



External Project Stakeholders Engagement Summary Report

**City of Fernie Development
Approvals Enhancement Project
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Submitted to: City of Fernie
Prepared by McElhanney

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Acknowledgement

McElhanney acknowledges that the City of Fernie is located within Qukin ʔamakʔis, the unceded traditional territory of Yaqit ʔa·knuqti'it. We recognize that we live and work within their vast lands. ʔakanuxunik are from Yaqit ʔa·knuqti'it and are members of the Ktunaxa (Kootenay) speaking peoples of British Columbia, Idaho and Montana.

McElhanney would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the City of Fernie project team, staff, and Council for their unwavering support and invaluable contributions throughout this engagement process. Their dedication, expertise, and collaboration were integral to the success of these activities, and we are appreciative of their commitment to enhancing the development approval processes in the City of Fernie.

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Executive Summary

This Engagement Summary Report provides an overview of the findings from a series of engagement activities conducted with external project stakeholders in February 2023 as part of the initiative to streamline the Development Approvals Process in the City of Fernie. The activities were guided by the Project Communication and Engagement Plan. The in-person events focused on having interactive dialogues and meaningful discussions with members of the local development and construction communities and Fernie's local housing societies.

The main goal of the workshop with the development and construction communities was to empower them with an [enhanced understanding of the planning framework and approval process](#). Key focuses of the educational part included detailed walkthroughs of the planning and legislative framework, the various stages involved in the approval process, the roles and responsibilities of both the City and the applicants, and the [importance of proactive planning, comprehensive submission, and timely communication](#). The purpose was to establish that expedited and efficient approvals demand concerted efforts from both the City and the applicants before and during an application process. The interactive nature of the workshop allowed for clear communication, addressing concerns, and creating a shared vision for a streamlined development approval process.

The productive discussions that unfolded during the workshop provided an in-depth assessment of the City's current performance in handling the development approval process. This dialogue highlighted the City's on-going efforts in streamlining the approval process, while also giving participants an opportunity to openly share their concerns and thoughts regarding where they felt improvements could be made.

When discussing the City's strengths, participants commended the [accessible communication with the planning department](#) and [the smooth planning application process](#). The planning and development approval process was noted to typically [surpass expectations](#), with delays mainly attributed to incomplete applications from the applicants.

On the other hand, participants also brought attention to areas that needed improvement. The slow response and review times from City staff were identified as key points of contention, particularly concerning specific types of applications. Participants also expressed [difficulty in obtaining all relevant information and highlighted the need for clearer checklists](#). Additionally, there were concerns about defining a "complete" application and the [lack of an online portal to check application status](#).

Notably, several opportunities for improvement were identified during the engagement process. These encompassed [pre-zoning](#) strategies for multi-family housing, the establishment of [affordable housing agreements](#), and the creation of [an online GIS mapping portal](#), among others. Furthermore, the introduction of [user-friendly application checklists](#) and an [online permit tracking system](#) were also suggested.

The challenges identified through the engagement activities have provided valuable insights that will help shape the path towards a more efficient and transparent development approval process. The input from the engagement process will be crucial in formulating a refined strategy for the city's Development Approvals Process.

Overall, this report serves as an indispensable resource, laying the groundwork for the next phase of improvements in the City of Fernie's development approvals process.



Figure 1. Workshop with Development and Construction Communities

Contents

Acknowledgement i

Executive Summary i

Introduction 1

Objectives 1

Engagement Events Overview 2

What We Heard 8

Conclusion 13

Appendices: 13

Introduction

As part of the Project Communications and Engagement Plan, the project team has successfully executed Phase 2 engagement activities in February 2023. The focus of these activities was to facilitate [meaningful dialogue and interaction](#) among the internal staff of the City of Fernie and external [development and construction communities](#) through a series of well-curated in-person events.

This engagement summary report has been created to record and summarize the key insights and outcomes derived from these engagement activities, with special emphasis on external project stakeholders' involvement. It outlines the engagement events, summarizes participants' perspectives, insights, and feedback, and provides a detailed analysis of the results.

The purpose of this report is to serve as a resource for public review and to guide decision-making processes. It will provide the City of Fernie with valuable insights to identify and prioritize strategies aimed at [improving and expediting](#) the development approval process.

The ultimate goal is to enhance the development approvals process for applicants. Keeping this objective in focus will help the City of Fernie continue its stride towards organizational excellence and better service delivery.

The insights and recommendations gathered in this memo will lay the groundwork for future planning and action, ensuring the City operates at peak efficiency. This will, in turn, streamline the development approvals process and facilitate improved service to the local community.

Objectives

The Phase 2 engagement activities with external project stakeholders aim to fulfill two primary sets of objectives:

1. Educational Objectives:

- 1.1. Educate the development and construction communities about the city's planning framework and procedures, thereby enhancing their [understanding and efficiency in navigating the process](#).
- 1.2. Demonstrate how applicants' [proactive involvement](#) and submission of [thorough, complete](#) applications can contribute to a more streamlined approvals process.
- 1.3. Clarify the specific [roles and responsibilities](#) of applicants at each step of the development approvals process, providing guidance to ensure a smooth application submission, review, and approval process.
- 1.4. Create a collaborative atmosphere where community members feel their opinions are valued and acknowledged, thereby fostering a sense of [mutual responsibility](#) in improving the development approvals process.

2. Feedback Collection Objectives:

- 2.1. Engage the development and construction communities in productive dialogue, eliciting their insights on the current development approvals process' **strengths** and areas for **improvement**.
- 2.2. Gather feedback on potential areas of **enhancement or modification** within the development approvals process.

Engagement Events Overview

The project team undertook a comprehensive suite of engagement activities aimed at fostering dialogue and collaboration among different stakeholder groups. The following summarizes these activities:

LET'S TALK FERNIE PROJECT WEBPAGE

The City's engagement platform, "Let's Talk Fernie" – <https://letstalk.fernie.ca>, hosts all of the City's major projects, serving as a central hub to communicate project information to the public and facilitate online engagement activities.

The project engagement webpage was initiated on "Let's Talk Fernie" on February 10, 2023. The webpage offers an overview of the project along with a summary of the project phases and timeline. Project-related documents, including the Workplan and Schedule, Communication and Engagement Plan, and Phase 2 Engagement Activities, are readily available for download.

The project webpage will be regularly updated throughout the life cycle of the project, ensuring the public stays informed and up to date. Residents have the opportunity to pose questions to the project team through the Q & A section available on the webpage.

WORKSHOP WITH LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION COMMUNITIES

On February 27, 2023, the project team conducted an interactive in-person workshop specifically for the development and construction communities. Hosted in collaboration with the City's planning team and members from various departments, the workshop provided an introduction to the project, its objectives, team, key components, phases, and legislative framework. The event was marked by interactive questions, fostering active participation.



Figure 2. Let's talk Fernie Webpage



Figure 3. Engaging with local developers and builders at the workshop

A total of 28 members participated in the local development and construction communities' workshop, with about five members attending virtually. During the workshop, we received 993 responses to various questions from the participants (Figure 4). The presentation slide deck and responses to the interactive questions can be found in **Appendix A**.

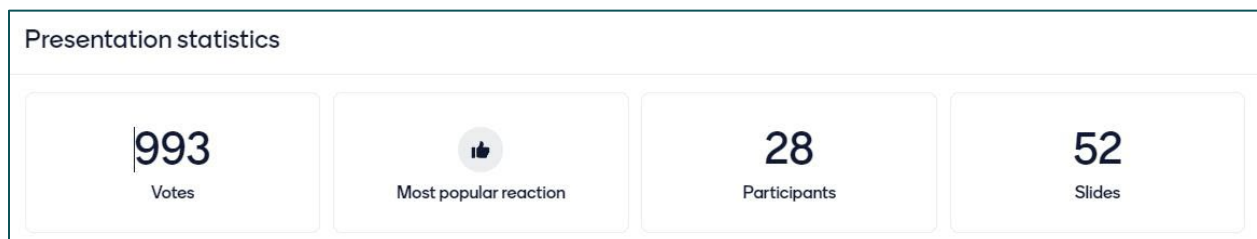


Figure 4. Workshop Statistics

The majority of the workshop participants were land developers and builders (Figure 5), with approximately half of them submitting development applications to the City once or less per year. Approximately a quarter of the participants indicated that they conduct business with the City regularly and submit applications three or more times per year. A significant majority, 60% of the participants, indicated that the majority or all of their projects take place within the City of Fernie.

Which of the following best describes your involvement in the development and construction industry?

Mentimeter



Figure 6. Workshop question and answers

Many of the participants have a significant history with the development application process in the City of Fernie, with half of them having been involved for more than five years. The most common type of application they have been involved with is the Development Permit application, followed by Development Variance Application and Business License Permit. The Official Community Plan amendment application has been the least utilized among the participants.

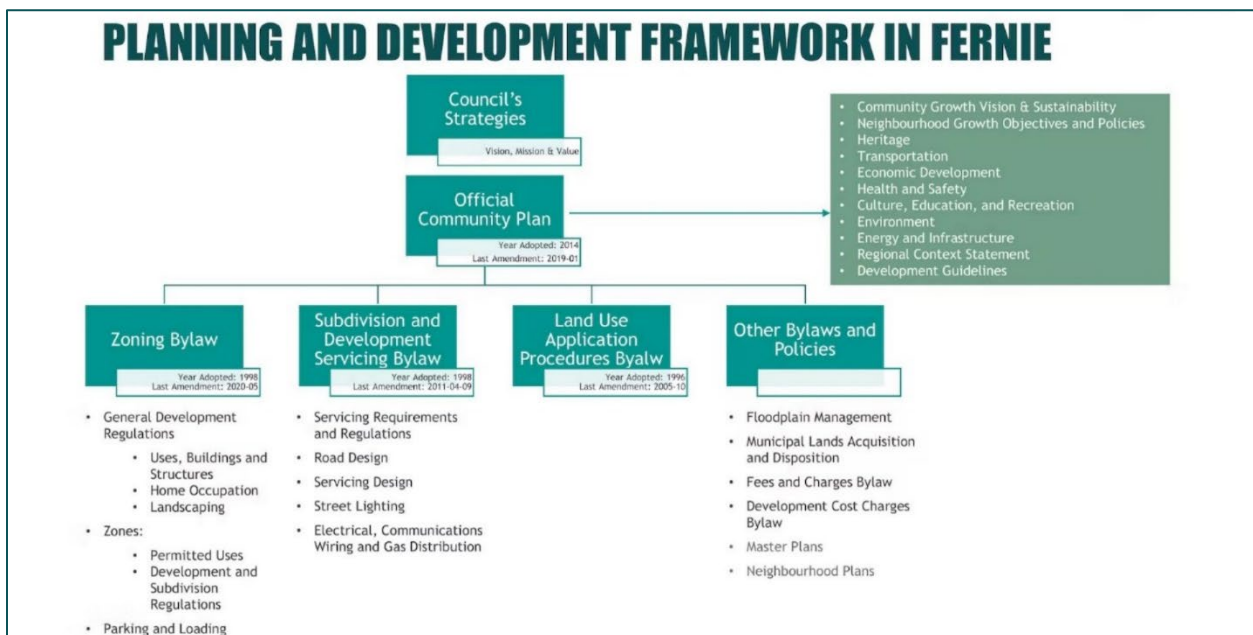
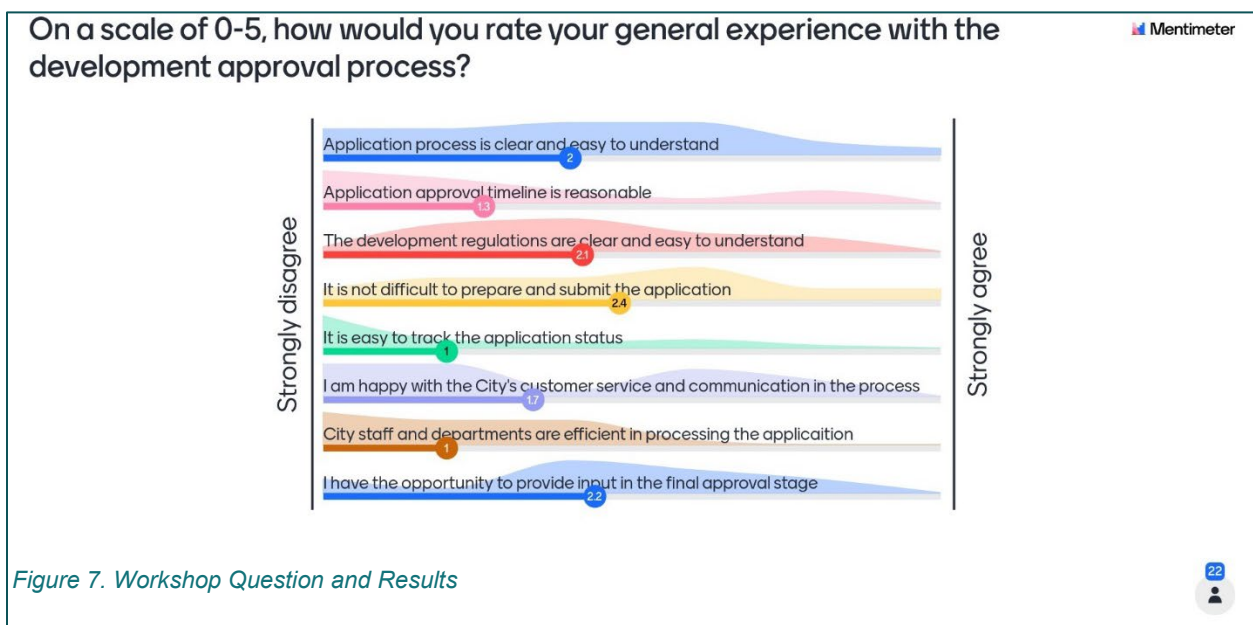


Figure 5. Workshop Slide – Fernie Planning and Development Framework

The principal objective of the workshop was to educate the development and construction communities about the planning framework and the process involved in development approvals (Figure 6). The intention was to establish a clear understanding of the various stages of the approval process and articulate the responsibilities that both the City and the applicants need to shoulder at each step.

The workshop served as an educational platform that presented the regulatory landscape, the requisite documentation, submission protocols, and various stages of the approval process. It underscored the importance of preparedness and timeliness on the part of the applicants, emphasizing that the smooth functioning of the approval process is a shared responsibility. The workshop aimed to emphasize that both the City and the applicants have critical roles to play in ensuring a streamlined approval process. Through collaboration, understanding, and adherence to the protocols, the workshop aimed to enhance the efficiency of the development approval process, thereby benefiting the City, the development and construction communities, and the general public.

The second part of the workshop incorporated a range of interactive questions and facilitated discussions aimed at understanding the perspectives of the development and construction communities (Figure 7). The project team adopted an engaging approach, prompting the participants to share their views on various aspects of the development approvals process.



During the question-and-answer segment, participants were encouraged to share their experiences with the development process, including specific challenges and opportunities they've encountered. Key themes are summarized in the following "What We Heard" section.

The inclusion of interactive questions and open discussions in the workshop provided invaluable insights into the experiences and needs of the development and construction communities. This dynamic engagement strategy not only enabled a deep understanding of the community's perspectives but also fostered a sense of collaboration and shared responsibility in improving the development approvals process.

COUNCIL PRESENTATION

Also on February 28, 2023, McElhanney's team had the privilege of presenting our project work plan and engagement activities to the City's elected officials at a Council meeting. This presentation provided an opportunity for us to share our plans, objectives, and progress, and to receive valuable feedback from the Council members.

MEETING WITH FERNIE'S HOUSING SOCIETIES

On March 1st, 2023, the project team facilitated an interactive session with representatives from the local Fernie housing societies. The purpose of this meeting was to understand the needs of the housing societies and identify strategies to work towards more housing developments led by local housing societies.

The project team provided an introduction to the project. This introduction covered the project's overarching objectives, timeline, and how the project would potentially support the activities of the Fernie Housing Societies.

After setting the context, the project team transitioned into a question-and-answer segment (Figure 8). This segment was designed to be interactive, allowing for an open dialogue between the project team and the housing societies. The questions sought to gauge the housing societies' insights, expectations, concerns, and suggestions related to the project. This feedback is invaluable for ensuring the project's alignment with the needs of housing societies and subsequently, the larger Fernie community.



Figure 8. Meeting with Housing Societies - Question and Results

Responses to these interactive questions were documented and have been included in **Appendix B** along with the presentation slide deck. The documentation serves as a record of the discussion and will be used to guide the project team's strategies and decisions moving forward. It also provides transparency, allowing for a clear understanding of how the housing societies' feedback is being taken into account in the project's progress.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS WITH INTERESTED PUBLIC MEMBERS

Subsequent to the in-person consultation events at Fernie, the project team was contacted by three interested public members. These individuals represent a diverse set of stakeholders, including a local developer, a representative from a local construction company, and a Calgary-based realtor. This indicates a wide-ranging interest in the project and underscores its impact on a variety of community members and sectors. The conversations were in-depth and personalized, addressing the specific concerns and questions of each stakeholder. The phone calls allowed for a thorough explanation of the project, its objectives, potential implications, and the ways it may affect or involve each stakeholder's professional activities. These discussions were summarized in the forthcoming section, where we delve into these enriching discussions and share the key takeaways that will aid us in refining and driving the project forward.



Figure 9. City Hall - City of Fernie

What We Heard

STRENGTHS

The City of Fernie exhibits a range of strengths within its Development Approvals Process, reflecting its commitment to fostering sustainable growth and development within the community. A synthesis of the feedback we received from the development and construction communities reveals that the city has successfully created an enabling environment catering to the needs of developers, residents, and the broader community. The key strengths of the Development Approvals Process, as per our feedback, are as follows:

- **Communication from Planning Department:** The City of Fernie has excelled in establishing effective communication channels, particularly with the planning department. Participants appreciated the ease of communication and the staff's responsiveness in addressing their inquiries and concerns.
- **Ease of Planning Application Submission:** The application process at the City of Fernie is perceived as straightforward and user-friendly. Information regarding application requirements is easily accessible on the City's website, enabling applicants to submit without requiring significant input from staff.
- **Efficient Planning Collaboration:** Fernie's development community commends the city's approachability, which has fostered a comfort level among stakeholders in contacting the staff for any queries or concerns. This open line of communication has contributed to efficient and collaborative planning.
- **Transparency:** The development review process in Fernie is seen as transparent, accountable, and accessible. The city's commitment to these principles has cultivated trust and confidence among applicants in the fairness and integrity of the process.
- **Service Exceeds Expectations:** The City of Fernie's approval process has consistently exceeded expectations, reinforcing a positive reputation. Any delays encountered during the process were predominantly associated with the submission of incomplete applications, emphasizing the city's efficiency in processing complete applications.

In essence, these strengths underline the City of Fernie's dedication to an effective and efficient Development Approvals Process, reinforcing its commitment to facilitating sustainable development in harmony with the community's needs.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section illuminates the major challenges and corresponding opportunities unearthed during the engagement events with the development and construction communities and the housing societies. The identification of these challenges is not just a candid reflection of existing obstacles but also a launching pad for harnessing potential opportunities. Effectively addressing these challenges and capitalizing on the proposed opportunities is pivotal to the overall process. By doing so, the City aims to streamline the operational flow, enhance efficiency and customer service, and foster a more modernized and transparent development approvals process. This endeavor is not only about resolving immediate concerns but also about laying a robust foundation for long-term improvements and sustainable growth within the city's planning and development framework.

Challenges

Despite the strengths noted, several challenges persist within the City of Fernie's Development Approvals Process, identified as follows:

- **Slow Response and Lengthy Review Time:** Feedback from the development and construction communities highlighted instances of slow response and review times from City staff. The lag time appears to fluctuate depending on the nature of the application, which could lead to uncertainties and inefficiencies in the development process. The process to obtain development approval can often be complex and time-consuming, which may delay project start times and escalate costs. The long approval timelines can be a significant impediment to the timely completion of construction and development projects.
- **Unclear Pre-Application Meeting Instructions and Application Checklists:** It was noted that arranging a pre-application meeting with City staff can sometimes be a difficult task due to scheduling constraints. Additionally, clear, and concise checklists outlining the application requirements were identified as a need, to facilitate a more efficient application process.
- **Limited Staff Availability and Capacity:** While communication is generally praised, occasional unavailability of key staff members poses a challenge to the prompt resolution of queries and concerns raised by the community and applicants. Participants indicated that the City has limited staff available, especially Building Officials, to review and process development applications and building permits and inspections. This can further delay the approval process.
- **Lack of Accessible City Information:** Currently, there is no online open data system, such as a GIS database, that provides essential development information, including civil servicing details.
- **Lack of Clear Communication and Consistency from the Building Department:** The workshop participants and interviewees raised concerns in working with the Building department due to unreturned phone calls, unclear and lengthy email correspondence, inconsistencies in Schedule B Assurance application, upfront costs for engineering drawings without building permit

assurance, and unclear, inconsistent responses received from the City. This lack of consistency and clarity in the process often leads to confusion and uncertainty, making it challenging for developers and builders to navigate the system efficiently and meet the City's requirements.

- **Lack of Tools to Track Application:** One significant challenge faced by the development and construction communities is the lack of digital tools to track the status of their development applications in real-time. This issue can result in inefficiencies, causing delays and confusion for both the developers and the municipal staff.
- **Lack of Transparency:** Developers and builders have expressed a need for more transparency in the approvals process, including a clearer understanding of how decisions are made and the status of their application at any given time.
- **Unclear Definition of 'Complete Application':** Applicants often grapple with determining when their application is considered 'Complete' by City staff. The absence of an online application portal to monitor application status contributes to this challenge.
- **Lack of a Clear Vision for Attainable Housing:** Housing societies indicated that the City of Fernie does not communicate a clear vision or strategy for fostering attainable housing within the city limits.
- **Resort Staff Housing Issues:** Particularly for ski resort employees, the high cost of rent within the City of Fernie is a significant concern. Despite Fernie Alpine Resort's status as an international destination, it does not provide worker housing.
- **Limited Land Inventory:** The availability of land for affordable housing is limited, and when available, the pricing is often unaffordable.
- **Influx of Remote Workers:** Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, Fernie has seen an influx of remote workers with high-paying jobs. This demographic shift has increased demand and competition for housing, further exacerbating the housing challenges.
- **Complex Rezoning for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs):** Applicants suggested that the current process for rezoning to allow ADUs within Single-Family zones could be simplified. By allowing all Single-Family zones to permit ADUs by default, the process could become more efficient and less burdensome.

Addressing these challenges will be crucial in the city's efforts to streamline the Development Approvals Process, enhancing efficiency and better serving the needs of the community.

Opportunities

This section delves into the realm of opportunities for the City of Fernie, identified through the interactive engagement with the development and construction communities and the housing societies. These opportunities symbolize potential strategies and modifications that could transform and streamline the development approval process.

- **Pre-zoning Candidate Lands for Multi-family Housing:** Proactively identifying and zoning lands suitable for multi-family housing could reduce complexities for developers in locating potential sites.
- **Affordable Housing Agreements:** Implementing a policy or template for affordable housing agreements could expedite the writing of such agreements by housing societies.
- **Online Permitting System:** A user-friendly online system for submitting and tracking permits could streamline the process for applicants and the internal departments.
- **A Well-defined Pre-application Process:** Create a structured pre-application process to guide applicants through the necessary steps, ensuring that they are well-informed and prepared before submitting their applications. Clear guidelines, expectations, and requirements for starting the process should be communicated to applicants. These might include preliminary plans, site details, proposed use, and any other relevant information. Providing a summary of relevant legislation to applicants during the pre-application stage can help ensure they understand the legal context of their proposed development. The formal pre-application process can help ensure that applicants are well-prepared and understand what is expected of them before they formally apply.
- **Fast-Track Permit Approval for Non-Market or Rental Housing:** Drawing from best practices implemented in other cities, Fernie could consider a fast-track permit approval process for non-market or rental housing. For example, City of Victoria has passed new legislation to remove rezonings or public hearings requirements for projects by non-profit, government or co-op housing organizations when they are consistent with the City's Official Community Plan and related design guidelines. Victoria is the first municipality in B.C. to approve a city-wide accelerated process for qualifying affordable housing projects. Developments that meet all the necessary criteria will be permitted to build up to the maximum density in the City's Official Community Plan.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Encouraging public-private partnerships can lead to innovative solutions for housing and development challenges and help share the cost and risk of development projects.
- **Waiving Public Hearing for Compliant Applications:** If a proposed development aligns with the city's Official Community Plan, the public hearing requirement could be waived to expedite the

approval process. By waiving the public hearing in such cases, the City of Fernie could potentially speed up the approval process for compliant projects, saving time and resources for both the city and developers. Under the provisions of the Local Government Act a local government may waive the holding of a public hearing if the proposed amendment bylaw is consistent with the OCP that is in effect. To implement this, the city would need to ensure that the OCP is kept up to date, reflecting current community values and priorities

- **Online GIS Mapping Portal:** Develop an online GIS mapping portal that consolidates all relevant city information for developers and property owners, including zoning, land use, infrastructure, environmental, and floodplain data. This will make it easier for users to access and analyze the information they need for their projects.
- **User-friendly Application Checklists:** Design and implement easy-to-follow application checklists that clearly outline the requirements and steps for submitting development applications.
- **One-stop Shop for Developers:** Establishing a single point of contact or a one-stop-shop for developers to answer queries, receive applications, and provide updates can simplify the process for applicants.

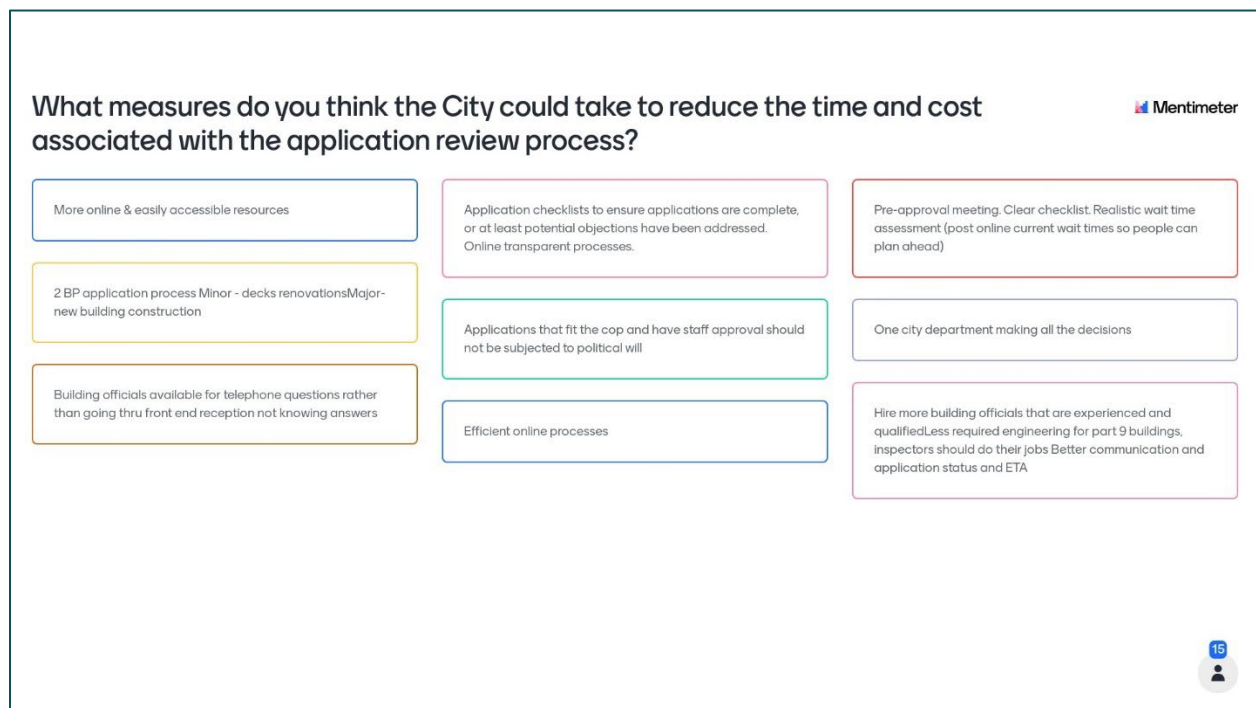


Figure 10. Workshop Question and Results

Conclusion

Overall, a broad cross-section of viewpoints and perspectives were captured from the development and construction communities and the housing societies on a range of key topics and considerations. The City of Fernie Development Approvals Enhancement project signifies the city's commitment to continuous improvement and adaptation in response to the evolving needs of its community. By harnessing the wealth of knowledge and insights gathered through these engagement activities, the City of Fernie is well-positioned to make impactful changes that will ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for its residents.

This engagement summary report marks an essential milestone in our commitment to enhance the development approvals process within the City of Fernie. The participation and feedback from the development and construction communities, along with various stakeholders, have provided us with critical insights and actionable opportunities to streamline our practices and ensure a more efficient, transparent, and user-friendly process.

It is evident from the engagement activities that while there are challenges to address, there are also numerous opportunities to capitalize on. Key areas for improvement include enhancing communication, increasing process efficiency, improving application checklists, and leveraging technology to support the development application and review process.

In conclusion, the insights gathered from this engagement process have not only illuminated the existing strengths of our development approval process but also highlighted the areas where improvements are necessary. These findings will undoubtedly serve as an invaluable guide as we work to implement changes that will have lasting benefits for our community, developers, and all those involved in the development process.

Sincerely,

APPENDICES:

- A. Presentation for Workshop with Local Development and construction communities and Engagement Results**
- B. Meeting with Fernie Housing Societies Engagement Results**

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