

November 17, 2025

To: Mayor and Council
City of Fernie
501 – 3rd Avenue
Fernie, BC V0B 1M0

Re: Strategic Importance of the Director of Planning / Approving Officer Recruitment

Dear Mayor and Council,

The Board of Directors of the Fernie Chamber of Commerce would like to thank & acknowledge Director of Planning, Bruce Lennox, for his long service and congratulate him on his upcoming retirement. His departure represents a pivotal moment for the City of Fernie — one that creates a constructive opportunity for renewal, modernization, and long-term improvement within a department that plays arguably the most critical role in Fernie's Economic Development.

While we respect Mr. Lennox's tenure, it is important to be candid: Fernie's development approval system has struggled for many years. Businesses, builders, and developers, including local employers have consistently experienced:

- long and unpredictable timelines
- inconsistent interpretation & application of bylaws & standards
- ambiguity around expectations
- a regulatory culture that prioritizes constraints over collaborative solutions

These challenges have had real consequences for the community. Delayed housing supply, stalled commercial investment, and uncertainty among those seeking to build or operate in Fernie have limited economic potential and resulted in lost tax revenue for the municipality.

A Strategic Opportunity for Organizational Development

The City has a unique opportunity to revitalize and restructure the planning function to align with modern best practices and better serve the community's evolving needs. With the 2026 budget process already underway, this is an ideal moment to pause, reassess & ensure the department is resourced for success, both today and well into the future, to support Fernie's continued growth.

The Chamber strongly supports the financial principle outlined in the City's recent corporate services presentation: fund growth with growth. Tying non-market change and development-related revenue directly to the services required to manage growth *before* allocating dollars elsewhere—creates stability, reduces taxation pressure, and ensures that staffing and systems can keep pace with increasing demands. As noted in the City's own analysis, Fernie is facing compounding pressures from development growth, aging infrastructure, staffing constraints, and increasing regulatory

responsibilities. These are systemic challenges, and the planning department is central to managing them effectively.

A well-resourced, high-functioning planning team is essential if the City is to capitalize on opportunities such as increased development interest, more complex applications, and improved internal tools and processes. Conversely, if the City does not make the needed investment now, existing challenges will continue and the community will feel the consequences for years to come as investment chooses other resort communities.

A Pivotal Leadership Decision

The next Director of Planning / Approving Officer will significantly influence whether Fernie moves toward a more efficient, solutions-oriented system or remains hindered by long-standing barriers that constrain economic growth. The Chamber urges Council to ensure the CAO's recruitment strategy reflects the importance of this moment and the opportunity for meaningful, positive change.

The City Needs a Planning Leader with a Modern, Solutions-Focused Mindset

The successful candidate must be someone who:

- has a demonstrable track record of significantly reducing approval timelines
- adopts a collaborative, solutions-focused mindset
- recognizes that enabling compliant development is a foundational municipal responsibility
- brings strong leadership and accountability in managing internal processes
- is confident in making timely, defensible decisions as Approving Officer

Modernizing internal processes, such as limiting review of engineer-stamped plans to code-only checks will also be essential in reducing duplication, shortening timelines, and improving service consistency.

An Example of Success: Langford, BC

Langford, BC offers a compelling example of what's possible. In the early 2010s the City restructured its planning and building leadership with a clear focus on efficiency and responsiveness. The results were widely recognized:

- 48-hour building permit turnaround times for one- and two-family dwellings
- increased residential construction starts
- stronger economic output
- dramatically improved investor confidence

Importantly, this transformation was achieved not through new bylaws but through hiring the right people, setting clear expectations, and fostering a culture that enables growth.

Langford is just one example. Across BC & nationally, many other municipalities have successfully implemented systemic change. Today, Fernie has the same opportunity. We urge you to seize the moment and hire a candidate who has achieved this elsewhere.

Our Expectation of Council

The Chamber respectfully requests that Council:

1. Direct the CAO to only consider candidates with proven experience in streamlining planning and development systems where measurable reductions in processing times have been achieved and they can clearly articulate their role in that change.
2. Ensure the recruitment process evaluates not only technical qualifications but also leadership philosophy, decision-making approach, and commitment to service excellence. Consider engaging external partners or respected leaders in the building & development community to help identify the strongest candidate.
3. Establish clear, measurable service standards for the planning department—such as maximum processing timelines for each application type, supported by quarterly public reporting to ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.
4. Ensure that best practices are applied to all leadership appointments, including conducting Canada-wide searches through open and transparent processes.
5. Recognize that Fernie's future economic pace, housing stability, and the City's own revenue growth are directly tied to this crucial hire.

This decision will influence Fernie's business climate, housing availability, and investment stability for years to come. It should be viewed not as a routine staffing matter but as a strategic reset of a department essential to the City's long-term financial and economic health.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,



Antony McElwee

Chair, Fernie Chamber of Commerce

cc: Fernie Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors

Wendy McDougall, Executive Director, Fernie Chamber of Commerce

Michael Boronowski, Chief Administrative Officer, City of Fernie

Rose Choy, Executive Officer, CHBA Central Interior