

Information Report



Service Area	Infrastructure, Development and Enterprise Services
Date	Friday, November 3, 2023
Subject	Streamline Development Approval Fund – Final Report

Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the work completed as a result of the Streamline Development Approvals Fund (SDAF) that was used to support the shared Provincial and local objective of accelerating development reviews and bringing new housing to construction in Guelph. The SDAF is an important part of the Province’s tool kit to support municipal partners, so that much-needed housing can be built faster.

Key Findings

The SDAF project has led to a number of positive organizational and process outcomes through the integration of Lean principles which has been widely embraced by staff. It is anticipated that staff will proactively continue with new Lean reviews and implement those that are successful. Under the SDAF, the City of Guelph has made significant progress to address application backlogs, modernize planning processes through investments in technology, and position the City to continuously update development review process with the implementation of technology.

Strategic Plan Alignment

The City of Guelph’s housing supply advocacy and work to realize a faster development approval process advances the Working Together for Our Future and Building Our Future strategic priorities of the City’s Strategic Plan by improving service delivery through modernization and increasing the availability of housing in the community.

Financial Implications

The total estimated project budget of \$3 million extends beyond the allocated \$1.75 million of provincial funding. The SDAF grant will primarily cover the first year of contract positions and a portion of the IT solutions to automate and digitize planning processes and citizen access.

Through SDAF, funding was initially provided through an upfront payment of \$875,000 within 30 days of execution of the Transfer Payment Agreement. The remainder will be provided upon submission and approval of the final report and will be based on project actuals.

The total estimated cost incurred to date is \$2,146,576.47 excluding HST. Of this amount, \$993,154.26 relates to labour recovery of temporary staff to implement the project. Work is to continue into 2024, including the completion of the digitization of building permit records and the Digital Road Map Project

Report

Details

On January 19, 2022, the provincial government announced more than \$45 million for a new Streamline Development Approval Fund (SDAF), administered by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (the Ministry). This fund will help Ontario's 39 largest municipalities modernize, streamline and accelerate processes for managing and approving housing applications.

In addition to implementing municipal efficiencies to accelerate housing development, the approved funds were also utilized to hire temporary staff to reduce existing backlogs and to implement online application portals related to development approvals in the planning, building development engineering and IT departments.

Under this program, the City of Guelph is eligible to receive up to \$1.75 million, and there is no municipal cost-sharing requirement. Based on the program guidelines, eligible expenses must be incurred between January 19, 2022, and November 1, 2023. These dates reflect a previous Ministry extension of the SDAF project completion timeline originally set for February 28, 2023.

The City undertook a preliminary business case options analysis to determine the best way to proceed. Through this process, it was determined that SDAF will be used to finance Phase 1 of the City's project to improve development approval processes in Guelph.

The project involved securing a dedicated project team led by a Lean professional to complete process reviews and find ways to streamline pre-consultation to assumption processes. As well, the City will pursue numerous phased improvements of technology software solutions to increase the efficiency of delivering building permits and development approvals. SDAF-funded portions of the project will also involve securing contract human resources and contract consulting firms to address the backlog in development applications and to advance Guelph's comprehensive zoning bylaw to pre-zone additional lands and to end exclusionary zoning.

Phase 2 of the project is ongoing and will advance additional digital systems to automate development application review processes. As part of the interim report, it was expected that this phase would extend 12-18 months beyond the time period for this program. Some digital components have been advanced as part of SDAF.

The City's project consists of multiple discrete but complementary individual projects across four theme areas:

1. Streamlining Processes and Workflows
2. Land Use Policy and Regulation
3. Technology
4. Staffing and Resourcing

The following is a description of the work that was undertaken as part of the SDAF within the four theme areas.

Streamlining Processes and Workflows

Process Review

The first step in the SDAF initiative was to hire a contract Lean Black Belt to engage staff from across the organization in an end-to end process review in order to find ways to reduce the processing timelines for development applications. The outcome of this work is reflected in the figures below. Additional processes are currently under review including Heritage Permits and Plans of Condominium to identify additional efficiencies. The results of the process improvements are a dramatic reduction in processing timelines for both Zoning By-law amendments and Site Plans. As of 2023, our data for Official Plan amendments will not be available until Q4, 2023 based on the timelines of application submissions.

Figure 1: Yearly trend showing average number of days to process Zoning By-law applications from 2021 until Q3 2023 based on approval date (90 days legislated timelines)

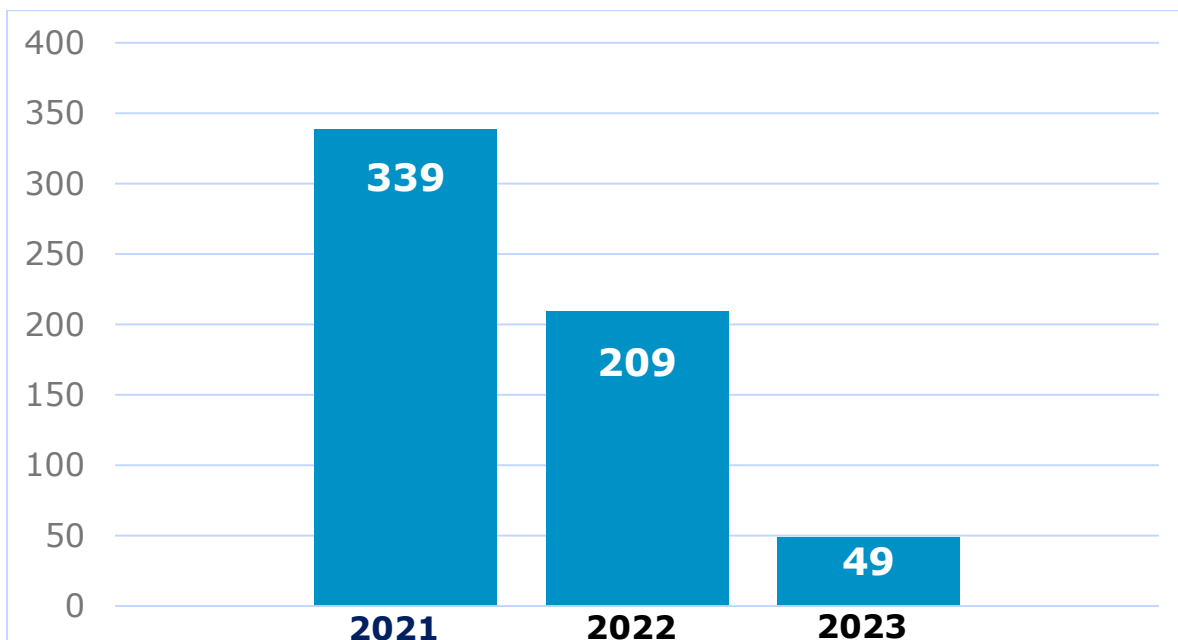
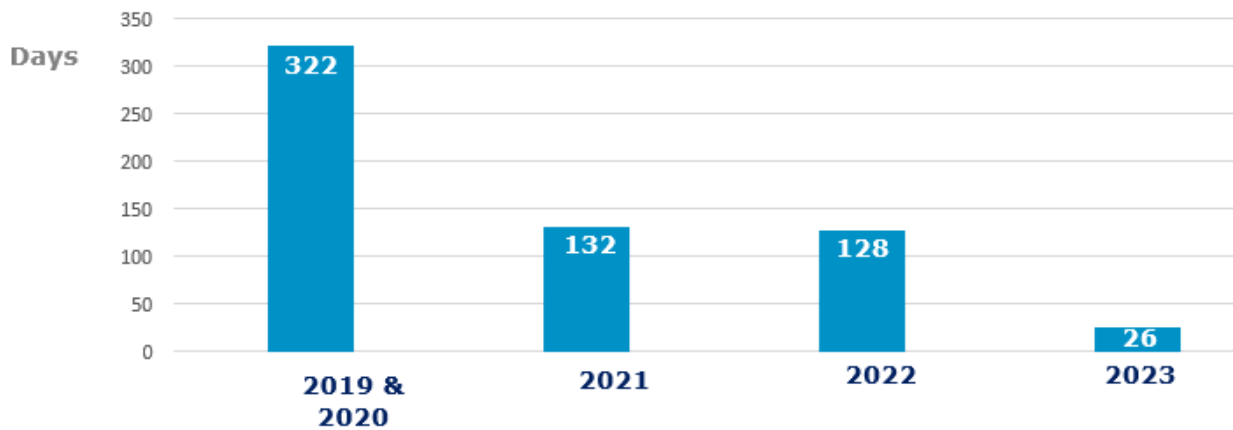


Figure 2: Yearly trend showing Average number of days to process Site plan applications from 2019 until Q3 of 2023 based on approval date (60 days legislated timeline).



Land Use Policy and Regulation

Comprehensive Zoning By-law

A comprehensive review of the City’s Zoning Bylaw (1995) was completed to conform to the City’s Official Plan and implements the vision, policies, and land use designations. In addition, the new Zoning Bylaw is reflective of contemporary zoning practices and will streamline the development review process, including ending exclusionary zoning and pre-zoning land to maximum height and density of the Official Plan designation.

A separate review of parking in the downtown was conducted, with the assistance of a consultant which resulted in a reduction of parking requirements for the downtown residential uses.

City Council approved the Zoning By-law in April of 2023 and the SDAF was used to accelerate the timing, retain consultants to assist in the preparation, to implement tools, such as charts, illustrations, notes to add clarity and assist in interpretation and to have the document peer reviewed. Unfortunately, the By-Law is under appeal.

3-Unit Demonstration Plans

As part of the Comprehensive Zoning By-law, the City ended exclusionary zoning and permitted three units as of right. In order to facilitate this form of development, a consulting team was retained to develop demonstration plans for new multi-unit low-rise residential applications. The 3-unit apartment and townhouse design demonstration concepts included a site plan, sketches of façade options, floor plans and a street view. The goal was to assist development proponents in designing successful infill townhouse and apartment developments.

Terms of Reference (TOR) for Various Studies

Student and interns staff helped prepare multiple Terms of Reference (TOR) for Official Plan Amendments (OPA), Zoning By-Law Amendments (ZBA) and Site Plan

development applications. TORs will assist the applicant to submit appropriate studies that are required to support the development application process. The TORs will be used to provide clear direction regarding City requirements so that the developers/consultants can submit necessary documents to fast-track development applications. Receipt of these standardized documents will assist staff in their review and will reduce time associated with the review process to meet the new timelines.

Technology

Engineering Modeling

The City uses hydraulic modelling for water supply system and wastewater collection system analysis to support growth capacity assurance, flood risk reduction, operational assessment, and long-term capital planning. The models are complex and require time to analyze. One of the deliverables of the City's recent Water and Wastewater Servicing Master Plan update was a recommendation to calibrate/rebuild the hydraulic models. Given the models would be with the consultant during the calibration/rebuilding time, we chose to have the Master Plan consultant complete our development capacity modelling work. This enabled us to be able to continue the development capacity modelling work in an efficient and accurate manner, thereby not slowing down our development review process.

Building Department Digitization of Records

Funding was used to digitize paper building permit records. This project is at the halfway point with additional capital funding needed in 2024 to complete the project. The digital records will be added to AMANDA to make permit review more efficient by having all permits related to a property stored in a digital form and reduce the reliance on having to check paper copies. A contract staff team was hired to sort and prepare the paper records to be sent off site to be digitized.

Digital Plan Review

Digital plan review software licenses were purchased for markup and collaboration tools and overlay digital plan review to expedite processing times and allow for a more efficient review process. This will allow for collaboration in real time and allow for faster, more accurate reviews to be used across departments who review development applications. Bluebeam will be used to improve user experience and to better leverage technology in the development application process.

AMANDA 7

The AMANDA system has been upgraded as of October 21, 2023, and now includes features and operating systems to facilitate electronic plans review and document management for Building, Planning, Engineering, and other divisions. The addition of the public portal has enabled the City to receive and process applications and documents related to building permit approvals digitally through the portal. In addition to creating the portal to provide access for external residents and clients, other solutions were required. These included software and workflow process amendments that were either included in the original project proposal or were added from contingency funds as need was discovered.

The overall outcome is streamlined online approvals application service with improved efficiency, a more organized work structure with efficiencies to better support staff, and overall accountability of the process.

Staffing and Resourcing: Retention of Temporary Staff, Peer Review Consultants to Advance the Application Backlog and Process Improvements

Funding was used to retain a contract Lean Black Belt to initiate process reviews and streamline development reviews. A number of interns were retained to support the digitization project and support planning staff in day-to-day processing and inquiries to free up senior staff time to assist in the process reviews. A contract consulting firm was retained to assist in Site Plan reviews and to help address the backlog in those applications while working through process reviews.

Expert consultants and contract staff were retained to advance the comprehensive zoning by law which pre-zoned land and ended exclusionary zoning.

IT staff were added to the SDAF team to advance Amanda 7, assist in folder review and clean up, and to train staff on the new updates. The project launched on October 21, 2023, and is operational and client facing.

Financial Implications

The total estimated project budget extends beyond the allocated provincial funding and is estimated at \$3 million. The SDAF grant of \$1.75 million is anticipated to cover the first year of the contract positions and a portion of the IT solutions to automate and digitize planning processes and citizen access.

Funding was provided through an initial upfront payment of \$850,000 within 30 days of execution of the Transfer Payment Agreement, and the remainder, based on project actuals will be provided upon submission and approval of the final report. The initial payment has been received.

The total estimated cost incurred to date is \$2,146,576.47 excluding HST. Of this amount, \$993,154.26 relates to labour recovery of temporary staff to implement the project. It is expected that additional capital and operating budgets will be needed to complete some of the work in progress.

Attachments

None

Departmental Approval

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