

NO: R257

COUNCIL DATE: December 16, 2024

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council** DATE: **December 11, 2024**

FROM: **General Manager, Planning & Development** FILE: **1855-03**
General Manager, Corporate Services (Housing Accelerator Fund)

SUBJECT: **Development Inquiry Assistant Official Release & Enhancements**

RECOMMENDATION

The Planning & Development Department and Corporate Services Department recommend that Council receive this report for information.

INTENT

The intent of this report is to inform Council about the official launch of the Development Inquiry Assistant, an Artificial Intelligence-powered chatbot designed to provide citizens with instant, accurate, and user-friendly answers to their questions about permitting requirements and development opportunities.

BACKGROUND

As part of the City's Housing Accelerator Action Plan, the City developed the Development Inquiry Assistant ("DIA") to improve accessibility to development information and further support applicants. DIA was first piloted on April 9, 2024, focusing on single-family building permits and tenant improvement building permits. Accessible through the City's website, DIA is designed to be an interactive, web-based tool that complements the role of Building Front Counter staff.

DISCUSSION

The official launch of DIA marks a significant step forward in improving customer service and operational efficiency. Since the pilot launch, the system has undergone several enhancements based on user and staff feedback to improve its functionality and accuracy, as highlighted below:

- **Release 1 (April 9, 2024):** Focused on single-family and tenant improvement permits and enabled initial feedback loops to measure user satisfaction.
- **Release 2 (August 29, 2024):** Updates to accommodate zoning changes introduced by provincial legislation, including small-scale multi-unit housing ("SSMUH"), and streamlined content updates between DIA and the City's website.

- **Release 3 (December 12, 2024):** Expanded capabilities to address questions about subdivisions and CD zones, improved integration with the Online Development Inquiry service and the Permitting Portal, added DIA functionality to Planning and Development pages on Surrey.ca, and introduced multi-lingual support.

Since its inception, DIA has significantly reduced the volume of routine inquiries handled by frontline staff, allowing them to focus on processing applications and resolving complex issues. DIA currently handles an average of 460 inquiries per month, with a user dissatisfaction rate of just 1.9%.

With its latest release, DIA is now fully operational, offering:

- **Comprehensive Development Information:** Publicly accessible and easy-to-navigate information about complex permitting requirements.
- **24/7 Accessibility:** Available across devices, ensuring fast response times and enhancing the support provided by frontline staff.
- **Multi-lingual Support:** Leveraging natural language processing to assist a diverse range of users.

Next Steps

Staff will continue to actively monitor the reliability and quality of answers of DIA based on user feedback built-into the service and performing updates and improvements, as required.

CONCLUSION

The Development Inquiry Assistant is an innovative, AI-powered chatbot that empowers citizens with instant and accurate answers to their development-related inquiries. As part of the City's Housing Accelerator Action Plan, DIA enhances customer service and improves access to development information, aligning with the City's commitment to operational efficiency and public engagement.

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