

REPORT

Planning and Development

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: July 8, 2024

From: Jackie Teed,
Director, Planning and Development
File: 2495304/13.2620.01
Item #: 2024-436

Subject: Development Application Process Review

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **THAT** Council endorse the proposed changes to the Development Review Process as outlined in Attachment 2 of this report.
 2. **THAT** Council endorse, in principle, the inclusion of the two Clerk positions in Attachment 3 of this report, in the 2025 Operating budget for Council's consideration, which would initially be offset by the UBCM Local Government Approvals Grant.
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PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is twofold. First, to seek Council's endorsement of the results of the City's Development Application Process Review. Second, is to seek Council's endorsement of a new staff team that would be intended to advance implementation of the review, including further digitization, and communications.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Development Application Review Process (DAPR) has been ongoing since early 2023. DAPR aimed to provide a comprehensive review of the City's development approval process from application intake through to final approval, with an objective of increasing efficiency and reducing approval timelines. This program would have a direct impact on the Council Strategic Goal of building more homes faster. The review of the City's development review process is now complete. This review has resulted in a number of improvements for which staff is seeking Council endorsement.

One of the major findings from the review is a need to complete the digitization of all permits associated with development review as well as improving documentation and communication materials. In order to implement these changes as well as to implement continual improvement in development review, a new Planning and Development Systems Team is being created in the Planning and Development Department, using reallocation of current positions, as well as staff are seeking Council’s endorsement to create two additional clerk positions, for which salaries would be offset 100% in 2025, and would likely be funded through the capital plan in subsequent years as they focus on digital permitting.

BACKGROUND

Over the last decade, the Planning and Development Department has been actively working to identify and implement improvements to the City’s development review process. This has included: proactive interdepartmental review opportunities, reducing public hearings, reducing the number of staff reports, redefining the role of advisory committees, reducing consultation for small-scale projects, building flexibility into land use designations, eliminating rezoning for government housing developments, bringing e-apply online for key permits, creating a one-stop-shop service counter, implementing new provincial streamlining tools such as delegated authorities that arose from the Province’s Development Approvals Process Review (DAPR), etc.

In early 2023, the City officially launched our own Development Application Process Review (DAPR), engaging a consultant to review our approvals process, from initial enquiry to building occupancy, to identify any outstanding improvements. The DAPR process has now been completed. An overview of the consultant’s process is included in Attachment 1.

DISCUSSION

Development Review Outcomes

The consultant’s comprehensive review concluded that the City’s current development review process does not include any fundamental steps or requirements that would unnecessarily lead to slower approval times. That the review identified no major steps or requirements in the City’s overall development review process that require streamlining is considered to be a result of the continual and incremental improvements made “off the side of the desk” as they were identified over the years.

Instead, the consultant highlighted a number of improvements related to planning and development review policies, practices and tools that cumulatively impact overall development processing times, and process transparency. These are outlined in Attachment 2, and include items such as policies used in application review (e.g. updates to the Family Friendly Housing Policy), procedures used for processing applications and training staff (e.g. manuals and guides), methods for calculating and providing charges and fees (e.g. simplified fee structures for development), use and innovation of technology (e.g. use of Bluebeam technology), materials used in

communicating with the public about development processes (e.g. website, handouts). That the review identified a broad range of such items that require improvement is considered to be a result of the City not having capacity to monitor, innovate in, and maintain these tools.

Staff are seeking Council endorsement of the improvements as outlined in Attachment 2.

Three Key Next Steps

Based on the outcomes of the DAPR process, staff has identified three key next steps to improve the City's development application review process:

1. *Continue to Accelerate Digitalization*: DAPR was initiated to ensure the City's core development review process is structured as efficiently as possible prior to translating it fully into a digital permitting process. Digital permitting improves internal and external communications, transparency and efficiency, maintenance of City records, and results in higher levels of customer service.
2. *Improve Documentation*: Many of the actions identified through DAPR point to a fundamental lack of documentation, including ongoing creation and updating of both internal and external facing development procedures, practices and processes. This also includes internal policies and procedures for ongoing maintenance of the City's record, as relates to development. Proper ongoing management of these components of the planning and development process improves internal and external communications, maintains corporate knowledge and reduces onboarding challenges, supports consistency, and results in higher levels of customer service.
3. *Create a Planning and Development Systems Team*: Though the City's core development review process has continued to be streamlined over the years, this work has been done 'off the side of the desk' of staff whose core job function is to review development applications. The policies, practices and tools which have been identified for approval have not been maintained due to lack of focused resources. Establishing a team dedicated to implementing such continual improvement would have benefits to overall approval time and staff workload.

Planning and Development Systems Team

A Planning and Development Systems Team is proposed within the Planning and Development Department. This team would support the Planning and Building divisions with a mandate to oversee, improve, maintain, and innovate the many systems used in planning and development approvals work. This includes technological, communications, and people-centred processes, such as:

- Planning, implementation and continued maintenance of all digital permitting phases with the goal to create a one-stop-digital-shop for all permits and applications associated with development
- Creation and maintenance of development review procedures, and manuals which would have the effect of reducing the need for time consuming staff onboarding and training and provide better customer service and transparency management, customer service and ongoing support and implementation of process improvements
- Management of development records for easier retrieval as well as the retrieval of statistics related to development approvals
- Customer service for applicants to coordinate responses for customer complaints and work with the team to help resolve issues when projects get stuck
- Website updates including better publicizing current development applications and making development procedures easy to understand for both developers and the general public.

To create the team 1.5 existing FTE have been reallocated, under the current department operating budget. Two additional clerk positions are proposed to be requested as part of the 2025 budget process. The salaries for these positions would be 100% funded in 2025 through the UBCM Local Government Approvals Program, which has been provided to support the improvements identified through DAPR, and can be applied to staff positions. The two clerk positions would likely be funded through the capital plan in subsequent years as they focus on digital permitting.

Staff are seeking Council endorsement of the proposed service enhancements as outlined in Attachment 3, as part of the 2025 budget process.

NEXT STEPS

Should Council endorse the proposed improvements as outlined in Attachment 2, staff would work to implement the changes resulting in both immediate and future improvements in review times.

Should Council endorse referring the proposed service enhancements as outlined in Attachment 3 to the 2025 budget process, staff would work with Finance Department to implement that referral.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The DAPR program has been funded through the E-permit Enhancement line item in the approved Five Year Capital Plan.

The Planning and Development Systems team uses 1.5 existing FTE reallocated, under the current department operating budget. Two additional clerk positions are proposed to be requested as part of the 2025 budget process. The salaries for these positions would be 100% funded in 2025 through the \$150K grant received from the UBCM Local

Government Approvals Program, which has been provided to support the improvements identified through DAPR, and can be applied to staff positions. The two clerk positions would likely be funded through the capital plan in subsequent years as they focus on digital permitting. Staff would submit a service enhancement request during the 2025 budget process.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

The DAPR work to date has included close collaboration with a number of other departments to advance development policy, including: Electrical, Engineering, Finance, Intergovernmental Relations, and Parks and Recreation. Interdepartmental representatives would continue to be engaged in the implementation of the DAPR program.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented for Council's consideration:

1. That Council endorse the proposed changes to the Development Review Process as outlined in Attachment 2 of this report.
2. That Council endorse, in principle, the inclusion of the two Clerk positions in Attachment 3 of this report, in the 2025 Operating budget for Council's consideration, which would initially be offset by the UBCM Local Government Approvals Grant.
3. That Council provide staff with alternative feedback.

Staff recommends Options 1 and 2.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Development Approvals Process Overview

Attachment 2: Development Application Process Review – Proposed Changes

Attachment 3: Development Application Process Team Staffing

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:

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This report was approved by:

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