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The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

From: Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development
Report: #2023-INFO-80
Date: September 22, 2023

Subject:

Final Reporting under the Streamline Development Approval Fund

Recommendation:

Receive for information

Report:

1. Background and Purpose

- 1.1 On January 19, 2022, the Province of Ontario announced the launch of the Streamline Development Approval Fund (SDAF) to implement streamlining development approval initiatives aimed at unlocking housing supply. The fund provides over \$45 million in funding to help Ontario's 39 largest municipalities accelerate the development of new housing by streamlining, digitizing, and modernizing their approach to managing and approving applications for residential developments. The Region was notified of its eligibility to receive up to \$500,000 under the SDAF Program subject to the execution of a Transfer Payment Agreement (TPA).
- 1.2 On February 23, 2022, Regional Council authorized the execution of the TPA and soon after, the Region received 50% of the eligible funding (\$250,000).
- 1.3 To be eligible for the final payment, a Final Report is required which: i) summarizes the project; ii) identifies how the funds were spent; and iii) outlines the measures or actions expected to be achieved. The Final Report is to be posted on the Recipient's publicly available website. Eligible funds are to be spent prior to the November 1, 2023 deadline.

1.4 Staff can confirm that all eligible funds have been spent; hence, the purpose of this report is to satisfy the Final Report requirements under the TPA.

2. Project Description

2.1 In July of 2021, the Region introduced a new development tracking software known as “PLANit”. This development tracking software replaces the previous software known as “Land Development Office” (LDO), and is comprised of two interfaces: an internal staff portal; and an external public portal.

2.2 The staff portal is for day-to-day data input, internal and external file circulation, data analysis, and outgoing public communications.

2.3 The public portal is for members of the public to electronically submit development applications to the Region and provide electronic payment. The public can view all other active development applications with Regional circulation. Components of the public portal include:

- Applying for applications;
- A details page including description, parcel attachment, owner information, location, and project details;
- Document uploading, which identifies the types of documents related to application;
- Application submission and payment; and
- Upload of building permit information from Area Municipalities.

2.4 PLANit has greatly modernized the Region’s development application review and approval process, with benefits including:

- a. Streamlining the application process, improving efficiency for Regional staff, applicants, agencies, and planners with use of electronic file reception, storage, and circulation;
- b. Significantly reducing the Region’s reliance on print material;
- c. Improving ease and simplicity through a browser-based interface;
- d. Improving access to development application information via the online Public Portal; and
- e. Tracking development applications through their entire life cycle creating a rich dataset that can be easily accessed, queried, and reported on.

2.5 The SDAF presented an opportunity to implement PLANit enhancements originally earmarked for subsequent years.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 Report [#2022-F-7](#) provides authorization to enter into the TPA, and provides background information on the SDAF, eligibility requirements and financial implications.

4. Work Completed Through the SDAF

- 4.1 To complete the SDAF work, staff re-engaged Computronix, PLANit's original vendor. Table 1 shows how the funds were spent by outlining the various PLANit enhancements that have been completed together with a description of the benefits to be achieved.

Table 1: Listing of Enhancements to PLANit through the SDAF

Enhancement	Description and Benefit
Creating an online application submission function for six application types	Allows for applicants to submit and manage development applications online. This is advantageous for users, allowing for an organized "one-stop shop" experience. For Durham Region, it integrates workflows in a unified manner, thereby minimizing errors, improving communication, and simplifying the overall process. Members of the public can use the online capability to search existing applications and use the Region's public map of application locations. The online process is AODA compliant.
Introducing the online payment portal integration	Applicants can submit fees associated with their development applications online instantly, saving time and costs associated with issuing, collating, receipting, and the courier of traditional payment methods.
Implementing an incomplete application workflow feature, allowing applicants to create and save their application submissions and return to finish later if they choose	Applicants can start the application process, save what progress has been made, and finish it at a later time. This enhancement allows users flexibility to start and submit the application at their convenience.

Enhancement	Description and Benefit
Ability to generate five new reports, including: Application Fees Revenue Report, Circulation Lists, Land Use Summaries, Consent Activity, and Application Processing Times	New reports were created which aggregate and summarize indicators related to development applications. The metrics generated are useful in Regional and provincial-level reporting.
Conducting analysis for area municipalities to use online submission tools and to upload building permit information online rather than via submitted spreadsheets	High-level requirements for system access by area municipalities for area municipal submissions/applications and application search and display, to allow for more efficient data transfer.
Adding circulation (eReferral) functionality to relevant parties on Pre-Consultations	Relevant commenting agencies are circulated on application and related documents. This reduces delays in the review process and provides all parties with documents in a “one-window” format.
Applying map display functionality for internal Staff Portal as well as the external Public Portal	Location of parcel(s) are shown on a map, to provide context to users. This feature provides the benefit of visualizing the location of the application and understanding the surrounding geography.
Displaying “ARN” labels which are more meaningful in development applications	Within a workflow map, a parcel’s “Assessment Roll Number” (ARN) is displayed to ensure the correct property is being viewed and used, reducing potential for error.
Creating multi-document upload to eReferral workflows	Users can upload multiple documents in a single transaction (in parallel) which shortens and streamlines the review and communication process. Workflows are improved as there is less chance for missing pertinent documents.
Ability to copy “conditions” from parent Subdivision or Condo phases to subsequent approvals	The copying of conditions from “parent” to “child” applications ensures consistency between development phases, where applicable.

Enhancement	Description and Benefit
Tracking of surplus farm dwellings in Regional Official Plan Amendments (ROPA)	Where ROPA application includes surplus farm dwelling(s), the system calculates land coming out of the agricultural base, tracks lots, and additional units.
Ensuring maximum file sizes are clearly listed in Public Portal	Development applications documents can be large. Listing a maximum file size for attachments helps ensures the document upload process is as seamless as possible.
Update the Open Data Protocol (OData) Feed and data model to include new fields introduced through SDAF enhancements	New fields introduced into PLANit database have been added to the OData Feed. An OData Feed reduces delays in accessing and collating data from PLANit, including information related to development applications.
Ability to Merge Contacts (Applicants)	Where legacy data contains multiple entries for the same applicant, the system can now merge historic records and related contact information so that up-to-date contact information, and good data hygiene practices are maintained.
Auto-populating application forms associated with online applications	Where applicants enter information online that is also required on a formal application form, the information entered online will auto-populate the formal (PDF) application form. This enhancement reduces clerical time to fill-out the application, as well as eliminating manual data-entry errors.
Upgrading the platform from v7.3 to v7.4.2	PLANit has been upgraded to the POSSE 7.4.2 platform. In addition to delivering the most secure version to date, the latest version of the POSSE platform brings enhancements, including enhanced GIS functionality such as displaying a map and parcel selection on the public site. Within the internal site, standardized Esri mapping buttons and tools are now available to assist in viewing and managing applications.

4.2 All the listed enhancements in Table 1 are now live. The Region has conducted a soft launch of these enhancements to ensure technological issues are resolved in advance of a roll-out to all users.

5. Relationship to Strategic Plan

5.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

Service Excellence – To provide exceptional value to Durham taxpayers through responsive, effective, and fiscally sustainable service delivery.

- 5.1 Optimize resources and partnerships to deliver exceptional quality services and value.
- 5.2 Collaborate for a seamless service experience.
- 5.3 Demonstrate commitment to continuous quality improvement and communicating results.
- 5.4 Drive organizational success through innovation, a skilled workforce, and modernized services.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The considerable number of enhancements to PLANit created through the SDAF support consistency and streamlining of the Region's development application review process, thus meeting the intent of the funding program.

6.2 The improvements made to PLANit will assist in accelerating the processes for reviewing, managing, and approving development applications.

6.3 All funds have been distributed to the vendor as per the grant terms and conditions.

6.4 A copy of this report will be forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to enable the remaining funds (\$250,000) to be paid to the Region.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Brian Bridgeman, MCIP, RPP, PLE
Commissioner of Planning and
Economic Development