

Region of Waterloo
Planning, Development, and Legislative Services
Community Planning

To: Planning and Works Committee
Meeting Date: May 7, 2024
Report Title: Streamlining Development Application Approvals

1. Recommendation

For information.

2. Purpose / Issue:

To inform Council about initiatives undertaken to streamline the review, commenting and approval of development applications.

3. Strategic Plan:

Homes for All and Future Ready Organization: Explore new service models and partnerships to achieve fiscal resilience and better service.

4. Report Highlights:

- In 2023 Community Planning staff reviewed, commented on and / or issued approvals for over 1,100 development related applications. An increased demand for housing combined with legislative changes through Bill 109 has increased the need for agility in responding to Planning Act circulations within required timelines.
- There are continuous reviews of the internal development application process to identify ways to reduce the time that Regional staff provide comments and / or issue development approvals. These reviews are often in partnership with Area Municipalities and can include consultation with the development industry.
- Over the past few years, the Community Planning Division has implemented operational and organizational changes to streamline the delivery of planning services including Lean Six Sigma reviews and retaining peer reviewers to review technical studies. Further, Regional staff coordinate with Area Municipal staff to respond to Area Municipal priorities. Where appropriate, Regional staff also support the use of holding provisions to advance applications where technical work remains outstanding or could be addressed at a later stage in the development process.

- A Lean Six Sigma review completed in 2020 validated that the Region would benefit from the introduction of a Digital Development Tracking System (DTS) which led to the preparation of a Business Case and a Negotiated RFP. Provincial funding to streamline development was received to assist with funding this project and the Region procured Cityworks PLL as the core system of the DTS.
- The Development Tracking System will result in faster processing times by modernizing, streamlining and automating the development review process. It is expected to decrease processing times by at least 25% and reduce associated administrative tasks currently performed by Planners by 50%.
- Implementation of the Development Tracking System is currently underway and Phase 1 is expected to be live by Fall 2024. Phase 2 will commence late spring and will focus on data transfer with Area Municipalities to further streamline the process and response time. Consultation and coordination with Area Municipal staff will occur prior to any implementation.
- Significant recruitment and retention efforts have been undertaken given increased staff turnover on the development team since the announcement of Bill 23 in 2022. These efforts have assisted to maintain staffing levels to respond to the increased volume and complexity of planning applications.
- Preparation for a post Bill 23 planning framework has been underway including working closely with the Area Municipal CAOs and Planning Heads on future transition.

5. Background:

The Region is currently the approval authority for Official Plan Amendments and Draft Plans of Subdivision and Condominium (except in Kitchener where delegated) and provides comments and / or recommendations with respect to Regional and / or Provincial interest on zoning by-law amendments, consents, minor variances and site plans. In 2023 Regional staff reviewed, commented on and /or issued approval on over 1,100 development related applications.

Staff also conduct ongoing reviews of the development process, including a Lean Six Sigma review that was initiated in partnership with the Area Municipalities in 2020. The review validated that the Region would benefit from the introduction of a Digital Development Tracking System (DTS) which led to the preparation of a Business Case and a Negotiated RFP.

Provincial funding to streamline development was received to assist with funding this project and the Region procured Cityworks PLL (ESRI) as the core system of the DTS. In 2022, the Province made \$500,000 in funding available for the Region of Waterloo to undertake projects related to streamlining the development approval process. Building

upon an existing Business Case for a Development Tracking System (DTS), the Region issued a Request for Proposal for a Digital Development Tracking system to transform the current semi-automated and reduce the cycle time from application to approval of all development applications.

The Region is currently implementing the system and has completed components of Phase 1, which includes the requirements analysis and design, current process review and workflow mapping, base configuration as well as purchasing the necessary licenses to implement the system. Phase 2 will include consultation and coordination with Area Municipalities and will facilitate digital data exchange leading to greater efficiencies and faster response times.

Proclamation of Bill 23 would shift approval responsibilities to the Area Municipalities. Regional Planning will continue to provide comments through the circulation of development applications to ensure key Regional interests and services are coordinated and integrated with future growth. Regional staff recognize the importance of responding to circulations in a timely manner and regularly review the process to implement improvements to reduce timeframes. Current initiatives are expected to reduce the processing time by 25% leading to faster planning approvals.

6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public

Area Municipalities: The Region and Area Municipal Planning Heads meet regularly to share updates, feedback and coordinate various initiatives.

Public: The public are consulted on development applications in accordance with the Planning Act.

7. Financial Implications:

The Community Planning 2024-2033 capital program has a provision for the work described in this report (Development Tracking System project #22038) of \$1,964,000 to be funded from the Province of Ontario – Streamline Development Approval Funding (25% \$500,000), Development Charge Reserve Fund (19%, \$366,000) and Regional Capital Reserve (56%, \$1,098,000). To date, \$1,239,000 has been spent or committed in the period of 2022-2024. There is a provision for future work in the capital program in the years 2026-2029. This provision will be reviewed during 2025 budget development.

System licensing costs to be reflected in future operating budgets are estimated to be approximately \$171,000 in 2025 (six months), annualized at \$356,000 in 2026 and future years.

Conclusion / Next Steps:

Streamlining the development review process within Waterloo Region is a priority for

Community Planning and Regional staff will continue to implement measures to respond efficiently. Further, Regional staff will work closely with Area Municipal staff to support transition of roles and responsibilities post proclamation of Bill 23.

8. Attachments:

None.

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