

Operational Review

GREATER MIRAMICHI SERVICE COMMISSION - DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIVISION

Final Report

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PREPARED FOR : Greater Miramichi Service Commission

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Executive Summary

The Greater Miramichi Service Commission (GMSC) engaged Stantec Consulting Ltd. to conduct an **operational review of its Development Services Division**, which oversees planning and building inspection services across the region. This initiative was driven by a desire to improve service delivery, enhance customer experience, and ensure alignment with best practices observed in comparable jurisdictions. The review was structured around **four key phases**:

- Project initiation;
- Data collection and stakeholder engagement;
- Comparative and operational analysis; and
- Solution development

Through interviews, focus groups, and consultations with internal staff, elected officials, developers, and community members, the review identified several operational challenges and opportunities for improvement. Key findings included the need for more dialogue during the building permit evaluation process, limited public understanding of planning regulations, and gaps in the CloudPermit system. Staffing constraints, overlapping roles, and the absence of succession planning were also noted as critical issues. Stakeholders expressed a need for clearer communication to improve public perception of the Development Services Division and implement a development services mandate that is focused on providing high quality customer service.

The comparative analysis with other Regional Service Commissions in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia showed that while GMSC's staffing levels and development activity are proportionate, strategic adjustments are necessary to meet evolving

demands. The report emphasizes the importance of modernizing internal processes, improving customer service, and fostering a culture of collaboration and accountability.

To address these challenges, the report outlines a series of recommendations categorized into **five strategic areas** which include:

- **Evaluating Current Practices** - Assessing the existing planning and building inspection processes to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.
- **Enhancing Customer Service** - Improving communication, responsiveness, and overall customer service to better meet the needs of the public and stakeholders.
- **Optimizing Resources** - Addressing challenges related to staffing, physical space, and technological tools to ensure that the department is well-equipped to handle its workload efficiently.
- **Improving Public Perception** - Implementing strategies to enhance the department's image and public relations, and fostering a positive relationship with the community.
- **Ensuring Regulatory Compliance** - Communicating regulatory requirements clearly and effectively to the public and ensuring that all building and development activities comply with relevant codes and standards.

The report concludes that a **cultural shift within the Development Services Division is essential**. By implementing the proposed recommendations, GMSC can strengthen its operational capacity, improve stakeholder relationships, and support sustainable regional development.



1 INTRODUCTION

Project Introduction

The Greater Miramichi Service Commission (GMSC) initiated a comprehensive operational review of its planning and building inspection services to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and overall service delivery of the Development Services Division. This initiative reflects GMSC's commitment to continuous improvement and its strategic goal of fostering a responsive, streamlined, and development-friendly environment across the region.

To support this effort, Stantec Consulting Ltd. was retained by GMSC in November 2024 to conduct this review. The scope of work included a detailed evaluation of existing policies, procedures, and regulatory frameworks, stakeholder engagement, and comparative analysis with similar jurisdictions. The objective was to identify areas for improvement and provide actionable recommendations that align with best practices and the evolving needs of the region.

The review was structured around the following key objectives:

- 1. Evaluate Existing Policy and Practices:** Assess planning policies and building inspection processes to identify strengths, inefficiencies, and opportunities for improvement.
- 2. Enhance Customer Service and Engagement:** Improve communication, responsiveness, and transparency to better serve residents, developers, and stakeholders while fostering trust and collaboration.
- 3. Optimize Organizational Resources:** Review staffing levels, roles, physical space, and technology to address challenges and ensure the department is equipped to manage workloads effectively.
- 4. Improve Public Perception and Departmental Identity:** Develop strategies to strengthen the department's image, and promote its role in development, fostering a positive relationship with the community.

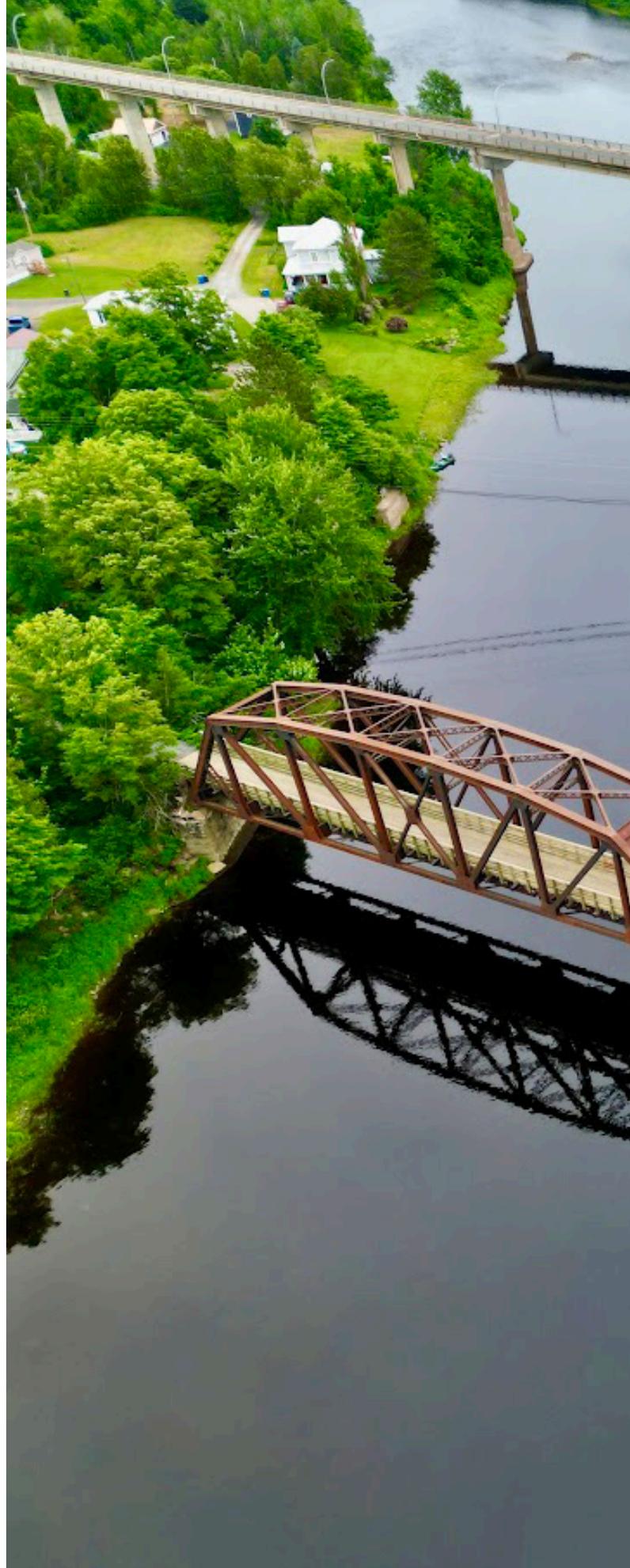


5. **Strengthen Regulatory Compliance:** Ensure alignment with provincial codes and standards while improving communication of regulatory requirements to the public.
6. **Benchmark Against Best Practices:** Compare GMSC's operations with similar municipalities to identify successful standards and innovative approaches that can inform local improvements.

As part of the work plan, a comprehensive methodology was developed that included four distinct phases:

- **Project Startup:** Establishing the scope, schedule, and engagement strategy.
- **Data Collection and Stakeholder Engagement:** Gathering qualitative and quantitative insights from staff, clients, and community stakeholders.
- **Comparative and Operational Analysis:** Benchmarking GMSC's operations and technologies against other Regional Service Commissions in New Brunswick and select municipalities in Nova Scotia.
- **Solution Development and Finalization:** Synthesizing findings into practical recommendations to improve service delivery and support regional growth.

This final report presents the outcomes of the review, offering a roadmap for operational enhancements that will help GMSC better serve its communities and support sustainable development across the Miramichi region.





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BACKGROUND REVIEW

Historical Overview

New Brunswick has recently experienced large-scale reform of its municipal governance. Through its April 2021 Green Paper *Working together for vibrant and sustainable communities* and the White Paper that followed in November 2021, the Province of New Brunswick made multiple changes to its municipal framework.¹ The Province reduced the number of municipal entities from 328, including 236 Local Service Districts (LSDs),² to 77 through consolidation and re-designation of existing municipalities and dissolution of the LSDs. The new municipalities, furthermore, were organized within 12 regions within which they were expected to collaborate to deliver several regional services mandated by the Province as well as to make other collaborative arrangements to deliver local services advantageously.

The restructuring culminated 50 years of reconsideration and adjustment to New Brunswick's municipal system that followed the dramatic changes that followed changes made following the Byrne Commission in 1968. At the time, the Province chose to abolish its system of county-based local governments. While the counties are still familiar to New Brunswickers as geographic identifiers, they ceased to exist as providers of local governance and services. Instead, cities, towns, and villages, which existed before 1968 continued to provide local services and the remaining areas of small settlements and rural land received the services

they needed through LSDs formed for the purpose or directly from the Province.

The reorganization undertaken in 2022 involved two processes: municipalization and regionalization.³ Municipalization involved the consolidation of LSDs and other rural lands in incorporated municipal governments by combining them with one or more existing municipalities or bringing two or more together in a new municipal structure with the overall goal of ensuring all areas of the province were subject to municipal government as they were under the county system. Regionalization organized the resulting municipal entities (i.e., existing, reformed, and newly created) into the 12 aforementioned regional service districts.

According to New Brunswick-born political scientists Zack and Jon Taylor, the regional service districts "are similar to municipalities in that they have the power to buy and sell property, enter into contracts, hire and fire staff, and so on." On their establishment, they state the regions were "mandated to 'provide or facilitate the provision' of regional planning and solid waste services to their constituent entities and manage land-use planning within unincorporated areas."⁴

While the transformation initiated in 2021 did not change the number of regions, the Province stated in the White Paper that it intended to "introduce changes to stabilize and increase [the] capacity

1 Government of New Brunswick, *Working together for vibrant and sustainable communities A Green Paper*, April 2021 and New Brunswick Environment and Local Government, *Working together for vibrant and sustainable communities White Paper*, November 2021.

2 Taylor, Zack and Taylor, Jon, "Representative Regionalization: Toward More Equitable, Democratic, Responsive, and Efficient Local Government in New Brunswick" (2021). Centre for Urban Policy and Local Governance – Publications. 5., <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/urbancentre-reports/5>, p. 10.

3 Ibid., pp. 20-22.

4 Ibid., p. 9.

[of the commissions] and build on their strengths.” The paper proposed “interdependent changes and actions that include:

- Expanding the role and mandate of the regional service commissions.
- Strengthening the governance structure to allow for improved coordination including adjusted representation and voting processes.
- Realigning commission boundaries.
- Enhancing leadership and capacity by expanding the executive team.
- Requiring the development of a comprehensive regional strategy aimed at identifying the strengths and gaps in the region and establishing priorities and actions.
- Establishing standards and performance measures.”⁵

The formulation of New Brunswick’s new system of municipal governance is largely attributable to the Finn Commission, although some credit can also be given to the earlier Commission on Land Use and the Rural Environment (CLURE). The model for the regional districts now in place, furthermore, is similar to the system of regional districts created in BC in the 1960s.

Like New Brunswick from 1968 to 2022, BC in the early 1960s had no form of rural local government. The new fabric of regions has additional antecedents in New Brunswick. The province had a network of district planning commissions that date from the 1970s. The roots of the Greater Miramichi Regional Commission lie in that structure. Staff in the current commission and many of its responsibilities are traceable to the Miramichi

District Planning Commission. The province also had solid waste commissions and a variety of inter-municipal arrangements for service delivery that are now organized within the new regional framework.

The 12 regions now in place are the direct descendants of 12 regions created by the Province in 2012 to replace 12 solid waste commissions and 12 land use planning commissions that served the province at the time and whose boundaries were moderately adjusted to conform to the new municipal entities.

New Brunswick’s new system positions regional government as a framework within which communities organized as municipalities can receive services such as planning and solid waste management that benefit from economies of scale that are available within a larger regional structure as well as a broader view of the issues that must be addressed. The implementation of districts in New Brunswick differs significantly from BC insofar as the BC system originally avoided assigning any specific responsibilities to its regions and allowed them to essentially grow to address local needs.⁶

Whereas BC’s regions began with a blank page, New Brunswick’s regions were already served by organizations delivering planning and solid waste management service, both of which have a critical regional dimension. Planning, notably, must be addressed on both the regional and local levels. Issues like transportation and housing benefit from a regional perspective. The central issue of transportation, for example, is the management of commuting patterns, which create the maximum pressure on transportation infrastructure.

Commuting issues involve interaction between communities and modes that require a regional

5 New Brunswick Environment and Local Government, op cit., p. 18.

6 Walisser, Brian, G Paget and M Dann, ‘New Pathways to Effective Regional Governance: Canadian Reflections’ in Sansom, G and P McKinley (eds), *New Century Local Government: Commonwealth Perspectives*, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2013, Chapter 9, p. 146.

perspective. There are also, of course, local issues such as neighbourhood traffic management and the application of traffic controls (e.g., intersection signalization) that have a local dimension.

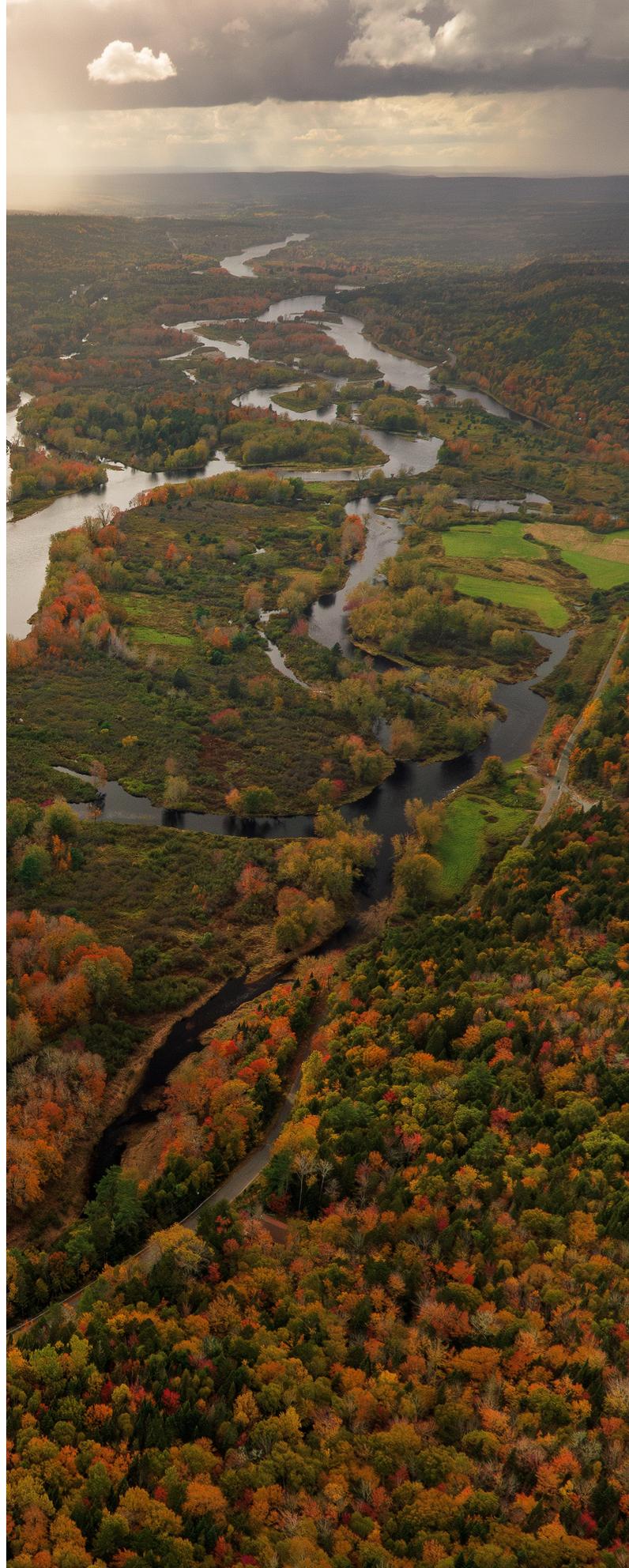
Housing is another example. The housing market is invariably regional. Residents choose their housing location within their region based on the location of their work, schools, or other considerations. The overall demand for housing, therefore, is determined at the regional level, although housing units themselves are clearly delivered at the neighbourhood level. A central concern of planning is the reconciliation of regional needs for housing and non-residential development.

Solid waste has similar local and regional considerations but is also influenced by the extreme economies of scale that affect the development and operation of landfills. Contemporary landfills almost always serve a region and are often shared by more than one region. Collection services, on the other hand, are clearly delivered on the local level to individual properties.

The Province of New Brunswick added several more services to the mandate of regional commissions on the implementation of its reform program in 2022. Additions recommended in the White Paper were economic development, community development, regional tourism promotions, regional transportation (including transit), and cost-sharing on regional recreation infrastructure. The Province's stated intention was to "strengthen" the commissions.⁷

Land use planning, in any case, was identified as one of four pillars of the reform process in the Green Paper, along with the structure of local governance, regional collaboration, and finances.

⁷ New Brunswick Environment and Local Government, op cit., p. 18.



The paper expressed concern with “varying levels of planning” noting fundamental issues such as “urban sprawl, linear development, the need to protect natural resources and emerging issues related to climate change” that had largely been identified by the CLURE Commission in 1993 remained a serious concern.⁸ While the RSCs had made progress in preparing and coordinating land use plans, the paper noted “about 50 per cent of LSDs have no land use plan” making them “more vulnerable to unwelcome development with attendant negative impact on property values and on the quality of life.”⁹

Notwithstanding the clear benefits, implementing planning regulations in communities that are unfamiliar with them is challenging. A regional organization with centrally located offices such as the GMSC may be perceived as remote by residents in rural communities who may have to travel for more than an hour to meet with staff in person. Planning requirements such as separation distances and buffering requirements, furthermore, are often perceived as superfluous by rural residents, who often live on larger landholdings at considerable distances from neighbours and/or are simply accustomed to varied land uses in their vicinity.

All residents are adjusting as well to changes in their communities, some of which have reconfigured and re-named. For LSD residents, who were previously represented by appointed boards, changes include a shift to elected representatives serving on a local council, which is presumably viewed positively. Such changes, however, take time for residents to accept and understand, a transition that is now underway in Greater Miramichi as well as in other regional districts across the province.

The BC system that has influenced New Brunswick’s new arrangement is well regarded. It has been in place in BC with minimal modification since its adoption and nearly all municipalities in the province are federated in a regional district. The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador appears to be moving, albeit gradually, to the development of a similar framework to address issues in its municipal system, which is characterized by many small towns and extensive unorganized areas.

The districts in BC went through an initial period in which district leaders have said it had to prove its worth. Rural residents in unorganized areas were particularly resistant when the Province created the regional district system and have continued to be more skeptical than residents of urban communities. Presentations by leading administrators who experienced the districts’ first 40 years emphasized that public outreach and education were critical to bringing the public inside. They also agreed that the flexibility of the regional district concept was vital to adapting to varied needs across the province, but communication and education have continued to be important. Some also noted the importance of managing relationships between municipal partners to encourage collaboration.¹⁰

While New Brunswick’s regional districts have only recently been formed, they are not new. They have developed from previous regional commissions and the planning and solid waste organizations that preceded them. They are, however, a key feature of the province’s new municipal structure and are facing the challenges of any organization dealing with a new context in which the roles and responsibilities of key players have been significantly changed.

8 Government of New Brunswick, op ci., p. 20.

9 Loc cit.

10 See: Local Government Knowledge Partnership, 40 Years: A Regional District Retrospective, Summary of Proceedings, 2009, pp. 1-11.

GMSC Overview

The GMSC oversees planning and building inspection services across a vast geographic area of 12,853 square kilometres in northeastern New Brunswick. Following the Province's 2023 local governance reform, GMSC's jurisdiction expanded to include the Rural Communities of Alnwick and Miramichi River Valley, the Village of Doaktown, the enlarged City of Miramichi, and the Greater Miramichi Rural District.

The GMSC currently operates out of 1773 Water Street, Miramichi, occupying the second floor of the building and using additional space, accessible via Loggie Drive, for Board of Director meetings, PRAC meetings, and other Commission-related business.

The department operates with a dedicated team of eight staff members, led by a Planning Director. The current Director of Planning splits their time between Planning and Operations, with roughly 40% dedicated to the Operations role and the remaining 60% applied to Planning. The remaining team includes a Building Inspection Services Manager/Development Officer, two



Building Inspectors, a Planning Services Manager, a Planner, a GIS Technician/Development Officer, an Approvals Coordinator/Development Officer, and an Office Administrator. Additionally, GMSC has recently transitioned from its contract with Maritime Enforcement Services and will now provide enforcement services directly under the GMSC umbrella.

GMSC utilizes CloudPermit as its primary online platform for managing both permit and planning applications, streamlining service delivery across its communities.

According to the 2024 Annual Report, the following highlights in planning activity and permits were experienced at GMSC over the past year:

- Total construction value decreased from \$30.3 million in 2023 to \$136.8 million in 2024.
- Development activity remained concentrated in the City of Miramichi, which accounted for 89% of the region's total construction value. In addition, 56% of the building permits issued and 38% of the subdivision applications were in the City of Miramichi.
- 34.7% of permits issued were for residential

buildings, accounting for 452 new dwelling units.

- The region saw 121 subdivision applications, resulting in 221 new lots.
- The regional PRAC met 10 times and considered a total of 29 applications.

Despite previous efforts to address service delivery issues through initiatives such as *Working Together: A Plan to Better Assist and Support Our Clients (2016 – 17)*, followed by an *Agenda Item 2020-3-7a Working Together Plan Update*, and *Greater Miramichi Regional Services Commission – Planning Services Communications Strategy (February 2021)*, some client requirements remained unmet. These documents outlined strategies and plans to support and assist stakeholders, but service gaps have persisted.

In pursuit of continuous improvement, GMSC is undertaking a comprehensive operational review of its planning and building inspection services. This initiative aims to enhance the responsiveness and effectiveness of service delivery of its Development Services Division, building on previous efforts to address service gaps and longstanding challenges.





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**ENGAGEMENT
AND FEEDBACK**

Consultation Methodology

The consultation sessions were conducted through a combination of online interviews, in-person sessions, and focus groups. The sessions were held on various dates and at different venues to ensure broad participation and representation.

In addition to the online interviews, the following meetings were held with stakeholders to gather further insights:

- Greater Miramichi Chamber of Commerce: February 25, 2025
- Development Community Drop-in Session #1: February 26, 2025
- Miramichi River Valley Rural Community: March 5, 2025
- Alnwick Rural Community: March 5, 2025
- City of Miramichi: March 11, 2025
- Village of Doaktown: March 11, 2025
- Development Community Drop-in Session # 2: March 12, 2025
- Greater Miramichi Rural District: March 21 and March 31, 2025
- GRSC Development Services Division Staff: July 17, 2025

The consultation sessions aimed to gather feedback from various stakeholders involved in the development and building process, including developers, builders, municipal council members, and other interest groups such as the Chamber of Commerce. The analysis of data and documentation related to planning and building inspection processes was also conducted.

Interviews and consultations with key planning and building inspection personnel, including senior planning and development officer staff, application intake and processing staff, administrative staff, senior building inspectors, the Director of Operations and Planning, and the CEO, were carried out through a combination of virtual and in-person meetings.

The stakeholder consultations consisted of structured focus group sessions with the following participants:

- Building/Developer Sit-Down
- Miramichi Chamber of Commerce

The outcomes of the sessions were summarized in a short report that reflects the feedback and perspectives shared by participants. While some comments identified areas for improvement, others acknowledged the technical expertise and professionalism of Commission staff. The feedback presented in this section captures what was heard from the various stakeholders. Not all points shared were fact checked or further evaluated for justification given that the sessions were intended to be a listening exercise, aimed at capturing anecdotal insights and constructive criticism.

Feedback from Engagement Sessions

INTERVIEWS WITH GMSC SENIOR STAFF

The interviews with senior staff revealed several key insights and observations regarding the operational and strategic aspects of the organization. The following points summarize the main themes and feedback provided during these interviews:

Operational Challenges and Recommendations

- There is a need for a more standardized process to handle inquiries and regulatory laws. The current system lacks consistency and clarity, leading to confusion among staff and clients.
- The implementation of a Development Services Coordinator was suggested to improve customer service and public perception. It was suggested that the position be focused on assisting applicants with inquiries, permits, and funding opportunities, as well as confirming that submitted applications are completing and specifying the additional information required when they are not. It was also noted

that this position could rotate throughout the various partner communities to provide specific guidance and in-person support with inquiries and applications.

- The suggested Development Services Coordinator position could be an elaboration of current responsibilities of the Approvals Coordinator, with appropriate training, but it is unlikely that the existing position could have capacity to visit partner communities and not leave the current office unstaffed.
- It was noted that staff need to understand their accountability to the public and the importance of customer service. Customer service training was identified as an initiative that should be embedded in the onboarding and continuing workplace education program.
- General inquiries are handled through the email address info@gmsc.ca, or they are directed to the appropriate staff member. The Approvals Coordinator, often the first point of contact and therefore there is an expectation among clients



that they will be efficiently directed to the next person.

- A client referral guide and specific Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are necessary, although current SOPs are very specific and lack standardization.
- The Cloudpermit system has been beneficial in tracking permit applications, but there are still misconceptions among developers about the process. Better communication and education about requirements and procedures are needed.

Staff and Budget Considerations

- The organization is facing staffing challenges, particularly in the development services area. There is a consensus that additional staff, such as building inspectors and development services coordinators, are needed to handle the increasing workload and ensure efficient operations.
- The budget for 2025 includes provisions for additional positions, but there is a need for careful planning and review to ensure these resources are effectively utilized. Since the consultation were carried out, a new building inspector has been hired. This is expected to assist with keeping pace with the current level of development activity, but there is still a need to evaluate the backlog and adequately prepare for succession planning.
- Cloudpermit system has made the job easier by providing accurate reports and bank statements. However, the software package is expensive.

Technology and Process Improvements

- The customization of the Cloudpermit system has taken longer than expected, but it has improved accuracy and efficiency in tracking applications and fees. There is a need to explore

other technologies that may better fit the organization's needs.

- The Commission has a variety of resources to assist clients, but contacts noted a lack of digital material, such as checklists and pamphlets, was noted, along with the need to modernize existing material so that it provides clearer and more accessible information to clients, especially the older population.

Communication and Public Relations

- The potential for the organization to focus and improve communication with the public was mentioned repeatedly. The Commission needs to demystify existing stereotypes about planning and development services, including translating technical jargon into simpler language and using social media and other platforms to engage with the community.
- Some comments characterized staff as abrasive and derided the red tape associated with development processes. The regulatory environment, admittedly, is complex with many procedural requirements that can create barriers for applicants and contribute to delays in service delivery. A related gap is the absence of a clear, guiding document to help clients understand where they are in the process and what the next steps may be. Filling this gap was seen as an essential tool for improving transparency and reducing confusion throughout the development process.
- The need to communicate the benefits and value of obtaining Building and Development Permits was identified, including the legal requirements, safety, insurance coverage benefits, peace of mind, and other considerations. Permits not only address legal requirements, they also play a critical role in ensuring safety, structural integrity, and compliance with building codes.

While some stakeholders recognize this value, others do not. Some residents and builders are frustrated with the permit process and as a result, choose not to obtain a permit prior to construction. The complexity and time associated with the process were the main reasons identified.

- Similarly, the Commission needs to work cooperatively with the development community so that they understand Building and Development Permit requirements, including modernizing submission requirements with more professional documentation that was not required in the past.

Staff Planning and Policy

- Given the housing crisis, interviewees noted the need to work cooperatively with the development community, along with communicating the benefits of obtaining permits to the public. It was suggested that the organization could benchmark against other areas to ensure they are not asking for too much information from applicants.

INTERVIEWS WITH GMSC STAFF

The interviews, conducted individually through Microsoft Teams, spanned one hour to one hour and 45 minutes. The same set of questions, detailed in Appendix A, was used to ensure consistency in the replies. This approach helped effectively identify key themes and concerns including:

Customer Service and Internal Communication:

- **Strengths:** The department is recognized internally for its strong customer service, knowledgeable staff, and supportive work environment. Staff members are willing to learn

and take on additional roles to assist clients. Internal communication is generally strong, with open doors and easy access to colleagues and supervisors.

- **Weaknesses:** Challenges include dealing with public misconceptions about the department's role, enforcing rules, and the need for better dissemination of information to the public. Internal communication has been affected by leadership changes and the retirement of long-serving staff, leading to challenges in adjusting to new leadership and rebuilding team cohesion.

Public Interaction and Misconceptions:

- **Challenges:** The public often misunderstands the department's role as consultants and regulators, expecting design solutions outside the department's scope. Recent changes to Provincial regulations have created confusion and dissatisfaction among clients. Better public education and resources are needed to address these issues. Complaints often stem from a lack of public knowledge about regulations and procedures, leading to frustration and, sometimes, aggressive behavior towards staff.

Space and Resources:

- **Challenges:** The department faces challenges related to physical space and resource allocation, that impact efficiency and staff morale. More physical space is needed to accommodate the growing team and keep Development Services staff in one building to continue to improve efficiency and collaboration. The departments are currently under-resourced and struggle to meet minimum requirements.

Technological Tools:

- **Challenges:** The effectiveness of the current online platform (Cloudpermit) was questioned. Better training and information sharing are

needed to improve understanding of the application. Staff have suggested exploring alternative platforms to enhance the review and approval process. Cloudpermit does not start tracking time until the application is complete, which can lead to delays. The platform has a checklist and can track the number of days to get a permit, but its functionality can be improved.

- There is also a disconnect between CloudPermit and the inspection process. Since the department operates on a request-based system, many files remain open indefinitely, frequently resurfacing as issues when flagged in the Gazette. At that stage, property owners must often hire engineers to verify completed work, since no inspections were conducted and the construction is no longer visible.

Staff Roles and Workload:

- **Challenges:** Staff expressed concern with the distribution of workload among staff and the need for additional resources to manage the increasing volume of applications. Staff feel their department is under-resourced. Most feel a Development Services Coordinator is needed to guide applicants through the process. The need could be addressed by shifting of responsibilities of the Approvals Coordinator.
- Many also suggested staff workloads should be reviewed. For example, one employee is serving as both the Planning Director and Director of Operations, while both of these roles have significant responsibilities and workloads. Similarly, another employee is splitting time between being the Commission's GIS Specialist and sole Subdivision Development Officer.

Communication and Training:

- **Opportunities:** Communication needs to be improved within the department and with the

public, with a leading need to provide sensitivity training to help staff deal more effectively with diverse members of the community. Enhanced training for staff, particularly in using new technologies like Cloudpermit, is also needed. Staff have suggested hiring IT and social media/communications personnel in addition to the existing IT contracts and in-house Communications and Marketing staff to improve efficiency and public engagement. Better documentation and communication of regulatory changes to the public are needed.

Public Relations:

- **Opportunities:** Improving the department's image and public relations through proactive communication and engagement can help address reputational issues. Better public relations strategies will improve the department's reputation and make it more approachable and flexible. The department has done some work in this area but needs to continue educating one-time developers and the development community. It was noted that the new website will be a big improvement.

Policy and Regulatory Challenges:

- **Challenges:** Communicating Building Code requirements, such as the need for a registered professional engineer's stamp, is often misunderstood by the public. The department faces issues with buildings being constructed without permits, which has been addressed by engaging Maritime Enforcement Services. There have been concerning examples of houses being constructed without permits, impacting tax revenue. One of the other key challenges is the limited budget that restricts their ability to pursue legal action. As a result, regulations are not consistently enforced, leading to an increase in illegal development, as individuals recognize

that there are few consequences. To address these barriers, the department needs to better communicate the regulatory requirements and the benefits of the process to the public.

Development Prioritization:

- **Prioritization:** It was suggested that housing developments should be prioritized over other types of development given the current housing crisis. The department triages applications, processing complete applications first, similar to a passport application process. The average time to get a permit was recently estimated to be 12.5 workdays. The department also noted that it needs to ensure that plans stamped by an engineer or architect are still reviewed.

Leadership and Accessibility:

- **Leadership:** Strong leadership and clear communication are critical to the success of the department. Some staff suggested performance management is often used by employers to help employees and teams to improve work performance and implement the Commission's strategic objectives.
- **Accessibility:** Some members of the public have complained about the difficulty of reaching some staff members. This has led to frustration among the public and a perception that the Commission is not accessible. The compressed work week was seen as compounding this issue, but there are identified ways to manage the issue.

Customer Service Accountability:

- **Accountability:** Staff must understand that they are accountable to the public and are in the customer service business. Some members of the public believe GMRSC staff are not responsive and are not willing to engage with an applicant to discuss options or head differing

opinions on how a particular requirement may be interpreted, which can lead to negative public perceptions.

- **Development Services Coordinator:**

Implementing a Development Services Coordinator or concierge-type service could be beneficial in improving customer service and public perception. This service could be both in and out of the office and specifically mandated to help guide applicants through the process and provide a more personalized experience. As noted previously, this could be integrated into the existing Approvals Coordinator position or piloted as a new position depending on the availability of financial resource.

Action Plan Implementation:

- **Time and Effort:** Implementing an action plan across the region will require time and effort. It is important to communicate this to the public and manage their expectations.

Key Themes and Concerns

The key themes and concerns noted in this section reflect the feedback and perspectives shared by participants. The feedback presented in this section is not entirely factual or comprehensive, but it offers a representation of what was heard.

the Building Code, which is a significant issue. A dispute process or some form of flexible negotiation is needed, particularly with architectural aspects. Fire, safety, and accessibility are major stumbling blocks.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MEETINGS

Communication and Consistency:

- **Red Tape:** Chamber members are concerned about excessive red tape and building permit requirements as well as inconsistent messaging, particularly among inspectors. There is a need for a comprehensive list of requirements, as engineers are sometimes overruled by building inspectors. Some of these concerns could be attributed to a developer's or resident's building experience.
- **Consistency:** Consistency in enforcement and communication is crucial. While the planning side is generally clear, there are more issues on the inspection side. The lack of consistency creates challenges, especially when inspectors go on vacation, putting pressure on other inspectors and that backfilling open permits is not able to take place because of the number of employees. The lack of consistency creates challenges, particularly when inspectors are on vacation, as it puts additional pressure on others and prevents backfilling of open permits due to limited staffing.

Dispute Resolution:

- **Lack of Dispute Process:** There is no local avenue to dispute the interpretation of

Permit Process:

- **Permit Issuance and Closure:** When a permit is issued and the assigned inspector leaves, it must be closed by a new inspector, often leading to confusion and delays due to differing interpretations. These delays may also be attributed to applicants failing to request final inspections.
- **Enforcement vs. Facilitation:** Some residents see inspectors more as enforcers than facilitators. They do not necessarily provide feedback with customer service in mind and sometimes are seen as not being solution oriented.

Developer Experience:

- **Overwhelmed Developers:** Developers, especially inexperienced ones, often feel overwhelmed by the requirements. They sometimes inquire about starting projects too late and do not want to accept "no" for an answer.
- **Communication Plan:** A communication plan would improve the interface with developers. The front desk experience needs to be more welcoming, and there should be a better understanding of the communication role.

Public Perception and Education:

- **Permit Process Perception:** People feel that

getting a permit is a frustrating process and an expense, leading them to avoid it. There is a stereotype that permits are a nuisance, and there is still sticker shock on the price of plans.

- **Education:** There is an opportunity to partner with insurance companies and financial institutions to educate people on the importance of the permit process for safety. This could help change the negative perception of the permit process.

Online Permitting Process:

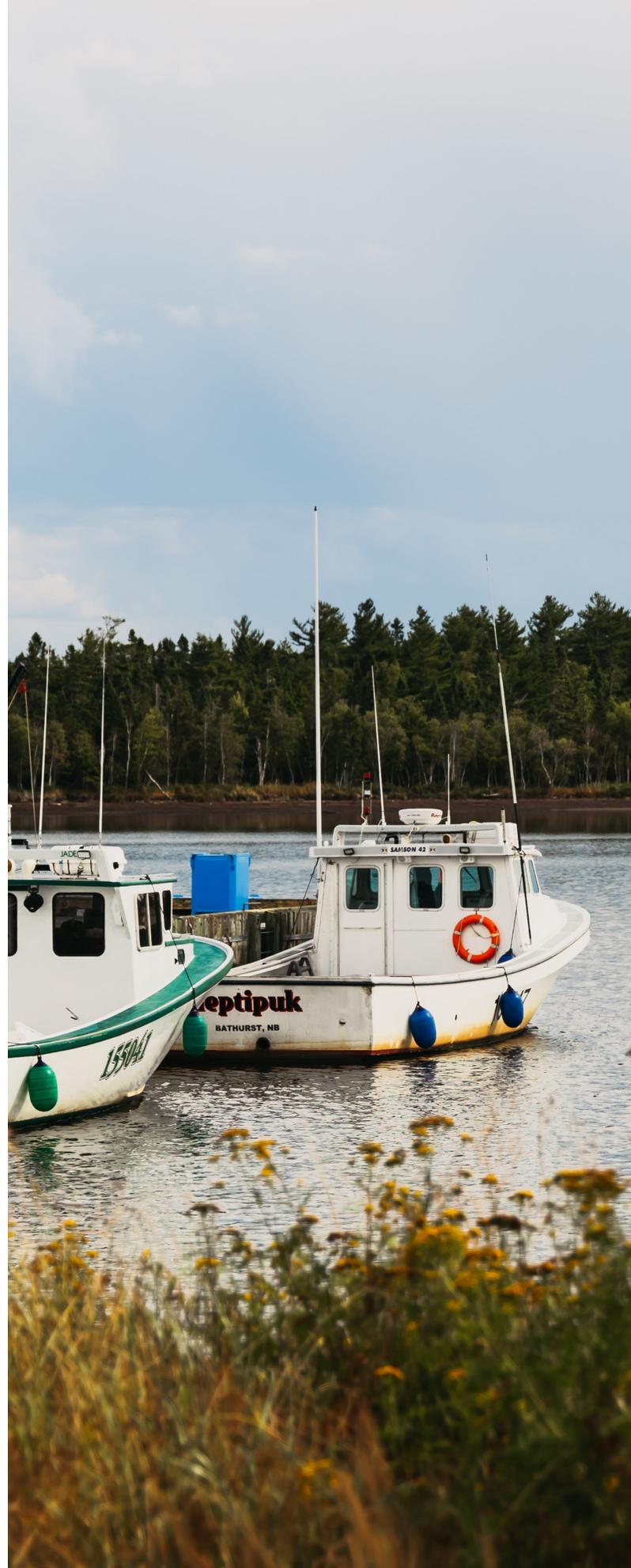
- **Pros and Cons:** The online permitting process has its advantages and disadvantages. Someone needs to be in the office at all times to answer questions and help people navigate the process.
- **Facilitator Role:** If hiring another Development Coordinator or concierge position is not possible, having a facilitator to help people through the process would be beneficial. As noted above, this could be shifting of responsibilities of the Approval Coordinator or piloting a new position.

Inspector Training and Liability:

- **Training:** Specific training was identified as a gap. Inspectors as well as other staff could be provided with a better understanding where their liability starts and stops. This could help with their approach and comfort in their role, particularly with respect to interpreting the Code and Act requirements. Specific legal training should be identified to help overcome this issue.

Communication Methods:

- **Email Communication:** Email sometimes works, but people do not always read them. A more effective way is needed to communicate with developers and the public. While phone calls also have shortcomings, multiple



communication techniques, including SMS should be explored.

COUNCIL MEETINGS

The council sessions were held on various dates and times to gather feedback from elected officials and senior staff members on the development services provided by the GMSC. These sessions aimed to collect valuable insights and perspectives from different communities to identify key themes and concerns related to the development services. As noted above, the Council sessions were held as follows:

- Miramichi River Valley Rural Community: March 5, 2025
- Alnwick Rural Community: March 5, 2025
- City of Miramichi: March 11, 2025
- Village of Doaktown: March 11, 2025
- Greater Miramichi Rural District: March 21 and March 31, 2025.

The Council sessions highlighted several themes, including:

Public Education and By-Law Enforcement

- The need for public education and pop-up events to bring the development community together and for the GMSC to be more visible in their communities was emphasized.
- Concerns were raised about by-law enforcement officers being regarded as police officers, which may send the wrong impression and lead to compliance out of fear rather than understanding.
- The importance of customer service and the well-being of the community was discussed, along with suggestions for improving online

permitting and considering a satellite presence in rural communities.

Communication and Staffing

- Better communication and a checklist for applicants to understand the approval process were suggested.
- Interest in having a seasoned building enforcement officer and reevaluating staffing needs around enforcement was expressed.
- Suggestions for a Development Services Coordinator position and proactive communication about permit revenues were made.

National Building Code and Consistency

- The rigidity of the National Building Code and the need for more subjective, but justifiable interpretations were discussed.
- Communication issues were noted and, particularly, the need for a transition from technical language to layman's terms were highlighted.
- Concerns about preferential treatment were expressed (mainly based on the experiences of developers), and the need for consistency between inspectors was raised, along with suggestions for rebranding and improving the Cloudpermit system.

Internet Challenges and Customer Service Policies

- Internet challenges in rural areas and the lengthy permit process for routine, rural-based permits, such as decks, and accessory buildings were highlighted.
- The need for customer service-focused policies and clear communication was emphasized.
- Concerns about favoritism being shown to some developers and the importance of timely permit reviews were discussed, along with suggestions

for a development or housing concierge position to guide people through the permitting process, preferably in-person.

Training and Succession Planning

- The need for customer service and clarity in the permit process was emphasized.
- Concerns about inconsistencies from one employee to another (mainly with respect to interpretation) and the need for customer service training were raised.
- Suggestions for performance evaluations and succession planning, including resources and cross-training, were made, along with the importance of visibility in the community and addressing the housing crisis.

DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

The developer focus group sessions were held on various dates and times to gather feedback from developers on the development services. While only one session was originally planned, a second event was added to help increase participation. These sessions were informal drop-in style events and were aimed at collecting valuable and frank insights and perspectives from the developer community to identify key themes and concerns related to the development services. Both sessions were held at the Travelodge by Wyndham Miramichi with the first session held on February 26 and the second on March 12. Both sessions were held from 10 am - noon.

Information Requirements and Inspection Issues

- Developers expressed concerns about the amount of information required, including

engineering drawings for air exchangers and fire caulking.

- Issues were raised about inspectors missing items during initial inspections and bringing them up at the final inspection, leading to additional costs.
- Developers felt that inspectors were trying to override engineers, and some felt uneasy about speaking-up without retaliation.
- There appears to be a desire for someone, such as an ombudsperson (or an organization) to adjudicate differing opinions on the National Building Code. Often, builders share as much or more experience with the Code than the inspectors do, but there does not appear to be an interest in listening to another interpretation.
- Concerns were raised about the public not knowing the permit process.
- Developers emphasized the importance of consistency between inspectors and the need for more staff.

Communication and Customer Service

- Developers highlighted the rigidity of the National Building Code and the need for more subjective interpretations but stressed that safety is key.
- Communication issues and the need for a transition from technical language to layman's terms were discussed.
- It was suggested that the senior leadership of the Commission needs to be more engaged in the inspection process and that performance management needs to be implemented so that the culture within the organization changes.
- There was a need for better communication and a checklist for applicants to understand the approval process at the start of the process.

- Developers felt that inspectors were treating them as if they were trying to get around the rules and were identifying issues at the end that cost thousands of dollars to fix.
- There were concerns about the enforcement being overboard, mainly in their interpersonal approaches and the need for inspectors to realize the mandate of the Commission is to serve the public.
- Developers stressed the importance of a heads-up approach and the need for a conversation about issues, so that major changes are not identified at the final inspection.

CloudPermit System and Training

- Developers raised issues with the CloudPermit system, including the need for more personal communication and the problematic remarks section.
- There was a need for someone in the office to answer questions and help people navigate the process.
- Developers suggested partnering with insurance companies and financial institutions to educate

people on the importance of the permit process for safety.

- The online permitting process can be overwhelming and has pros and cons, and there was a need for someone in the office to answer questions.
- Developers emphasized the importance of understanding the benefits of a permit and the need for a reset given the change in senior leadership.

The developer focus group sessions collectively emphasized the need for improved communication, consistency, and customer service in the permit process. Developers suggested proactive measures such as public education, standardizing the review checklist, and partnering with other organizations to enhance community engagement and trust.

A key theme from these sessions was the need for a more constructive approach to the Building Permit process. Developers repeatedly noted that inspectors are reluctant to listen to alternative interpretations and work with them to find proactive solutions.





4

COMPARATIVE AND OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

Comparative Analysis

Stantec conducted a comparative analysis of similar jurisdictions to better understand the operational realities and challenges faced by similar development approval organizations. The analysis included an assessment of online platforms – their strengths and weaknesses – as well as staff training and administrative time, development service tools, and customer service strategies. Staffing considerations in this review were limited to planning, development, inspection, and supporting personnel. In addition to reviewing publicly available information, planning directors from the reviewed agencies were contacted to gain deeper insights into their development services and operational challenges.

SOUTHEAST REGIONAL SERVICE COMMISSION

Southeast Regional Service Commission (SERSC) serves the Cities of Moncton and Dieppe; Towns of Cap-Acadie, Riverview, Salisbury, Shediac, and Tantramar; Villages of Fundy Albert, Memramcook, and Three Rivers; and Maple Hills and Strait Shores Rural Communities. The region is located in Southeast New Brunswick where it abuts the Province of Nova Scotia. It is centred on Moncton and includes suburban and rural communities surrounding the city. The SERC delivers community and social development, economic development, infrastructure cost-sharing, land planning, tourism, transportation, and waste management. Some municipalities pay the Commission for mosquito management services.

Development Activity:

- According to the SERSC's 2023 Annual Report, the total value of new development and construction in the Southeast Region hit a record high of \$800 million, a 14.6% increase from the year before.
- As the major hub of New Brunswick, the SERSC is experiencing its fastest growth in years. The core is becoming increasingly dense, and apartments are being introduced in areas where that used to almost exclusively single-detached homes.

Staffing Considerations:

- The SERSC consists of 28 staff members, including 10 Planners, 6 Building Inspectors, 7 Development Officers, 4 GIS Technicians, and supporting staff.
- Additional staff are needed to deal with increased demand and workload; however, finding the right candidates is challenging.

Planning Services:

- The SERSC provides services to 12 municipalities and a rural district (Cap-Acadie, Dieppe, Fundy Albert, Maple Hills, Memramcook, Moncton, Riverview, Salisbury, Shediac, Strait Shores, Tantramar, Three Rivers, Southeast Rural District).
- Generally, each partner municipality seeks more efficient service, less complicated plans, and fewer restrictions.
- The municipalities that once competed for development are now working collaboratively on regional growth and development.

Operational Challenges:

- One of the ongoing challenges is tracking and maintaining the information received in the digital database. The SERSC is currently working on providing more feedback to the software developer to help automate additional functions and improve overall efficiency.

Dispute Resolution:

- Complaints received by the SERSC are addressed on a case-by-case basis. Most are due to a lack of understanding of the processes, highlighting the need for greater public education about the profession and its procedures.
- Complaints are submitted through an official form. Once processed, they are addressed if an infraction is identified. However, due to the high volume of applications and complaints, combined with fast-paced growth in the region, the Commission does not have the capacity to handle complaints through one-on-one calls.

Technology Use:

- The SERSC collaborated with an external software developer to use a customized version of Modified FileMaker as their comprehensive digital database. The transition to this system was implemented five years ago and included customizations to meet the specific needs of the SERSC. While there are plans to enhance certain features for improved efficiency, the Commission has no intention to switch to a different program or software.

SOUTHWEST REGIONAL SERVICE COMMISSION

Southwest Regional Service Commission (SWRSC) serves the Town of Saint Andrews; the Villages of McAdam and Grand Manan; the Municipal District of St. Stephen; the Rural Communities of Campobello Island, Fundy Shores, and Eastern Charlotte; and the Southwest Rural District. The region covers the southwest corner of New Brunswick and is on the border with the United States. The Commission provides solid waste management, land use planning, development and building inspection, regional economic development, regional tourism promotion, recreation cost-sharing services, and community development services including public transportation planning.

Development Activity:

- The SWRSC's 2023 Annual Report observed a decrease in development activity compared to previous years.
- The total estimated construction value decreased from \$59.16 million in 2021 but increased from \$44.95 million in 2022, reaching \$48.71 million in 2023.
- The year 2021 marked a peak in development activity, and levels have remained relatively consistent or lower.

Staffing Considerations:

- The SWRSC consists of 10 development staff members, including a Planning Director, a Senior Planner, a Planner, a Senior Development Officer, a Development Officer, a GIS Technician / Junior Development Officer, an Administrative Officer / Enforcement Officer, and four Building Inspectors including two full-time, one half-time, and one contract-based building inspector.
- The team size currently seems adequate,

provided the work is streamlined and permit files are delegated to junior staff in a timely manner to prevent bottlenecks.

- Some roles are shared between two areas – for example, the GIS Technician also performs the tasks of a Development Officer as needed. Similarly, one individual provides both administrative support and serves as an enforcement officer when needed. Contract positions are intended to offer the same flexibility as required.

Planning Services:

- The SWRSC provides planning services to seven local governments and 1 rural community (Fundy Shores, Eastern Charlotte, Saint Andrews, Southwest Rural District, McAdam, Grand Manan, Municipal District of St. Stephen, Rural Community of Campobello Island).
- There is ongoing pressure for local control, driven by concerns that the matters referred to the regional level are likely to result in decisions driven by legal principles rather than local sentiment.
- A few local governments are seeking a more hands-on role in planning by establishing their

own advisory committees; however, if this happens, a strong contract may be necessary to ensure the local municipalities are solely accountable for their decisions, as these may get influenced by political preferences.

- Although the term for receiving planning services from the SWRSC is renewable, local governments are required to actively opt out. At present, no local governments have expressed a desire to do so.

Operational Challenges:

- Rapid changes in provincial legislation often add steps, requiring constant efforts to keep up with evolving requirements.
- The planning appeal process can be initiated at no cost, which demands a significant amount of dedicated staff time to manage. While the intent was to create a more accessible and inclusive system, it is often misused, with many appeals submitted for frivolous reasons. A legal threshold or standing may be required to ensure the validity of the appeals.

Dispute Resolution:

- Several complaints have been raised regarding the Building Code and red tape. However, the



SWRSC is simply enforcing codes created by the the Federal Government or the Province through legislation or by local governments through plans and bylaws and has little to no control over these regulations.

- Customer service involves documenting all interactions and providing the public with specific details, code references, and photographs to assist in correcting identified issues.
- A cultural shift is required, as planning and building inspection are relatively new for individuals who have historically built homes without the need for permits or oversight. While the red tape complaints relate to fairly standard practices in larger communities, they require some learning and a shift in mindset for similar local governments and their constituents.
- The SWRSC has an HR system in place to receive and investigate formal written complaints. This process includes a preliminary investigation to gather details and ensure a fair and transparent system for assessing the legitimacy of each complaint.
- Employees receive customer service training on effectively engaging with members of the public. One of the key challenges is overcoming the common stereotypes associated with going to government offices, such as a perceived lack of enthusiasm, which may stem from burnout caused by frequent or negative public interactions. The training aims to shift the mindset that the public is the problem. Instead of reacting defensively and contributing to a negative experience, staff are encouraged to communicate with openness and compassion, creating a more positive and constructive environment overall.

Technology Use:

- In early 2023, the SWRSC rolled out a comprehensive digital permit platform developed by planning staff called MachForm.
- This user-friendly and cost-effective software allows applicants to complete forms online, while officers can review submissions, conduct inspections, and upload photos, all within a single platform. A key advantage is that the information can be accessed on mobile devices, and annual updates to the platform can be performed internally as needed. Previously, the process relied on PDF forms requiring manual data entry; the new digital system streamlines this by limiting it to a single file, improving overall efficiency.

FUNDY REGIONAL SERVICE COMMISSION

Fundy Regional Service Commission (FRSC) serves the City of Saint John; the Towns of Grand Bay-Westfield, Hampton, Quispamsis, and Rothesay; the Village of Fundy St. Martins; and Fundy Rural District. The region is centred by the City of Saint John and incorporates surrounding suburban towns and rural areas. The Commission is responsible for solid waste management, community planning and building inspection services, regional public safety, regional transportation, community development, regional facilities, and economic development and tourism promotion.

Development Activity:

- According to the FRSC's 2023 Annual Report, the total estimated cost of construction in their jurisdiction was \$17.15 million. Development in 2024 and over the past couple of years in

general has remained fairly consistent. While the number of permits has decreased, the estimated value has remained nearly the same, as costs have increased.

- While recent development has focused on single-detached homes, some potentially exciting projects are underway this year, including a provincial park welcome center and some small prefab apartment buildings.

Staffing Considerations:

- The FRSC consists of three development staff members, including a Planning Director, a Building Inspector, and a Development Officer.
- Since they provide services to one rural district and one local municipality, the work is manageable and additional staff are not required.
- More training for development officers is needed.

Planning Services:

- While planning services are available to all entities within the region, currently only used by Fundy Rural District (FRD) and Fundy-St. Martins (FSM).
- Local planning services are voluntary and only members using the service pay for the cost. However, under the *Community Planning Act*, rural districts are required to take planning services from the RSC.
- Due to the voluntary nature of planning services offered by the RSC and its previous inability to provide comprehensive planning support, other communities have not considered engaging its services. However, the recent addition of a local planner has fully equipped the organization to deliver complete planning services. The current challenge is to effectively demonstrate their capability.

Operational Challenges:

- One of the biggest challenges is the lack of communication and the spread of misinformation. While Fundy St. Martins recognizes the value in the services provided by the RSC, the Fundy Rural District has been challenging due to inaccurate information being shared with the public through the Rural District Advisory Committee. This misinformation often relates to building permits and development permits.
- The spread of misinformation is exacerbated by limited public understanding of planning matters.

Dispute Resolution:

- Complaints are received by the RSC a few times a week, with an increase in volume during the spring.
- The current process for resolving complaints is largely manual and informal, typically starting with emails followed by phone calls. Previously, a contracted company handled enforcement, supported by an online submission system. However, that system is no longer in place.
- Most complaints involve civil matters, such as whether a development complies with the plan or whether a neighbour is permitted to conduct a certain activity.

Technology Use:

- Currently, the conduct of planning processes is entirely manual, but there is hope to incorporate a digital system into the upcoming year's workflow, given its benefits such as reduced risk and increased efficiency.

KENT REGIONAL SERVICE COMMISSION

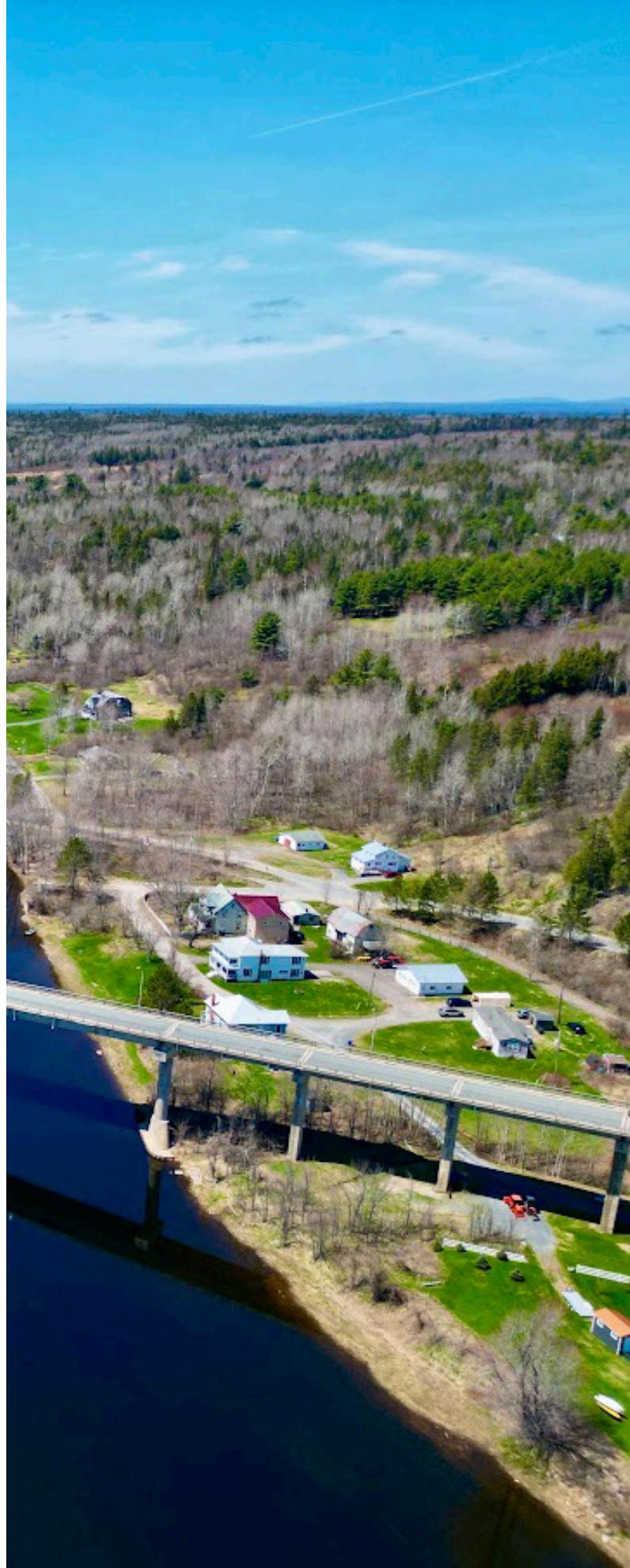
The Kent Regional Service Commission (KRSC) includes the Towns of Beaurivage, Champdoré, and Grand Bouctouche; the Villages of Five Rivers and Nouvelle-Arcadie; the Rural Community of Beausoleil; and Kent Rural District. The region borders the eastern limits of Greater Miramichi. The largest communities in the region are Bouctouche and Richibucto, which is now part of Beaurivage. The Commission offers planning; solid waste management; public safety; recreation, sports and culture; and community development services.

Development Activity:

- According to the Commission's 2024 Annual Report the RSC issued 503 building permits during the year with a total value just over \$100 million. While the total number of permits is a slight decrease from 2023 when 513 were approved, permit value was up almost 58.7% from \$63 million. Over the past four years, the RSC has consistently surpassed its previous records in terms of construction value. While the number of permits has remained steady, there has been an increase in multi-residential units compared to previous years.
- The RSC is working to amend local bylaws to permit more units, particularly for affordable housing, in order to address the region's housing shortage and support growth and employment.

Staffing Considerations:

- The KRSC consists of 9 development staff members, including a Planning Director, a Senior Planner, a Development Officer / GIS Technician, 3 Building Inspectors, 1 Admin Assistant, 1 Geomatic Analyst, and 1 Development Officer / Junior Planner.
- The RSC serves as a training ground for



inspectors, but inspectors often move to larger communities, leaving the RSC in a constant process of teaching staff.

- All staff are cross-trained in development activities to work at different levels, although planners are sometimes more hesitant to undergo cross-training.
- The region consists of local districts that did not previously have planning services, so a significant effort to develop new procedures and educate the public concerning these processes.
- With some staff retiring, succession planning is an important challenge.

Planning Services:

- The KRSC provides planning services to the Towns of Bouctouche and Richibucto; the Villages of Saint-Antoine, Rexton, Saint-Louis-de-Kent and Rogersville; and the Rural Community of Cocagne. Building and subdivision services are provided to unincorporated areas.
- The communities pay for planning services and repeatedly turn to the RSC, as they lack their own planning departments and necessary staff. Collectively, they can afford regional services, but they often demand immediate results, not realizing that these are shared services with many other partners.
- Some communities have considered funding their own services, but when they reach the budget stage and attempt to find the right bilingual staff, they have stalled.
- The goal is to establish a planning framework that can be applied consistently across regions, ensuring uniformity.
- Post-COVID, the RSC has have received several unusual requests, such as grotto houses, tree houses, and domes. While engineers are brought on board to approve the structures, they often turn vacant after a few years.

- Another challenge for KRSC is the addition of dwelling units in backyards. While this has become common in larger communities, their bylaws do not yet accommodate additional dwelling units. This has led to unpleasant public meetings and NIMBYism, making it difficult to address.

Operational Challenges:

- Re-doing seven plans in three years is challenging, especially in rural areas where many residents may not fully understand the planning process. Clear examples of potential outcomes are required to encourage participation.
- The RSCs play a key educational role. About 50% of their mandate involves explaining the process to residents and gaining their voluntary involvement. The goal is to ensure that people are informed and protected from potential unfavourable decisions that could be made by developers or Council.
- The political cycle influences outcomes, with Councillors often inclined to make popular decisions as local elections approach. Additionally, each election brings a new onboarding process for Councillors, leading to challenges in public awareness and a loss of institutional knowledge and time.

Dispute Resolution:

- Many people do not contact the RSC for required and timely inspections, and when they do, often after selling their property, it is too late for an RSC-led inspection, requiring them to hire a private inspector instead. Since last year, the RSC has implemented a system to red flag properties that have not completed the five

mandatory inspections. Once all inspections are completed, the flag is removed. However, less than half of the flagged properties have had their issues resolved, resulting in a large number of open-ended files.

- All formal complaints are documented. However, in terms of information retention, it is mandatory to destroy files every seven years, and staff have received workshops on how to properly do so.
- A small percentage of people are reluctant to engage with the RSC on planning matters. When a project is started without a permit, the RSC encourages individuals to reach out to staff rather than immediately issuing a stop-work order. This softer approach has significantly reduced the number of complaints. If the individual refuses to comply, a formal registered letter is sent to stop the project.
- Most complaints are received at the beginning of new projects, often driven by curiosity and a lack of understanding. The RSC aims to be as transparent as possible, but there are questions they either cannot answer due to privacy concerns. This sometimes leads the same individuals to escalate their complaints to higher authorities.

Technology Use:

- During the past five years, the RSC has made significant progress in adopting and implementing new technology. They have been using CloudPermit and plan to buy other modules to service other departments.
- Despite having a system in place, some members of the public are hesitant to use the website to create an application. This is typically the case for individuals submitting a one-time application for a single property, requiring staff to complete data entry on their behalf. The platform is more effectively used by repeat

applicants, who are comfortable filling out applications and submitting their documents online.

EASTERN DISTRICT PLANNING COMMISSION

The Eastern District Planning Commission (EDPC) is the last organization remaining from a network of regional planning commissions that at one time covered most of Nova Scotia. Whereas several other commissions broke apart over the years as municipalities withdrew, the EDPC expanded from its base in Port Hawkesbury and Richmond County to take in additional municipalities in Cape Breton and the northeast Nova Scotia mainland. The Commission currently provides planning, subdivision, and building inspection services for the Counties of Antigonish, Inverness, Richmond, and Victoria; and the Towns of Port Hawkesbury and Antigonish.

Development Activity:

- According to the EDPC's 2023 Annual Report, a total of 816 permits were issued during the year, with a total value of \$188.6 million. The number of permits issued decreased compared to the previous year (1,029 to 816); however, the average value of construction per building permit increased by 8.6%.
- Generally, a market response to the need for housing and a shift in the type of housing has been observed.

Staffing Considerations:

- The EDPC consists of 14 staff members, including 12 development staff members comprised of a Planning Director, a Senior Development Officer, 2 Senior Planners, a Planner, a Planning Technician, a Manager of

Inspection Services, 3 Senior Building and Fire Inspectors, and 2 Building and Fire Inspectors.

- Staffing appears sufficient on the building inspection side, but planning staff and development officers are needed.
- Some cross-training has occurred out of necessity, equipping some employees with basic skills for tasks that overlap with other roles.
- Overall, staff learn constantly on the job.
- Finding qualified professional staff in rural Nova Scotia remains a challenge.

Planning Services:

- The EDPC provides services to four Counties (Antigonish, Inverness, Richmond, Victoria) and two Towns (Port Hawkesbury, Antigonish).
- Some entities view EDPC planning services as an extension of municipal planning, a line department, and treat it as such, which is a positive approach. Others, however, see it as a separate entity and mistakenly regard municipal documents, such as zoning by-laws, as district planning documents. These documents are simply administered by the EDPC, but this

misunderstanding often results in municipal issues being misinterpreted as EDPC planning problems. Nonetheless, from the public's point of view, there is little distinction between the two.

- There is some coordination across municipalities, but this tends to result more from the structure and function of the Commission rather than intentional collaboration. As a commission, they are in a position to identify successful practices in one county that they can apply to others.
- Some member municipalities have discussed withdrawing from the Commission, but the legislation makes the process difficult, requiring a year's notice. For instance, Richmond County gave notice but later decided to remain, which misuses the intent of the process. When a county submits notice, it is expected to use that time to prepare for transition, rather than deciding whether to leave or stay. Ideally, a municipality should assess its capacity, possibly with support from a consultant, to determine whether it can provide the necessary services independently before submitting a withdrawal request.



Operational Challenges:

- No additional significant challenges were identified.

Dispute Resolution:

- The EDPC recognizes two types of complaint processes. The first relates to staff complaints and personnel conduct, which are investigated by the Director. The second involves complaints about violations of the Building Code, subdivision regulations, or land use bylaws, including complaints such as neighbours building without permits. In most cases, complaints are unfounded, but the processes are followed regardless.
- Liability insurance premiums for errors and omissions has been increased significantly, as lawsuits against the RSC can result in substantial payouts.
- When decisions are not favourable to members of the public, or when a stop work order is issued, they are sometimes perceived as stemming from personal bias or being pro-development.
- In terms of customer service, a stop work order is issued immediately when a process is not followed correctly. Afterward, the RSC seeks voluntary compliance, and if that fails, tickets may be issued.
- While misinformation may occasionally lead to complaints, applicants are generally well-informed about the processes. Most complaints arise simply because individuals are told they cannot proceed with something they want to do.

Technology Use:

- The need for permit tracking software is being reviewed, especially since receiving monies from the Housing Accelerator Fund, which is expected to increase application

volume and require faster turnaround time. At present, there is no online portal for the public to submit documents electronically, and all correspondence is conducted via email.

- While a digital system should improve efficiency, the Director expressed some doubts about the benefits for a few reasons. Current turnaround time for permits is already minimal, sometimes as quick as the same day, and the process involves very little red tape. Additionally, since digital portals often require step-by-step compliance (e.g., one attachment must be uploaded to proceed to the next step and so on). The Commission is concerned that applicants may upload irrelevant information simply to complete an application.

Technology Review

Stantec identified four leading building permitting software providers – Computronix, Amanda, CityView, and Accela – and conducted a review of these platforms, along with CloudPermit, the software currently used by the GMSC. The review aimed to understand differences in features, costs, and customizability to determine which solution may best meet the needs of the GMSC. The analysis included an assessment of planning, permitting, and inspection functionalities, as well as general add-ons that support integration with existing processes. In addition to reviewing publicly available information, staff from the respective companies were contacted to gain insights into the features and pricing of each platform.

COMPUTRONIX

Founded in 1979, Computronix is an award-winning Canadian-based provider of fully integrated software solutions for state and local government agencies across North America. Its platform is currently used by several major municipalities, including the City of Pittsburgh (PA), City of Calgary (AB), City of Edmonton (AB), Halifax Regional Municipality (NS), and Clark County (WA). Designed to automate workflows across building, planning, engineering, permitting, inspections, code enforcement, and other land management activities, Computronix offers a browser-based solution that streamlines processes for internal staff, external agencies, contractors, and citizens alike. The system uses a single-tenant environment, which means each customer gets their own private environment. This separation helps provide enhanced data security compared to shared platforms. Costs are generally

at the higher end of the market, with a one-time implementation fee typically ranging from \$1.5 to \$2 million—or more, depending on the scope of services. Annual Software as a Service (SaaS) fees for licensing and hosting range from \$350,000 to \$500,000, with additional support services offered at bronze, silver, and gold levels, scaled to the implementation cost. The licensing model is layered, including module-based licensing, named user access for municipal staff, and mobile licensing for inspectors. The average implementation timeline is approximately 18 months.

Planning

- Information Organization – Links all facets of planning engagement so planners can assess, evaluate, record, and retrieve all related information effectively.
- Integrated Conditions Management – Manages conditions that arise during planning reviews, so applicants can be made aware of each condition that needs to be met before moving to the next phase in the application. This also allows staff to easily record new conditions, identify outstanding conditions, and track when conditions are met.
- Comprehensive Public Portal – Allows staff and public to work together in a fully integrated system to track planning, public hearings and outcomes, and decision-making activities.
- Community Notifications – Notifies surrounding property owners of any relevant activity. The “buffered notification” process uses GIS to automatically identify surrounding parcels within a user-defined range and create automated mail-

outs for all property owners.

- Approval Times and Stakeholder Input – The eReferral functionality allows the agency to streamline the referral process by engaging with other departments and external agencies electronically. This allows users to view, modify, or comment on the referral packet, with all changes instantly captured in the system, shortening overall approval times. It also helps expedite the referral process and instantly captures and manages input from all stakeholders.

Permitting & Inspections

- Tracks all permitting and building inspection activity, from initial application to completion, renewal, or expiration.
- Provides a vast library of preconfigured workflows and permit times, based on International Code Council (ICC) best practices, and full compatibility with our existing permitted structure and metadata.
- Links all aspects of the data allowing easy navigation between any related data elements. For example, permits are associated with parcels or street segments, and they can be

grouped together into projects.

- PLS Workflow syncs the list of inspections on the inspectors to do lists for them to be up to date. Mobile integration allows inspectors to take pictures, attach documents, insert free-form comments, or pick from a pre-defined list of standard clauses and Code references.
- The public portal guides individuals and organizations through all steps of the permit application process, including application details, required documents, and permit application fees. It also allows permits to be created electronically and printed directly by applicants.
- Remote mobile access also provides customer self-service for expedited permit application, inspection requests, and scheduling and review of inspection results.

EPlans

- Complete electronic review processes that integrate land management permitting workflows, online plan submission, review, and markup tools.
- Transparent and open collaboration amongst all plan contributors with comparative plan



overlays for easy and immediate analysis of plan changes, notes, and current status (es).

- Multiple parallel plan review workflows, unlimited document change history, easy access to document lists, and auto-categorization of plans supporting a quicker plan review process.
- Pre-configured workflows tailored to stakeholder needs, email invitations for intra-agency collaboration, and a powerful public portal allows everyone to view the same information without requiring network drives/remote servers, leading to increased efficiencies and reduced planning delays/costs.
- The GIS location information is mapped directly to project files.

AMANDA

AMANDA (Permitting, Compliance & Licensing), supplied by Granicus, is an enterprise case-management system that has been evolving for decades. It digitizes complex regulatory workflows—including permitting, licensing, land/construction management, compliance, inspections, and Freedom of Information (FOI) processes—helping government agencies reduce costs, improve operations, and modernize citizen services. It enables agencies to design customizable online forms and workflows, supports mobile (including offline) inspection capabilities, and automates compliance processes to mitigate human error and enhance efficiency. The platform is actively in use by municipalities such as Coquitlam (BC), Seattle (WA), Aurora (IL), Gainesville (FL), and the Province of Nova Scotia. While exact pricing can vary, the average cost is around USD 18,000 per year, with adjustments depending on the required scope of services.

- Digitized workflows and interactions to simplify daily operations, improve customer service, and modernize Permitting Compliance and Licensing (PCL) and Freedom of Information (FOI) processes, including land and construction management and professional and business regulation.
- Flexible and scalable features that allow organizations to reduce costs, increase revenue, improve operations, and stay in compliance.
- Improve operations to enable employees to complete inspections in the field with mobile devices, whether online or off, and handle permit and licensing applications with ease.
- Enhance workflows across departments and enable disparate systems to converge or be replaced.
- Secure, enterprise platform that can be deployed in the cloud or on-site.
- Improve efficiency of permitting, inspections, and code enforcement and automate programs for any type of license or registration.
- Digitize inspections and compliance for government agencies, including law and code enforcement, fire prevention and safety, building code, food safety, environmental protection, audit and investigation.
- Transform permitting, licensing, and development to enable staff to create easy-to-use forms and workflows to handle the permitting, licensing, and development process online. It also helps simplify licenses and registrations for businesses, residents, vehicles, and animals.
- Reduce risk with automated processes and workflows to systematically manage the forms, processes, and workflows critical to government agencies, helping mitigate risks linked to human

error, misplaced paper forms etc.

- Digitize Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) and FOI requests end-to-end to improve compliance, including request intake and management, correspondence, document management, consultations, review and redaction, and fee calculations and payment.
- Optimize and integrate case management and redaction online using one solution while also collaborating with external agencies to quickly handle requests.
- Gain insights and efficiencies while reporting by generating legislated reports and leverage advanced analytics for compliance completion, including deadlines.
- Some of the additional solutions offered by Granicus that can work with Amanda:
 - OneView – A centralized, resident-focused solution for reporting and tracking service requests. As each request is received, it is routed to appropriate local government stakeholders to be fulfilled, with automated updates keeping residents informed.
 - OpenForms - Organizations can build online forms and digitize workflows to modernize outdated processes and rapidly respond to resident requests. Staff can translate complex business logic into simple “wayfinding” or digital tools to help residents ensure they are eligible for services. Plus, teams are empowered with tools for creating custom solutions without tech skills or time-consuming customizations.
 - EngagementHQ – A centralized community insight interface, allowing residents to participate from anywhere while meeting varying sensitivity needs (open / mixed / closed environment). It gives teams

the ability to engage across the entire IAP2 public participation spectrum, keep conversations connected, no matter which format they are in and where they take place. It also offers hundreds of ways to customize metrics, filters, and dashboards to analyze engagement performance.

CITYVIEW

CityView, developed by Harris Computer Systems, is a comprehensive community development and permitting software platform that has supported municipalities across North America since its launch in 1982. With over four decades of proven performance, CityView is a solution for streamlining planning, permitting, inspections, licensing, and code enforcement processes. Its value lies in enabling fully paperless workflows, reducing permit turnaround times, eliminating redundant tasks, and supporting data-driven decision-making through integrated reporting and analytics tools. Municipalities such as the City of Airdrie (AB), City of Grand Prairie (AB), Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury (ON), Chatham-Kent (ON), and the City of Langford (BC) have adopted CityView to enhance operational efficiency and improve service delivery. Although no response was received from the supplier regarding current pricing or cost structures, CityView’s long-standing reputation and flexible, scalable architecture make it a compelling choice for municipalities seeking to modernize their planning and permitting systems.

- CityView Permits and Inspections – Streamlines and automates the permit approval and inspections process. The digitization of the entire permitting process from initial application to approval, inspection process, and certificate

of occupancy or use ensures accuracy, consistency, and citizen satisfaction.

- CityView Property Information – Keep track of planning applications and milestones and adhere to your comprehensive development plan. Provides a powerful inventory of the property based to quickly view all location-based land use, zoning, and community development activities related to parcels, addresses, structures, parks, trails, roads and more. Based on the latest Esri ArcGIS Server technology, maps are embedded directly into CityView and allow for easy-to-use mapping tools to locate properties, measure distances, boundaries and areas, and create mailing labels from buffer selections.
 - CityView Planning & Zoning – Keep track of planning applications and milestones and adhere to your comprehensive development plan.
 - CityView Citizen Engagement – Uphold community standards by providing easily accessible mechanisms for constituents to make requests, complaints, and inquiries.
 - CityView Extensions
- Mobile provides field access to the team for real time inspection results.
 - Portal allows citizens to self-serve with online application and status updates, and inspections scheduling.
 - Electronic Plans Review digitizes the entire process, shortens review time, and eliminates the use of paper.
 - Virtual Inspections Save fuel and increase efficiency with remote inspections.
 - GIS Integration – Integration with Esri's ArcGIS Server or ArcGIS Online assimilates mapping and spatial analysis into the everyday business activities. The deeply integrated GIS capabilities allow all staff to quickly locate a job location on a map; measure distance, boundaries, and areas, create buffer selections for mailing lists, kick-off permit and other processes from the map and spatially analyze the surroundings of subject properties.
 - Productivity Extensions – Microsoft Outlook, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Exchange can be integrated, saving time and hassle of having to track down information.



ACCELA

Accela is a cloud-based government technology platform developed by Accela, Inc., a company founded in 1999. For over 25 years, it has been a leader in delivering software solutions that help communities thrive by enhancing government efficiency and increasing resident engagement. Accela's unified, ready-to-deploy solutions—spanning permitting, licensing, and code enforcement—offer flexible deployment for municipalities of all sizes, equipping agencies to meet both current demands and future challenges. The platform delivers significant value for planning and permitting by streamlining workflows, accelerating reviews and approvals, improving transparency, and reducing administrative overhead—ultimately enabling municipalities to provide faster, more citizen-friendly services. Accela is trusted by several jurisdictions, including the City of High Point (NC), Charlotte County (FL), Shelby County (TN), Pima County (AZ), and Deschutes County (OR). While an attempt was made to contact the company regarding current pricing, no response has been received to date.

- Modern and intuitive user interface with HTML5 and responsive design providing a seamless experience for both agency staff and citizens on any device, anywhere.
- Online citizen portal provides a one-stop-shop to submit proposals, conduct zoning research, verify status updates, pay outstanding fees, reducing in-person visits, emails, and phone inquiries, and improves the citizen experience.
- Built-in reporting to give administrators, managers and planning commissions or boards the critical insight they need to manage agency productivity, uncover bottlenecks, and highlight areas for process improvement.
- Automated push notifications to easily notify project owners, city council members, the general public, and press for public hearings, reviews, and feedback.
- Online payments system with credit card, ACH, and trust account capability to increase convenience for citizens and remove the manual payment processing work from agency employees.
- Platform-wide integration capabilities with APIs, SDKs, and open data, allowing developers to integrate with existing software solutions to meet the unique needs of any community.
- GIS mapping to easily produce interactive maps and visualizations, making planning and code enforcement data easy to leverage and understand.
- Electronic Document Review and Management to ensure all relevant documents are searchable, secure, and that employees are always working with the correct versions. It allows to mark-up, comment, review, and approve plans simultaneously leveraging systems like ePermitHub, Adobe, e-PlanSoft, ProjectDox, OnBase, DigEplan, and Bluebeam, and more to perform parallel plan reviews with version control.
- Full-featured mobile platform with role-based apps to allow inspectors and code enforcement personnel to efficiently manage their inspection routing, access all needed documents and information in the field, and increase efficiencies.
- Workflow management system to automate the tasks and functions needed for planning processes. The system can assign tasks, track reviews, associate documents, and information to tasks, and keep the most complex processes running smoothly.

- Code enforcement to ensure public compliance with city code and regulation by managing complaints and violations to achieve resolution quickly and efficiently.

CLOUDPERMIT

Cloudpermit is a cloud-based e-permitting and community development platform developed by Cloudpermit Inc., a company founded in 2011, and acquired by The Riverside Company in 2024. It has rapidly expanded its presence across North America, serving over 850 public agencies. The platform offers comprehensive tools for planning, permitting, licensing, inspections, and code enforcement, all accessible through a user-friendly, mobile-enabled interface. Cloudpermit delivers significant value to municipalities by streamlining workflows, enabling 24/7 online application management, automating circulation and approvals, and enhancing transparency. Municipalities such as the City of Brantford (ON), Town of Kingsville (ON), District of Sparwood (BC), Village of Pemberton (BC), Red River Planning District (MB), and Kent RSC (NB) have adopted Cloudpermit to modernize their development services. The estimated cost for implementing Cloudpermit's Planning and Building Enforcement services is approximately \$35,000.

Planning and Development Services

- Planning Applications: Accept, review, and approve complete applications with mandatory fields, attachments, and paid fees; manage all documentation in one workspace and track status updates in real time.
- Meetings: Schedule and track pre-consultations and planning meetings; create agendas with templates and generate downloadable meeting

packages for commissions, boards, or councils.

- Public Notice: Keep the public informed with status updates, auto-notifications, and public notice documents; gather public feedback and generate automated lists of affected property owners.
- Circulation: Circulate applications to internal and external reviewers simultaneously, control comment visibility, set response deadlines, and track all feedback in one place.
- Timelines: Set and monitor legislative processing timelines, track due dates automatically, and maintain visibility into upcoming deadlines and decision periods to ensure compliance.
- Conditions: Access all open conditions by property, set default conditions for application types, and ensure no condition is missed throughout the approval process.
- Two-Tier Approvals: Enable seamless collaboration between upper and lower-tier governments by configuring real-time digital workflows, adjusting user permissions, and streamlining the escalation of applications to upper-tier decision-making.
- Configuration: Tailor CloudPermit to specific planning needs with configurable workflows, templates, and application types. Share applications with external stakeholders and allow organizations to manage their own reviewers and assignments.

Building Permitting Services

- Building Permits: Accept complete building permit applications with mandatory fields; track processing times, filter and organize applications, issue permits promptly upon payment and send automatic status updates to all relevant parties.

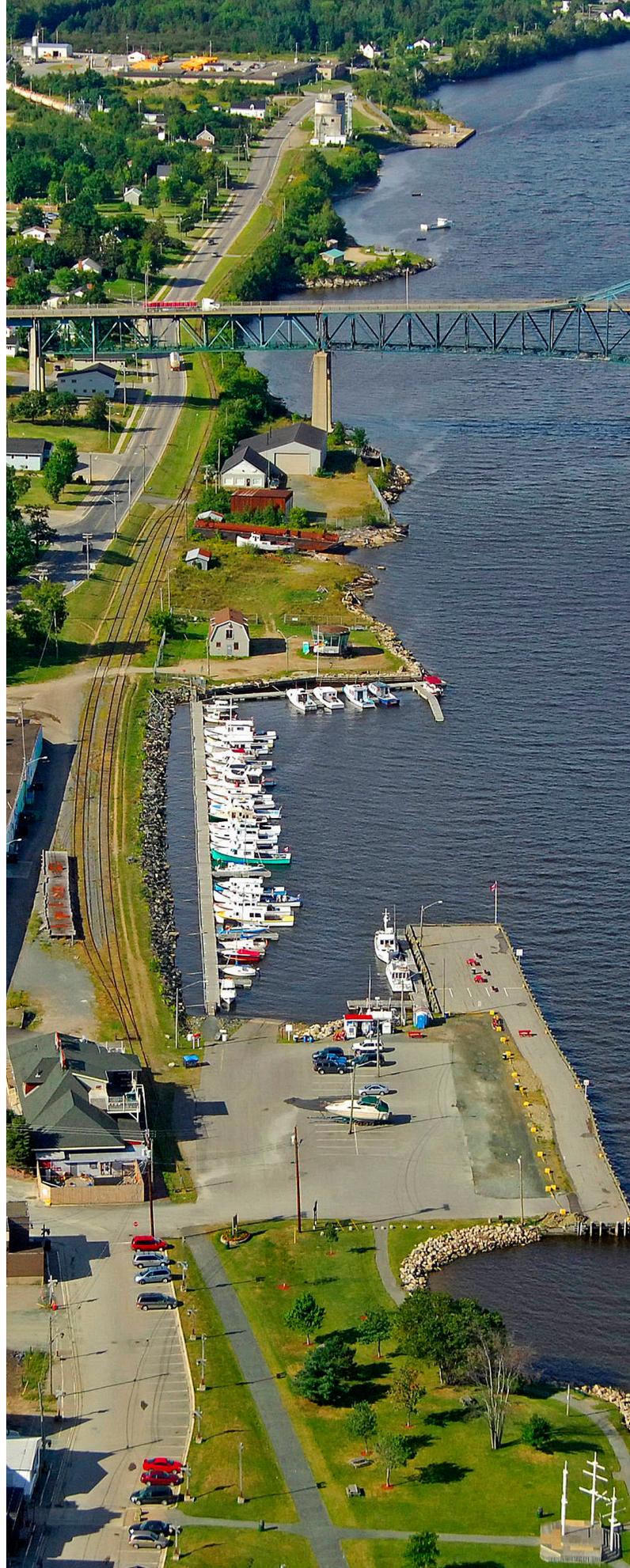
- Building Inspections: Conduct inspections in the field using mobile devices; manage follow-ups, deficiencies, and multi-permit sites; and keep applicants informed with real-time updates. Dispatch multiple inspectors and manage re-inspections remotely.
- Configuration: Configure workflows, application requirements, forms, and stakeholder roles to meet specific needs. Manage requirements and use templates to generate permits, reports, and certificates.

Inspection Services

- Inspections: Conduct inspections in the field using any mobile device; input notes, add photos, and manage both initial and follow-up inspections remotely.
- Scheduling: Enable citizens to schedule, confirm, or reschedule inspections online; manage multiple inspectors and require additional inspections as needed.
- Automated Communication: Automatically notify citizens about inspection status changes through emails and time-stamped messages without requiring login.
- Management: Track deficiencies, orders, and inspection history; view the status of inspections across multiple permits or violation sites in real time.

By Law Enforcement Services

- Complaints: Accept and organize complaints with customizable contact requirements; filter entries, document violations using standard templates, and view all complaints in one centralized dashboard.
- Cases: Create and manage cases in the field; add multiple violations per case, track resolutions, access full property histories, and



upload or store supporting documents such as photos.

- Inspections: Conduct inspections in the field using any mobile device; input notes, add photos, and manage both initial and follow-up inspections remotely.
- Configuration: Tailor the system without coding to suit organizational needs, manage by-law enforcement types, inspection types, templates, and standard document wording, as well as daily inspection scheduling.

Additional Features (as part of all services)

- GIS-Integrated Maps: Use interactive maps integrated with your GIS to find inspection sites, plan efficient routes, and access layered data such as flood zones and heritage areas.
- Online Access: Access CloudPermit anytime via the internet; securely store, auto-save, and protect inspection data on any mobile device.
- Application Programming Interface (API) Integration: Seamlessly integrate third-party data and services; manage workspaces, update metadata, access GIS attributes, and retrieve inspection and billing data.

- Reporting: Generate accurate reports with filtered data, export in Excel or CSV formats, save report presets for recurring reporting needs, and automate submissions to external agencies such as StatCan.
- Payment: Handle fines, fees, and citations with secure online or in-person payments; integrate third-party payment gateways, notify owners, and manage overdue or escrowed payments.



Key Themes and Observations

The following key themes were identified with regards to development services, operational challenges, and best practices.

- **Importance of public education**

Educating the public, especially in rural areas, about planning processes, building inspection, and permitting is essential to improving overall operational efficiency. This will also help address related issues such as complaints, customer service, staffing needs, and productivity across departments.

- **Need for customer service training**

Customer service training is essential to encourage positive interactions between staff and members of the public. At SWRSC, employees receive training focused on engaging the public with openness and compassion, aiming to shift the mindset that public is a problem.

- **Formalized complaints process**

Each RSC has its own process for handling and addressing complaints, which is important to ensure that all concerns are properly documented and resolved. Flexibility can be beneficial, however. The KRSC has chosen not to issue stop-work orders immediately and, instead, reaches out to resolve issues before a registered letter is sent. This method has helped reduce the overall number of complaints.

- **Need for staff succession planning**

Finding the right staff is a challenge for many agencies serving smaller communities and rural areas. RSCs often employ younger staff who require training but tend to leave for larger organizations when they have acquired experience. There is a clear need for long-term planning and constant evaluation to assess future staffing requirements and proactively identify potential candidates. Strategies such as cross training and the use of contract positions,



as implemented by the SWRSC, may help ensure adequate staffing, particularly during peak periods. These approaches can also provide flexibility, allowing staff to take on different roles as needed throughout the year.

- **Equating staff and development activity**

In general, the number of staff members, the level of development activity, and the number of local governments served by each RSC are closely related. The SERSC is a large region with the highest development activity (\$800 million), serving 13 member municipalities with 28 staff members. This is followed by the EDPC (\$188.6 million), which has 14 staff members but serving six member municipalities. The FRSC has the lowest development activity (\$17.15 million), serving just two member municipalities with three staff members. While the Southwest and Kent RSCs have a similar number of employees (9-10), KRSC serves two additional municipalities and experienced approximately \$14 million more development activity over the past year than SWRSC. In comparison,

Miramichi serves six municipalities with eight staff members, and has reported around \$30.3 million in development activity over the past year.

- **Digitization of information**

Several digital platforms are available to improve efficiency and accuracy. Most RSCs currently use some form of online application system, except for the FRSC and EDPC. Given the significant expense involved, platforms such as Amanda, and CityView may be worth considering based on the services provided. The GMSC could begin by developing a wish list of desired functions based on specific needs and requirements. This list can then be used to engage with service providers to determine how well the service packages align with those needs. Furthermore, the operational inefficiencies identified through this project can help pinpoint which customizable features could address specific gaps in the current process.





5 — RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

This project has identified a variety of improvements that should be considered by the GMSC. Generally, the recommendations are grouped according to the original intent and mandate of the project, which was based on the following five key areas:

- **Evaluating Current Practices** - Assessing the existing planning and building inspection processes to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.
- **Enhancing Customer Service** - Improving communication, responsiveness, and overall customer service to better meet the needs of the public and stakeholders.
- **Optimizing Resources** - Addressing challenges related to staffing, physical space, and technological tools to ensure that the department is well-equipped to handle its workload efficiently.
- **Improving Public Perception** - Implementing strategies to enhance the department's image and public relations, and fostering a positive relationship with the community.
- **Ensuring Regulatory Compliance** - Communicating regulatory requirements clearly and effectively to the public and ensuring that all building and development activities comply with relevant codes and standards.

Since the commencement of this project, the Commission has implemented four key initiatives that are aligned with the results of this report:

1. The Commission has successfully hired a third building inspector. This was noted

throughout the consultation process as a key need for the Commission to assist with cross training, succession planning, and the volume of development activity during the construction season.

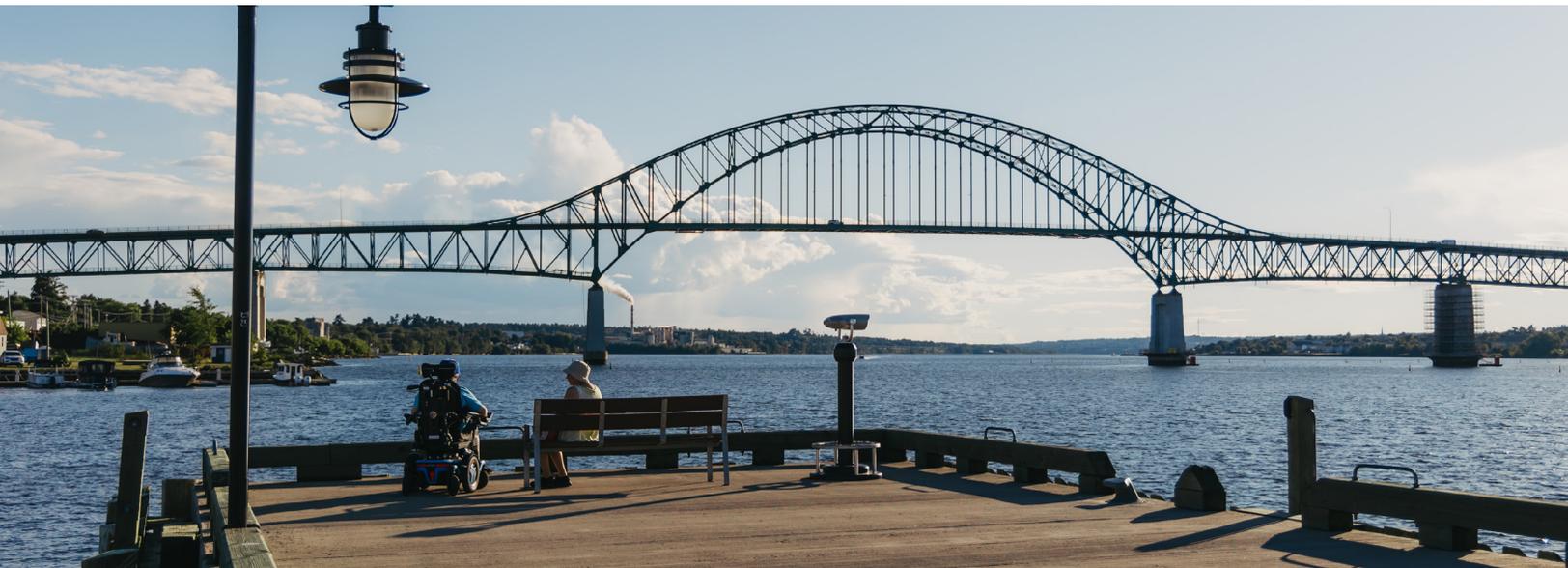
2. The Commission is overhauling its current website. The new site is modernized, clean, and informative, and will be launched in the coming weeks. The need for new communication material, including the website, was noted during the consultation process.
3. The Commission has assembled helpful "how to" instructions that are aimed at assisting clients with navigating the CloudPermit e-permitting software. While face-to-face instructions and assistance is still needed, the lack of online resources to assist with the preparation of online applications was noted during the consultation process, particularly within rural areas.
4. The Commission leadership has recently changed, and the operational review process has remained a very high priority with the above actions taken within a short period of time and changing the corporate culture within the organization has been communicated as a high priority.

Ultimately, this project has determined that a cultural change within the Development Services Division is needed. This change should be focused on customer service delivery and working proactively with municipal partners and the public, including the development community, to implement a culture that is based

on collaboration and problem resolution. This was evident from the employee interviews, as well the various focus group sessions with stakeholders. The recommendations below are

aligned with this change in corporate culture. They are categorized based on short- (1-2 years), medium- (3 – 5 years), and ong- (5+ years) term priorities.

#	RECOMMENDATION	PRIORITY
1	Evaluating Current Practices	
1.1	<p>The building permit evaluation process needs to include more dialogue; particularly when multiple options or alternatives are presented for Code-related matters that require interpretation. This creates uncertainty, as the legal authority to interpret and apply the Building Code rests with the appointed inspectors. While the Director of Planning oversees governance, consistency, and facilitation of the service, they are not authorized to substitute their judgement for that of an inspector of Code-related matters.</p> <p>To address this gap, it is recommended that the Commission enhance collaboration between planning staff and the building inspection team during the permit evaluation process. Establishing clearer protocols for engaging inspectors when Code interpretation is required can help improve transparency, reduce delays, and support a more integrated permitting process.</p>	SHORT
1.2	<p>It is a provincial responsibility to introduce and implement an appeal process or any type of adjudicative committee to oversee Building Code disputes. However, until the province establishes an adjudicative committee of some sorts, consider a supervisor or some authoritative position to hear views and help arrive at a consensus. This process could simply include regular discussions of problematic</p>	SHORT



processes among the three inspectors under the supervision of their director. Alternatively, the Commission could develop a roster of outside technical experts to be available on an on-call basis to assist staff with technical matters in the review of alternative solutions.

1.3 The Commission's current e-permitting software has clear strengths and weaknesses based on Stantec's review. Regardless of the software chosen by the GMSC, the costs of implementing a new or significantly altered system are high. Nonetheless, CloudPermit, Amanda, and CityView are all worth considering.

Given the Commission's experience with e-permitting, it is recommended that the Commission develop a preferred list of desired functions based on specific needs and requirements and then engage with service providers to find a suitable service package before the existing contract is set to expire.

SHORT

1.4 Under existing legislation, site inspections for issued permits are the responsibility of the property owner and are only conducted upon request by the applicant. This approach leads to instances where construction proceeds, or even completed, without the required inspections being scheduled. Consequently, property owners face project delays and incur additional costs to engage qualified professionals to verify compliance after the fact. Additionally, permits remain open in the CloudPermit system, leading to administrative inefficiencies.

It is recommended that the Commission adopt a more proactive approach to the inspections process. By utilizing CloudPermit as a monitoring and communication tool, staff can ensure timely responses to inspection requests and proactively follow up with applicants. This would help ensure inspections are conducted at appropriate stages, minimizing delays and additional costs, and allowing permit files to be closed upon completion. The planned provision of inhouse enforcement services by the GMSC next year will further enhance this approach, enabling more coordinated and responsive oversight throughout the permitted and inspection process.

MEDIUM

2 **Enhancing Customer Service**

2.1 The existing training budgets should be re-evaluated to ensure adequate funds are available for customer service training and other, more specialized learning, to assist with understanding the level of liability associated with positions and those of other professionals who stamp building related plans and materials.

SHORT

2.2 While there were suggestions throughout this project for the Development Services Division to explore, via a pilot project, the creation of a Development Concierge position, it would be most prudent to first review and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Approvals Coordinator position. This evaluation should

SHORT

establish a level of service threshold that the Approvals Coordinator could focus on and report on, as they work with stakeholders to guide them through the Development Permit and Building Permit Process. A focus of this position should be to identify and assist with stalled applications, including assisting clients with missing information, questions, and other considerations.

2.3	In addition to the preceding recommendation, the Commission could consider piloting and promoting an appointment booking platform to help determine if a dedicated concierge position is needed should the Approvals Coordinator resources be stretched too thin. This initiative could include regular check-ins with municipal partners via internet to keep them informed but manage costs.	 LONG
2.4	To help ensure that customer service continues to be a priority, some metrics should be maintained and shared with the department to illustrate the success or improvements needed in key areas, such as response times, development application timelines, and complaints. These metrics can then be integrated into annual, public facing reporting templates.	 SHORT
2.5	The Development Services Division should prioritize regularly scheduled site visits to their rural partners. This may include offering regularly scheduled dates/times where a GMSC employee will be physically present in the rural community to meet with stakeholders and residents to communicate, educate, and facilitate the development process. This could be a specific responsibility of the revamped Approvals Coordinator position, or a future Development Concierge position.	 SHORT
2.6	To assist with visibility throughout the region and for the public to appropriately identify a Commission building inspector, public-facing employees be provided with magnetic Commission branded decals for their private automobiles, as well as Commission branded clothing, hard hats, and identification for use when working in the field. It is essential that building inspectors be seen as approachable and not be regarded as enforcement officers.	 MEDIUM
2.7	The Commission should explore the options available within the CloudPermit technology to customize messages to applicants so that they are consistent with best practices in customer service delivery. Should the Commission opt to pursue other technologies, the ability to customize messaging should be a criterion for evaluation.	 SHORT
2.8	The Commission needs to work with CloudPermit resources to determine if the application intake process can be tailored to not only help clients understand the next steps of their application but also flag material that may be missing from the application so that clients do not get a false expectation that their application is complete on submission. An incomplete application should not be capable of	 SHORT

being submitted without an error message, or as an alternative, a notice should be evident to the applicant that the submission will be evaluated for accuracy and completeness and that subsequent communication may be forthcoming. While the Commission has communicated with CloudPermit about this issue, finding a solution should be prioritized.

2.9

The Commission used to provide an opportunity for clients to provide feedback via a short survey that was promoted on the corporate website and embedded on e-mail signatures. This engagement should be reintroduced with an annual summary report card or infographic provided as part of the overall communications plan.

SHORT

2.10

The Greater Miramichi region is fortunate to be represented with an active Chamber of Commerce. There are opportunities to collaborate with the Chamber on educational initiatives, such as lunch and learns, awards, or events. Regardless of the initiative, it would be advantageous for the Commission to meet regularly with the Chamber, including a standalone monthly or quarterly meeting, presenting annually to the Chamber on development activity, or joining the Chamber as an ex officio member of the board. These options should be explored with the Chamber of Commerce to identify ways to connect directly with the business community.

SHORT

3 **Optimizing Resources**

3.1

The roles and responsibilities of the Director of Planning position have evolved quickly and demand more time and attention. There are new and emerging issues that involve planning expertise, such as the allocation of Housing Accelerator Funds, climate change initiatives, and the general trend to liaise with other internal and external departments and stakeholders, including municipal partners, on the

SHORT



new mandated service delivery responsibilities such as economic development initiatives, rural transportation and recreation initiatives.

These responsibilities are in addition to managing the increased development activity and pressures, along with mentoring and supporting staff in their day-to-day actions. It is therefore strongly recommended that the Director of Operations and Director of Planning positions be restructured into separate

3.2	The GMSC office located on Water Street should always be staffed during open hours. There are understandable reasons for a complete office closure such as staff training or during an emergency water shut off or power outage, but it is critical that the office be open for business at all other times.	SHORT
3.3	positions. This will ensure adequate time is available to adequately manage the growing responsibilities noted above, as well as helping the CEO to implement the recommendations of this report.	SHORT
3.4	As part of the Commission's long-term succession planning, the existing office space should be evaluated to ensure that it is capable of accommodating the long-term growth of the organization. The mandate of the Commission is growing and will continue to evolve, so it is inevitable – regardless of additional resources noted in this report – that space may have to be increased or re-organized.	LONG

4 **Improving Public Perception**

4.1	The GMSC should evaluate and, if necessary, reallocate a portion of the communications budget to ensure dedicated financial resources are available for the Development Services Division to implement a communications plan. This plan should aim at strategic advertising focused on the changing corporate culture to remove negative stereotypes of the Division and the development approval process, as well as educating stakeholders, including residents, the development community, and municipal partners about the benefits of the Development Permit and Building Permit processes. The communications plan should include scheduled reporting that shows the level of activity and inquiries fielded by the Division. Several municipalities have dashboards that are good prototypes for providing a quarterly update.	MEDIUM
4.2	The Commission should evaluate their onboarding procedures to ensure that municipal partners are aware of new and departing employees. The Commission's exiting procedures should also be reviewed to ensure that partners remain informed of the current staffing. This initiative could be integrated with the recommendation above, where quarterly reporting not only documents permit handled and lists current processes and their status, but could also report	MEDIUM

changes in the Commission such as hiring and retiring, along with other information, including funerals, weddings, and births, to create a more personal connection between the Commission and its municipal partners.

4.3

To help promote the Commission's Development Services Division, a part of the overall communications plan should focus on timely, regular permit applications, particularly around construction season. For example, the neighbouring KRSC has used social media to educate clients about requirements related to pools and the need for associated permits. The Commission could create a regular calendar of scheduled Public Service Announcements on topics of general education, even if the same material is repeated each year.

SHORT

4.4

The communications plan noted above should focus on public awareness on the importance of building permits to help mitigate the popular perception these permits are simply a bureaucratic nuisance. Emphasis should be placed on the value of permitting and the application of the National Building Code to ensure the value and safety of construction works. This initiative could include partners, such as the insurance industry, and emergency responders to help deliver appropriate messaging.

SHORT

5 Ensuring Regulatory Compliance

5.1

While the Commission has established checklists and other guides to help clients understand required processes, modernized communication materials are needed to help educate and guide clients through the development and building permit processes. New materials should be graphic and interactive and should use plain language to ensure they are easy to read and understand. Video should be considered to replace or supplement written materials.

SHORT



Conclusion

The operational review of GMSC's Development Services Division represents a significant step toward modernizing and strengthening the region's planning and building inspection services. Through a structured and collaborative process, this review has provided a clear understanding of current operations, identified key challenges, and outlined practical solutions to enhance service delivery. The findings of this review highlight the need for a cultural shift within the Development Services Division – one that prioritizes customer service, proactive collaboration, and transparent communication. This shift is essential to building trust with municipal partners, developers, and the broader community, and to positioning GMSC as a leader in regional development facilitation.

It was essential that the recommendations be clear and achievable for the GMSC. The recommendations presented will help GMSC streamline its operations, improve stakeholder satisfaction, and support sustainable growth across the Miramichi region. By implementing these recommendations, GMSC will be better equipped to meet the evolving needs of its communities and ensure that its Development Services Division continues to deliver high-quality services effectively.

