

Development Concierge Program – Pilot

Recommendation:

THAT Council approve the launch of the concierge pilot program and proposed implementation approach.

Report Purpose and Summary Statement:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview of the proposed concierge pilot program and its implementation approach, and to recommend approval for moving forward with its implementation.

Previous Council Action:

At the September 10, 2024, Workshop, Council received, discussed and provided feedback on a preliminary proposal for the implementation of a development approvals concierge program for strategically important projects.

Financial Impact:

The financial impact during the pilot is anticipated to be minimal, primarily involving the retention of a single, part-time resource to support project reviews.

Funding Source:

Pilot program staffing resources will be funded through the 2024 Housing Accelerator Fund.

Strategic Alignment:

Liveable Community; Diversified, Thriving Economy;

Communications:

A communications and marketing strategy will be developed to increase awareness of the new service offering and attract prospective applicants. This communications and marketing strategy will support a recruitment campaign in the short term, specifically for the launch of the pilot program.

To: Mayor and Council

The Development Approvals Concierge Service Pilot

BACKGROUND:

On September 10, 2024, Council received and discussed a proposal for the implementation of a development approvals concierge service for strategically important projects. During this discussion, Council provided feedback on key aspects of the proposed service, including eligibility criteria and the approach to service costing. Building on Council's input, feedback from targeted industry engagement, and a cross-jurisdictional analysis of other concierge services in municipalities across Canada, a preliminary concierge pilot program, tentatively named the Maple Ridge VeloCity Program Pilot, has been developed. This report outlines the key elements of the program pilot and the proposed implementational approach.

ANALYSIS:

The concierge program pilot has been designed to facilitate and advance strategically important development projects that support the City's housing and broader growth goals. The program will achieve this by providing eligible projects access to an enhanced development approvals process, including tailored guidance throughout the application process and an expedited review approach.

As the program is one of the first of its kind in British Columbia and new to the City of Maple Ridge, a soft launch in the form of a 2-phased pilot is proposed to ensure better understanding of the service need and other key considerations before full implementation. The pilot will run from April 2025 to October 2026, with two expected project intakes. Insights gained from the pilot will inform the refinement and full rollout of the program.

At the conclusion of the pilot, program findings and a proposed implementation plan for the full program rollout will be presented to Council for consideration and awareness.

The concierge pilot program description:

The key elements of the concierge program pilot are described below:

Phased Implementation: The concierge program pilot will be implemented in two phases. Phase 1, running from April to September 2025 and Phase 2 running from September 2025 to September 2026. At the end of each phase, the service model, uptake and performance will be evaluated to determine necessary adjustments for the subsequent phase and to inform the full rollout of the program tentatively scheduled for October 2027.

Program Description: The concierge program will provide comprehensive, tailored support throughout the development approvals process, offering personalized guidance proponents for their project. The program pilot is designed to ensure a streamlined and efficient experience for clients, emphasizing responsiveness, clear communication, and adaptability to the unique needs of each project. The assigned concierge to each project will act as a dedicated point of contact, supporting clients at every stage of the approvals process, and facilitating any challenges that may arise along the way in collaboration with a cross-department review team.

Program Scope: The pilot is inclusive of all planning-related development approvals and stages (e.g., development permits, zoning applications, variance permits, subdivision approvals) except the building permit application and approvals process.

Program Fees: For both phases of the pilot, program fees will be waived to encourage interest and participation. This approach offers applicants a low-risk opportunity to test and benefit from the new program, while enabling staff to capture valuable insights into the value of the program and the costs associated with delivering enhanced service levels. It is anticipated that the full implementation of the program, at a minimum, will aim for full cost recovery for staff time and any additional resources required, and may also involve a value-based model where program fees are aligned with the level of value provided. For example, a monthly fee structure could be considered, with higher total cost resulting from longer or more complex projects.

Project Selection: Phase 1 recruitment will be by invitation only, focusing on developers who are already navigating (or are about to begin) the City's development approvals process. This intake will also include invitation to developers impacted by the Bus Rapid Transit freeze on Lougheed Highway to help mitigate potential impacts from the development pause. Recruitment for both pilot phases will prioritize projects at different stages of the approvals process, enabling a more comprehensive assessment of the need and demand across various scenarios. For phase 2, it is expected that program intake will be done via a broader call-out.

Project Types and Eligibility: Acceptance into the pilot will be at the discretion of program administrators. Potential projects will be evaluated based on range of factors such as scale, community impact, strategic alignment, and development type. Minimum recommended thresholds for different project types have been established and are intended as guidelines to support decisions regarding program acceptance. This approach provides flexibility in evaluating each project relative to the City's project pipeline, evolving development needs, and staffing capacity, while still providing a consistent set of qualification criteria. A project evaluation matrix has been developed to guide the case-by-case assessment of projects, ensuring the program remains adaptable to Maple Ridge's changing needs.

The following is a high-level framework for the scope of eligible projects and other qualifying considerations.

Eligible Project Types	Qualifying Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrial • Commercial • Mixed-Use • High density residential in priority development areas • Affordable housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project size • Employment impact • Economic impact • Location (LTCAP, Town Centre) • Environmental standards • Capital investment • Alignment with Council's strategic objectives, or key employment sectors as identified in the City's Economic Development and Investment Attraction strategies. – tourism, film, high tech, agri-business, advanced manufacturing

Staffing Structure: There are two primary staffing components to the concierge program pilot:

- 1) *Concierge Service:* Working in collaboration with a file manager, the assigned concierge will provide an enhanced level of client relationship management, ensuring proactive and tailored engagement. While the file manager focuses on the day-to-day project management of each pilot project, the concierge will oversee the overall client experience. The level and type of support provided by the concierge will vary depending on the project and the experience of the proponent. Examples of support include assisting with permit applications and submissions, interpreting bylaws and regulatory requirements, and providing guidance on navigating the approvals process as a single point of contact.
- 2) *Cross Department Review Team:* The cross-department review team, comprised of planners, engineers, and other support staff, will coalesce and lead the application review process. Convening outside of the routine project review stream, the review team approach offers a unique review process for pilot projects allowing for the prioritization of these projects and the facilitation of more efficient collaboration during project peaks. While this staffing model enables the priority review of certain projects, it is predicated on the notion that a more efficient deployment of staffing resources can help streamline the review process for both pilot and non-pilot projects by reducing bottlenecks in the review queue.

Staffing Funding Approach: The staffing model for phase 1 of the pilot will rely on an existing Full-Time Employee to manage the concierge function. As the primary client-facing liaison, the concierge function will be led by a seasoned staff member with in-depth knowledge of the City's development-related regulatory processes, along with the authority to mobilize resources, facilitate decisions, and drive discussions independently. To ensure adequate coverage and capacity for project reviews within the Engineering Department, it is proposed that an additional resource, in the form of a consultant, be retained there on an as-needed basis to address any short-term increases in workload. This resource will be funded through the Housing Accelerator Fund.

As demand grows, Phase 2 may require the addition of more dedicated resources, including a dedicated concierge and potentially other approvals staff, to ensure continued effective service delivery. The proposed staffing model allows scaling staffing as needed throughout the pilot's duration. The costs associated with this additional resource will be recovered through future fees charged to participate in the program.

Strategic Alignment:

The Maple Ridge concierge program pilot aligns with several key strategic initiatives aimed at optimizing the development approvals process and advancing the City's housing and growth goals. The service complements the City's on-going Comprehensive Development Service Optimization project, which seeks to streamline approvals for all development and building permit applications. It also aligns with the recently launched Certified Professional Program, which enables building permit applicants access to industry experts to help augment and expedite the building permit review process.

The implementation of this program is also a key initiative under Council's OKR (Objectives and Key Results) of "Securing 30 below-market housing units by the end of 2025". Additionally, the City's Draft Housing Strategy recognizes the development of a concierge program as a strategy to reduce development approval timelines, directly contributing to Council's OKRs of "Increasing housing supply by 2.5% by Q3 2026" and "Increasing the multi-unit housing portion of building stock by 4% by Q4 2026."

The concierge program was included in the City's application and successful bid for the 2024 Housing Accelerator Fund, and aligns with CMHC's best practices. Given the success of similar services in other jurisdictions, the concierge service is expected to support Council's Strategic Objective of "Attracting, retaining, and expanding business investment to diversify the tax base and increase local employment."

Financial Impact:

For the first phase of the pilot, costs are anticipated to be minimal, as the concierge function will be primarily fulfilled by existing staff. In the immediate short term, the main program related costs will be related to engaging a consultant on an as-needed basis to assist with project reviews during peak workload periods. In Phase 2 of the pilot and beyond, as demand for the program increases, additional staffing resources, including the potential for a dedicated concierge, may be funded through the Housing Accelerator Fund, and ultimately the fees charged to program participants.

Following the completion of the pilot, should a staff recommendation be made to continue with the program as an ongoing service (either for a temporary period or permanently), the financial impact of a continuing concierge will be brought forward for Council's consideration and direction in the relevant budget and business plan.

Applicable Legislation/Bylaw/Policy:

The launch of the concierge program pilot does not require changes to any bylaw or legislation.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, the implementation of the Concierge Program pilot will enhance and streamline the development approvals process, position the City as a preferred destination for investment, and demonstrate the City's commitment to working collaboratively with developers to achieve high-impact, high-value growth, and help advance the City's objective and goals related to housing and development.

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Development Concierge Program - Pilot.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Mar 19, 2025

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

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