

Working Together: *A Plan to Better Assist and Support Our Clients (2016 – 17)*

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Executive Summary

This Plan outlines a framework for supporting and assisting the clients of the Greater Miramichi Regional Service Commission. The Plan contains specific objectives for achieving four main goals. Detailed strategies and activities with associated implementation time line and budget are also included for meeting Plan objectives.

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Key Messages

- It is important for clients to know the overall function, role and mandate of Planning Services—i.e. what ‘we are’ and ‘what we are not’
- The development/building permit application process is unique to government organizations, and requires dialogue (client and staff working cooperatively together)—i.e. unfortunately, a ‘one size fits all’ approach does not apply
- The more concrete and detailed a building/development proposal is, the more specific and informative this dialogue process can be to best assist and support the client
- Regulations are dynamic—it is important for the client to understand that ‘the rules’ can change, therefore keeping current is extremely important in preparing a strong application
- There are many different types of clients that require diverse supports
- Roughly 60% of our clients are ‘potential first-time builders’ and ‘regular return builders/contractors’; these groups take up the most departmental time and resources—as such, the strategies and activities in this Plan reflect this

Section 1: Analysis

1.1 About the Commission

The Greater Miramichi Regional Service Commission (GMRSC), initially Regional Service Commission #5 (RSC#5), was formed on January 1, 2013. The GMRSC is a consolidation of the former Miramichi Planning District Commission (MPDC) and the Northumberland Solid Waste Commission (NSWC).

The GMRSC is given legislative authority through the provincial *Regional Service Delivery Act*. The Commission currently provides Planning and Building Services and Solid Waste Services to its member municipalities (City of Miramichi, Villages of Blackville and Doaktown), Rural Community of Upper Miramichi, and unincorporated communities (Local Service Districts(LSDs)). Future services of the GMRSC may include, but are not limited to: regional planning; regional emergency and measures planning; regional policing collaboration; and regional sport, recreation, and cultural infrastructure planning and cost-sharing.

The primary role and mandate of GMRSC Planning Services is to:

- 1) Develop and maintain planning, building, and subdivision by-laws for communities in the Greater Miramichi Region;
- 2) Develop and maintain operational policies, procedures, and guidelines for Planning Services staff and the Planning Review and Adjustment Committee (PRAC);
- 3) In helping to prepare building, development, and subdivision applications,
 - a. Provide information to clients;
 - b. Facilitate meetings for clients; and
 - c. Refer clients to appropriate departments or agencies
- 4) Regulate development and land use through reviewing applications and enforcing building/development by-laws and provincial regulations.

Planning Services is thus a quasi-governmental regulator and facilitator. The department promotes a client-driven application process wherein the client takes ownership of the process and staff strives to build client capacity through assisting and providing the necessary supports where possible. Due to potential conflict of interest and limited time and resources, staff cannot act as builders, contractors, technicians, or other qualified professionals in the application process.

It is also important to differentiate the building/development application process from other application processes. In other government application processes (e.g. applying to have your driver's license renewed), a 'complete form' often means a 'complete application' — requirements are often addressed through a brief 'one size fits all' checklist and there is little to no dialogue between the regulator and client.

In contrast, the building/development permit application process often involves a back-and-forth dialogue between the regulator (e.g. Building Inspector and/or Planner) and the client, as

the building/development proposal is ‘firmed up’ with increased detail. There are often slight variations to each application that create unique regulatory challenges—in other words, a ‘one size fits all’ checklist is not possible for all building/development proposals. As a general rule of thumb, the more concrete and detailed a building/development proposal is, the more specific and informative this dialogue process can be to best assist and support the client. Clients need to be aware and informed of this unique application process.

1.2 Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of this Plan is to develop an overarching framework for assisting and supporting clients. This framework entails two types of approaches:

Direct Approaches

Direct approaches include regular interactions with clients through various forms of media or facilitation strategies (e.g. providing information, facilitating meetings, offering or setting up support sessions). These are the core approaches in supporting clients in preparing applications.

Indirect Approaches

Indirect approaches include more intangible strategies in supporting clients in preparing applications. This includes promoting a positive and inviting culture of cooperation, openness, and professionalism; and strengthening relationships with key stakeholders in order to leverage client supports that cannot be offered directly through Planning Services.

1.3 Client Profiles

This Plan focuses on assisting and supporting the following client profiles. Application volumes from the 2014 Annual Report are used to estimate the percentage of clients served on an annual basis.

- 1) **Potential first-time builders (25%)** – This category generally includes local home owners looking to begin residential projects such as houses, fences, accessory buildings, small additions, etc. This category may also include small business owners interested in small-scale commercial site improvements (e.g. signs and small-scale renovations). These clients may or may not hire other individuals to see their project through. They are unlikely to return to Planning Services once they have attained a building/development permit.
- 2) **Regular return builders/contractors (35%)** – This category generally includes local builders, contractors, and technicians that submit applications to our office on a regular basis. They are generally familiar with the building/development application process through experience, but still run into roadblocks for various reasons (e.g. not keeping current with a dynamic regulatory context).
- 3) **External developers (≤5%)** – This category generally includes non-local (inter)national consultancy firms that specialize in the building/development application process. They often perform work for commercial chains and local franchise owners. They are

proficient in working in a dynamic regulatory context, as it is an inherent requirement for success in working in various municipalities.

- 4) **Regular subdivision applicants (15%)** – This category generally includes local licensed surveyors and lawyers that submit applications to our office on a regular basis. These clients are generally familiar and comfortable with the application process.
- 5) **Regular administrative request clients (20%)** – This category generally includes realtors, lawyers, and property appraisers seeking confirmations of zoning, zoning compliance letters, and building inspection reports. These clients are also generally familiar and comfortable with making these administrative requests.

The bulk of the clients of Planning Services fall under 1) and 2), in which roughly **60% are ‘potential first-time builders’ and ‘regular return builders/contractors’**. Unlike 4) subdivision applications and 5) administrative requests, building/development permit applications also take up more departmental time and resources. Therefore, the overall resources allotted to 1) and 2) are in actuality much higher than 70%. As such, strategies and activities in this Plan should largely be focused on this group.

Identifying target audiences is necessary in order to best tailor approaches that address the needs of all clients. Although Planning Services is unbiased and treats all clients equally, not all clients require the same supports through the application process. For example, a realtor may simply benefit from an intuitive, user-friendly website in order to quickly and efficiently locate the zoning of a property. However, a first-time builder interested in constructing a garage may require more ‘hands on’ support and assistance in following through with the development/building permit application process (e.g. a meeting with a Building Inspector to discuss any pertinent regulations and to receive any take-home materials such as informational booklets and/or checklists in order to prepare his/her application).

It is also important to note that not all application proposals are destined for approval. Planning Services will assist applicants in preparing the strongest application possible given the unique contextual constraints of the proposal. Notwithstanding a strong proposal, the application may still be denied for various reasons—e.g. staff assists a client in preparing a re-zoning proposal in which Council ultimately has the final say in approving or denying the application.

1.4 Strengths, Weaknesses, Challenges, and Possibilities

The following strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and possibilities are taken from the *Madawaska Planning Commission – Communication / Marketing Plan (2010)* (now Northwest Regional Service Commission (NRSC)). These were developed by the author, consultant group Productions Rouj (2010, pp. 8 – 9), through extensive consultations with clients and regional stakeholders. Although both Regions are contextually distinct, parallels exist between the Northwest Region and the Greater Miramichi Region (e.g. population size, rural character, same statutory context). Underlined statements have questionable relevance and **bolded** statements have been added as they are relevant to Planning Services.

Strengths

- 1) The Commission is perceived, both internally and externally, as an organization composed of experienced and competent employees who offer quality services.
- 2) The Commission has the advantage of playing a role within the Madawaska [Greater Miramichi] region.
- 3) The Commission uses high-quality technology in its daily operations.
- 4) The location of the Commission's offices is seen as an advantage.
- 5) Its staff is knowledgeable and well acquainted with the legislation. **Staff also has diverse skillsets and educational backgrounds in addition to their specific roles in the office.**
- 6) The Commission participates in various regional development projects.
- 7) The services offered have been noticeably enhanced over the last few years.
- 8) **The Commission is able to draw bilingual staff from neighbouring French communities that are in close proximity but are not within the predominantly Anglophone Greater Miramichi Region.**

Weaknesses

- 1) Partners and the public at large have a poor or erroneous knowledge of the Commission's services.
- 2) The Commission's relationship with its customers would benefit from enhancement. Due to its mandate to enforce laws and regulations, the Commission is sometimes perceived as a "police" entity.
- 3) The Commission has to deal with legal and professional constraints arising from its reduced staff and the lack of knowledge.
- 4) For good or bad, the Commission is perceived as an organization focusing primarily on Edmundston [the City of Miramichi] rather than on the other small communities it serves.
- 5) Customers believe their requests take too long to be processed.
- 6) Refusals should be better explained to customers.
- 7) Customers feel a lack of support in preparing their requests and cases. Besides, submittal procedures are not very clear.
- 8) There seems to be a perception of lack of continuity and consistency in the responses given to similar issues.
- 9) The Commission is not always seen as a partner or a service centre.
- 10) Services seem to slow down during busy periods because of staff taking their vacations.
- 11) Business hours do not seem to suit certain customers.
- 12) The sharing of responsibilities between the City of Edmundston [Miramichi] and the Madawaska Planning [Greater Miramichi Regional Service] Commission create confusion and frustration among customers.

Challenges

- 1) To project an objective and positive image by increasing the Commission's presence and assistance in the community.
- 2) To obtain appropriate provincial funding to continue improving the services offered.

- 3) To become a reliable, essential partner for all community planning projects.
- 4) To prepare a long-term and annual planning, and to share it with partners, staff and municipalities. [Addressed through the 'Greater Miramichi Regional Service Commission – Operational Workplan (2014 – 2016)]
- 5) To shorten processing time for customer requests and provide a better explanation for occasional extended processing time.
- 6) To improve customer and partner perception and operate as a service centre.
- 7) To create a one-stop centre for all community planning services in Edmundston [the Greater Miramichi Region].

Possibilities

- 1) To take advantage of the municipalities network to promote the role, expertise and services the Commission can offer.
- 2) To form partnerships with other commissions in the province for certain projects.
- 3) To develop leadership with partners and municipalities in certain specific projects.
- 4) To hold meetings with commissioners more often in order to expedite processing of certain requests or to allow urban development decision makers greater flexibility.
- 5) To ensure full service availability at times of great demand (March - November).
- 6) To change the name "Commission d'urbanisme du Madawaska" to "Commission d'aménagement du Madawaska" in order to better portray the agency's mandate.
- 7) To improve communication tools for the main types of projects.

Negative preconceptions and the misunderstanding of the function of the department are thus not unique to Planning Services. It is likely that the above-noted weaknesses and challenges are, to some degree, relevant to all regulatory planning departments. However, this does not abdicate the department from further promoting its overall function and the positive, efficient, and effective delivery of services to better support and assist clients. The following sections thus outline goals and objectives, and associated strategies and activities, to illustrate how Planning Services is addressing these concerns currently and over the next two years.

Section 2: Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives outline a framework for assisting and supporting clients. The goals reflect the direct and indirect approaches outlined in subsection 1.2.

Goal 1: To convey the function of Planning Services

Goal 1 focuses on conveying and reinforcing the overall function and purpose of Planning Services. Many clients do not understand what it is that Planning Services does or why the department is needed. This misunderstanding often leads to negative preconceptions in which Planning Services is viewed as a bureaucratic entity whose sole purpose is to create regulatory barriers.

Objective 1.1: To emphasize the specific role and mandate of Planning Services

The primary role and mandate of Planning Services is outlined in subsection 1.1. As described in 2), the department will:

[In helping to prepare building, development, and subdivision applications,]

- a. Provide information to clients;
- b. Facilitate meetings for clients; and
- c. Refer clients to appropriate departments or agencies

It is important for clients to understand that Planning Services cannot act as builders, contractors, consultants, or other qualified professionals in the application process. The onus of responsibility to hire the right individuals and prepare the application ultimately lies with the client.

It is also important for clients to understand the unique nature of the building/development application process as highlighted above in subsection 1.1. Accepting that the process involves dialogue and working cooperatively together, as opposed to ‘submitting and hoping for the best,’ is equally important as understanding the role and mandate of Planning Services.

Objective 1.2: To promote the range of services offered by Planning Services

Planning Services currently offers many services in assisting clients in preparing applications. Such services include, but are not limited to Developer Assistance Committee (DAC) meetings, ‘Planning’ and ‘Building’ informational booklet series and the ‘My building-development project’ guides on www.greatermiramichirsc.ca. However, many clients are unaware of such services. Planning Services needs to increasingly advertise and promote its key services to be of use to clients.

Objective 1.3: To convey the importance and rationale supporting sound community planning and building practices

Many clients do not understand why Planning Services exists. As mentioned above, many clients and members of the public view Planning Services as a bureaucratic department whose sole purpose is to create regulatory barriers; or mistakenly believe the key purpose is to foster/promote economic development.

However, the core principles underlying the regulatory framework that Planning Services is responsible to develop, maintain, and/or enforce include promoting safe, healthy, and environmentally sustainable buildings, developments, and neighbourhoods. Our work is thus focused on facilitating culturally vibrant, economically viable, and physically active communities wherein nuisance activities are avoided or mitigated. Planning Services needs to convey the foundational principles underlying its day-to-day operations in order for clients and members of the public to better appreciate the department’s relevance in the community.

Goal 2: To create a more positive, inviting, and professional image of Planning Services

Goal 2 focuses on fostering a department that is on the whole positive, inviting, and professional. Clients may feel intimidated and marginalized by the application process if they hold negative preconceptions about the department.

Objective 2.1: To promote openness and transparency in the day-to-day operations of Planning Services

Planning Services should convey an overall sense of openness and transparency. Clients and the public should not feel as though the department operates behind closed doors. This objective is intrinsically linked with Goal 1 in which clients and the public should be made aware of the overall function of Planning Services. However, in order to protect the privacy of our clients in accordance with the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, not all information can be made public. Clients and the public must also be made aware of the limits of openness and transparency of the day-to-day operations of the department.

Objective 2.2: To increase and strengthen the lines of communication between Planning Services and the public

Objective 2.2 relates directly to Objective 2.1 wherein openness and transparency are promoted through strengthening communication with the public. Through various forms of media, the public should be made aware of the operations of Planning Services. The department currently updates the public primarily through posting the Annual Report, meeting minutes and agendas on the website. However, communication can be strengthened through other means such as but not limited to posting on social media sites, newspaper ads, and conducting web polls. Strengthening communication should be viewed as a ‘two-way street’ in which clients and members of the public are given the opportunity to provide ideas and suggestions on services offered by Planning Services.

Objective 2.3: To convey the diverse skillsets and education offered to the public by Commission employees

Creating a more positive, inviting, and professional image of Planning Services also entails personalizing the department. Clients and members of the public should be made aware that their tax dollars are being well spent on employing competent individuals that are skilled and qualified in their specific areas of expertise. This Objective can be achieved through such strategies as but not limited to posting employee profiles on the website detailing educational backgrounds, skillsets, training, etc.

Objective 2.4: To foster an office climate that is comfortable, inviting, and unthreatening

Clients should be comfortable approaching the department in asking for assistance or initiating the application process. The office climate should be comfortable, inviting, and unthreatening. This may include such strategies as but not limited to increasing amenities in the waiting room (e.g. more comfortable furniture, office plants, children’s toys, etc.).

Goal 3: To help support client-driven improvement of requisite skills and knowledge

As outlined in subsection 1.1, Planning Services supports a client-based application process in which the department assists clients through providing information, facilitating meetings, and referring clients to appropriate departments and agencies. The client should take responsibility in the application process by becoming familiar with the forms, plans, and any other required documentation; in other words, the client should take adequate ownership and be willing to build capacity to participate efficiently in the process. The department supports, but is not ultimately responsible for, clients improving their requisite skills and knowledge. The following Objectives outline how Planning Services can help provide these supports to clients.

Objective 3.1: To provide info directly to clients in a structured, organized, and intuitive manner

Clients should not feel lost in searching for information. Informational media, such as website walk-throughs, info booklets, checklists, etc., should be presented in a structured and organized way that is intuitive for the user. Wherever possible, media should be referenced by series, reference numbers, and colour codes. All media should be interlinked wherever possible.

Objective 3.2: To run in-house educational sessions for clients

In the past, Planning Services ran conventional in-house educational sessions for clients in which staff members present to clients and members of the public regarding specific planning and building topics (e.g. the 2014 ‘Before you Build’ seminar in the Village of Doaktown). However, there are other educational session formats that are less formal and may be more inviting and unthreatening for clients such as, but not limited to, general information sessions focusing on the role and mandate of the department. These less informal sessions may be less structured and more inquiry-based thus complementing the client-driven application process.

Objective 3.3: To facilitate external educational sessions for clients

Planning Services does not have the resources or capacity to run all educational sessions for clients. Further, the department is not certified to run certain types of workshops and training sessions that clients may require for improving requisite skills and knowledge for the application

process. However, Planning Services can act as a facilitator in organizing sessions for clients or referring clients to the appropriate third party educators/trainers.

Goal 4: To establish and maintain relationships with stakeholder groups that can also help support clients

Goal 4 focuses on building and maintaining strong relationships with other stakeholder groups that can also help support clients. Planning Services should focus on leveraging potential supports offered by other groups, which the department is unable to provide due to financial, resource, staff, or legal constraints. Planning Services should adopt an inter-organizational approach to supporting clients wherein the department functions as the building/development support hub for the Greater Miramichi Region.

Objective 4.1: To establish and maintain relationships with other Regional Service Commissions and governmental organizations

Strengthening ties with other Regional Service Commissions and municipal planning/building departments can provide further insight into how to better provide support services to clients. These departments have similar challenges and opportunities and may have unique approaches to assisting clients. Further, establishing and maintaining relationships with other provincial departments involved in the building/development permit application process is also imperative to supporting clients. This may include, but is not limited to making provincial regulatory information accessible to clients from the Planning Services office.

Objective 4.2: To establish and maintain relationships with other local and regional stakeholder groups to better assist our clients in the application process

In addition to establishing and maintaining better relationships with other Regional Service Commissions and governmental organizations, it is also important to take a similar approach with other local and regional stakeholder groups. Potential groups include but are not limited to the Miramichi Valley Business Association, Miramichi Chamber of Commerce, and the New Brunswick branch of the Canadian Home Builders' Association (CHBA). One important function other stakeholder groups may play is keeping an ongoing reference list of builders, contractors, technicians, and other qualified professionals. Due to potential conflict of interest as a quasi-governmental organization, Planning Services is unable to keep and maintain such a reference.

Section 3: Strategies and Activities

The following strategies and activities are the means of achieving the above-noted goals and objectives. This list is not static or exhaustive, and should thus be updated and maintained as the Plan is implemented. Notwithstanding 'Section 4: Implementation and Budget,' a degree of flexibility is required in implementing the following.

3.1 Reference for Builders, Contractors, Technicians, and Other Qualified Professionals

Clients regularly ask for a list of builders, contractors, technicians, or other qualified professionals in proceeding with the building/development permit application process. However, Planning Services is unable to provide this information due to a potential conflict of interest. This basic information is critical to the success of applications, as the strength of an application can hinge on the quality of work completed by the above-noted individuals. This strategy relates directly with Objective 4.2 in which establishing and maintaining relationships with other local and regional stakeholder groups can potentially leverage client supports that cannot be provided directly through Planning Services. However, Planning Services can help by providing a list of categories to the stakeholder group(s) wishing to participate in this initiative (such categories may include, but are not limited to residential site plans, more complex site plans, geotechnical reports, storm water management plans, etc.).

3.2 General Information Sessions

General information sessions, where staff present to members of the public and potential clients, may be used for conveying the function of Planning Services and to create a more positive, inviting, and professional image of the department (i.e. for achieving Goals 1 and 2). These sessions can also be used to give basic, general information about building/development requirements in the area. Further, this strategy may include a series of general information sessions (e.g. quarterly sessions such as: 1. About Planning Services – Role and Mandate, 2. About Development/Building Permits and Fees, 3. About Garages and Other Accessory Buildings, 4. About Fences and Signs, etc.). This format should not be used to give in-depth information on specific, complex regulatory changes.

3.3 Regular Return Builders/Contractors Focused Sessions

As opposed general information sessions, focused sessions can be used to give information on specific, complex regulatory changes (e.g. key changes to energy efficiency requirements in the 2010 National Building Code (NBC) of Canada). Depending on the nature of the topic, Planning Services may or may not run these sessions.

3.3.1 Directing Clients to Sessions offered by Third Party Trainers/Educators

Planning Services should, when able and a conflict of interest does not exist, direct regular return builders/contractors to third party trainers/educators who offer focused sessions. This may include, but is not limited to sessions offered by the New Brunswick Building Officials Association (NBBOA), Province of New Brunswick, or the New Brunswick branch of the Canadian Home Builders' Association (CHBA).

3.3.2 Working with Stakeholders to Organize Sessions offered by Third Party Trainers/Educators

Planning Services may also work directly with other stakeholders in organizing sessions to be offered by third party trainers/educators. This may include working with other departments/agencies, organizations, businesses, etc. in co-sponsoring training sessions. This strategy may be proactive or responsive in which Planning Services identifies a need and proactively spearheads sessions, or wherein regular return builders/contractors approach Planning Services to help organize sessions.

3.3.3 Sessions Offered Directly by Planning Services

Planning Services may directly offer focused sessions to regular return builders/contractors. This strategy should be used subsequent to preferred strategies 3.3.1 and 3.3.2, as departmental time and resources are limited. Sessions may be offered in specific areas where a need is present but no sessions are offered by third party trainers/educators.

3.4 Developer Assistance Committee (DAC) Meetings

Developer Assistance Committee (DAC) meetings are used to bring up main challenges and opportunities that the client should be made aware of in the pre-application stage of complex projects. Generally speaking, the main function of the meeting is to identify 'red flags' early on as opposed to being surprised during the official application review process. The meeting cannot, nor should it, function as a comprehensive review of the project, as not all information is available at this stage. The client should use information discussed at the meeting to modify and improve the application in preparation for final submission. According to Zucker Systems (2015), there are various DAC committee models that planning offices use to help support clients. The DAC model currently used at Planning Services is best categorized as:

3. Committee that Includes the Applicant

This model makes the most sense in communicating with the applicant and actually solving issues around the table. We worked with a great model of this in an Arizona community and they went around the table solving problems, except when they got to the City Engineers representative. He always had the same answer, "I will need to check and get back with you." Our solution was simple, we asked the City Engineer to send someone to the meeting who could make decisions."

Some guidelines for facilitating DAC meetings include:

- The meeting should be structured, including a circulated agenda in advance, and chaired by a Planning Services staff member
- The client should be briefed on the importance of taking notes, as the meeting is ultimately for their benefit
- The meeting should be arranged only if the proposal is sufficiently complex and would benefit from the relationships and discourse between multiple decision-making

- individuals; a DAC meeting is not a ‘one size fits all’ approach to the application process, as it is overkill for simple, more straightforward proposals
- All members should be prepared by reviewing all circulated pre-application materials in advance of the meeting
 - Departmental/agency representatives require at least one individual with decision-making authority to attend the meeting

3.5 Website

The website should function as the information hub for Planning Services. Although not all clients and members of the public are tech savvy and may not avail of this support service, it nonetheless provides an opportunity to organize all resources in one location. It is also a platform to interlink with other social media outlets.

Current services provided on the website include:

- Home page ‘Quick Links’ section
- ‘My Building-Development Project’ walk-throughs
- Interlinked ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ page
- ‘Latest News’, ‘Upcoming Meetings & Events’, and live calendar

Future services may be added as required.

3.6 Communications Strategy

A communications strategy is required to achieve Goals 1 and 2. As highlighted in Objective 2.2, strengthening communication should be viewed as a ‘two-way street’ in which clients and members of the public are given the opportunity to provide ideas and suggestions on services offered by Planning Services. The following table outlines some ways of providing outgoing information to the various client profiles described in subsection 1.3. The potential to communicate with each group is further outlined by ‘high’, ‘med’, or ‘low’ estimations. Please note that the table is a generalization, as demographics within each client profile will likely influence preferred form(s) of communication.

Outgoing Communication	1) Potential first-time builders	2) Regular return builders/contractors	3) External developers	4) Regular subdivision applicants	5) Regular administrative request clients
Newspaper notices	High	Med	Low	Low	Low
Home newsletters	High	Med	Low	Low	Low
Flyers and posters	High	Med	Low	Low	Low
Info booklet and pamphlet displays	Med	High	Low	Low	Low
Social media	Med	Low	Low	Low	Low
Website updates	Med	Med	High	Low	High
Emailing list	Low	High	Low	High	High
Texting list	Low	High	Low	High	High

Some ways of providing opportunities for ingoing information (i.e. for clients to provide ideas and suggestions on services) include but are not limited to:

- Comments boxes
- On-line questionnaires (e.g. Facebook, or Survey Monkey or Google Forms via the website)

3.7 Take-home Materials

As per Objective 3.1, take-home materials, such as pamphlets, booklets, cards, forms etc., should be organized and presented in an organized, accessible, and intuitive way. Wherever possible, materials should be referenced by series, reference numbers, and colour codes. For example, the information booklets are currently organized by series ('Building' and 'Planning') and have

reference numbers and publication dates. Regulatory jargon should be minimized wherever possible and terms defined where necessary.

3.8 Integration of Informational Media

This strategy is also directly related to Objective 3.1 in which all media should be interlinked wherever possible. As mentioned above, the website should function as the information hub for Planning Services. Electronic versions of take-home materials, on-line resources, and other informational media should be interlinked in a convenient and intuitive way. For example, the 'My Building-Development' walkthroughs regularly refer to the information booklets which provide additional supports for the application process.

3.9 Office Presentation

This strategy relates directly with Objective 2.4 in which Planning Services should foster an office climate that is comfortable, inviting, and unthreatening. However, the office should also be viewed as an opportunity to educate and support clients through the presentation of media. This may be achieved by, but not limited to, the following:

- Series of building, planning, and subdivision topic posters
- Information screen with scrolling messages
- Organization/presentation of take-home materials

3.10 Meeting Etiquette

Improving meeting etiquette can also help support and assist clients in the application process. Facilitating structured, efficient, on-task and on-time meetings can greatly help support the client in being organized and informed on how to best proceed. According to the Planning Commissioners Journal (2014) in response to a questionnaire submitted to various U.S. Planning Commissions, respondents regularly reported 'meeting etiquette and attitudes' as central to improving the effectiveness of their planning commissions. The author summarizes common responses from the questionnaire:

- "Be respectful with staff and developers and change the tone at meetings."
- "Leave personal agendas at home. Always."
- "One member arrives late frequently. Curbing this would be less disruptive."
- "Need to try harder to be objective." ...

A different meeting format may be used depending on the stage, nature, and complexity of the application (e.g. a more structured meeting approach may be required for larger DAC meetings involving numerous department and agency representatives). For any meeting or presentation, staff should always be on-time, on-task, polite, respectful, objective, prepared, and proactive.

3.11 Employee Professional Development

Planning Services should increase employee professional development in areas that develop skills and approaches that can improve client support. Although workshops and seminars for

improving theoretical and regulatory knowledge are critical, developing skills and approaches should be as equally important. Some potential areas include but are not limited to the following:

- Conflict management/resolution
- Adult education
- Project management
- Public relations
- Media/communications

3.12 Builder/Developer Awards Programs

Builder/developer awards programs, such as the proposed ‘Silver Shingle Award,’ are opportunities to recognize clients that have completed exemplary developments in the region. They are also an opportunity to achieve Goal 2, wherein a more positive, inviting, and professional image of Planning Services is fostered. This strategy provides positive reinforcement to support clients in the development process (i.e. clients may feel increasingly motivated to facilitate high quality developments to be given such recognition and reward).

3.13 Inter-agency Meetings

The annual inter-agency meetings are an opportunity to help meet ‘Objective 4.1: To establish and maintain relationships with other Regional Service Commissions and governmental organizations.’ Meetings typically include, but are not limited to Planning Services staff, City of Miramichi and provincial departmental representatives. Each meeting is an opportunity for all agencies and departments to brief the group on key regulatory changes, new projects and initiatives.

3.14 “Pop-up” Info Booth

Planning Services currently participates in the annual Miramichi Home & Community Showcase by staffing an information booth. The booth typically includes an informational poster, map of regional service area, and take-home materials. This format is an informal and positive way of informing the public about the overall function of the department. This format can also be used in various ‘pop-up’ locations throughout the Region. Potential locations may include high pedestrian traffic areas such as retail stores, community centres and events.

3.15 Community-based Projects and Initiatives

Spearheading and actively participating in community-based projects and initiatives is an effective way of achieving ‘Goal 2: To create a more positive, inviting, and professional image of Planning Services.’ Examples of previous initiatives include donating food and gifts to the Salvation Army for families in need, volunteering for the Solid Waste Services household hazardous waste pickup days, and donating recyclables to the SPCA. Other potential initiatives, which help the organization build a more positive presence in the community, include

participating in community events (e.g. Miramichi Dragon Boat Festival) or lending specialist services to non-profit, community-based organizations (e.g. assist with mapping projects).

3.16 Completion/Compliance Incentive Programs

The current regulatory framework for incomplete and non-compliant developments includes mainly negative reinforcement strategies (e.g. an Order to Comply will be issued if non-compliance is discovered; this may be followed up by legal action at the discretion of the respective municipal council). However, a completion/compliance incentive program may be a much more effective positive reinforcement strategy in which clients receive a 'completion/compliance rebate' for following through with their approved plans and achieving building/development compliance. As with Builder/Developer Awards Programs, this initiative aims to support and foster success in the building/development application process. Planning Services will explore options and feasibility of the program in 2016.

Section 4: Implementation and Budget

This Section provides a framework for implementation and budget planning. As mentioned in Section 3, the framework should be used as a guideline in moving forward. A degree of flexibility may be required in preparing for and launching strategies and activities.

4.1 Implementation Time Line

A general implementation time line for 'Section 3: Strategies and Activities' is found below in subsections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2. Items are organized by the main Goals in Section 2. However, some items fall under multiple goals; an attempt is thus made to best categorize items.

The implementation time line also reflects common initiatives found in the GMRSC 'Operational Workplan (2014 – 2016)'. This Plan falls under the 'Corporate Services (CS)' and 'Planning Services (PS),' service categories. 'Services/projects' which this Plan addresses include:

Corporate Services (CS)

Public Relations / Communications (CS – 3)

- 1) Implement a public relations/communications program, including corporate branding & media releases.
- 2) Develop and implement annual Excellence Recognition Awards for solid waste & planning/development initiative/projects by clients, organizations etc.
- 3) Assist with planning and support for outreach activities by Board & members with public, stakeholders & other agencies
- 4) Website improvement, including corporate consolidation activities, corporate branding for GMRSC & addition of French (translation) content
- 8) Maintain good working relations and make presentations to community & business organizations, other agencies, development/real estate industry groups, member

Municipal Councils and LSD Regional Advisory Committee, regarding issues, roles & activities of GMRSC

Planning Services (PS)

Building Permit & Inspection (PS – 1)

- 6) Update Info sheets/pamphlets regarding building permits & inspections “FAQs”
- 7) NBBOA training for 1 Inspector to achieve Levels 1 & 2 and another 2 Inspectors to achieve Level 3

Development Support (PS – 2)

- 1) Responding to Inquiries (Info & Advice) –Zoning & Development & Subdividing land
- 12) Initiate & coordinate Developer Assistance Committee (DAC) meetings

Long-range Planning (Policy & Projects) (PS – 4)

- 10) attend, make presentations to, coordinate Inter-Agency meetings

Administration/Management/Professional Development (PS – 5)

- 9) Junior Planner training – CIP Ethics course, NB Property law
- 10) GIS Specialist training – ESRI Canada conference (Atlantic Region)
- 11) Planning Services Manager – professional development (APA annual conference)
- 12) participate in Planning Directors meetings
- 13) planning staff participation in NB Association of Planners & Canadian Institute of Planner Continuous Professional Learning events

Public Relations & Education

- 1) major revision/update to content & format of Planning Service website, including addition of portals designed for major client groups & types of development
- 2) Monthly Media releases on selected topics, incl. use of social media
- 3) Info Pamphlets on selected topics
- 4) Corporate presentations- revamp & standardization
- 5) info booth at Miramichi Spring Lifestyles Show

4.1.1 Strategies and Activities – 2016

Strategies & Activities	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
P : Preparation L : Launch O : Ongoing												
<i>Goal 1: To convey the function of Planning Services</i>												
General Information Sessions (3.3) (≈ 2/yr)	P	P	P	L	P	P	P	L	P	P	P	P
Communications Strategy (3.7)	P	P	P	L	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Pop-up Info Booth (3.14) (≈ 2/yr)	P	P	P	L	P	P	P	L	P	P	P	P
<i>Goal 2: To create a more positive, inviting, and professional image of Planning Services</i>												
Office Presentation (3.10)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Builder/Developer Awards Programs (3.11)	P	P	P	P	P	P	L	P	P	P	P	P
Community-based Projects and Initiatives (3.15)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
<i>Goal 3: To help support client-drive improvement of requisite skills and knowledge</i>												
Regular Return Builders/Contractors Focused Sessions (3.4)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Developer Assistance Committee (DAC) Meetings (3.5)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Website (3.6)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Take-home Materials (3.8)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Integration of Informational Media (3.9)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Meeting Etiquette (3.11)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Employee Professional Development (3.12)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Completion/Compliance Incentive Programs (3.16)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
<i>Goal 4: To establish and maintain relationships with stakeholder groups that can also help support clients</i>												
Reference for Builders, Contractors, Technicians, and Other Qualified Professionals (3.1)	P	L	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Interdepartmental Committee Meetings (3.15) (≈ 1/yr)	P	L	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P

4.1.2 Strategies and Activities – 2017

Strategies & Activities	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
P : Preparation I : Implementation L : Launch												
<i>Goal 1: To convey the function of Planning Services</i>												
General Information Sessions (3.3) (≈ 2/yr)	P	P	P	L	P	P	P	L	P	P	P	P
Communications Strategy (3.7)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Pop-up Info Booth (3.14)	P	P	P	L	P	P	P	L	P	P	P	P
<i>Goal 2: To create a more positive, inviting, and professional image of Planning Services</i>												
Office Presentation (3.10)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Builder/Developer Awards Programs (3.11)	P	P	P	P	P	P	L	P	P	P	P	P
Community-based Projects and Initiatives (3.15)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
<i>Goal 3: To help support client-drive improvement of requisite skills and knowledge</i>												
Regular Return Builders/Contractors Focused Sessions (3.4)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Developer Assistance Committee (DAC) Meetings (3.5)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Website (3.6)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Take-home Materials (3.8)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Integration of Informational Media (3.9)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Meeting Etiquette (3.11)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Employee Professional Development (3.12)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Completion/Compliance Incentive Programs (3.16)	P	P	P	L	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
<i>Goal 4: To establish and maintain relationships with stakeholder groups that can also help support clients</i>												
Reference for Builders, Contractors, Technicians, and Other Qualified Professionals (3.1)	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Interdepartmental Committee Meetings (3.15) (≈ 1/yr)	P	L	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P

4.2 Budget Template

The strategies and activities included in the proposed time line must be accompanied by budget planning; the following template may be used as an example for budget planning.

#	Strategy or Activity	Provider	Notes	Cost
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
...				Total Cost

Section 5: Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is needed to verify whether or not targets have been reached and to what extent (Production Rouj, 2010). This may affect the nature and variety of strategies and activities offered in the future, and their implementation and budget planning. Monitoring and evaluation practices also help to achieve 'Objective 2.2: To increase and strengthen the lines of communication between Planning Services and the public.' Productions Rouj (2010, p.31) outlines the following as measures for monitoring and evaluation:

- Apply a customer satisfaction survey once a year.
- Evaluate the number and nature of website visits each month.
- Welcome customer comments and, if necessary, conduct a more formal activity once a year.
- Apply an evaluation questionnaire at the end of each information/training session. Assess trends.
- Set up a questions/comments e-mail address in the website.

Section 6: References

1. Planning Commissioners Journal (2014). Retrieved on October 15, 2015 from: <http://plannersweb.com/2014/10/one-thing-improve-planning-commissions-effectiveness/>
2. Production Rouj (2010). Madawaska Planning Commission – Communciation / Marketing Plan. Retrieved directly from the Northwest Regional Service Commission.
3. Zucker Systems (2015). Retrieved on October 15, 2015 from: <http://zuckersystems.com/development-review-committees/>