

SOLVING THE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE NETWORK COMPLIANCE BOTTLENECK

Issue

New developments, especially in the Metro Vancouver area, but in all of BC, are severely delayed due to required environmental review assessment at the provincial level. This exacerbates the housing crisis as housing is not built to meet the demand of an expanding population. The Environmental review process can be expedited with more staffing at the Provincial level.

Background

Environmental review processes were originally undertaken by the Federal Government at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). In order to streamline the regulatory process, the position was terminated, and all environmental reviews for land was passed to the provincial Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD).

Some cities had an environmental review staff person that would work with developers to ensure that they are abiding by the regulations set by FLNRORD. However, this resulted in the same burden that was alleviated when the Federal Government DFO position was terminated. In Surrey, for example, the city staffer was put in a new role, and developers are now working with planners. Once approved by planners, the environmental applications go to FLNRORD. But the approval delays by the province due to staff shortages cause significant delays in construction.

There also used to be an Environmental Review Committee comprised of municipal staff, provincial regulators, and some industry representatives in Surrey. This group ensured that plans were aligned and provided a forum for municipalities to voice their concerns. Since its termination, there is no direct line for municipalities to provide input on regulatory inefficiencies and potential remedies.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. to ensure an adequate level of service, provide required level of staffing at the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development to review environmental applications based on level of service needed by cities and the private sector; and,
2. Encourage municipalities to re-establish an environmental review committee with municipal staff, provincial regulators, and industry representatives.

Submitted by the Surrey Board of Trade