

Streamlining The Municipal Development Review Process

Current Guide of Municipalities' Best Practices
January 23, 2020

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Introduction

Ontario's *Planning Act*, 1990, recognizes the decision making authority of municipal councils in local planning matters and establishes a process for development approvals. Municipal governments have the power to approve, conditionally approve, or reject development applications submitted by residents, businesses and others. If an appeal is made on a municipal decision, the application approval may then move onto the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT).

Every municipal development approval process follows a similar path from the moment of submission until the municipality makes a decision. The objective of this planning best practices guide is to offer solutions to the hurdles and bottlenecks faced by municipal governments in the approval process.

AMO recognizes that delays in development approval processes can impact economic development in the community by slowing the pace of new construction and affecting the supply of housing entering the market. Process delays can also result in deferred property tax revenues from new development, impacting the municipalities' fiscal capacity. The time taken to process different development approvals is often dependent upon the following variables:

- Complexity of the development application approval
- Comprehensiveness of supporting documents submitted in the application
- Alignment of the proposed development with the Zoning By-law, the Official Plan, the Provincial Plans and the Provincial Policy Statement
- Conditions of approval and additional permits required by third parties
- Municipal development approval process

This guide offers ideas for municipal governments to tackle these variables and so that the development approval process moves more quickly to save time while achieving good planning outcomes. Best practices can result in the following outcomes:

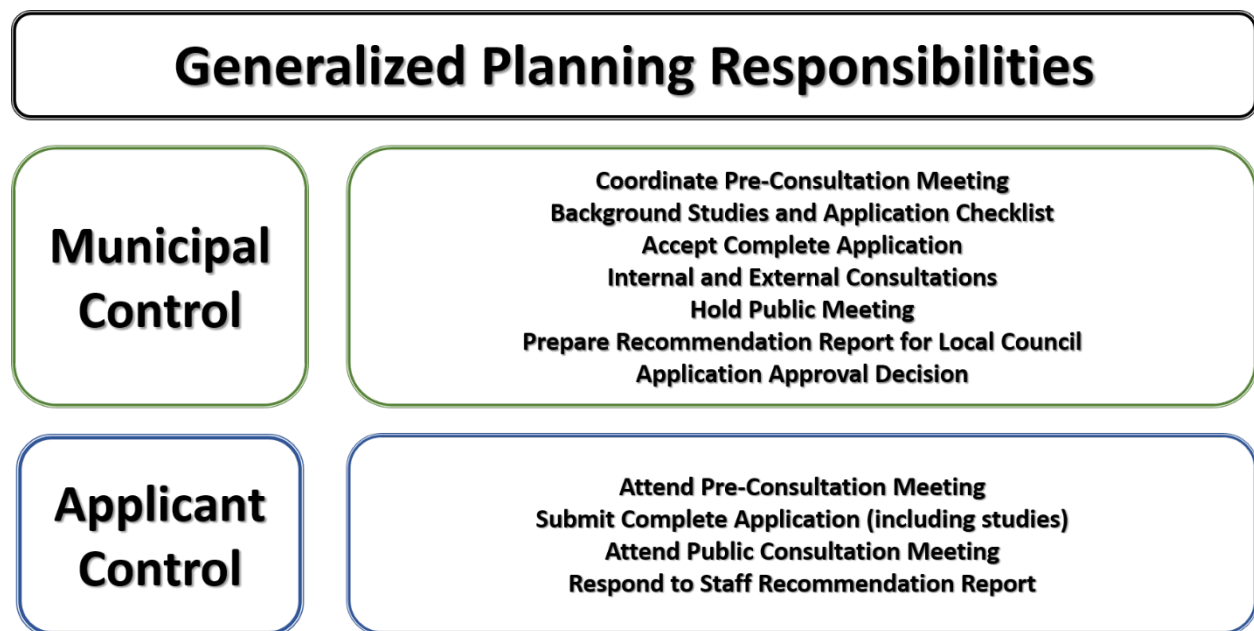
- Clarity on standards and requirements during the approval process for developers
- Reduce the number of incomplete applications submitted
- Arrive at approval decisions within prescribed timelines
- Increase coordination between municipal and other approval granting authorities
- Reduce the number of appeals to Local Planning Appeals Tribunal (LPAT)
- Encourage residents and businesses to follow the overall vision and development goals set by the municipality in its Official Plan.

Generalized Planning Process

To provide a context for improvement, the Guide begins by explaining the planning process for different types of development approvals under the *Planning Act*. Then the guide provides ideas for streamlining municipal decision-making. Finally, it provides case studies of initiatives taken by Ontario municipal governments to improve their local development process.

Why bother?

Applying planning best practices to the development approval process can address costly inefficiencies and lead to sustainable growth in local communities. It can also help local developers¹ navigate the development approval process with greater ease.



¹ The term “developer” used throughout the Municipal Best Practices guide covers the complete spectrum from local property owners looking to make improvements or additions to their property, to large scale real-estate builders looking to build condominiums or commercial complexes.

1 | Types of Development Approvals

Official Plan Amendment

WHAT IS IT?

The Official Plan is the municipality's vision for how a community will develop and describes what uses are best suited to which area. An Official Plan amendment changes a municipality's Official Plan, usually in response to a development application. Applications for Official Plan amendments cannot be made within two years of a municipality passing a comprehensive Official Plan, unless Council permits the application to be made².

IMPORTANT TIMELINES

| | | |
|---|-----------------|--|
| Application submitted by applicant | 30 Days | Municipal staff to review the completeness of application within 30 days of its receipt. |
| Municipal staff to issue public notice | 20 Days | Notice of statutory public meeting to be sent out 20 days prior to the date of meeting. |
| Applicant may appeal to the LPAT | 120 Days | If municipal council fails to make a decision on application within 120 days of it being deemed complete. |
| Official Plan amendment comes into effect | 20 Days | If there is no appeal within the 20 day appeal period after a decision, the notice for its adoption is posted. |

If the municipality is not exempt from approval, the matter needs to proceed to an approval authority.

² As per Section 26 of the *Planning Act* if an Official Plan is in effect in a municipality the council shall revise the Official Plan every 10 years as a new Official Plan and every five years thereafter, unless the Official Plan is replaced by another new Official Plan.

Zoning By-Law Amendment

WHAT IS IT?

The function of the Zoning By-law is to implement the Official Plan's vision, to put it into effect. If a developer wishes to use or develop their property in a way not permitted by the zoning by-law, they may apply for an amendment, a rezoning. To be approved, the proposed rezoning must align with municipality's Official Plan. Applications to amend the zoning by-law can only be made after two years have passed since the creation of a new comprehensive Zoning By-Law, as a result of an Official Plan update, unless Council permits the application to be made.

IMPORTANT TIMELINES

| | | |
|---|----------------|---|
| Application submitted by applicant | 30 Days | Municipal staff to review the completeness of application within 30 days of its receipt. |
| Municipal staff to issue public notice | 20 Days | Notice of statutory public meeting to be sent out 20 days prior to the date of meeting. |
| Applicant may appeal to the LPAT | 90 Days | If municipal council fails to make a decision on application within 90 days of it being deemed complete. |
| Zoning By-Law amendment comes into effect | 20 Days | If there is no appeal within the 20 day appeal period after a decision, the notice for its adoption is given. |

Minor Variance Approval

WHAT IS IT?

A minor variance allows a developer to use or develop land in a way that does not conform to the zoning by-law but follows its general intent. The Committee of Adjustment must ensure that the minor variance meets the “four tests” listed below.

1. Maintain the general intent and purpose of the official plan;
2. Maintain the general intent and purpose of the zoning by-law;
3. Be desirable for the appropriate development or use of the land, building or structure; and
4. Be minor in nature.

Minor variance applications are decided by a municipality’s Council or by their Committee of Adjustment. Applications for the minor variances cannot be made within two years from the day a zoning by-law amendment was made for the same property, unless Council permits.

IMPORTANT TIMELINES

| | | |
|---|----------------|--|
| Municipal staff to issue public notice | 10 Days | Notice of statutory public meeting to be sent out 10 days prior to the scheduled committee of adjustment hearing date. |
| Applicant can participate at the public hearing | 30 Days | The hearing by the Committee of Adjustment must be held within 30 days after the application is received. |
| Notice after a decision is made | 10 Days | There is 10 days for Committee of Adjustment to send out notice of decision. |
| Minor Variance decision is final | 20 Days | If there is no appeal within the 20 day appeal period after the notice of decision is given. |

Site Plan Control Approval

WHAT IS IT?

Site Plan Control by-laws are intended to establish areas which require site plans. A site plan shows on a map where development, landscaping, site drainage, infrastructure and other site details are designed, built and maintained in keeping with plans approved for a development. The Official Plan of a municipality shows or describes an area as a proposed site plan control area, where developers are required to undergo a 'site plan control approval' process in order to undertake development. In these areas a site plan approval is required prior to the issuance of a building permit for the proposed development.

IMPORTANT TIMELINES

Applicant can appeal



30 Days

After 30 days plans / drawings are submitted, applicant can appeal to the LPAT.

Draft Plan of Subdivision Approval

WHAT IS IT?

A subdivision application is a request to divide a piece of land into lots or parcels and offer for sale. Applicants must submit a Draft Plan of Subdivision for approval to the concerned approval authority³. Through the approval process, the municipality can ensure the proposed subdivision is developed in accordance with provincial policies and plans, and appropriate municipal regulations and standards. The municipality can also determine servicing needs and capacity.

IMPORTANT TIMELINES

| | | |
|--|-----------------|--|
| Application submitted by applicant | 30 Days | Municipal staff to review the completeness of application within 30 days of its receipt. |
| Municipal staff required to issue a formal notice of application to the public | 15 Days | Within 15 days of the application being deemed complete by the municipal staff. |
| Notice of statutory public meeting | 14 Days | Municipal staff to issue notice of public meeting at least 14 days before the date. |
| Applicant may appeal to the LPAT | 120 Days | If Approval Authority fails to make a decision on application within 120 days of it being deemed complete. |
| Draft Plan of Subdivision is approved | 20 Days | If there is no appeal to LPAT within the 20 day appeal period after the decision is made on the Draft Plan of Subdivision application. |

Once all the conditions of draft approval have been met, lots can be sold only after plan of subdivision has been registered.

³ The **approval authority for Plan of Subdivision** may vary across the municipalities:

- The local councils of some upper-tier, lower-tier and single-tier municipalities are the approval authorities for draft plans of subdivision. Upper-tier municipalities may further delegate the authority to approve plans of subdivision to its lower-tier municipalities.
- Municipal government may also delegate the authority to committees of council or appointed officers.
- In all other areas, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) is the approval authority but may delegate the authority to approve plans of subdivision to municipalities or planning boards in Northern Ontario.

Draft Plan for Condominium Approval

WHAT IS IT?

Condominium development is the form of ownership of property where owners have individual ownership of their own units and shared ownership of common elements like corridors, lobbies, elevators, etc. Draft Plan for Condominium Approval is a request for division of land and/or buildings through Plans of Condominium. Section 9(2) of the *Condominium Act* states that an application for condominium is processed in the same way as a Plan of Subdivision under Section 51 of the *Planning Act*, with necessary modifications.

IMPORTANT TIMELINES

See the Subdivision Section Timeline Chart as it is the same process for Condominium Approval.

Land Severance (Consent) Approval

WHAT IS IT?

A land severance or consent is the authorized separation of a piece of land into two lots to form two separate parcels of land. An application is required if the developer wants to sell, mortgage or enter into an agreement (for at least 21 years) for a portion of their land. The consent granting authority is generally Council. Council may in turn delegate consent granting authority to a Committee of Adjustment.

IMPORTANT TIMELINES

| | | |
|--|----------------|---|
| Notice of decision on application to public | 15 Days | Council to issue notice of decision within 15 days of decision. |
| Applicant may appeal to LPAT | 90 Days | If Approval Authority fails to make a decision on application within 90 days of it being deemed complete. |
| Land Severance (Consent) comes into effect | 20 Days | If there is no appeal to LPAT within the 20 day appeal period after the decision is given. |
| Conditional approval for Consent application | 1 Year | Severance conditions must be met by the applicant within one year of conditional approval. |

Some municipalities may hold a public meeting for consent applications. Fourteen days before the decision is made, Council should ensure that appropriate notice is given and if required, a public meeting should be held.

Building Permit

WHAT IS IT?

Building permits are issued by municipal Building Officials responsible for enforcing the Building Code in the municipality. A building permit is necessary when a developer wishes to construct a new building, renovate, demolish, or change the use of a building.

IMPORTANT TIMELINE

| | | |
|---|-------------------|--|
| Timeframe for Building Permit application | 10-30 Days | Depending upon the complexity of the building, municipal staff will be responsible for reviewing and making a decision on the Building Permit application. |
|---|-------------------|--|

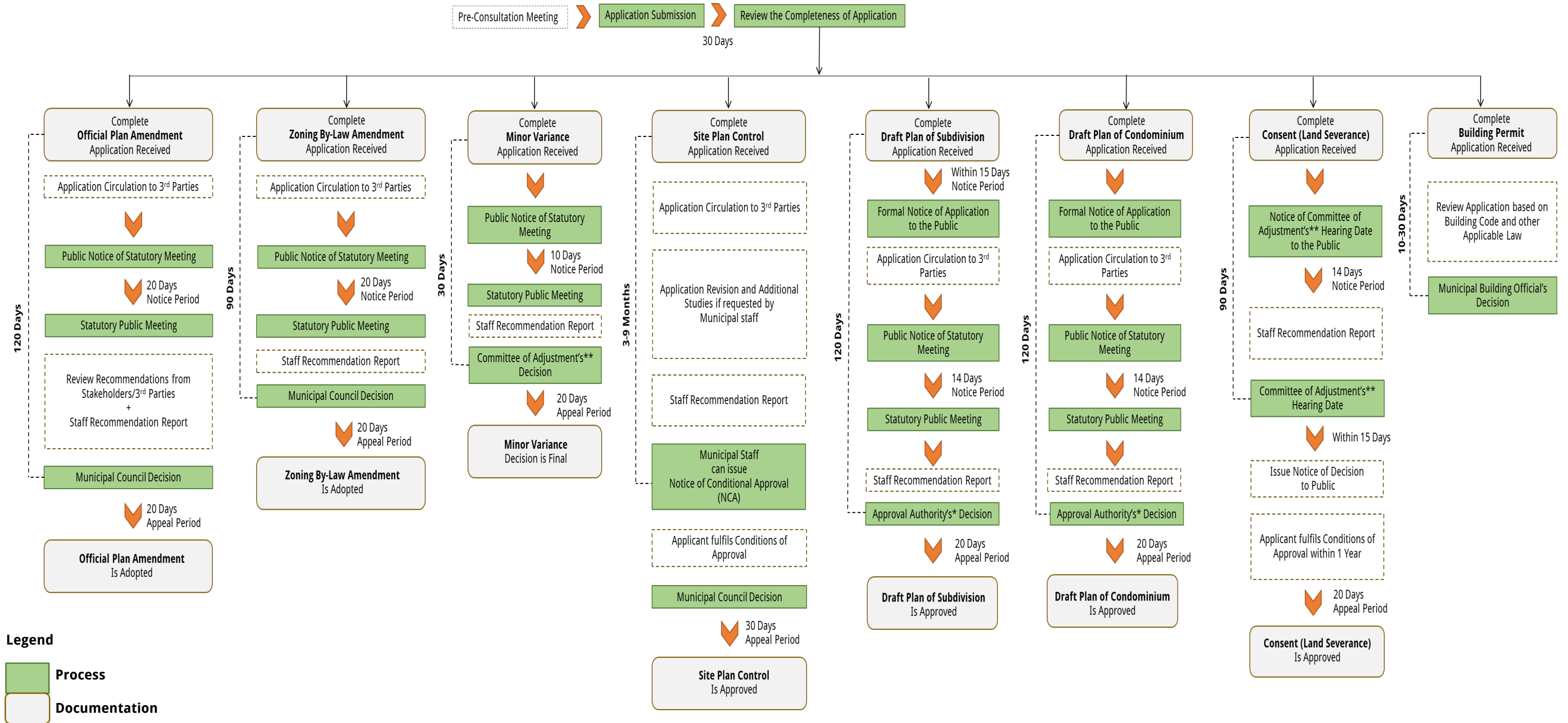
Other Approvals

Other permits and approvals may be required in specific circumstances. These include:

- A. **Part Lot Control Exemption Application Part** allows municipal council to pass a by-law removing Part Lot Control restrictions from lands. This allows land parcels to be divided for sale within a registered subdivision plan. For example, it is used for townhouse developments after construction has started to accurately set the boundary lines between the townhouse units.
- B. **Septic Tank Permits** are required where there is no municipal or communal sewage system. It is obtained from the local municipal government to construct a new septic system under the Ontario Building Code. In rural or cottage areas, a permit may be required from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry before the landowner/developer can begin construction.
- C. **Heritage Permit**, under the *Ontario Heritage Act*, is required from the local municipal government to carry out works that may alter the appearance of the façade of a building listed as being of cultural or heritage importance.
- D. **Environmental Assessments (EA)** are a provincial or federal approval process that some developments must follow under the *Environmental Assessment Act*. Some developments will require an assessment of environmental impacts. Often this need is identified by the conservation authority. These reports need to be of sufficient depth to meet scientific requirements.
- E. **Change of Use Permits** are required from the building department when there is a major change of occupancy in the building. Even if there is no new construction, change of use permits are necessary to ensure that the existing building can safely accommodate the proposed use as per Building Code requirements.
- F. **Records of Site Condition (RSC)** describe the environmental condition of a property based on a given point in time based on the results of an environmental site assessment (ESA). They are commonly required when a developer wants to change the land use of a property from a use where soil contamination was likely. RSCs must be filed with the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks to ensure the condition of the property meets the appropriate standards.
- G. **Certification of Property Use (CPU)** is a control document that is issued to developers by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, to operate on a land with environmental risk as part of a Record of Site Condition (RSC). CPU is issued in relation to an accepted Risk Assessment that is required to implement Risk Management Measures (RMMs) on site. RMMs are implemented on a site to ensure there is no adverse effect associated with the contaminants present on site, this can include installing equipment, monitoring, recording or reporting of contaminants.

- H. **Removal of Holding Symbol** application may need to be submitted by the owner/developer to the municipality to remove the “hold” on future use of lands, buildings or structures in a particular zone. Holding provisions in an area may be applied to prevent the development of land for a particular use (example commercial, residential) until local municipal services such as roads or sewers are in place. Council may remove the (H) Holding Symbol by passing a Zoning By-law amendment to remove the “hold” on the zoning.

Application Process



NOTE: Timelines as per the *Planning Act*, 1990

***Approval Authority** may vary across the municipalities:

- The local councils of some upper-tier, lower-tier and single-tier municipalities are the approval authorities for subdivision and condominium applications. Upper-tier municipalities may further delegate the authority to approve plans of subdivision to its lower-tier municipalities.
- Municipal government may also delegate the authority to committees of council or appointed officers.
- In all other areas, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) is the approval authority but may delegate the authority to approve plans of subdivision to municipalities or planning boards in Northern Ontario.

***Committee of Adjustment** is set up by the Council in municipalities who have passed a Zoning By-law under Section 34, *Planning Act*

Considerations for your Municipal Application Process

| Direct Municipal Control | Questions about your application process? |
|--|---|
| Some processes like applications for Official Plan, Zoning By-Law, Subdivision, Severance, Part Lot Control Exemptions, Draft Plan for Condominiums, and Removal of Holding Symbol fall directly under the municipal government's control. | <p>Is the information provided on your municipality's website clear and complete?</p> <p>Is there any duplication or unnecessary steps in the application process that you can combine?</p> <p>Are the development application forms easy to follow and complete?</p> <p>Can you reduce the number of people involved in the application review?</p> <p>Is there a stage in the application process that routinely takes too long to be completed? How can it be streamlined?</p> |
| Partial Municipal Control | Questions about your application process? |
| Other processes require a collaborative effort between the municipality and third parties such as provincial ministries or other Boards (i.e. EAs, Heritage Permits, etc.) | <p>Is there a way to address complaints from applicants related to the coordination between municipality and third parties?</p> <p>Is there a way to improve collaboration between departments and third parties?</p> <p>How can you inform the applicants about the status of the application and possible ways to address delays?</p> |
| Limited Municipal Control | Questions about your application process? |
| Finally, there are some processes like the Certificate of Property Use (CPU) and the Record of Site Condition (RSC) which, after a certain stage of processing are completely out of municipal control. | <p>Have you informed applicants about the third party expectations?</p> <p>Do you have good relations with third party reviewers?</p> <p>Have you discussed how to make it easier for third party reviewers to meet application process deadlines?</p> |

2 | Best Practices for Ontario's Municipalities

This section provides examples of approaches which have helped streamline the process. It highlights the immediate and long term benefits that could arise from municipal attention to certain crucial stages of the planning process.

Better Approval Processes

Efficient planning processes typically focus on five critical steps.

1. Conveying Information and Municipal Expectations to Applicants

Municipal governments can encourage better quality applications and approvals by publishing all essential information and requirements. This information can be made available through the municipal government's website or through guides available at municipal offices. The following are suggested documents that may help applicants understand what their municipality wants for development:

- a. **Growth Vision of the Municipality:** Making the municipality's strategic vision for the growth of the community publically available in both a simple and in-depth version can help developers create proposals that align with municipal expectations.
- b. **Location of Lands Ready for Development:** Informing developers about prime development or re-development areas can direct applicants to places where the municipality is prepared to accommodate growth, where infrastructure and amenities are in place. This can be done by making land use and other maps publically available or by identifying vacant land parcels.
- c. **Encourage Developers to Seek Advice from Municipal Staff:** Discussions with staff before an application is submitted is a good opportunity for applicants to gather the types of information they need to submit to have complete and high-quality applications.

2. Pre-Consultation Meeting

A comprehensive pre-consultation meeting at the very beginning of the approval process can reduce delays caused by incomplete or low quality applications and ensure greater co-ordination between the applicant, the municipality and all other third parties involved in the approval process. It is the most important step to streamline development approvals. Council may by by-law require applicants to pre-consult and must honour requests by applicants for pre-consultation.

- a. **Site Visit:** A meeting at the site can fast track issue identification. All parties involved in the approval process should attend. Depending on the nature of the application, the pre-consultation meeting could include planners, building officials, ministry representatives, Conservation Authorities, Local Distribution

Company (LDC) or Hydro One, etc. The meeting will ensure all participants have an understanding of what permits and processes will be necessary to make a decision on the approval. As well, participants can assess the complexity of the application and identify barriers and other “deal breakers” before time and money is invested.

- b. **Information Package:** Municipal staff should prepare an information package for applicants as part of the pre-consultation meeting. This package can include a checklist of documents, supplementary reports, surveys or studies that will or may be required to submit a complete application. As well, the information package can include approval process flowcharts, expected timelines, frequently asked questions and a sample or template of a complete application.
- c. **Complex and Straightforward Approvals:** Some municipalities identify the level of complexity of an application to help shape expectations, timing and requirements. This helps move more routine approvals through the process in a timely manner.

3. Complete Application Approvals

Decision-making timeframes under *the Planning Act* begin when a complete application is first submitted.

- a. **Applicant checklist:** Applicants should have access to a comprehensive checklist of documents, supplementary reports, surveys or studies that will be required for them to submit a complete application. They should also be aware of the level of detail required to ensure the decision-making process goes smoothly.
- b. **Letter from a Planning Professional:** Municipal governments can request applicants to submit a letter from a registered planner stating the application is complete to the best of their knowledge. Where this has been done there is a higher level of coordination and integration of the various components of the application.

4. Conditional Approval

Municipal staff have the option of recommending an application be conditionally approved in their report to council. This means that the development is approved on the condition that certain requirements are met in timely manner. Council can establish timelines for inspection to enforce conditional approvals. The applicant must be informed that clearing conditions is their responsibility to secure final approval from council. Failing to clear conditions by the specified timeframe can lead to delays in the development process. This helps keep the process moving while clarifying responsibilities.

5. Municipal Government Decision

The staff report evaluates the proposed development's conformity with the municipality's Official Plan, conformity or conflict with any Provincial Plans, and consistency with the Provincial Policy Statement. It also incorporates input from the public and other approval bodies and considers factors like environmental risk and potential impacts on the neighbouring residents and the community at large. It then makes a recommendation on whether the application should be approved.

Municipal staff should make their best efforts to reduce multiple peer-reviews of these background documents. A consistent lens, when considering development approvals, is also essential. If the municipal staff identifies a new or unfamiliar technical element in the application, they should present the new concept to the council members in advance of using it. Then when an application using this tool is under consideration, council is clear on what they are being asked to do.

The professional opinions found in staff recommendation reports should be taken seriously. In many cases not taking this advice can have legal implications. For example, at the Local Planning Appeal tribunal (LPAT) hearing, any discrepancies between the staff recommendation report and the final decision of the local council could be questioned. As well, should there be a natural calamity after the implementation of a development project, there may be legal action.

Better Approaches and Tools

In addition to evaluating the application process to find improvements, the municipality can optimize the use of certain approaches, tools and organization of its planning and building departments to streamline the application process. These practices significantly reduce the time spent circulating the development application within the municipality departments and with external agencies. They can also help strengthen staff reports to provide better advice councils as they decide on an application.

Community Planning Permit System (CPPS)

The Community Planning Permit System, also known as the 'development permit system,' is an alternative to traditional zoning and site plan minor variance approvals. The CPPS is an alternative to traditional zoning that might assist a municipality to achieve their growth objectives. Municipal council may by by-law establish a community planning permit system within the municipality for any area or areas set out in the by-law. The by-law sets out the conditions and processes to be applied at the area specific level.

CPPS can be used to streamline the planning process by combining zoning, site plan control, and minor variance applications into one process, and can outline other details like exterior design and discretionary uses. It is an upfront planning process to achieve local growth objectives. CPPS is enacted through Official Plan policies and a

by-law to regulate, among other matters, the use, size, height, lot coverage and location of buildings within the boundaries of the CPPS area as identified in an Official Plan.

To enact a CPPS, preliminary studies that address a wide range of planning and infrastructure matters must be completed. As well, the public must be given the opportunity to participate and provide comments on the CPPS. This approach requires a great deal of effort to initiate, but can speed up applications and give developers a very clear picture of what is required of them. Forty-five days is the regulated timeline for reviewing permit applications.

Appeals Process

Council has one opportunity to make a decision on a planning application. The latest changes to the *Local Planning Appeals Tribunal Act (LPAT)*, 2017 have re-introduced de novo hearings. This means that if an application is appealed, the LPAT can make a new decision using new evidence introduced during LPAT hearings as well as the original application. The new changes also mean that LPAT decisions will now be made based on the adjudicator's judgement of the "best planning outcome" instead of the "consistency and conformity" with the official plan and provincial policies test.

LPAT hearings can prove to be a time consuming and expensive for municipal governments. Improving the development approval process can reduce the number of planning applications sent to the tribunal by ensuring more applications align with municipal interests, priorities and expectations.

Department Structures

One Window Approach: Municipalities that combine planning, building and engineering staff into a development department have significantly reduced approval times. A combined department can provide an internal "one window" perspective on development approvals, and advise applicants on required changes to the application. This coordination and focused attention on applications reduces the amount of municipal resources and time needed to approve applications.

Concierge Approach: Some municipalities assign a single staff member to a development proposal to create 'concierge services'. This staff person is responsible for guiding the application through the development approval process from the pre-consultation meeting to the final decision by council. The staff member can be responsible for:

- Making sure that the approval process follows all timelines set out in the *Planning Act*;
- Routinely communicating with the developer on the status of their application, including what may be causing delays;

- Integrating recommendations and resolving issues that may arise amongst internal departments, external agencies, and stakeholders at the public meeting; and
- Assisting the applicant in understanding any resubmission requirements or conditions of approval.

Tools for Process Improvement

Some municipalities are using the following process management tools to improve the quality of service and reduce timelines:

- a. **Six Sigma/LEAN:** LEAN/Six Sigma incorporates private sector performance methodologies into improving public sector performance related to effectiveness, efficiency and modernization of staff, departments, processes, and overall municipal organizations. Through the LEAN/Six Sigma process, further efficiencies and cost reductions can be realized internally with staff, as well as externally with customers, such as developers, councillors, and members of the community.

Municipal Staff are trained learn and develop the fundamental steps of LEAN/Six Sigma using certificate courses and workshops. Some municipalities have trained staff to become the 'trainer' themselves, allowing for internal training and a consistent contact to guide and track projects, planning, and short and long-term goals. Much of the training focus is on how to synchronize work processes, eliminate waste, duplication, and outdated practices, and increase value.

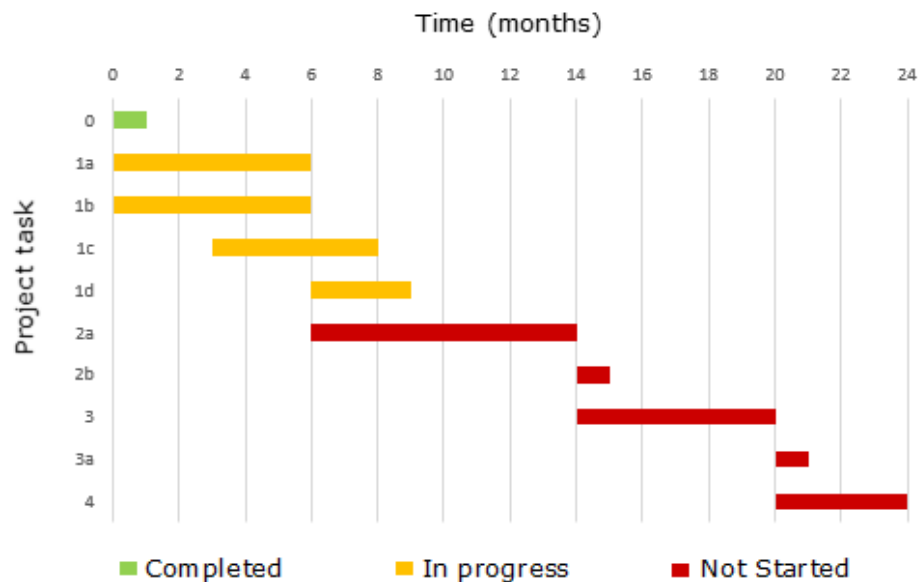
In simplified terms, initially the principles of Six Sigma focus on problem identification, definition and the desired outcome. Secondly, they are used to identify and measure the process in order to quantify process efficiencies or inefficiencies into data. Next, staff analyze the data to identify issues or incorrect information. Using this analysis, staff can modify, change, or eliminate process characteristics to make improvements. Lastly, the control principle in Six Sigma can prevent or correct issues before they result in delays or other inefficiencies down the road.

Lean and Six Sigma, as mentioned above, seek to change the way work is completed by placing the emphasis on inefficiency and waste within work processes. This is often achieved through cross-collaborative work teams throughout the organization, where departments work with one another in order to identify where synergies can be created and defects can be corrected – thus improving organizational communication by way of this cross-collaboration. –Public Sector Digest

- b. **Gantt chart:** Gantt charts are used for tracking timelines and step-by-step actions required to reach an outcome. Gantt charts are a simple, affordable and efficient way of identifying process stages, timelines and critical decision points.

A Gantt chart lists out each task to be performed as well as deadlines and the expected time it will take to complete individual tasks. In doing so, it identifies a critical path for achieving desired outcomes on time. Gantt charts can be prepared and circulated with the application package (figure 1) to make all municipal departments and external agencies aware of their responsibilities in co-ordination with others.

Figure 1. Gantt chart



Source: uwaterloo.ca

- c. **Digital Solutions:** Digital solutions can be helpful on many fronts. It can reduce staff time required for in-person interaction with applicants before, during and after development approvals by providing information they need. Electronic or E-permitting is a set of online tools and services that automate and streamline approval processes. One such e-permitting system is the Building Information Management (BIM) system that provides a common online platform for all internal departments and external agencies. Because everyone has access to all information in the application it assists in:

- Receiving documents and supporting documents from applicants
- Circulation to internal and external departments and status of review
- Tracking of Application

While purchasing this software can be costly, professionals who use the system have experienced time savings of up to 65%, a reduction in need for human resources of up to 44%, printing cost savings of up to 72% and reduction of hardcopy storage by up to 54%.

After the submission and acceptance of a complete application, municipal staff can save additional time by reducing the number of status inquiries by

applicants. E-permitting systems can also provide applicants with approval details, links to staff reports, information on the council/committee hearing date and links to the meeting agenda and schedule.

3 | Best Practices in Action

This section of the Guide highlights innovative measures taken by municipal governments to improve the development process.

Case Studies

1. Caledon's Development Application Review Team (DART)

The Town of Caledon has created a Development Application Review Team (DART) to facilitate improved and complete development application submissions that takes place before the applicant submits a formal application. The purpose and processes behind DART are to confirm when approvals are required, identify the drawings, supporting studies and reports required, and review applicable planning policies, timeliness, relevant council decisions, and areas of concern. The overall goal is to streamline the process, heightening applicant and involved parties' awareness, and ensure timeliness, while eliminating duplication. All parties involved in the development application process are able to be transparent about the requirements and concerns and keep everyone informed at one table during a set meeting time.

As an initial step before the DART process begins, the municipal planning department holds a meeting (free of charge) between municipal planners and the applicant to share information. Therefore, all parties can move forward to start the DART process fully aware and prepared with the required materials (e.g., studies and logistical details). The professional composition of the DART team includes a department representative (e.g., planning, building, finance, public works, engineering, urban design, landscape, zoning etc.) and external organizations (e.g., Conservation Authorities and the Region of Peel). The team also circulates invitations to the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) as required. Depending on location, other parties such as school boards or hydro companies may be involved. Caledon Council is heavily involved in the DART process since the 2008 Official Plan amendment on DART went through Council. Councillors also share the DART process and related information to their constituents through forms available on Caledon's website. Caledon has found the process to be more upfront, transparent by helping to form community relationships across the private and public sectors by combining a group's time and resources at one table. For a fee, applicants can meet with the DART team before submitting an application and receive face-to-face comments and direction on their work to-date as a fully involved consultative group. The DART table attendees on both the municipality's and applicant's sides are encouraged to have open discussion and ask questions to create a fuller and

faster application process. The overall goal is to have a complete, one-step application process determined from the DART meeting.

The DART team:

- a. Identifies all drawings, supporting studies and reports required by the municipality to make a decision on the development application approval
- b. Identifies other approvals required by third parties like provincial ministries or conservation authorities
- c. Reviews planning policies applicable to the proposed site or potential areas of concern based on the preliminary information provided by the applicant
- d. Outlines expected decision timelines to the applicant

The DART was created as a result of robust changes to the *Planning Act* (2004-2005). Caledon was looking for ways to improve the miscommunications and overall struggle around the application approval procedure for applicants and staff. Before implementing the DART, difficulties that Caledon experienced around the application approval process included missing reports required for the application, incomplete site-walk visit requirements, inaccurate planning jurisdiction reports, and receiving applications in incorrect formats.

After implementing the DART, many of these difficulties have been improved or eliminated altogether. For Caledon, some specific benefits include getting site plan approval by the third submission (generally), not having to send out an initial letter about required studies, a decrease in the number of submissions, a strong sense of trust between parties, improved cross-departmental communication, and familiarity around the process. Having the same Planner throughout the whole process allows for a smoother, faster process.

Efficiencies have been found and information does not have to be repeated. The return on investment of forming the DART have been completing the application earlier, applicants being aware of dates and expectations, and the DART being able to analyze multiple applications during table meetings. Overall costs included the \$400.00 fee for applicants that is paid to the municipality, along with the separate application fees. It is also important to factor in the table discussion costs of having multiple participants attending the table DART meetings. Because the DART process is affordable and the payment from the applicant is put towards cost recovery for the municipality, the DART is transferable and scalable depending on a municipality's size, complexity and capacity.

2. E-Permitting (BizPaL) in the City of Greater Sudbury

The City of Greater Sudbury provided a free, online and nation-wide portal service, called BizPal that allowed businesses to apply to business permits and licences.

This e-permitting service allowed businesses to access a customized list of permits and licenses required by each order of government. In doing so, this platform reduced administrative burden and lowered the risk of non-compliance for businesses. There are 22 municipalities across Ontario that provide an e-permitting service. However, Greater Sudbury created a Compliance and Enforcement Services division that provided assistance directly to businesses, in conjunction to the online e-permitting system. The division also helped to organize and relay information across departments in the municipality and connect businesses accordingly. This created greater transparency both internally across departments and staff, as well as externally to businesses as members of the public when interacting with the municipality. It is important to note that Greater Sudbury is no longer running BizPal, however it is a great example of what e-permitting services could be like for other municipalities when working with businesses directly.

3. Community Planning Permit System (CPPS) in Gananoque

In 2010, the Town of Gananoque passed a community planning permit by-law, applicable to certain areas of the municipality. It replaces the need for zoning, site plan and minor variance approvals in areas covered by the Community Planning Permit System (CPPS). The CPPS lists the types of developments that do not require planning approvals for construction, such as single dwelling, semi-detached and duplex units.

Gananoque's CPPS has three different application streams based on the scale, need for securities and potential off-site impact of the proposed development. This streamlines the process by identifying the level of application complexity and review required from municipal staff. Any additional approval controls that would be required for implementation are also determined by municipal staff. In having three different application streams under the CPPS, the entire development process was improved. Applicants found having one application easier, especially if they are new to the application approval process. By having one application, the debate around minor variance versus zoning by-law amendments was eliminated.

In the CPPS, pre-consultation is required by the Town of Gananoque and is a key component in identifying what the applicant is proposing to undertake. As part of the pre-consultation, staff are able to outline the requirements of submission (e.g., background reports, renderings, drawings and other information) and note any potential concerns or challenges. The applicant is provided with a pre-consultation form which summarizes the project, expected requirements and is signed by staff and the applicant. The formal application form is not available to the applicant until the pre-consultation has occurred. Applications are not deemed complete until they fulfill the requirements outlined in the pre-consultation form and any internal or peer review of background information. This is particularly important in more complex applications. In the case of Gananoque, staff have placed a receive date and a deemed complete date on the application. Staff do not proceed until

such time as the application is deemed complete – then the “clock starts”. In some circumstances, there are times that staff are aware of certain conditions forthcoming and set the meeting dates, however, not anything that would impede or halt the process. Staff also prepared a list of exempted developments which included a list that was similar to their site plan control by-law around single family, semi, and duplexes, unless they are within 30 metres of a watercourse. Staff highlight the importance of having strong language included in the by-law around the exempted developments.

Prior to developing the CPPS, municipal staff and council decided that they wanted to improve and streamline their planning process from the standpoint of the developer or contractor, as well as within the organization. From a municipal perspective, having one application and up-front information from developers made a difference in efficiency, sped up the application approval process, and required less frequent public meetings notifications to go out to the public.

Staff prepared an information report to Council on the Development Permit System and how it could work. While staff identified that they could undertake a zoning by-law and development permit by-law in a specific area, it was noted that given the size and geographical area of the town, it would be beneficial to have one central document to be more flexible in some areas and specific in other areas. Staff anticipated that the type of CPPS document would be primarily in the hands of the business community. Therefore, they held a preliminary consultation session with the Chamber of Commerce and the Business Improvement Area (BIA), and a secondary session held with the real estate sector and lawyers. The Planning Advisory Committee also had two working sessions on the development plan and there was an open house and public meeting. The CPPS application approval document was created with clear and accessible descriptions and graphics.

Undertaking the CPPS and writing the applicable by-law included Gananoque hiring a consultant to undertake an Official Plan and Zoning by-law. It was during this process that staff decided to move forward with the development permit by-law. In Gananoque, the financial implication in 2010 for a zoning by-law was \$16,896 and to change to a development permit bylaw was \$41,040. This is due to a full municipal inventory of buildings, important landforms and design conditions, development and illustrations of design criteria, land use standards, and review streams. Fortunately, for the municipality, it could be undertaken with the Consultant and there was no additional studies required.

In undertaking the CPPS, Gananoque has seen the benefits and costs of the system. The CPPS has added extra flexibility in traditional residential areas where the town has large homes with architectural and historical merit. It prevents a new modern home looking “out of place” within that area if it does not meet the criteria or site provisions. However, as noted above, it is important to have strong language around these provisions. Stakeholder response has been generally positive and developers and contractors appreciate the simplified application. Gananoque staff

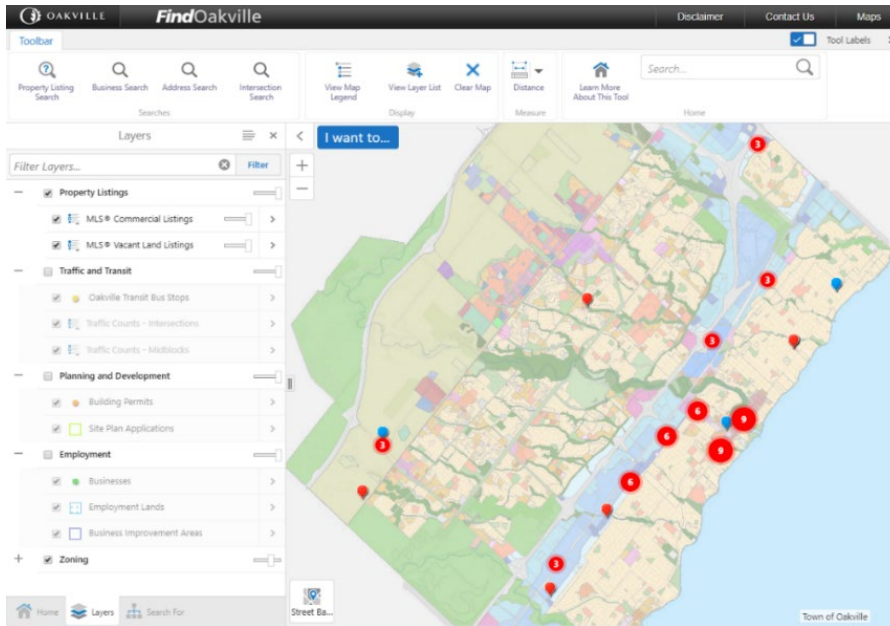
think that the CPPS has been a positive initiative for their small, rural municipality. Geographically the town is small enough that it made sense to undertake one DP by-law and not both a DP and zoning by-law. Other municipalities may have areas that they would like to focus on, such as entrances, their downtown core, or heritage areas where a separate by-law may work better than a zoning by-law. The by-law needs buy-in from council and the approval authorities from either committees or staff. The overall quality of the CPPS document rests on the people that are approving it.

4. Digital Solutions in Oakville

In the Town of Oakville, the “FindOakville” online directory was developed to provide detailed property information to interested buyers and commercial businesses on available industrial and commercial real estate. It also includes other information that is useful during the site selection process (e.g., zoning, demographics, local business information, etc.). “FindOakville” was developed as a departmental-level initiative built by staff using the municipality’s internal GIS system. At a high-level, the development process included scoping out the features and functionality of the tool, acquiring licenses for the data included in the tool (e.g., real estate data feed, employment survey data, demographic data, etc.), the build-out of the tool, and extensive question-and-answer testing. Once the tool was ready, Oakville Council was provided training on how to use the tool and the information that it contains. Council training sessions were held for one-hour so that each member of council had the opportunity to use the tool hands-on. Oakville staff also have access to the one-on-one tool training that is quick and built on the same platform as the other mapping tools available at the municipality. Staff have seen it as a useful tool when meeting with prospective businesses looking to locate in Oakville. From a business and public perspective, the response has been positive from the business community and has given Oakville larger economic development outreach.

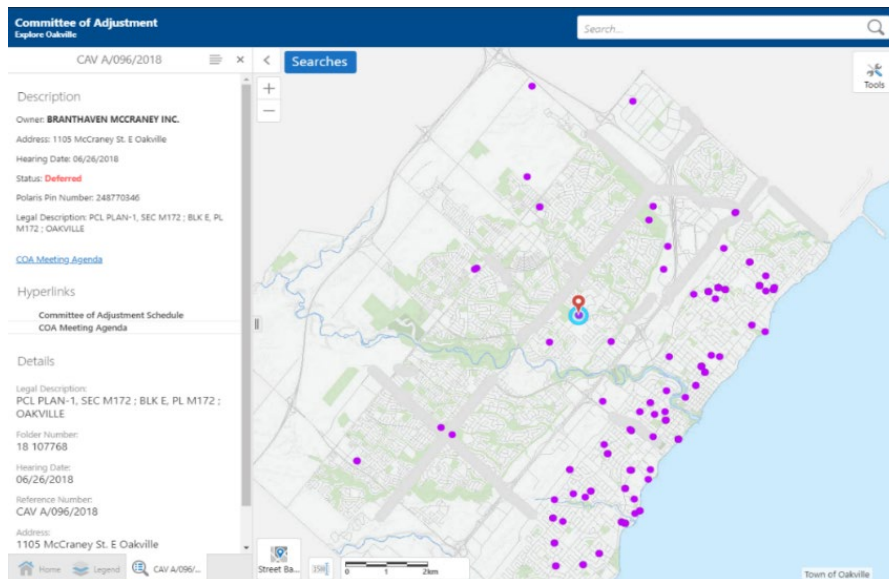
The “FindOakville” online directory is a transferable initiative, especially from a financial perspective. The work to build the tool was done internally through existing staff and therefore had no budget additional attached. However, there are some annual fees for data licensing. While Oakville’s tool was built in-house, there are also similar tools available commercially. According to staff, the most difficult part of the process was getting all of the necessary and accurate real estate data. It is important for municipalities to consider the time consuming process of maintaining real estate data if a robust real estate data feed is not available for a particular community. Without this data, the tool becomes less valuable for finding sites. However, the ability to see all of the other site selection data in one place (e.g., zoning, demographics, etc.) is still quite valuable for a municipality and the business community. Below, Figure 2 shows a map of vacant commercial and residential land listings publicly available.

Figure 2. Map showing Property Listings



Additionally, the status of planning applications (figure 3) can be tracked online at the ward level on “FindOakville”.

Figure 3. Tracking Application Status



5. LEAN in Bruce County

Bruce County has taken significant steps to ensure that municipal staff are trained to use techniques and tools that make everyday work as efficient as possible. The County is working to become a LEAN certified organization and using the LEAN model's principles across departments to continuously improve service delivery and optimize resources. The principles of LEAN are applied across the municipality in the areas of invoicing, report templates, and applicant awareness (consent lapsing). In 2018, Bruce County started the LEAN initiative by including staff in a two-day training session on the 'Introduction to LEAN for Government' and 'iLEAN: Visual Management and Flow Experience' offered by Alpen Path Solutions Inc. Two staff members were then selected to have additional, senior training that allowed them to be internal LEAD leaders and central sources of knowledge for the organization. These leaders could then provide additional training and real-time feedback to staff as required regarding ongoing LEAN projects, questions and concerns. The following year, Bruce County participated in "LEAN: Optimizing Flow to Deliver Value" training. Particularly, the County saw great value in the introduction of "Gemba Walks", where all levels of staff, including the management team, review daily work together and discuss staff recommendations. Many efficiencies have been found by going through these "Gemba Walks" toward "Just Do It" actions, as named by the staff, where recommendations are implemented. As part of this implementation process, staff identify the "Just Do It's," that are problems that staff want to fix to improve their work and overall workplace. The majority of staff efforts have been focused on small incremental improvements and are illustrating tangible results.

Implementing LEAN at Bruce County included the initial training, with new staff being trained and included in the process and projects on an ongoing basis. As such, the organization offers monthly opportunities to take the introductory LEAN Training. Annually, staff review additional training that will advance the initiative throughout the organization. Great leadership has come from Bruce County's CAO who has created the organization intent in which "everyone innovates and solves problems everyday to deliver more value to Bruce clients" and respects that LEAN is a five-year transformation for the organization. In addition to staff involvement, County Council is continuously supportive of the LEAN transformation initiative.

Prior to working to become a LEAN organization, Bruce County faced challenges, such as a lack of applicant familiarity with the planning process; applicant intake, assessment processes that are consuming and inconsistent; too many templates related to request for comments, public notices, and reports; discoordination between departments; and an overuse of paperwork. Since starting the five-year plan of implementing LEAN, Bruce County has set aside \$60,000 of their budget towards corporate LEAN training. Within the Planning Department, approximately \$7,000 was set aside in 2019 to offer additional one-day training and initial certification for new staff. Staff and Council have had positive feedback about the initiative in that positive change is coming out of LEAN. Individuals are taking

responsibility for change-making within the organization and it has created a more engaged, progressive and efficient culture across the organization. Outdated and hierarchical decision-making is being replaced with staff empowerment and authoritative decision-making toward the goal of improving the value that they offer clients.

Many municipalities, including Bruce County have started to undertake the LEAN initiative. LEAN is highly transferable and scalable to various municipalities, given the initial investment around staff education. Staff describe the simple methodology that is slow and thoughtful enough to allow for small improvements that lend themselves to a larger cultural shift. It is recommended that LEAN would be easier to implement in municipalities where departmental flow is tangible (e.g., applications, invoices and reports). The process becomes more challenging when the work is knowledge-based or project work. However, it is important that staff continue to challenge themselves to improve processes, thus increasing value for service, which ripples out to developers, contractors and relevant stakeholders that work directly with the planning department. Below, Figure 4 is an example from Bruce County's LEAN initiative process showing how staff initially choose projects, and assess the steps and timelines required to work through selected projects throughout the year.

Figure 4. LEAN Strategy adopted by Bruce County



Conclusion and Next Steps

The Best Practices Guide for streamlining the development approval process is a work-in-progress. The good practices, process improvements, planning strategies and operational tools suggested throughout this guide have been assembled through the experiences shared by municipal staff and elected officials during workshops and planning discussions. The guide aims to help municipal governments identify the frequently occurring issues within their planning process, and find pragmatic solutions to address those.

AMO hopes that municipal staff and council will adopt some of the practices and strategies highlighted, as per their local needs. As well, AMO welcomes municipal governments and officials to share other useful management practices that they use locally, to process development approvals timely and efficiently. Please see the [Development Application Process Form](#) on the AMO website.