Staff Report

Report To: Service Review Implementation Ad Hoc Committee

Report From: Tim Simmonds, City Manager

Meeting Date: September 9, 2026

Report Code: CM-26-029

Subject: Service Review Implementation Committee Summary and Next Steps Report

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CM-26-029 respecting Service Review Implementation Committee Summary and Next Steps Report, the Service Review Implementation Ad Hoc Committee recommends that City Council receive the report for information purposes.

Highlights:

- The Service Review evolved from 49 actions into a broad corporate modernization initiative that strengthened how the City plans, delivers, and evaluates services.
- The initiative generated more than $2 million in savings, revenue, efficiencies, and cost avoidance while improving service delivery.
- New systems, technology, and data-driven tools have improved accountability, service planning, and long-term decision-making across the organization.

Vision 2050 - Strategic Plan Alignment:

Strategic Plan Priority: The recommendation contributes to core service delivery or a corporate initiative that enables service delivery for one or more strategic priorities.

Previous Report/Authority:

N/A

Background:

The Service Review was approved as a major corporate improvement initiative to help the City take a clear, practical look at how services are delivered, how resources are used, and where the organization could become more efficient, transparent and sustainable. What began in February 2024 as a response to 49 approved actions quickly became a broader effort to strengthen how the City plans, manages, reports on and continuously improves its work.

Over the life of the Service Review, staff from across the organization participated in project teams, process reviews, technology implementation, policy development, asset inventories, financial analysis and service level reviews. This work was completed while staff continued to deliver core municipal services and more than a hundred operating and capital projects to the community. The result is a body of work that gives Council and the public a much clearer picture of what the City does, what it costs, where pressures exist, and how future decisions can be made with better information.

The Service Review Ad Hoc Committee provided a dedicated forum for this work to be reviewed, challenged, refined and advanced. Through that process, the City moved from identifying opportunities to building practical tools and systems that are now embedded in day-to-day operations.

Analysis and Options:

More Than a Service Review

The Service Review should be viewed as one of the most significant organizational improvement initiatives undertaken by the City in recent years. What started as a review of municipal services evolved into a broad effort to build a stronger, more responsive, and more sustainable organization.

Since its inaugural meeting in February 2024, the Service Review Implementation Ad Hoc Committee received approximately 60 reports covering project updates, operational reviews, technology modernization initiatives, service level studies, governance improvements, organizational planning efforts, and financial reviews. Taken together, those reports tell the story of an organization willing to take a close look at itself, ask difficult questions, and invest the time required to improve.

The work touched virtually every area of the corporation, including Public Works, Parks, Engineering, Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Corporate Services, By-law Enforcement, Building Services, Tourism, Fleet Operations, Cemeteries, Records Management, and Corporate Planning. Few initiatives in recent memory have involved such a broad cross-section of staff, services, and operational functions.

Building the Foundation for the Future

One of the most important accomplishments of the Service Review is that it helped build systems and practices that will continue delivering value long after the individual projects are complete.

A strong example is Project 5A.1 – Organizational Project Management System, which ultimately led to the implementation of ProjectTeam. Prior to this work, project tracking relied heavily on spreadsheets and disconnected reporting processes. Today, the City has a corporate platform that improves project coordination, budgeting, accountability, and transparency while supporting a consolidated organizational work plan.

Similarly, Project 1A.1 – Comprehensive Onboarding Program created a standardized approach to welcoming and training new employees. While onboarding may not be highly visible to the public, it plays a critical role in helping new employees become productive sooner, improving employee retention, and strengthening organizational culture. The result is greater consistency across the corporation and better support for future workforce development.

The Service Review also helped establish broader organizational disciplines that did not previously exist in the same coordinated manner. The City now has stronger annual work planning processes, improved project reporting, service level reviews, a developing KPI framework, cost allocation methodologies, agreement management tools, succession planning initiatives, and a growing culture of continuous improvement. These accomplishments represent foundational improvements that will continue to support better decision-making for years to come.

Better Services Through Better Systems

While much of the Service Review focused on internal improvements, the ultimate goal has always been to improve service delivery for residents, businesses, and visitors.

For example, Project 2B.4 – Implementation of Cloudpermit modernized permit processing by replacing legacy systems with a digital platform that improves application processing, online payments, interdepartmental collaboration, and customer access to services. Residents may not see the underlying technology, but they benefit from faster, more convenient access to City services. In turn this greatly impacts the speed of development and ultimately supports the timing at which development positively impacts the property tax base.

Likewise, Project 3A.6 – Increase Online Services expanded digital service delivery through initiatives such as Virtual City Hall, online recreation booking enhancements, online licensing tools such as DocuPet, and other customer-facing improvements. Together, these projects support a municipality that is more accessible and easier to do business with.

Another highly visible example is Project 3A.3 – Tourism Services at the Tom Thomson Art Gallery Pilot. What began as a pilot project demonstrated stronger visitor experiences, improved collaboration, enhanced staffing resilience, and better service continuity. The success of the initiative ultimately supported the continuation of the integrated model, creating a more seamless experience for visitors while improving operational effectiveness behind the scenes.

These projects demonstrate an important lesson from the Service Review. Better service does not always come from adding more resources. In many cases, it comes from improving systems, strengthening coordination, leveraging technology, and finding better ways to deliver existing services.

Making Better Decisions with Better Information

Many Service Review projects focused on collecting information that did not previously exist or was not available in a form that could effectively support decision-making.

One of the strongest examples is Project 3A.2 – Review of Park Classification System, Service Levels and Associated Operating Costs. Through this work, more than 5,100 park assets were inventoried and classified, creating a much stronger foundation for future service level discussions, asset management planning, lifecycle investment decisions, and parks planning. Rather than relying on assumptions, future decisions can now be supported by accurate and comprehensive information.

The same principle can be seen in Project 1D.1 – Fleet Management Strategy, which established the City's first comprehensive fleet management framework and identified opportunities to improve utilization, enhance safety, strengthen data collection, and support long-term fleet planning. Fleet services are now a corporate function rather than a department-based endeavour. By pairing this work with vehicle tracking and utilization projects, the City is now in a much stronger position to make informed decisions regarding equipment replacement, fleet investment, and operating costs.

The shift toward including a Resource Alignment section in staff reports is another example of this change in thinking. It reflects a more complete view of municipal decision-making by considering financial resources, staffing capacity, technology requirements, timing, and operational impacts together. This may be one of the most important legacies of the Service Review: better questions, better information, and ultimately better decisions.

Recognizing the Dedication of Staff

The success of the Service Review did not happen because of a single project or department. It happened because employees across the organization embraced the challenge of improving how the City works.

Organizational modernization is often one of the most difficult forms of work any organization can undertake. Research on public sector transformation consistently highlights that modernization efforts require organizations to improve processes, adopt new technologies, strengthen governance, build new skills, and manage cultural change, all while maintaining day-to-day service delivery. Over the past two years, Staff were challenged with providing day-to-day core service and facilitating service review initiatives. Public sector organizations often face additional challenges because they must balance innovation with service continuity, regulatory requirements, public accountability, and limited resources.

That reality was reflected throughout many of the Service Review reports. Staff developed onboarding programs, implemented new technology platforms, reviewed fleet operations, completed service level studies, developed policies, strengthened records management practices, conducted operational reviews, built asset inventories, and implemented continuous improvement projects while continuing to deliver core services to the community. City reports have openly acknowledged that this pace of change required a significant commitment from staff and that balancing improvement work with day-to-day responsibilities has not always been easy.

That effort deserves recognition. Modernization work is often invisible when it is being done well. Residents may not immediately see the creation of a project management framework, a service level review, a fleet strategy, an onboarding program, or an information management roadmap. However, those foundational pieces are precisely what allow an organization to become stronger, more efficient, and more sustainable over time.

The Work Continues

While the Service Review Implementation Ad Hoc Committee is approaching the conclusion of its mandate, the work itself is not ending.

The systems, tools, practices, and mindset developed through the Service Review are now more embedded within the organization. The City is managing 157 projects through its organizational work plan, supported by enhanced project management tools, stronger planning practices, service level reviews, performance measurement initiatives, and continuous improvement efforts.

It is also important to recognize that, like any significant organizational improvement initiative, not every project was completed exactly as originally envisioned. The goal was always to achieve 100% of the Service Review Action Plan, but as with most long-term plans, circumstances changed over time. Employee turnover, emerging priorities, legislative requirements, unforeseen projects, operational demands, and the reality that some initiatives required more effort and time than initially anticipated all influenced the pace of progress. In some cases, projects evolved as staff gained a better understanding of the issue being studied. In others, the organization determined that additional review, analysis, consultation, or future consideration was warranted before proceeding further.

That should not be viewed as a shortcoming. Rather, it reflects the realities of managing a complex municipal organization while continuing to deliver day-to-day services to residents. In many cases, the review process itself provided value by improving understanding, identifying risks, refining future priorities, or confirming that existing practices remained appropriate. As of this report, 80% of the projects were completed or are near completion.

The same principle applies to measuring savings and efficiencies. Throughout the Service Review, staff worked diligently to identify, quantify, and report financial and operational benefits wherever reliable information existed. The organization is confident in the savings, revenue generation, cost avoidance, and efficiencies that have been formally reported and verified.

At the same time, the Service Review highlighted a challenge common to many organizations: in some areas, when work began, sufficient baseline data simply did not exist to accurately measure every efficiency or operational improvement. While staff expected that some benefits would be easier to quantify, the information, systems, or historical tracking methods required to validate those results were not always available. This was particularly true for administrative efficiencies, process improvements, staff time savings, and operational changes that had never previously been measured in a consistent way.

Ironically, identifying those gaps may be one of the most valuable outcomes of the entire initiative. Many of the modernization projects completed through the Service Review, including the Organizational Project Management System, service level reviews, cost allocation work, fleet management improvements, information management modernization, annual work planning, and performance measurement initiatives, have improved the City's ability to understand both the financial and human resource costs associated with delivering municipal services.

Simply put, the City now has a much clearer picture of how work is performed, what services cost, where resources are being utilized, and how performance can be measured. While there is still more work to do, the organization is significantly better positioned today than it was at the beginning of the Service Review to make informed decisions based on reliable operational and financial information.

The next chapter of this work will be advanced through the newly established Resilient Community Advisory Committee of Council. Rather than marking the end of the journey, this transition reflects that notion that qualities of Service Review are moving into an ongoing commitment to organizational excellence, responsible stewardship, and continuous improvement.

Ultimately, what was learned through the Service Review work was that the initial concept that Service Review was primarily rooted in the idea of cost avoidance, efficiency and savings was much more than that. It was about building a stronger organization. Through the collective efforts of Council, Committee members, and staff, the City has developed better systems, stronger planning tools, more reliable information, and a culture that embraces continuous improvement. Those investments will continue to benefit residents, businesses, and the broader community for many years to come. The Service Review may be concluding, but the pursuit of a more effective, sustainable, and resilient municipality continues.

Resource Alignment:

Financial Resources

The financial impact of the Service Review is substantial. Based on the City Manager's November 2025 update, the City had achieved $1,023,270 in combined savings, new revenue and operational efficiencies and was on track to meet and exceed the original $2 million target when benefits are compounded year over year. Since that report, an additional $600,000 in cost avoidance through the parks/playground work has been achieved.

These results were achieved through a mix of direct savings, new revenue, cost avoidance, staff-time efficiencies and better use of existing resources. Some of the most significant direct examples are the court security agreement with Grey County, which generated more than $370,000 in Owen Sound taxpayer savings and the review of Parks Infrastructure, namely playgrounds, which has a future costs avoidance of approximately $600,000 in capital replacement costs and the associated repair and operational costs. In addition, the Municipal Accommodation Tax revenue was expected to generate $317,000 annually to support tourism, events and capital projects. In 2025, its first full year the MAT generated $418,000 and in 2026 is tracking to be $360,000. Corporate Services modernization activities were estimated to produce annual soft savings between $118,000 and $250,000 through digital platforms and process improvements.

Financial / Operational Item	Reported Impact	Note
Court security agreement	$370,000+ Annually	Direct taxpayer savings through agreement with Grey County.
Municipal Accommodation Tax	$317,000 Annually	Revenue expected by year-end for tourism, events and capital support.
Corporate Services digital modernization	$118,000 to $250,000 annually	Soft savings from technology and process improvements.
Fleet rental replacement opportunity	$41,340 annually	Estimated value from replacing long-term rentals with owned or leased units.
Microsoft Purview / records platform change	$45,000 annually	Expected savings from decommissioning third-party records platform.
By-law fees and charges changes	$24,625 annually	Estimated new revenue from re-inspection, work order and cleanup administration fees.
LEAN pilot improvements	89.4 hours and $2,500	Staff-time savings from reimbursement process plus revenue from disposal of surplus items.
Playground Consolidation	Approximately $289,000/playground	One-time cost avoidance and future operating repair and replacement.

Not every financial benefit appears as a line-item budget reduction. Many improvements create soft savings by reducing manual work, improving accuracy, shortening turnaround times, avoiding future remediation costs, or allowing staff to focus on higher-value work. While these savings may be less visible than a direct budget reduction, they matter because they improve the City’s capacity to deliver services.

The financial story is therefore both practical and positive: the Service Review generated measurable financial benefits, created new revenue opportunities, improved cost recovery, and built better systems for understanding the true cost of municipal services.

Human Resources

N/A

Time and Scheduling

N/A

Technology and Infrastructure

N/A

Climate and Environmental Impacts:

There are no anticipated climate or environmental impacts.

Communication and Engagement:

This report has been posted to the City's website with the agenda in advance of the meeting.

Report Developed in Consultation With:

N/A

Attachments:

None

Reviewed by:
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