

Nelson Vendors Market Society (NVMS)
Proposal for Transition of the Nelson Farmers Market to NVMS
Submitted to: City of Nelson
Submitted by: Nelson Vendors Market Society (NVMS)
Date: December 2, 2025

INTRODUCTION:

The Nelson Vendors Market Society (NVMS) is a newly formed, not-for-profit, vendor-led organization established in early 2025. We are local business owners, food producers, and vendors. Our purpose is to strengthen, protect, and enhance the long-term sustainability of Nelson's markets. We currently have 42 members and are still growing.

Collectively, NVMS leadership brings over 16 years of experience managing large community events on and off City property, including vendor management, grant writing, social media content creation, website development, easy application processing, promotions/advertising, bookkeeping, CRA compliance, staffing, payroll and overseeing events with more than 120 vendors. We have created a 4500 + customer email base and a 700-person vendor list.

Our board member are all vendors and have traveled throughout BC and AB vending at large indoor and outdoor events for over a decade. We have all had experience on NFP boards and are proficient in following policy and procedures as well as filing paperwork accurately and in a timely fashion.

Over this past year, there has been increasing public interest in the Nelson Farmers Market. Throughout 2025, vendors, farmers and community members voiced growing concern about the long-term stability, rising fees, administrative complexity, and uncertainty around market location of the Nelson Farmers Market. Due to ongoing and upcoming construction on Baker Street, community members and vendors are concerned. For many of them, especially local farmers, their livelihoods depend on these types of markets.

NVMS proposes a collaborative, structured transition that reduces administrative pressure on the City, increased community involvement, and aligns Nelson with proven models used in Kamloops, Vernon, Revelstoke, and Kimberley.

NVMS is offering a 3 phases proposal

This partnership-based proposal:

- Reduces financial and administrative pressure on the City
- Aligns Nelson with other successful BC communities

- Supports local food security
- Strengthens the vendor community
- Protects the cultural and historical importance of the market.

This is not a request for takeover. This is a request for shared solutions and a partnership model based on provincial best practices.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Historically, the Nelson Farmers Market was operated by a community-led non-profit. During COVID-19, operations temporarily transitioned to the City of Nelson for public health coordination and temporary stability.

Many BC communities experienced this same temporary shift. In every case, once the City's crisis-period role was complete, markets returned to non-profit management.

The following BC cities experienced nearly identical transitions:

Kamloops

City stepped in temporarily → administrative complexity increased → vendors pushed for return to a vendor-led society → transitioned back.

Vernon

City involvement led to vendor frustration and rising fees → transitioned to a non-profit vendor society.

Revelstoke

City-run markets struggled with staffing and budgeting → returned to vendor-led management.

Kimberley

City took over during infrastructure upgrades → community and vendor pushback → society restored independent management.

Nelson is following this same lifecycle. The transition back to a non-profit is not unprecedented but consistent with provincial patterns.

CURRENT CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY THE CITY

The City has publicly acknowledged:

- significant staffing hours required to manage the markets over diverse departments
- difficulty tracking vendor cash fee collection
- challenges issuing CRA-compliant receipts
- administrative pressure from multiple special event permits
- budget overruns of \$30,000+
- increased pressure due to ongoing and upcoming Baker Street construction
- meeting diverse vendor expectations

These challenges are not unique to Nelson. This is exactly why other BC municipalities transitioned markets back to non-profit governance.

BENEFITS OF PARTNERING WITH NVMS

1. Substantial Decrease in City Burdens and Staff Workload

NVMS can take over:

- vendor communication and application processing
- market layout & scheduling
- daily logistics
- on-site operations and staffing coordination
- conflict resolution and vendor support
- bookkeeping and digital record keeping
- social media, branding, and marketing
- safety coordination and operational planning

This shifts hundreds of staff hours away from municipal staff.

2. Financial Sustainability With Access to Grants the City Cannot Apply For Less Financial Burden on Taxpayers

NVMS unlocks key grants unavailable to municipalities, including:

- BCAFM Farmers Market Nutrition Coupon Program
- Columbia Basin Trust food security & community grants

- Columbia Basin Trust community development grants
- Heritage, arts, and tourism cultural activation grants
- Buy BC Partnership Program
- Destination BC co-marketing funds
- Rural Economic Development grants
- Community Gaming Grants (after year 1)
- Agri-Food & Value-Added Market grants

These grants can cover:

- equipment & signage
- entertainment
- marketing
- staff & volunteer support
- fee reductions
- infrastructure upgrades

City-run markets cannot access most of these programs.

3. Strengthening Local Food Security

City support of a NFP run market demonstrates leadership in:

- agricultural resilience
- farmer retention
- climate-resilient food strategies
- food security program eligibility
- low-barrier access for new producers

City Support can be as simple as donating space for the market and/or offering gifts in kind as support from departments such as public works, (as many BC cities do)

This is viewed as:

- food security investment
- public health contribution
- regional economic development
- small business support in the community

4. Supporting Tourism & Economic Development

The Nelson Farmers Market is one of many large tourists draws that happen between May–October.

A vendor-led NFP society can provide and enhance:

- branding and advertising
- enhance marketing
- seasonal tourism partnership and promotions
- economic impact data collection for tourism reporting
- farm-to-table initiatives
- enhanced customer experience/engagement (music, performers, education booths)
- showcase unique, local products, artisans and farmers

This aligns directly with Destination BC and Nelson Kootenay Lake Tourism goals.

ROLE OF THE CITY UNDER THIS PROPOSAL

NVMS is not requesting funding. We are seeking a coordinated, collaborative, transition partnership

City responsibilities would remain:

- providing market space in city property
- Baker St or alternate locations during construction years
- granting administrative permission
- continuing to issue annual special event permits
- providing barricades, signage & road-closure equipment
- Ensuring alignment with municipal bylaws by maintaining bylaw, fire, and safety compliance oversight
- coordinating construction schedules
- other departmental supports from e.g. bylaw enforcement, public works, fire and police

This keeps the City in a collaborative role while reducing administrative strain.

This positions the City as:

- Supportive
- Collaborative

- Community-focused
- Aligned with provincial best practices at minimal cost.

Providing market space is recognized as:

- a food-security investment
- a regional economic contribution
- a community health initiative

PROPOSED 2-YEAR TRANSITION MODEL

We recognize the Nelson Farmers Market is a large, complex series of event with long-standing community expectations. NVMS recommends a three-phase transition that ensures stability for vendors, the City, and the public.

PHASE 1 – Transitional Hybrid Model (2026 Season)

Goal: NVMS handles operations; City maintains financial oversight & compliance.

City Responsibilities:

- Collect vendor fees
- Handle GST and financial reporting
- Provide signage, barricades & street-closure equipment
- Coordinates permit approvals
- Issue special event permits
- Oversee high-level safety compliance
- Provide interdepartmental support

NVMS Responsibilities:

- BCAFM Membership Application (Jan–Feb 2026) to secure grant funding for 2027
- Full on-site operations
- Vendor applications, communication & scheduling
- Market layout, logistics & safety planning
- Staff & volunteer coordination
- Conflict resolution
- Safety & emergency planning
- Grant applications and long-term planning

Purpose:

This allows NVMS to demonstrate operational capacity while maintaining City financial oversight. It reduces risk for both parties and provides continuity for vendors during Baker Street construction. This in turn will stabilize the market, reduce City workload, allow NVMS to demonstrate capacity and establish eligibility for major 2027 grant funding.

PHASE 2 – Shared Administrative Model (2027 Season)

Goal: NVMS handles full operations & revenue; City gradually steps back and provides oversight only.

City Responsibilities:

- Provides space and municipal support (similar to other BC communities)
- Approve annual permits filled in by NVMS
- Provide barricades & signage
- Oversee high-level compliance
- Maintain construction coordination communications

NVMS Responsibilities

- Full operational management
- Full vendor fee collection (electronic, secure, CRA-compliant)
- Financial management & reporting
- Implementation of digital systems (Square, digital receipts, records, QuickBooks)
- Reinvestment of all surplus into market improvements
- Full alignment with BCAFM standards

Purpose:

- City steps back from operations
- NVMS becomes financially self-sustaining
- Major grants become available (Community Gaming Grants, CBT, BCAFM programs)

This model aligns Nelson with Kamloops, Vernon, Revelstoke, and Kimberley, who have all successfully transitioned in similar ways.

PHASE 3 – Full NVMS Management (2028 and Beyond)

Goal: Long-term, stable NFP-managed market with municipal partnership.

City Responsibilities:

- Provide space
- Provide road-closure equipment
- Provide high-level compliance oversight
- Provided continued communication for construction
- Provide gifts in kind/grants

NVMS Responsibilities:

- Full operational, financial & administrative control
- All staffing, logistics, vendor support
- All grant and sponsorship acquisition
- Annual reporting to City

BCAFM MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENT

NVMS intends to apply for BCAFm membership for the 2026 season, which requires:

- community-led governance
- administrative systems
- farmer-first policies
- municipal support “in principle”
- compliance with provincial standards

Membership unlocks:

- FMNCP (Nutrition Coupon Program)
- BCAFm marketing grants
- training & support
- provincial credibility

NVMS requests City support in enabling this membership during Phase 1.

STAFF COMPENSATION & FINANCIAL RISK MANAGEMENT

NVMS acknowledges that:

- many grants begin in 2027
- vendor fees alone must cover basic operating costs in 2026

To manage this responsibly:

2026 (Phase 1):

- City collects fees (reducing NVMS administrative risk)
- NVMS funds staffing through operational efficiencies and early grants
- NVMS absorbs staffing costs but avoids risk of uncertain revenue

2027 (Phase 2):

- NVMS collects vendor fees directly
- Significant grants become available
- NVMS can reinvest surplus into improvements

2028 (Phase 3):

- Fully independent, fully grant-supported model

This phased approach ensures stability, transparency, and responsible management.

WHY NOW?

- Vendor support is growing we currently have 42 members and rising.
- Construction disruptions require a nimble, vendor-led model.
- Many BC cities have proven that non-profits manage markets more efficiently.
- The City is experiencing staffing instability, pressure and financial strain.
- A partnership reduces risk for everyone.

REQUEST:

NVMS respectfully requests an opportunity to present this proposal formally.

CONCLUSION:

Nelson deserves a vibrant, stable, community-driven farmers market that supports local farmers, food producers, artisans, and small businesses.

A partnership between the City of Nelson and NVMS is the pathway proven to work across BC.

NVMS is ready to collaborate, ready to support, and ready to help build a stronger market for 2026 and beyond.