bylaw.

- Update Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw to establish clear servicing standards and requirements.

Internal Procedures

- High demands for staff resources coupled with a small number of staff results in insufficient capacity to meet the desired level of service with respect to application processing timeframes and response to inquiries. Staff seem "overworked" and "overwhelmed" by current volumes and application complexities often associated with infrastructure limitations.

- Need for role clarification between various departments to outline responsibilities and streamline the development approvals process.

- Improve internal filing system to ensure a uniform, consistent approach and make institutional knowledge more accessible to new staff.

- Measuring progress and presenting an annual report on development application process statistics and implementation of process improvements.

- Desire for the City to only accept and begin to process complete applications (i.e. submitted with all required documentation as detailed on the application form/checklist and discussed in pre-application meetings).

- Formal pre-application meetings with staff to review the application process, requirements, timeline, and fees are helpful at guiding them through the requirements and processes (incl. engineering, fire, building, and planning requirements). Consider fees for pre-application

meetings, fees are intended to encourage effective meetings, costs of an improved level of service, and capture the value of staff.

- Improved process guides/checklists/tip sheets for each type of application (OCP amendment, rezoning, development permit, subdivision application) to reflect the spectrum of development experience (mom and pop vs. experienced developers).

- Internal development review meetings to discuss current and upcoming developments and referral comments. Support the various departments in clarifying needs of different departments and role.

- Find procedural efficiencies and create systems to track information such as security, application conditions, legal agreements, and records to reduce staff time finding information.

- Departments are a single layer deep and would benefit from additional staff capacity (i.e., Planning Technician, Development Clerk, Building Inspector / Plan Checker, Corporate Records Clerk).

- Standardize process for sharing fees and collecting payment for consistency and ease for staff and applicants.

- Develop internal policies and technical bulletins to guide consistent approaches and interpretation of policies and regulations.

- Need for internal development applications tracking to keep staff up to date with application queue and for information sharing with members of Council and the Chief Administrative Officer.

- Increase willingness to adopt new technologies and move towards electronic filing systems consistent with the Local Government Management Associations standards for Records Management.

Corporate Records

- Further implement, with full organizational buy-in, a corporate records management system based on the recommended best practices by the Local Government Management Association (LGMA).

- Implementation of standardized digital and paper file naming procedures across the organization.

- Paper and folder-based records management is time consuming and prevents staff from reliably and easily obtaining information. Procedures regarding the digital and/or paper filing and application intake may be useful for streamlining development application intake.

- Implementation of a file management procedure to guide staff in consistently and efficiently handling development application information.

- Implement procedures for scanned records.

Infrastructure Capacity

- Improve documentation, mapping and understanding of existing servicing limitations and planned improvements within the City for ease of development application and approval processes for staff and applicants.

Software and IT Solutions

- Find ways to better leverage underutilized information systems software such as Geographic Information Systems software and productivity software with cloud-based capabilities to make more efficient use of existing systems.

- Improve internal and external GIS for finance (public utility), water and sewer infrastructure, building information, OCP land use designations, Zoning, etc.

- Enable "self serve" online applications, guides, and reporting for higher capacity stakeholders to free up staff time for applicants who require a more hands on approach.

- Automated and/or digital forms for internal uses and application submissions.

SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES

The following table outlines a summary of the key themes emerging from engagement that inform recommendations for improvements to Grand Forks' development applications & approvals processes.

Table 3: Summary of Key Themes

Policy and Regulations	Communications

• Amend Bylaws
   o OCP
   o Zoning
   o Subdivision Servicing
   o Development Procedures
   o Development Cost Charge
   o Fees
• Align policies with Council vision
	• Website updates
	• Brochures, Guides
	• Maintain small town service
	• Pre-application meetings
	• Self-serve online portal

Internal Procedures	**Process**
• Application Volumes • Training and Onboarding Manual • Interdepartmental collaboration (and role definition) • Department depth and redundancy • Process for repealing and rescinding policy and bylaws	• Development Approvals Information & Procedures Bylaw • Public hearing process • Opportunities to delegate • Consider Bill 26 streamlining opportunities • Benchmarks, Monitoring, Tracking and Reporting
Infrastructure Capacity	**Corporate Records**
• Data transfer procedure • Infrastructure servicing capacity • Knowing what is serviced • Development finance strategy	• All departments access to shared server • Implement standardized filing procedures • Implement procedure regarding electronic and paper filing

Software and IT Solutions

- Internal vs external GIS
- Email management software to assist staff with automated filing and record keeping
- Templates and fillable forms
- Tracking and dashboards

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY REVIEW

Urban Systems completed a review of the City of Grand Fork's current IT and GIS infrastructure to gain an understanding of the systems at our disposal in the development of the OMNII software solution. Our project team held brief interviews with the City's IT and GIS staff focusing on licensing, administration, and deployment patterns of various information management systems.

GIS INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure:

The City's GIS infrastructure is currently running on an ESRI based platform with the base deployment pattern. The City utilizes ArcGIS Portal and hosts data and web mapping infrastructure internally on virtualized machines. The City currently also holds licensing for ArcGIS Online through their Enterprise License Agreement (ELA) with ESRI. The ELA modelling license type is desirable for a project of this nature as it provides sufficient user accounts and access to various applications and plugins. There are currently 3 virtualized machines utilized in this deployment with ArcGIS Portal, ArcGIS Server, and the SQL database separated across machines. This deployment pattern is sufficient and helps ensure appropriate performance resources for the OMNII software solution.

Administration:

The City currently uses ESRI's Named User licensing model where new user accounts are created by the GIS team and are isolated from the organization's single sign on. The city currently has around 53 active users, some of which are external contractors and consultants. The user allotment is 50 & 100 at the Creator and Viewer permissions level respectively. This licensing model is sufficient for the scope of this project; however, creates a few needs as outlined below:

➢ USL will require a service account created in Portal, with either administrative access or elevated publisher access (*details to be discussed with City GIS at a later date*). At minimum, a Creator type license is required for USL to integrate ArcGIS environment with Microsoft 365 tools.

Data:

In conversations with the City's GIS team, it has come to our understanding that the City's data integrity is not to the level it should be. The City's GIS team has been working on cleaning the data up, which is a very timely project. We also understand that there are some crucial new layers yet to be delivered from a recent OCP project. The City consumes the ParcelMapBC parcel fabric which will be required for the OMNII solution deployment. While data integrity is a key aspect of the OMNII solution's successful roll out, it does not hinder the development and testing of the application. USL will continue working with the City's existing GIS data. When layers such as those generated during the new OCP process are made available, USL will work with City staff to ensure they replace the existing layers on the City's SDE data.

IT INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure:

Urban Systems met with the City's IT team to discuss existing infrastructure available for the OMNII solution. This conversation was centered around the City's Microsoft 365 environment as USL plans on

utilizing Microsoft 365 applications for automation purposes and to assist in the flow of information. The City currently has a hybrid Microsoft 365 environment and access to the necessary applications for OMNII (Power Automate, SharePoint).

Administration:

Currently , most City staff hold a Microsoft 365 E3 license. The E3 license gives access to most Microsoft 365 applications; however, Power Automate is not included. USL project staff will need to work with the City to create a headless service account to gain access to tools necessary for OMNII. The City currently uses SharePoint for document management. SharePoint will be utilized in the OMNII solution to store various documents.

➢ USL will require a service account created in the Microsoft 365 environment that has the attended robotic process automation (RPA) access. This service account will also need read/write access to SharePoint as the intent is for staff to use folders for development permits and store document attachments.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Based on the staff and development community interviews and best practices review, the recommended action items have been identified for the City of Grand Forks. The full list of recommended actions can be found in Appendix A.

For ease of use, this section groups the recommended action items into a summary table of short -term priority actions. The recommended actions have been grouped by project and strategically prioritized based on immediate need, grant scope, and the LGDAPR funding available for ease of use and implementation. The summary table includes a column for funding options as several of the actions are fundable through the UBCM grant funding awarded to the City.

The green checkmarks indicate actions that are grant fundable and within the scope of the Review.

The blue checkmarks indicate actions that are out of scope of the Review.

Table 4: Short-term Priority Actions

Sections	Actions at a glance	DAPR GRANT ELIGIBLE
Short Term Actions **Completed by August 2023**		
R.3, P.2, P.3, P.6, C.7, C.10, C.12, I.9, I.10	**Development Approvals Information Bylaw** • External Review Option – clarity of when there is external review is required and cost of external review; fast tracking external review • Establish mandatory pre-application meetings and checklist • Align public hearing procedures with legislative requirements • Update application forms • Update referral agency forms to require single point of contact • Align Procedures Bylaw with best practices and Provincial legislation • Establish a policy for development application delegation requests	✓
	Development Finance • Research Affordable housing financing/incentive opportunity options • Complete a DCC review and update • Consider expanding DCC's to incorporate affordable housing financing opportunity • Explore a development finance and growth strategy	✓
I.12, CR.1, CR.2, CR.3, IT.4, IT.5	**Corporate Records Management** • Implement a file management procedure • Implement a corporate records management system • Develop procedures for electronic and paper filing • Enhance use of digital file platforms	✓
C.1, C.4, C.8, I.8, IT.2	**Communications** • Update external application guides and brochures • Provide refined checklists for applications • Publish updated guidelines and information on City website • Develop internal procedures, technical bulletins	✓
C.13	**Regional** • Communicate with adjacent jurisdictions and provide project updates and share DAPR deliverables with Regional partners.	✓
C.11	**Operational** • Provide applicants with a pre-application meeting, summary letter, and checklist (require that the checklist be submitted at time of application submission)	✓

Sections	Actions at a glance	
P.4, P.5	**Operational** • Establish clear distinctions in expected level of information for pre-application and response to inquiry • Focus on improving application intake procedures (reduce incomplete applications)	✅
C2, I.1, I.2, I.5	**Internal Procedures** • Outline requirements for pre-application meeting (pre-application package and brochure) • Create internal procedures, letter and report templates and checklists (consistency of approach and onboarding) • Improve procedural flowcharts and formal onboarding practices, and internal filing systems • Establish file closeout procedures (conditions of approval, subsequent requirements)	✅
R.1	**Official Community Plan Review** • Review of OCP in collaboration with Council as part of new Council orientation to ensure the goals, objectives, and policies are generally supported and reflective of the community's vision for the future. Consider in 2023/2024 budget. • Update mapping to reflect scientific realities of land constraints that are not presently contained in the Bylaw	✅

Table 5: Medium-term, Long-term, and Ongoing Actions

Medium Term Actions **Completed 2023 - 2026 (or as time and resources allow)**		
Sections	**Actions at a glance**	**Grant Funding Eligible**
P.1, C.6, I.4, I.6, IT.3, IT.7, IT.10	**Software and IT Solutions** • Establish application processing benchmark targets • Create centralized online location for application tracking/status • Financial tracking process and documentation • Tracking procedures (statistics, benchmark monitoring) through quarterly updates to Council. • Self-serve application tracking for applicants • Dashboards and summary reporting • Communication and coordination between departments (templates and tracking of info)	✅

Sections	Actions at a glance	
P.7, IT.1, IT.6, IT.8, IT.9, IT.10	**Software and IT Solutions** • Digital application submission option • Web portal for development application submission • GIS integration for finance, water, sewer infrastructure, building info, OCP land use designations and zoning • Public access to GIS info • Public GIS map for infrastructure constraints	✅
R.5, R.7	**Building Bylaw** • Continue regular updates to the Building Bylaw to streamline processes and align with other bylaws • Continue to implement construction cost standards or alternative approach for project valuation (i.e. Marshall Swift Construction Data)	✅
IC.1, IC.2	**Infrastructure** • Create a comprehensive development finance strategy to ensure rate stability in relation to asset management needs • Documentation/mapping for existing servicing limitations and planned improvements	✅
I.7	**Internal Procedures** • Establish timeline targets for key aspects in the development review process	✅
CR.4	**Corporate Records Management** • Support organization-wide access to servers and data	✅
R.2	**Zoning Bylaw Review** • Improve clarity and ease of understanding regulations • Amend to reduce common variances, pre-zoning opportunities.	✅
Ongoing		
Sections	**Actions at a glance**	**Grant Funding Eligible**
C.3	**Comprehensive Review of Provincial Legislation** • Advocate for more comprehensive review of Provincial legislation (e.g. DCCs and community amenity contributions)	✅
C.5	**Regional** • Establish consistency in development standards and procedures across region and share bylaws, policy and procedures	✅

C.9	**Communications** • Engage with development community about policies, regulations, processes, and procedures (e.g. enhances relationships with industry)	✓
I.3	**Internal Procedures** • Ongoing investment in staff training to improve internal knowledge.	✓
R.4, R.6	**Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw** • Update Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw to ensure standards are updated	✓

CONCLUSION

This Existing Conditions Report represents the work completed in Stage 1 of the DAPR/OMNII Grand Forks Project. It has been a pleasure and privilege to work alongside the Grand Forks team. While reports like this can often focus on the work that must still be done, and the existing gaps, it is important to reflect upon the good things that are already being done. Feedback provided in this process has included a number of comments about the collaborative internal environment with staff in Grand Forks, the seemingly natural tendency to communicate with teammates, and the individual strengths of those working on development processes in Grand Forks. Now, in efforts to ensure clear, transparent processes that assist the next generation of the team, systems and processes must be addressed. Stage 2, which has already begun to some extent, will help address these matters, getting the organization ready for Stage 3, where technology can amplify new, strong processes.

APPENDIX A

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

APPENDIX A

The green checkmarks indicate actions that
staff have already completed.

Section	Action
Process Based on conversations with staff and the development community, best practices in streamlining the application intake and review process have been identified as most relevant to Grand Forks' context. Process improvements could be made in steps involving the pre-application meeting, the intake of applications, public engagement, and application referrals.	
P.1	Establish, track and monitor application processing benchmark targets.
P.2	Clarify opportunities to fast-track applications that align with strategic priorities or the provision of affordable housing utilizing the "external review" option or a prioritized processing queue.
P.3	Require mandatory pre-application meetings and provide applicants with an application requirement checklist that they must comply with in order to qualify as a complete application submission at time of application intake.
P.4	Establish clear distinctions in the expected level of information provided between a request for a pre-application meeting and a response to a development inquiry.
P.5	Focus on improving application intake procedures to reduce incomplete applications and the identification of missing information later in the process.
P.6	Align public hearing procedures and question period with legislative requirements and best practices.
P.7	Offer the option to submit applications in digital format.
Communications Effective communication is key to a streamlined development approvals process. Communication includes materials such as guides and application forms, internal and external communication, and mid-stream application updates. Improvements to communication will help to clarify application requirements, improve the quality of applications submitted to the City and save staff resources.	
C.1	Update and create new application guides and brochures to clearly outline entire application process and components of the process that often lead to staff inquiries for clarification.

C.2	Outline requirements for a pre-application meeting and associated application fees. Include a pre-application information package with brochure and educational materials about the development process and information requirements.
C.3	Advocate for a Comprehensive Review of Provincial legislation respecting development cost charges and community amenity contributions.
C.4	Provided simplified checklists for application submissions including details on approval timelines, application timeframes, and associated benchmarks.
C.5	Encourage consistency in development standards and procedures across the region and share bylaws, policies and procedures where appropriate.
C.6	Create a centralized online location where applicants can track their application status.
C.7	Clearly state on all application forms and guides that only complete applications will be accepted.
C.8	Publish updated guidelines, brochures, and information on the City website.
C.9	Continue to engage with the development community about policy, bylaws, regulation, processes, and procedures to foster positive industry relationships outside of specific development applications. Offer industry education sessions or webinars to communicate information about updates to codes and development requirements.
C.10	Create a pre-application checklist and memo template to communicate requirements to applicants.
C.11	Provide applicants with a pre-application meeting summary letter and checklist that clearly outlines the application requirements applicable to the scope of the subject application as well as advisory comments. • Require that the summary letter and checklist be submitted at the time of application submission to apply additional rigor to the application intake process. • Offer information and educational materials as well as staff's insight on the unique development needs of parcels to clarify approval expectation
C.12	Update application and agency forms to require a single point of contact and place onus on owner or agent to communicate or forward application information to a variety of stakeholders and/or consultants to make better use of staff resources.
C.13	Communicate with adjacent jurisdictions and provide DAPR project updates and share deliverables with regional partners.

Policy and Regulation

Bylaw amendments to streamline the process will create clarity for applicants. Additional transparency on external review procedures may also help to encourage use of the process and alleviate pressure on current internal processes.

R.1	Undergo an Official Community Plan review in collaboration with Council as part of Council orientation in early 2023 to ensure that the goals, objectives and policies are generally supported and reflective of the community's vision for the future.
R.2	Zoning Bylaw No. 2039, 2018 • Improve clarity and ease of understanding of zoning regulations (including height restrictions, secondary suites, front parcel line definition) • Amend the zoning bylaw to reduce the number of commonly requested variances.

		• Consider in the next Zoning Bylaw review to include a comprehensive review of well-serviced, vacant and under-developed properties within the City that could potentially be pre-zoned to allow for infill opportunities.
R.3	Planning Procedures and Fees Bylaw No. 1669, 2001 • Complete a comprehensive bylaw review to reflect best practices. • Clearly articulate fees associated with engineering peer reviews and collect a retainer at time of application to cover costs and reduce administration associated with accounts receivable. • Amend Development Procedures and Fees Bylaw to allow the municipality to collect a retainer for engineering peer reviews.	
R.4	Development Approvals Information & Procedures Bylaw(s) (DAI&P) • Implement Development Approvals Information & Procedures Bylaw(s)	
R.5	Development Cost Charge Bylaw • Update the DCC Bylaw	
R.6	Update the *Subdivision Development and Servicing Bylaw No. 1970 to* ensure standards are updated and applied consistently in relation to the development approvals process.	
R.7	Consider scheduling regular updates to the Building Bylaw (No. 2070). Consider streamlining opportunities for expanding on professional reliance provisions and establishing construction valuation standards to reflect current market conditions.	

Internal Procedures

During engagement, staff capacity was identified as a potential streamlining issue. Consistent internal organizational practices will create clear onboarding procedures and ultimately streamline the processing time. Succession and redundancy planning is needed for all roles to ensure that there are no major gaps when a staff member is absent or following retirement.

I.1	Create internal procedures, templates, and application checklists to ensure consistency of approach and improve effectiveness of onboarding new staff and third-party consultants.
I.2	Improve procedural flowcharts and formalized onboarding practices and materials for staff that are entering a new role. Improve internal filing systems to ensure a uniform, consistent approach and make institutional knowledge more accessible to new staff.
I.3	Invest in staff training to improve internal knowledge and keep up to date with best practices in development.
I.4	Improve financial tracking process, documentation procedure, and establish clear roles and responsibilities between various departments to outline responsibilities and streamline the development approvals process.
I.5	Establish file close-out procedures that clearly outline conditions of approval and tracks requirements for consideration of subsequent approvals.
I.6	Improve tracking procedures by enhancing the application process through automation and include additional application statistics and benchmark monitoring in quarterly updates to Council.
I.7	Establish approval timeline targets for key aspects in the development review process and monitor the success of reaching these targets.

I.8	Develop internal policies, technical bulletin, and answers to frequently asked questions to guide consistent approaches and interpretation of bylaws, policies and regulations.
I.9	Align provisions in the DAI&P Bylaw with City practices, Provincial legislation, legal advice, and recommended best practices.
I.10	Public Hearing procedures • Review the current practice of holding question period in concert with public hearings and revise procedures to reflect recommended best practices. • Establish a policy for development application delegation requests.
I.11	Consider the need for additional staff capacity to assist in implementing recommended actions for internal procedures improvements.

Corporate Records

Effective corporate records management is vital to streamlining the development approvals process. Procedures for corporate records management will be useful for streamlining development application intake and for guiding staff in consistently and efficiently handling development application information.

CR.1	Consider the creation of a file management procedure to guide staff in consistently and efficiently handling development application information.
CR.2	Implement a corporate records management system based on the recommended best practices by the Local Government Management Association (LGMA).
CR.3	Implement procedures regarding the digital and/or paper filing and application intake and filing. • Develop standardized digital and paper file naming procedures. • Establish procedures for scanned records.
CR.4	Support organization-wide access to servers and data

Infrastructure Capacity

Understanding and communicating infrastructure capacity can identify potential development constraints and help ensure that applicants prepare complete applications.

IC.1	Consider creating a comprehensive development finance strategy for infrastructure capacity and upgrade requirements within the City.
IC.2	Improve documentation, mapping and understanding of existing servicing limitations and planned improvements within the City for ease of development review for staff and for applicants.

Software and IT Solutions

Software solutions and record management procedure will help to provide a technical solution to adapt and update information systems to enable alignment on updating processes.

IT.1	Set up a web portal for development application submissions.

IT.2	Create simple application guides and application procedures information for hosting on the City's website.
IT.3	Deploy self serve application status and reporting for applicants.
IT.4	Implement a file management procedure that includes retention, storage, naming, and access.
IT.5	Expand the use of SharePoint/Microsoft 365 • Include internal process tracking, communication logging, centralized file storage, document integration and automation.
IT.6	Improve the use and integration of GIS in the review process including GIS for finance (public utility), water and sewer infrastructure, building information, OCP land use designations, zoning, etc.
IT.7	Utilize dashboards and summary reporting to communicate with Council, staff, and the public.
IT.8	Provide public access to GIS information on property Official Community Plan designations and Zoning Bylaw designations.
IT.9	Create a public GIS map that identifies infrastructure and development constraints.
IT.10	Foster better coordination between various departments using templates and tracking of information. • Examples of information that would benefit from this approach include bonding, DCC fees, legal agreements, application expiry dates, and cash in lieu.

APPENDIX B

SURVEY

City of Grand Forks Development Application Process Review

WELCOME

The City of Grand Forks is reviewing the Development, Engineering and Planning Department's development application process and we want to hear from you!

Your input is important to us! Please take a few minutes to complete this survey to share your thoughts on the development approvals process. It should take roughly 10 minutes to complete. There are a total of 15 questions.

Thank you for your participation.

City of Grand Forks Development Application Process Review
<u>Stakeholder Information</u>

1. How long have you been submitting development applications to the City of Grand Forks?

◯ Less than 1 year

◯ 1-3 years

◯ More than 4 years

2. Which of the following statements best applies to you?

◯ I am (or work for) a full-time developer.

◯ I am not a full-time developer, but usually have one or two development/subdivision/building projects on the go.

◯ I am not a developer but applied to develop/subdivide/build on my personal or business property.

◯ Other (please specify)

3. Approximately what percentage of your projects are in Grand Forks?

0%   50%   100%

* 4. Which of the following applications have you submitted (or been involved in) over the past 3 years? (please check all that apply)

☐ Official Community Plan Amendment

☐ Zoning Bylaw Amendment (rezoning)

☐ Development Permit

☐ Development Variance Permit

☐ Subdivision Application

☐ Building Permit

☐ None of the above

☐ Other (please specify)

[   ]

City of Grand Forks Development Application Process Review
Process

5. In what capacity were you dealing with the City of Grand Forks? (please check all that apply)

☐ Agent for property owner or developer

☐ Builder

☐ Business owner

☐ Developer

☐ Property owner

☐ Other (please specify)

[   ]

6. Did you have a pre-application meeting with staff to review application process, requirements, timelines, and fees?

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Other (please explain)

[   ]

7. Did you feel you had a clear understanding of the required documents to be submitted early on in the development application process?

○ Extremely clear

○ Very clear

○ Somewhat clear

○ Not so clear

○ Not at all clear

8. Did you feel you were able to easily find out the status of your application?

○ Yes

○ No

9. Based on your experiences in Grand Forks, please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
In general, the City of Grand Forks' development application forms are clear and easy to understand.	○	○	○	○	○	○
In general, the City of Grand Forks' development application process (e.g. the key steps/path of progression for each type of application) is clear and easy to understand.	○	○	○	○	○	○
The City provides useful guides, brochures, and/or website information to	○	○	○	○	○	○

communicate the development approval process and requirements.						
A staff member was assigned to my file that acted as the one point of contact.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Application requirements and fees are clearly communicated at an early stage in the review process.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Anticipated processing times are clearly communicated at an early stage in the review process.	○	○	○	○	○	○
City regulations such as bylaws and procedures are clear and easy to understand.	○	○	○	○	○	○
If there is something I do not understand about the application form, process and/or requirements, I feel welcome to contact City staff or a third party contract planner for assistance.	○	○	○	○	○	○
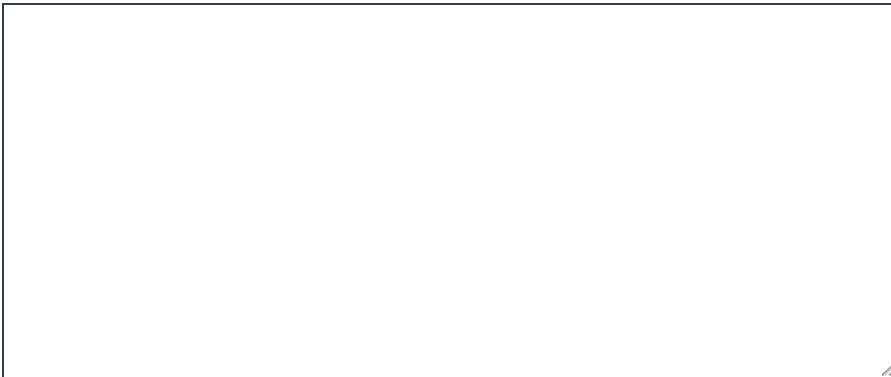
10. What went well during your <u>most recent</u> application to the City of Grand Forks?

11. What information or educational materials do you think would help clarify the development approval expectations and help ensure applicants prepare complete applications?

12. Please provide any additional comments that you feel may be helpful in improving the development application process:

13. Other communities have introduced various procedural changes to make development application review timelines more efficient. Which of the following changes, if any, do you think would be helpful for applicants in Grand Forks?

	Very Helpful	Helpful	Neutral	Somewhat Helpful	Not Helpful at All	No Opinion
Improved flow charts/brochures illustrating the application and review processes	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tracking information available online showing current applications and status	○	○	○	○	○	○
The City only accepts and begins to process complete applications (i.e. submitted with all required documentation as detailed on the application form/checklist and discussed in pre-application meetings)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Improved process guides/checklists/tip sheets for each type of application (OCP amendment, rezoning, development permit, subdivision application)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Increased staff delegation						

of development application reviews (i.e. expand delegation of development permits and development variance permits)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Host regular development forums to discuss topics of interest, changes in City regulations, etc.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Measure progress and present an annual report on development application process statistics and implementation of process improvements	○	○	○	○	○	○
Follow-up customer service surveys after the process is complete for applicants to provide feedback	○	○	○	○	○	○

14. Are you aware of any development application processes in other communities that you think are particularly well done? If so, please share where, and what you like about them.

15. From your perspective, what are the most critical issues facing developers or prospective developers in the current development approvals process (development costs, regulations, policy, approvals, other)?

City of Grand Forks Development Application Process Review
END OF SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey.

We look forward to the opportunity to share the results with you as part of the Development Application Process Improvement Report and Recommendations.

If you have any questions about the Development Approvals Process Review, please contact Darcy Roszell at droszell@urbansystems.ca