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Development Application Process Review - Achievements Information Report

Report Number: INFO-2024-23

Department(s): Planning Services

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In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any member of Council may make a request to the Town Clerk that this Report be placed on an upcoming Committee of the Whole agenda for discussion.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to advise Council of the work that has been done to date on improving our Development Application Process (DAP).

Background

In late 2021 the Provincial Government initiated a series of legislative changes aimed at increasing the pace and volume of housing construction in the province.

In response, the following actions were taken:

- Beginning in 2022 staff participated in a York Region study involving all local municipalities. The project aim was to address the impacts of changing legislation on municipalities with respect to development application processing. This is known as the Collaboration Application Preparation (CAP) project.
- In 2023, Newmarket initiated a project to look at its own internal procedures relating to development application processing. Sajecki Planning was engaged by Planning Services to facilitate the work which resulted in a report issued in June of that year entitled “Development Approval Process and Fees Review”. This is known as the Development Application Process (DAP) review project.
- In the fall of 2023, Planning Services issued an RFP seeking consulting assistance for the preparation of an implementation plan that would form the framework for project recommendations.

- In early 2024, McCauley and Moyle were selected as the successful consultants and began working with a Working Group of senior staff for the preparation of an implementation plan beginning in early 2024.

The 2024 project work was labeled “The DAP/CAP Implementation Project” and included an emphasis on change management.

Discussion

Based on the work that took place over several years leading up to the 2024 project, recommendations for development application processing improvements were available from several sources.

As part of the DAP and CAP work, a process mapping exercise was undertaken in the spring of 2024 allowing all Newmarket front line staff to participate and highlight their role and responsibilities relating to development application processing. The results of this work led to further areas having the potential for processing enhancements.

In turn, a consolidated table of recommendations was assembled from the following sources

- 1) The 2023 DAP Project – 23 recommendations in total
- 2) Recommendations originating from project work in 2024 – 27 recommendations resulting from the Process Mapping exercise plus 10 recommendations raised for consideration by the Project Consultants
- 3) Recommendations for Processing Efficiencies – suggested by the 2023 CAP Report – 16 in total
- 4) High Level Recommendations identified in the 2023 CAP Report – 24 in total

This combination of recommendations was reviewed and refined to focus on the 50 most impactful recommendations. This exercise has culminated in opportunities to provide better customer service, focus on streamlining the review process, reducing duplication, and finding areas of continuous improvement.

Purpose of Analysis

The impetus for this project has been the recent and numerous legislative changes. However, some of this work had been highlighted as a future project before the legislation was announced. It is acknowledged that Newmarket is a growing community in transition and that Newmarket needs more housing. Changing provincial legislation is requiring the Town to speed up the development approval process. With interest rates continuing to drop, we are expecting even more development pressure.

Part of Newmarket’s transition is to infill development and complicated intensified high-rise multi-use buildings. These complex developments require changes to our standards and business practices. Recognizing this, some changes to the development approval process have already been put into practice. Additionally, the drive for continuous

improvement will lead to further changes through implementing the DAP & CAP recommendations.

This is a responsibility we take seriously. Newmarket strives to be *even better* through timely community development. The DAP & CAP Project aims to see Newmarket modernize its development application process by addressing the following objectives:

- Seek out new ways to increase efficiencies and shorten the Newmarket portion of the development application process; with a goal of three submissions (or less), where and whenever possible.
- Assess opportunities for expedited decision-making, while acknowledging and analyzing the risk management factors associated with an expedited decision-making process
- Identify and record efficiencies, such as, process clarity, streamlining and elimination of duplication
- Evaluate constraints that prevent the Town from achieving the goals set above.
- Work collaboratively with developers to achieve our common goals of great community building, while maintaining the standards of community design and that residents enjoy and expect.

Despite the recent change to legislation lessening the most urgent pressure of returning application fees, staff are committed to keeping up with these changes.

Achievements

While the implementation plan creation was ongoing; changes to make the development review process more efficient were already underway. The recommendations and changes that could be implemented without further planning were rolled out. As a result, since 2023, of the refined list of 50 recommendations, 13 have already been implemented and a further 19 have been identified as changes that can be made immediately without further process.

The process mapping exercise showed that a typical site plan process currently takes approximately 13 months to approvals. We anticipate that the improvements could reduce the site plan approval process to approximately 6 to 10 months.

The following is a brief list highlighting some of the changes implemented:

- A focus on the Minimum Viable Product (MVP) for submission requirements, with the aim to simplify submission requirements and keep Official Plan Amendment and Zoning By-law Amendment applications focused on land use matters, leaving detailed design for the Site Plan Approval process.
- A new Pre-Consultation By-law was passed in fall 2023 to clarify and outline the new process adopted in response to the Bill 109 changes.
- Staff implemented the new delegated authority, as provided for in the Planning Act, for Removal of Holding Provisions and Temporary Use By-laws.

- Staff have worked together to streamline the submission requirements for different development applications and different types of proposals, including lengthening the list of proposals exempted from Site Plan Approval.
- Staff started using the standardized terms of reference created in partnership with the Region. This allows applicants and consultants to become familiar with the requirements for studies and reports regardless of which municipality in York Region they are working in.
- Staff have moved to a single cloud-based comment response matrix which allows all comments and each of the applicant's responses to be in a single document and available to all parties.

This exercise was a cross-department and highly collaborative; approximately 30 Town staff from 11 departments were involved.

Next Steps

Staff are convening several implementation teams to continue introducing the changes recommended through this process. It is anticipated that the changes will be rolled out over the next several years, allowing staff, the public and applicants to adjust to any new processes, practices and procedures. Some recommendations may take longer to implement, however, it is expected that many changes will be implemented in the short-term (within 1 year).

Conclusion

Staff are aware of the importance to process development applications efficiently while maintaining quality and thoroughness of the review. Efficiency is important as it is tightly correlated to Council's Strategic Priority of Customer-First Way of Life and the excellent customer service standards the Town has as an organization. Additionally, an efficient and effective development application review process directly results in the community we want to be and achieve.

Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages

This project aligns with Council Priorities:

- Customer-first way of life
- Extraordinary places and spaces

Consultation

This report was created in consultation with the DAP & CAP Implementation Working Group; a cross-corporate team of Directors, Managers and senior staff.

Human Resource Considerations

None.

Budget Impact

None.

Attachments

None.

Approval

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