



Est. 1873

REPORT TO MAYOR AND COUNCIL

PRESENTED: JUNE 26, 2017 - REGULAR AFTERNOON MEETING
FROM: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION
SUBJECT: BUILDING INSPECTOR POSITION

REPORT: 17-74
FILE: 1700-35

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council approve conversion of an existing temporary full time Building Inspector position to permanent full time, to be funded utilizing increased permit revenues.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Construction activity in the Township has continued to show signs of strength in 2017 and is anticipated to continue over the next few years. Building statistics indicate construction activity has increased in a number of categories, with total construction value, dwelling units created, multi-family buildings, tenant improvements and number of inspection units all having steadily increased over the last 5 years.

Since 2013, inspection requests have been increasing by approximately 1,000 per year, or approximately 10% (see Attachment A). However, the number of permanent inspector positions has not increased during this period despite the increased volume; with the use of auxiliary inspectors having increased to provide vacation coverage and sick time relief, when possible.

In order to accommodate the steadily increasing volume of workload and maintain vacation coverage, a temporary Building Inspector was hired in January 2017 for one year.

The addition of the temporary Building Inspector has proven to be a worthwhile investment. The ability to provide consistent staff coverage including coverage for vacation and/or sick time has proven to be effective in coping with the increased volume of inspection requests. Further, the plan review staff are able to focus on reviewing permit applications to provide more consistent permit processing and review times rather than backfilling to provide coverage with on site inspections, thus improving permit issuance times and overall customer satisfaction.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the current construction activity and to request that the existing temporary full time Building Inspector position be converted to a permanent full time Building Inspector position prior to the 2018 budget process.

BACKGROUND/HISTORY:

The Township's building activity has been increasing steadily over the last five years (see Attachment A). The number of building permits issued for all types of construction, especially single family dwellings, multi-family dwellings and tenant improvements continues to increase. With the increase of building permits issued, the number of inspections requested have also increased.

Attachment A demonstrates a five year comparison on the following statistics:

- Building Permit Revenue
- Building Permit Applications
- Building Permits Issued
- Inspection Units and Requests

Turn around time for issuing residential building permits has increased to approximately nine to 10 weeks. Historically, the goal has been to provide the best possible customer service at four to six weeks. This is also more consistent with other similar jurisdictions.

In addition to the increasing number of applications, general construction of buildings has become more complex in the area of technical and regulatory requirements. With ongoing growth and densification in the Township, buildings and housing types have become more complex, as more mixed use commercial / residential type buildings as well as a changing demographic of housing type inclusive of more multi-family dwelling units and secondary suites have been become increasingly common. The resultant condition with these building types requires an increased level of staff time from the Permit, Licence and Inspection Services Department (PLI) for plan review and inspections to ensure that required levels of health, safety, fire protection, accessibility, and energy efficiency provisions are incorporated into the design and construction of these buildings within the Township

Changes in the BC Building Code have been occurring on an annual basis with increasingly new additional technical requirements being introduced by the Building Safety Standards Branch at the Provincial level, most recently inclusive of new energy efficiency requirements, amongst other changes. These new requirements have also added significant time required to conduct most plan reviews as well as perform on site inspections.

The PLI Department, at times when volume is at higher levels, has not been able to perform all inspections requested in one day, as is typically the customer service goal of the department. It has become necessary, at these times, to advise our customers, that their inspection may have to be re-scheduled to the following day due to heavy volume of requests based on current staffing levels.

Unauthorized construction complaints continue to increase in volume and be a challenge for the current level of staff. The time required to research, set up files and inspect these properties repeatedly to try and gain compliance is challenging and especially time consuming from an enforcement perspective.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:

A few aspects of our business have significantly increased workload and require additional staff to maintain service levels that are comparable to the neighbouring municipalities.

Township construction activity continues to be strong with the number of building permit applications continuing to increase. Attachment “A” shows a comparison of the past five (5) years. With the increase in permit applications comes an increase in inspection requests and plan review workload. Also adding to workload challenges is the increased complexity of construction methods, building code requirements, and complexity of subdivisions that have more restrictions placed on them by design guidelines, covenants, and specific zoning requirements.

With the development of new neighbourhood areas in Latimer, Smith, Williams, Brookwood / Fernridge, as well Aldergrove over the next couple of years, building permit applications will continue to increase in volume, and further increase the workload of existing staff. As development continues to spread into communities beyond Willoughby such as Brookwood / Fernridge, and Aldergrove, logistical issues related to travelling time required by inspection staff to conduct daily inspections becomes more prominent, and hence the need for an additional staff person to contribute to offsetting this operational issue.

The PLI Department places a high priority on providing excellent customer service by having technical staff available in the office throughout the day to provide building code and building bylaw information as it relates to permits and inspections to residents and developers. Since the hire of a temporary full time Building Inspector in January 2017, inspection staff working in the office have been able to focus more on plan reviews and assisting customers with technical questions at the front counter, rather than spending the majority of time in the field conducting inspections for the entire day.

In the first five months of 2017, an inside Building Inspector (who regularly works on plan reviewing) has been required to go out to help with site inspections on nine days. During the same five month period in 2016, an inside Building Inspector was required to perform inspections on 26 days. In addition to the 26 days, PLI hired a retired inspector to assist with inspections for 23 days during the same five month period. Having the temporary full time Building Inspector position has allowed for the inside building inspector to spend more time performing plan reviews and issuing building permits, thereby reducing processing times and subsequent wait times for builders and developers to obtain building permits .

Over the last few years, there have been numerous building code changes including the new energy efficiency requirements for both housing and complex buildings, which has added time to both the inspection and the plan review process. The building code has also gone from being a prescriptive-based document to a performance-based document, which provides builders and developers the opportunity to utilize alternate solutions to achieve compliance with the objectives of the code. Although this is a positive step for the construction community, it requires additional time for staff to review and often involves numerous meetings between staff and consultants in the initial plan review process. A new release from the Province of the BC Building Code is expected for 2018, which will bring with it further additional new technical provisions to regulate construction that staff will be required to learn and be trained on to be effective in administering its requirements.

As of February 2017, sections of the Province's new Building Act have come into effect throughout BC. One of these new requirements is the mandatory certification of all Building Officials (plan reviewers and inspectors) in the Province. This is a positive step for the construction regulatory industry, as it facilitates consistency and competency throughout the industry. However, it will also result in increased competition from other local government jurisdictions to recruit and retain experienced and qualified staff.

As of June 6, 2017 there were over 22 Building Inspector/Plan reviewer jobs posted within the Province.

Community Implications:

If the one year temporary full time position does not become permanent, the plan review process, site inspections and overall customer service will be negatively impacted. Staff will not be able to maintain the service level we have achieved without permanently retaining an additional Building Inspector. Issuing a building permit for a single family dwelling could take more than 10 weeks, and requested inspections could be postponed two or three days, both negatively impacting the construction industry within the Township.

Financial Implications:

In 2016, a temporary Building Inspector position was added with funding from a variety of sources. In 2017, the department has continued to fund the position on a temporary basis from temporary sources.

By converting the position to a permanent full time Building Inspector, the department will be able to continue and maintain the service level gains that have been recently achieved and identified in this report.

Attachment A shows how inspection revenue has grown continuously over the last five years from a combination of growth from development and permit fee increases (2.5% in each of 2017). Finance projects revenue will be adequate to fund this position should Council approve the request. The total budget required including benefits will be \$85,900.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberto Cesaretti
MANAGER, PERMIT, LICENCE & INSPECTION SERVICES
for
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

This report has been prepared in consultation with the following listed departments.

CONCURRENCES	
Division / Department	Name
FINANCE DIVISION	K. Sinclair

ATTACHMENT A





