

To: Chief Administrative Officer **Date:** March 21, 2022
From: Mike Dickinson, Manager of Long Range Planning and Special Projects
Subject: Interim Policy for Growth Management

Recommendation(s)

That Council approve the Interim Policy for Growth Management, appended as Attachment A in the March 21, 2022 report by the Manager of Long Range Planning and Special Projects.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to introduce an interim policy for managing development and growth in Mission. The need for an interim policy is simply to bridge the gap between the City's current approach to managing growth in the municipality to a more formalized policy approach that is anticipated with an upcoming update to the City's Official Community Plan (OCP) in the coming year.

This report explains the concept of growth management and how best practices can be applied and communicated with the development community via an "Interim Policy" for growth management. The Interim Policy will be used to evaluate OCP compliant projects against growth management best practices which may not necessarily align. The Interim Policy would help identify any long-term implications to allowing growth to continue under the current approach.

Ultimately, the Interim Policy would provide staff with the opportunity to include additional planning input on OCP compliant projects for Council's consideration. For example, the Interim Policy would allow staff to comment on proposals on sites that are considered under-designated and likely underperforming in terms of density. Similarly, the Interim Policy would also provide opportunities for commenting on commercial, industrial, and institutional (employment lands) development within the context of best practices that aim to achieve optimum community and economic benefits for the City. Without a formal policy in place, staff would be seen as contradicting current OCP direction albeit that orderly planned growth is key to successful implementation of any community plan.

Background and Discussion

The City intends to amend the OCP in the coming year where the updated or new OCP will include a strategy for managing growth that will replace the current land use policies with a more comprehensive framework. Currently, the OCP lacks specifics on its land use policy direction as well as on the need to ensure that new development is strategically located. Until growth management direction is explicitly stated in the OCP, staff will continue to process new development proposals and in-stream applications but with additional planning input regarding a proposal's location and potential community impacts. This Interim Policy is intended to allow for more in-depth staff analysis and to provide Council with enhanced information that would assist in decision-making on projects that are compliant with the current OCP but may not be suitable in providing long term benefits to the City.

At the January 31, 2022 closed meeting of Council, staff gave a presentation on growth management, focusing on high-density residential development. The presentation concentrated on apartments specifically, as this housing form in Mission is increasing in popularity but also demonstrates the challenges of current OCP land use policy.

The goal of the presentation was to seek Council direction to undertake an OCP update to include a strategy for managing growth. At the same time, discussion ensued on an interim approach to address how new and in-stream applications could be addressed ahead of an OCP review in 2022 to 2023.

Council resolved, under Resolution C2022-012 (released from Closed Council) as follows:

1. That staff bring forward a terms of reference for an OCP update that includes a Growth Management Strategy, incorporates the municipality's other current strategic plans and initiatives, considers employment, considers parks and recreation needs, and expands opportunities for community engagement; and
2. That staff bring forward, in a timely fashion, an interim growth management policy to help staff and Council communicate to the development community, ahead of a growth management strategy.

How the Interim Growth Management Policy Works – A Flexible Approach

Staff will continue with the approach of assessing and generally supporting OCP compliant projects leaving the ultimate decision on the land use change to Council. In addition to apprising applicants of any opportunities to enhance their proposals from a community growth perspective, staff's role will be to provide Council with additional planning insight that includes analysis from a growth management perspective.

The Interim Policy applies to all land use projects across Mission, but in most cases, residential housing types including apartment, mixed-use, townhouse, rowhouse, duplex, single family detached, coach house, and garden suite. The Interim Policy also applies to commercial, industrial, and institutional developments. It applies to preliminary proposals and in-stream development applications until an amended OCP with a growth management strategy is approved.

The Interim Policy establishes general location performance standards and provides insight on growth management best practice through a detailed definition and benefits summary. The location standard is a high-level general principle of growth management – *“the project is located on a site within the area of the Downtown or Waterfront, or within an established or planned compact, walkable secondary mixed-use neighbourhood center”*. Staff will rely on the merits of the proposal in the context of the definition summary to flesh out any possible implications for sound City development. This approach avoids a prescriptive checklist and allows for an open and clear discussion with the applicant and Council.

What is Growth Management and How is it Supported by the Interim Policy?

Growth management best practice focuses on achieving walkable, compact, mixed-use neighbourhoods, that support public transit (by aiming to concentrate and increase public transport ridership). It is about building a high-density mixed-use area, surrounded by lower-density development. The approach aims to locate housing close to schools, parks, employment, and transit for good access and meeting daily needs and prioritizes new housing in appropriate areas where there is safe and convenient walking and cycling.

Growth management best practice points to creating community cores like Downtown Mission with walkable streets, mixed uses, fine grain street network and small retail frontage, significant

trees, high density, and pedestrian-scaled street and building design. A growth management strategy will help to strengthen and support development of the downtown by directing growth to this area, a key goal of the *Downtown Mission Action Plan*. The Interim Policy will communicate the benefits of focusing new apartment development in Mission's downtown.

Growth management aims to achieve optimal results for a community in terms of economic, social, and environmental benefits. It allows for more efficient servicing, place making, equality, housing affordability, and better public transit. It is a way to protect agricultural and natural lands and reduce carbon emissions. It also coordinates with other municipal strategies including the *Asset Management Policy* and *Transportation Master Plan* to provide clearer guidance for infrastructure planning and costing.

A broader policy within the OCP would provide a framework for guiding more detailed land use planning at the neighbourhood level. In the meantime, the Interim Policy will provide staff with the communication capacity to inform developers and Council about the effects of development proposals upon the City's economic and community development along with options to consider if proposals are not suitably located to support the City's growth needs.

Growth management is an interdepartmental collaborative effort, as it is planned by and affects all departments. All City departments will benefit from a growth management strategy given it will enable more efficient planning of services (e.g., parks, road, facilities). External government agencies also benefit from a community guided by a sound growth management plan including BC Transit, the School District, and the Fraser Valley Regional District given aligning priorities and clear City intention and direction.

In recent years, there have been cases where applications have been compliant with the City's OCP but have met with community opposition due to their proposed density, location, and other matters that may be perceived as counter to appropriate growth progress. Within the scope of an Interim Policy will be encouragement for development applicants to reach out to the communities where proposals are located, to engage in full discussions with local residents around the balance of community and development needs. The Interim Policy will also help inform a future OCP Growth Management Strategy that would formalize the broader goals and strategies of the City developed in consultation with the community resulting in a community-based approach to growth that assists Council in decision making.

Similar to growth management best practice, City strategies underway are generally telling us to protect employment lands, focus growth in concentrated areas around the City centre and neighbourhood commercial nodes. Lands designated for employment represent a modest amount of the City's total land supply, yet they are responsible for accommodating the majority of local employment opportunities. Protecting Mission's existing employment land supply is critical, particularly given that 63% of residents commute outside of Mission for work, Mission exports 45% of retail, and there is a 19.3 ha industrial land deficit. Rates of walking or cycling are significantly lower in Mission due to lack of amenities (schools, shops, services) within walking or cycling distance of most residents. These factors and others will be evaluated by staff through an Interim Policy lens, when reviewing new development applications.

A growth management strategy ties the directions from existing City strategies together to address the issues facing Mission. It is key to implementing the *Affordable Housing Strategy*, as it directly supports all housing options in the housing continuum. It will also provide direction for updating long range planning priorities. Until the OCP is updated with an in-depth growth management strategy, the Interim Policy will also take into account other municipal initiatives including the *Transportation Master Plan*, *Affordable Housing Strategy*, the proposed *Community Health Strategy* and financial updates for development cost charges and community amenity contributions. The Interim Policy will provide sound communication around the need for

more focused City development, will open opportunities for enhanced community engagement associated with development proposals, and will provide substantial input for the preparation of a growth management strategy with the OCP update in 2023.

Council Goals/Objectives

The Interim Policy supports Council's 2018 - 2022 Strategic Plan. In particular, it provides support for the goals of Strategy 4. 'Liveable Complete Community', wherein it will help to make the City an attractive community for living, working and playing, and also to meet the social, cultural and physical needs of the community.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Communication

City departments have been consulted in the development of the Interim Policy and will be highly engaged in the development of the OCP Review that will include a comprehensive growth management strategy. The Interim Policy will provide a vehicle for staff and Council to communicate the principles of growth management to the development community with the view of creating an efficient City.

Summary and Conclusion

The Interim Policy will assist staff and Council in communicating the principles of growth management best practice with the development community and provide staff with an effective evaluation tool for application analysis so that different types of development can be located more strategically for the City's long-term benefit.

The goal is to undertake an OCP update in 2022 – 2023 to include a growth management strategy as a central theme in its policies and in the meantime, implement an Interim Policy for addressing new and in-stream applications ahead of developing a growth management strategy. The Interim Policy allows staff to provide additional planning input for evaluating OCP compliant projects in terms of growth management best practice. Ultimately, new development and in-stream applications will continue to be processed, but with additional planning input regarding their location and potential community impacts. With additional information in hand, Council has full discretion and staff will continue to generally support all OCP compliant projects.

The Interim Policy applies to all land use projects across Mission and supports the initiatives of the *Affordable Housing Strategy* and the City's Master Plans. The Interim Policy will also provide insights for the preparation of a Growth Management Strategy within the 2022 – 2023 OCP Review and will help in updating long range planning priorities.

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Reviewed by: Dan Sommer, Director of Development Services

Approved for Inclusion: Mike Younie, Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment(s)

Attachment A: Interim Growth Management Policy