



# STAFF REPORT TO COMMITTEE

**MEETING TYPE & DATE:** Electoral Area Services Committee of December 3, 2025  
**FROM:** LAND USE SERVICES  
**SUBJECT:** Development Services Modernization Project  
**FILE:** 0600-20

## **PURPOSE/INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Development Services Modernization Project (DSMP) and seek direction to further streamline development application processing.

## **RECOMMENDED RESOLUTION**

That it be recommended to the Board:

1. That staff be directed to prepare amendments to the Development Application Procedures Bylaw No. 4483, 2023 to:
  - a) Expand delegated authority to staff for consideration of minor variances;
  - b) Delegate authority to staff to forward Non-Adhering Residential Use applications for detached dwellings to the Agricultural Land Commission;
  - c) Clarify public hearing and notice of intent procedures;
  - d) Update Schedule A – Development Application Fees – to ensure fair and appropriate cost recovery; and
  - e) Address minor bylaw maintenance issues.
2. That staff be directed to prepare amendments to the Development Applications Referrals Policy to:
  - a) Incorporate procedures for Agricultural Land Commission referrals to replace the current Agricultural Land Commission Referrals Policy.
  - b) Update procedures for Section 510 referrals to Community Parks Advisory Commissions.
3. That staff be directed to explore the option of a rules-based system for processing riparian development permit applications consistent with the *Riparian Areas Protection Act*.

## **BACKGROUND**

The DSMP was initiated following a service review of the Development Services Division (2020) and prior guidance to local governments from the Province of BC Development Approvals Process Review ([DAPR](#)).

In 2021, the CVRD was awarded a \$500,000 UBCM Development Approvals Process (DAP) grant to modernize Development Services and enhance service quality and efficiency. The DSMP has been approached in two phases:

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- Phase 1 – (Policy & Procedures, Communications & Capacity Building)
  - Phase 2 – (Implementation of a Land Management System)

The UBCM grant was used primarily to support Phase 1 activities with key expenses being roughly 50% consulting and legal services and 50% staff resources.

Phase 1 activities and deliverables included:

### **Policies & Procedures**

- [Development Application Procedures Bylaw](#) updated application procedures and increased delegation of authority to staff (including for all development permits and some minor development variance permits), and updated notice procedures and requirements, development signage requirements, landscape security requirements, and development application fees (*fees for rezoning were backloaded*); *further updates occurred through 2023 and 2024 amendments*);
- [Advisory Planning Commission \(APC\) Bylaw](#) clarified roles, responsibilities and procedures, established fixed referral timelines and provided for increased staff support for meeting administration and recording;
- [APC Handbook](#) created to provide a plain-language guide to APC roles and responsibilities, and the APC referral process;
- [Board of Variance \(BOV\) Bylaw](#) clarified roles and responsibilities, and the BOV application process;
- Internal development approval procedures reviewed and updated;
- Internal legal services request procedures introduced;
- Procedures for electronic and hybrid public hearings established;
- Provincial agencies engaged to understand regulatory requirements and explore opportunities for improvements to referral processes;
- Single point of contact established for CVRD LUS referrals coordination;
- [Development Application Referrals Policy](#) introduced to streamline development application review and referral processes (avoiding lengthy referral processes for minor applications, eliminating technical (non-discretionary) development permit referrals to advisory commissions and expediting preliminary reports to committee for major applications)
- [Development Approval Information Bylaw](#) updated development approval information requirements and procedures;
- Standard covenant templates created to expedite the covenant preparation process (and limit applicants' time and expenses related to covenant preparation);

### **Communications**

- New Development Application Guides, Forms and Checklists ([see Resources tab](#) and Applications page);

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- CVRD website updated to improve content, including a FAQ section, and simplify navigation; and
  - [PlanYourCowichan](#) launched as a public engagement platform;

### **Capacity Building**

- Advisory Planning Commission (APC) member training on APC roles and responsibilities, conduct and procedures;
- Board of Variance member training on BOV authorities, roles and responsibilities, conduct and procedures;
- Elected official and staff training on various topics including planning law (authorities under the *Local Government Act* and *Community Charter*), conduct, regulatory enforcement, authority and responsibilities in relation to development in natural hazard areas, community amenity contributions, and public meetings and hearings;
- MATI (Subdivision) Approving Officer training for staff; and
- Communications training for staff.

Development Services continues to seek opportunities to streamline application processes through updated policies, procedures and bylaws. For example, secondary suite covenant requirements were removed with recent zoning bylaw amendments, which will help expedite permit issuance and reduce costs for applicants.

We are also now in Phase 2 of the DSMP focused on implementation of a web-based Land Management System to enable efficient and transparent application tracking, processing and reporting. The CVRD is also nearing completion of a major update to its website which will also support public access to information.

This report includes recommendations to update policies, procedures and bylaws to further enhance development application processes and public access to development and building records.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Development Application Procedures Bylaw**

The Board has supported streamlined application processes through delegation of all development permits and some minor variances, which has enabled EASC to focus its attention on major projects and discretionary development applications (major variances, rezoning applications), while directing staff to deal with technical and minor applications.

From the staff perspective, this system is working well, and complete development permit applications (not reliant on external provincial approvals or referrals) can be processed quickly (in as little as two weeks). Where Provincial approvals are required (e.g. *Riparian Areas Protection Regulation* (RAPR), *Water Sustainability Act* (water licensing and in-stream works), Ministry of Transportation (drainage and other infrastructure in road right of ways), timelines are inconsistent.

There is an opportunity to further streamline application processes through delegation of additional minor variances (e.g. building height, floor area of suites, setbacks, signage, riparian hardship setbacks) and delegation of authority to forward certain Non-Adhering Residential Use

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(NARU) applications to the ALC (e.g. to allow suites larger than 90 m<sup>2</sup> – noting that non-ALR areas allow suites of 95 m<sup>2</sup>).

Staff have identified an opportunity to clarify public hearing and notice of intent provisions. While alternative forms of public notice have been integrated into the procedures bylaw, resulting in significant cost savings for advertising, staff wish to ensure that the provisions are clear and transparent for the public. Staff have also identified opportunities to streamline public hearings, reducing timelines and eliminating unnecessary administrative processes and associated costs.

Staff note that changes to development procedures may necessitate corresponding changes to Board and Committee procedure bylaws and will work with Legislative Services to ensure bylaw consistency.

### **Riparian Area Protection**

Under the CVRD's current development permit (DP) framework for Development Permit Area 1 - Riparian Protection, a DP may be issued only after the Province has accepted a RAPR report from a Qualified Environmental Professional (QEP). This process becomes protracted in cases where unlawful development or land clearing has occurred. In these cases, a QEP must undertake a retrospective "condition and impact" assessment, that is dealt with by local government – these are separate from the standard RAPR assessment and report process. The process is also complicated in more densely populated areas with complex drainage networks (including MOTT rights-of-way).

Notably, the option exists for the CVRD, under Section 12(4)(b) of the *Riparian Areas Protection Act* (RAPA), to implement a rules-based system that will "*provide a level of protection that, in the opinion of the local government, is comparable to or exceeds that established by the directive*", or "meet or beat" the current framework.

For example, the District of Squamish has implemented a "meet or beat" standard with their riparian development permit area:

<https://squamish.ca/sustainability-and-green-living/environment-and-sustainability/environmental-protection/>

Staff view a rules-based system as an option to avoid duplication of RAPR report review at both the provincial and local level, to significantly reduce the timeline for processing RAPR DP applications and to better support environmental values and protections within the CVRD.

RAPR staff are available (based on previous communication to UBCM) to support local governments who want to implement this approach.

Should the Board wish to pursue a "meet or beat" framework, staff would engage industry representatives (QEPs, developers) on this topic through planned engagement in early 2026.

### **Development Application Referrals Policy**

Staff have identified opportunities to enhance development application referrals policy, specifically regarding Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) referrals (to replace and expand upon the existing [Agricultural Land Reserve Applications Policy](#)) and referrals related to Section 510 (parkland dedication).

### **Modernized Official Community Plan (MOCP) and Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw (CZB)**

While technically separate projects, the MOCP and CZB factor heavily into Development Services' operations. One OCP and zoning bylaw for all electoral areas provides a single set of policies and regulations to guide the processing and decisions on development applications.

Critically important work includes updates to Development Permit (DP) Area guidelines, introduction of additional DP exemptions, which in some cases will eliminate the need for a DP for minor development. However, progress on this work has been delayed due to delays in the OCP process (as DP guidelines and exemptions (in zoning) must be consistent with the OCP).

Staff can provide an update on MOCP/CZB/DP (OCP implementation) project coordination following the Board's decisions on the MOCP.

### **OPTIONS**

Option 1: See staff recommendation on page 1.

Option 2: Direct staff to undertake one or more of the recommended actions noted on page 1.

### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

An update to the Development Application Procedures Bylaw will include legal costs estimated at \$3,000, which are within the existing 2025 budget for Function 325.

Costs for the establishment of a rules-based system for Riparian Areas Protection are at this stage unknown. Exploratory work will include an examination of costs.

The draft 2026 budget for Function 325 includes funding for the Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw (CZB) and no other projects, in respect of the Board's budget mandate. Notwithstanding, one-time projects may be funded through operating reserves or an increase to requisition.

### **COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS**

Staff will report to Electoral Area Services Committee on the DSMP and Phase 2 Land Management System implementation in early 2026.

### **STRATEGIC/BUSINESS PLAN CONSIDERATIONS**

Staff recommendations are consistent with the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan

Submitted by: Ann Kjerulf, MCP, RPP, MCIP, GM, Land Use Services Department

Reviewed for form and content and approved for submission to the Committee:

Resolution:

Financial Considerations:

Corporate Officer

Chief Financial Officer

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