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CORPORATE REPORT

NO: R222 COUNCIL DATE: December 18, 2023

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO:	**Mayor & Council**	DATE:	**December 14, 2023**
FROM:	**General Manager, Engineering**	FILE:	**5210-01**
SUBJECT:	**Improvements to the Engineering Development Process**		

RECOMMENDATION

The Engineering Department recommends that Council receives this report for information.

INTENT

The intent of this report is to inform Council of proposed process and timeline improvements to the Engineering Department's land development process.

BACKGROUND

At the July 10, 2023 Regular Council Meeting, Mayor Locke asked staff to look at opportunities to substantially reduce the time it takes the City to review land development applications in order to decrease carrying costs under the current market conditions and thereby increase access to housing and affordability in Surrey.

Over the past few months, Engineering staff have meet with developers and facilitated a workshop with land development consultants to seek feedback on areas for improvement, consulted with other municipalities, reviewed emerging technology and trends, and reviewed staff resources and priorities.

DISCUSSION

Continuous improvement is the foundation of the City's approach to enhancing customer service. Recent feedback from the land development industry to staff indicated that Surrey is innovative, collaborative with industry, and the City's staff and processes are more efficient and streamlined compared to other municipalities. Notwithstanding, the industry workshop and discussions allowed focused dialogue on key areas, and as a result, identified areas of opportunities to further improve engineering review timelines and predictability of servicing requirements.

Engineering Design Criteria Manual

As part of designing infrastructure, whether for capital or land development projects, engineering consultants rely on a series of documents including: the City's Subdivision and Development Bylaw, Design Criteria Manual, Supplementary Drawings and Specifications, Neighbourhood Concept Plans, stormwater management plans and other industry guidelines, standards and best practices.

Over a period of time, inconsistencies between these documents have developed given that their respective updates were not aligned. This has led to varying interpretations and unclear development servicing requirements. Feedback from the industry focused on identifying the most common differences and amending the City's documents as follows:

- Update and make consistent the road standard cross-sections and Subdivision, Development Bylaw (Schedule K) to take precedence, with NCP's utilized for illustrative purposes on unique road cross-sections;
- Clarify arterial road standards in both urban and rural areas, particularly in relation to road-side ditches;
- Clarify secondary suite allocations for assessing sewer capacity;
- Clarify conflicting water design criteria;
- Clearly define street lighting requirements for infill developments.

Engineering Review Processing Timeframe Considerations

The City continually tracks and monitors engineering review processing times, specifically the following key performance indicators associated with site servicing requirements:

1. Project drawing submittals ("PD's"); and
2. Internal review time, in weeks, per drawing submittal.

The number of PD's for site servicing varies between one and eleven iterations, with an average of five, and the variation is primarily dependent upon the scope of work and quality of submissions.

The target review/turnaround timelines for drawing submittals is 2.5 weeks. In 2022, the City averaged 2.6 weeks; however, the average rate has increased in 2023 to 3.6 weeks, predominantly due to challenges in filling staff vacancies. Engineering is addressing these staffing issues by reallocating resources and adjusting priorities until vacancies have been filled.

Accordingly, feedback from the industry reflected concerns over the cumulative duration of drawing reviews. To this end, the following improvements will be implemented January 1, 2024:

- Earlier involvement with Engineering staff to provide greater clarity on road dedications, access/egress and servicing requirements;
- Establish a professional reliance model where:
    - The applicant's consultants submit a list of design variances/exceptions, and staff's review will focus only on those requests.
    - The City relies on the applicant's Qualified Environmental Professional to determine watercourse classification within existing road allowances.
- Establish a maximum duration of three-week review per PD and a maximum of four PD's to minimize the number of revisions and subsequent submissions; and

- Expand the use of surety bonds as an alternate form of security for Servicing Agreements to reduce carrying costs to the developer.

Other Considerations

Staff are working on making additional improvements in the following areas which is also based on feedback from the industry, some of which will include future reports for Council's consideration.

- Part 7A of the Zoning Bylaw in regards to road-side ditches;
- Erosion and Sediment Control Bylaw and professional reliance;
- Traffic Management Plan reviews and related permitting timelines;
- Facilitating pre-construction meetings sooner in the process; and
- Expediting security and holdback releases at all phases of a project.

CONCLUSION

Based on industry feedback and staff's review, improvements will be made to the Engineering development process to reduce review times for applications and these changes will take effect in early 2024, as described in this report.

Scott Neuman, P.Eng.
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SL/cc