Corporation of the City of
NEW WESTMINSTER

Attachment 1

Development Approvals Process Overview

Development Application Process Review – Overview

In order to undertake the review of the City's Development Approvals process, staff engaged an external consultant to coordinate the review. The consultant examined the workflow and process for all of the City's development application types (e.g. rezoning, Development Permit, Official Community Plan Amendment, Heritage Revitalization Agreement, Tree Permit, Sign Permit). The review included a number of steps as follows:

1. Discovery: This phase encompassed a comprehensive review of all development approval materials held by the City, involving examination of several hundred files. Additionally, several interviews were conducted with City staff across departments.

2. Research: A thorough review of the Province's 2019 Development Approval Process Review (DAPR) was conducted. Furthermore, one-to-one interviews were held with staff from five municipalities that have initiated DAPR improvements (Surrey, Kelowna, Victoria, City of North Vancouver, and Coquitlam).

3. Engagement: A presentation was made to the Urban Development Institute's New Westminster Liaison Committee in October 2023. Following that, suitable interviewees were discussed and post-permit interviews were arranged. They were conducted with three recent applicants to gather insights into their experiences with the City's development approval process.

4. Process Mapping: The process mapping stage involved engaging all City staff involved in the development approval process through a series of workshops. The workshops aimed to identify pain points, areas of friction, and opportunities for improvement within the process.

5. Reporting: Finally, the findings from the previous stages were compiled into recommendations for process improvements

Results of Review

DAPR was to undertake a comprehensive review of the development review process with a particular focus on rezoning applications and associated planning permits.

The comprehensive review of the City's process did not find any major flaws in the City's Development Review Process. This is likely a result of continuous improvement that has occurred over the years. Notwithstanding, the review did identify a number of minor improvements that cumulatively could make a substantial impact on overall development processing times. The suggested improvements are included in Attachment 2.

Implementation

The full implementation of an improved process requires three further pieces of work

In the first piece of work, staff intend to fully digitize all Planning and Development Permits. This would entail fully transitioning to the e-apply platform to enable applicants of all types to apply directly online, including direct submission of all documents and payment of all fees. Throughout DAPR staff have been preparing for this next step in digitization and preparing a number of simpler application types to be brought into the e-apply platform. A summary of application types that would be digitized in the near term is included in Attachment 2. Through the completion of this work, staff would intend to bring all remaining planning application types into e-apply.

The second piece of work will involve the creation a number of materials and documents to further increase transparency and understanding of the City's development processes to help staff, applicants and the general public. Some of the work envisioned includes:

- Developing a Development Procedure Manual that can be used to address questions of staff and applicants alike and to increase consistency;
- Creating a number of FAQ documents and bulletins make them available in various forms for easy access to the public;
- Creating and providing templates for various technical studies and making them available online;
- Enhancing public access to application details on the City website;
- Establishing clear requirements for stakeholder consultation and reporting, including other government consultation; and,
- Creating new checklists that clearly outline and consistently apply requirements for consultation processes and report submissions.

To implement the work Staff intend to 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.

Completion of DAPR

The work of improving and refining development review to improve efficiency and improve customer experience is considered to be a continuous endeavour. Staff would intend to continue to seek further improvements even after the completion of the current program.

Upon completion of the current review, staff anticipate a number of significant outcomes including:

- Precise timelines for overall City review of development applications, with a further future goal of guaranteed City processing timelines
- Improved transparency in the development process, including for the ability for applicants to view on-line where an application is in the process and what is outstanding
- General increased efficiency in term of staff resources required to process development applications
- Increased use of automation in the review process and use of digital tools
- Improved collaboration and communications within the City to move applications faster
- Being prepared to further improvements in technology including greater automation and use of Artificial Intelligence