
REPORT TO: Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee

DATE OF MEETING: January 9, 2023

SUBMITTED BY: Garrett Stevenson, Interim Director, Planning, 519-741-2200 ext. 7070

PREPARED BY: Janine Oosterveld, Manager, Customer Experience and Project Management, 519-741-2200 ext. 7076

WARD(S) INVOLVED: All Wards

DATE OF REPORT: December 22, 2022

REPORT NO.: DSD-2022-416

SUBJECT: Planning Services' Customer Experience and Project Management Team Update

RECOMMENDATION:

For Information.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to provide an update on projects and services led by the Customer Experience & Project Management team ('the Team') since the establishment of the new team structure in the Planning division.
- Key findings:
 - The Team has been critical to carry out process improvements to meet provincial mandates to streamline development review and bring housing to market efficiently.
 - The Team has enhanced capacity for supporting affordable housing projects and facilitating streamlined approval processes to bring affordable housing projects to construction.
 - A dedicated customer experience and project management function that supports development review, customer and community engagement beyond traditional planning division roles has been instrumental to adapt the work we do to meet the changing needs of our community.
- There are no direct financial implications to this report.
- Community engagement included posting the report to the City's website.
- This report supports Great Customer Service by enhancing customer experience online. This report also relates to a Caring Community through the implementation of the Housing for All strategy by facilitating a streamlined approvals process for affordable housing projects. Additionally, this report supports the delivery of core services.

BACKGROUND:

In 2021, the Planning division underwent a reorganization that led to the establishment of the Customer Experience & Project Management Team ('the Team') as one of the three teams. The Team was established for the purposes of supporting customer service excellence across the division through both core service delivery and undertaking larger-scale strategic projects and programs that drive continuous improvement or require a coordinated approach. The team consists of a full staff complement and includes: 1 Coordinator (Planning & Zoning Services), 2 Technical Assistants; 2 Planning Technicians; 2 Project Managers; and, 1 Program Assistant.

To prioritize the work of this new Team, Planning leadership engaged with Council through a strategy session in August, 2021 (refer to DSD-2021-121). Key priorities included:

- Affordable housing/sustainability concierge service for development applications
- Enhanced support for development review
- Implementing digital solutions

These priorities have been reflected in the Team's workplan as summarized in this report along with other themes identified by members of Council including: enhanced customer experience and community engagement priorities.

REPORT:

This report provides highlights for the current key areas of focus in the Team's work program and work to be initiated in 2023.

Core Service DeliveryStandardization and Documentation

Through the delivery of core service, the newly established team has prioritized standardizing and documenting processes to achieve consistency in processing applications and responding to general customer inquiries. To date this year, the Team established or updated 20 standard operating procedures for services such as processing sign permits and zoning occupancy certificates, affordable housing incentives and Planning inquiries and appointments through the new temporary City Hall Service Centre.

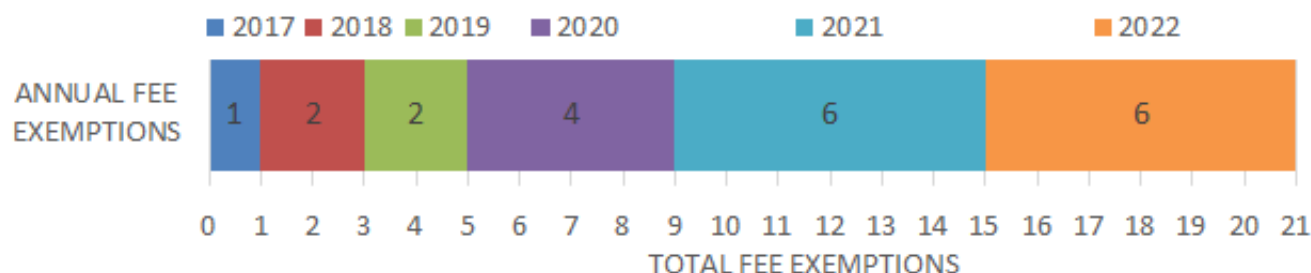
General Customer Inquiries

Through the pandemic, the Planning team shifted to a Planner of the Day model with scheduled planners and technical assistants responding to all inquiries – in-person, by telephone and email. The Team was instrumental in refining the system for coordinating inquiries to reduce response times, particularly for telephone and email inquiries, so that customers receive the information they need in a timely manner.

Concierge Service for Affordable Housing

To support the Development Review team and bring affordable housing projects to construction quickly, the Team's Project Managers have taken responsibility for processing requests for development application and building permit fee exemptions offered as part of the City's affordable housing incentives program. As shown in Figure 1, since the inception of the program in 2017, 21 fee exemption requests have been approved and 16 of these projects have proceeded to site plan application or building permit issuance. To date this year, 6 fee exemption requests have been approved.

Figure 1: Approved Fee Exemptions for Development Applications and Building Permits



Additionally, the Project Managers have begun to provide end-to-end concierge service for recently submitted affordable housing development applications. This program will be further expanded to include purpose-built rental housing in 2023 depending on the timing and volume of new affordable housing applications.

Strategic Programs and Projects

Rapid Response to Provincial Direction

The following projects were initiated this year in response to new provincial funding or changes to legislation:

- **Streamlining development approvals fund** projects: The City received funding in February of this year to support the streamlining development approvals to bring housing to market quicker and established a work plan with 11 priority projects. In the fall, the overall project management transitioned to this Team. Additionally, the Team is supporting the implementation of several digital solutions including:
 - An **online appointment booking system** for pre-submission consultations and site plan review committee meetings to allow an applicant to select the meeting time that works for their project team while getting the appropriate staff involved. This is associated with the city hall queuing and booking system led by the Corporate Customer Service team.
 - An **online public portal** for applicants to submit and check on the status of their development applications. A Project Manager in Planning is working closely with the Project Manager in Technology Innovation Services to integrate development processes into the technical design. This work is well underway for site plan and pre-submission consultation applications and the portal will expand to include all planning applications in the future.
 - **Electronic payment options** both in-person and online are underway with PIN pads now available for payment of select Planning fees at City Hall and online options to be integrated with the online public portal project.
 - A **strategy for mobile technology** for site inspections associated with development applications is underway to acquire mobile technology to support improved communication with the applicant and quicker documentation and reporting to accelerate the release of site securities (e.g. tablets with supporting software).
- **Bill 109 Zoning Bylaw and Official Plan Amendment application process review** (refer to DSD-2022-192 and DSD-2022-199 for background): As committed at the April 25, 2022 Finance and Corporate Services Committee meeting, the Planning team under the leadership of a Project Manager has established an action plan of improvements to streamline the review process with the goal of achieving provincial

timeline targets (90 days for Zoning Bylaw Amendments and 120 days for Official Plan Amendments). Most action items will occur at a staff level such as creating a standard project management tool with embedded timelines, reallocation of staff resources to support engagement, and standardizing submission expectations through updated or new Terms of Reference documents with roll-out starting in January, 2023. Staff anticipate bringing forward a report before June 2023 to address any streamlining action items that require Council approval including delegating approval authority for the release of holding provisions enabled through Bill 13.

- **Bill 109 Site Plan process changes.** A Project Manager is leading process changes, training and monitoring for the site plan process to meet the provincial target of a conditional approval within 60 days.
- **Bill 23 initial process changes.** A Project Manager is leading initial changes such as application forms and website information to address immediate changes to processes such as removing authority for site plan approval for properties with 10 residential units or less.

Other programs and projects

- **Continued Development Services Review implementation:** A Development Review All-Staff Forum was held in November 2022 as a continuation of process improvements recommended during the Development Services Review. With approximately 80 staff in attendance, the purpose of this forum was to build capacity and strengthen relationships across the multi-disciplinary teams involved with development applications. Additionally, this Team coordinates and chairs a monthly multi-disciplinary development review management meeting across the corporation to facilitate stronger communication on process improvements and issues resolution.
- **Kitchener's Great Places Awards program:** Project planning has launched for the 2023 Kitchener's Great Places Awards program.
- **Urban design public projects:** Re-initiated (post-pandemic) a working group to establish priorities for integrating enhanced urban design elements into road reconstruction projects (like Queen Street Placemaking) as well as smaller interventions (like industrial artifacts in parks and neighbourhood information panels).

What's Next

In addition to continuing the work program noted above, the following projects will be initiated in 2023:

- Continued and expanded support for affordable housing and purpose-built rental housing projects through the concierge service;
- Bill 23 action planning and implementation related to changes to planning applications and zoning reviews;
- Continued roll-out of process improvements recommended or piloted during the Development Services Review; and,
- Commencing project planning for a comprehensive update to the City's Sign bylaw in 2023.

Impact

The Team has been critical to carry out process improvements to address provincial mandates to streamline development review and bring housing to market efficiently. Additionally, the Team has enhanced capacity for supporting affordable housing projects to bring affordable housing projects to construction quicker. Overall, a dedicated customer experience and project management function that supports development review, customer and community engagement beyond traditional planning division roles has been and will continue to be instrumental to adapt the work we do to meet the changing needs of our community.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports Great Customer Service by enhancing customer experience online. This report also relates to a Caring Community through the implementation of the Housing for All strategy by facilitating a streamlined approvals process for affordable housing projects. Finally, this report supports the delivery of core services.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Capital Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Capital Budget.

Operating Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Operating Budget.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

INFORM – This report has been posted to the City's website with the agenda in advance of the council / committee meeting.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

- DSD-2021-121 Council Strategy Session: Priorities for the Planning Division (Policy & Research and Customer Experience & Project Management Teams)
- DSD-2022-192 Province of Ontario More Homes for Everyone Plan (Bill 109)
- DSD-2022-199 Addendum Report to DSD-2022-192 Province of Ontario More Homes for Everyone Plan (Bill 109)
- DSD-2022-501 Bill 23 More Homes Built Faster Act – Kitchener Comments

APPROVED BY: Garrett Stevenson, Interim Director, Planning