

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: Mayor & Council **DATE: July 22, 2009**

FROM: General Manager, Engineering **FILE: 6630-01**
General Manager, Planning & Development **XC: 5250-01**

SUBJECT: Economic Investment Action Plan – Streamlining Approval Processes

RECOMMENDATION

The Engineering Department and the Planning & Development Department recommend that Council receive this report as information.

INTENT

This report provides information on actions that are being taken in support of Element #5 of the Surrey Economic Investment Action Plan, “Streamlining Approval Processes”.

BACKGROUND

At its Regular meeting on April 20, 2009, Council considered Corporate Report Ro63, titled City of Surrey Economic Investment Action Plan Implementation Measures and approved the recommendations of that report, which included actions with respect to Streamlining Approval Processes that the City uses in relation to land and building development applications.

JKJ Management Ltd. conducted a review of Surrey’s land development review and approval processes and submitted a report on the findings of that review earlier this year along with a series of recommendations. A second consultant, KLR Consulting Inc., was retained to assist with implementation of the recommendations in the Planning and Development Department.

The underlying objective of these initiatives is to ensure that the development application review and approval process in Surrey is efficient and effective and does not stand in the way of economic investment and land and building development, particularly during the current challenging economic conditions.

DISCUSSION

Land Development Processing Review

Appendix I is a copy of the Executive Summary of the report *Land Development Processing Review* February 2009, JKJ Management Ltd. This is a high level, but comprehensive review of land development and building permit review and approval processes that was undertaken by a very experienced development consultant and former General Manager of Engineering for Surrey,

Mr. Jorgen Johansen. The report was based on personal experience as well as on interviews conducted with developers, builders, the Mayor, Councillors and City staff involved at various stages and in various aspects of the review and approval process.

The report notes that Surrey's Planning, Engineering, and Building Divisions are individually quite efficient; however, integration between Divisions and managing the City process as a whole needs improvement. The report highlights a number of recommendations in three focus areas:

- Customer Service;
- Documentation/Communication; and
- Project Management.

The report notes that the overall goal should be to implement improvements and shorten project timelines while raising customer service levels.

The following actions have been taken by the Engineering Department and the Planning and Development Department to implement the recommendations of the JKJ report:

Raising Customer Service Levels

- Commercial/Industrial application files are distinctly marked and given first priority. These applications are assigned to and managed by senior, more experienced staff.
- Dedicated inter-Departmental teams have been established for City Centre and Bridgeview/South Westminster applications so as to expedite the review and approval process for projects in these two areas.
- The need for timely and accurate staff responses to customer emails/voicemails has been reinforced across all staff. A project that will allow on-line customer access to project status reports has been initiated and is expected to be operational by October 2009.

Improving Documentation/Communication

- Several initiatives have been implemented or are being implemented to improve communication with customers including establishment of telephone and email customer hotlines and publication of a digital newsletter/eBulletin.
- Prospective applicants are being strongly encouraged to arrange pre-application meetings particularly for Commercial/Industrial and major development projects. Early discussion and advice on these proposals assists in establishing the goal posts early in the process and avoids delays later on. Pre-application inquiries are being followed up promptly by staff.
- Planning and Building Customer Manuals similar to the Engineering Customer Manual are being drafted and will be posted on line complete with process flow charts, submission checklists and related forms. This will provide better and more timely guidance to applicants than is currently available on line.
- Project meeting agendas/minutes/documentation and information circulation is being improved so as to eliminate uncertainty about responsibilities and decisions.
- Existing development reference materials such as NCPs, Road Concept Maps, etc., are being updated comprehensively and are available on-line.

Enhanced Project Management

JKJ Consultants noted that the most significant efficiency gain for development applicants and City staff is to recognize the city/applicant team approach, to understand the roles and responsibilities of each party including consultants and to manage the application process in a more coordinated manner. KLR Consulting Inc. was hired to provide Project Management skills training for all current planning staff. The training focused on improving staff's ability to handle effectively the day-to-day management of numerous development applications and understanding techniques to deal with difficult situations as well as negotiation and issue resolution.

KLR Consultants also addressed a number of recommendations put forward in the JKJ Consultant report. They focused on the following 3 main areas:

- Process improvements;
- Project management; and
- Information technology.

1. Processes Improvements

- The consultant worked with staff to document in a holistic manner, beginning-to-end processes for various types of development applications. The process flow charts highlight the role of each party in the process and milestone deliverables/decisions.
- In follow up to the mapping of the processes, some processes have been streamlined/refined to eliminate duplications and inefficiencies.
- Further review is being undertaken relative to the role and decision making of committees and external agencies.

2. Project Management

- A project management structure involving the developer's team and the City's team was drafted that highlights the City's "partnership" role with the applicant while clearly establishing the applicant's ownership and overall responsibility for the project.
- The roles and responsibilities of the 'Developer Project Manager' and the 'City Project Coordinator' have been documented and distributed.
- Effective communication (including establishment of a single City point of contact [project coordinator] and status reporting) and issue resolution processes (including 'an Escalation Process' to more senior level managers) were recommended and are being implemented.

Staff is implementing the above in consultation with the Development Advisory Committee.

3. Information Technology

An overall information technology strategic plan specific to development application review and approval is recommended to ensure project management software, City Web page, and eBusiness opportunities are used to full advantage. Phase 1 of the IT strategy – "on line development application status inquiries" will be operational this October.

CONCLUSION

Surrey residents and businesses benefit significantly from strong, sustained development. The Economic Investment Action Plan was structured to enhance investment in Surrey. An element of the Plan is “Streamlining Approval Processes”. In support of this element of the Plan and to enhance the development application review and approval process, two studies have been conducted by experienced consultants who have recommendations as to how the City could further improve the service it provides in the development application review and approval process. The reports provided a number of recommendations. As documented in this report actions have been and/or are being taken to address these recommendations. The Development Advisory Committee is being consulted with respect to some of the recommendations to ensure that actions taken are correctly targeted.

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Appendix I - Land Development Processing Review, February 2009, JKJ Management Ltd.

City of Surrey

Land Development Processing Review

23/02/2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The developers and consultants interviewed were pleased to hear that the City was soliciting input from industry to identify methods for improving the processing of land development projects. Every developer and consultant approached was happy to share their observations regarding the current process.

There have been a number of meetings between the author of this report and senior staff to discuss preliminary findings. Senior staff has already started to implement some of the recommendations in the report.

The current process does not provide an agreed upon schedule or communication plan for land development projects resulting in the expectations of the parties involved being unclear. When the process is not clearly articulated, there are lots of opportunities for problems and delays as well as a lack of accountability.

The City's land development process is a complicated process. Therefore, the City needs to work with industry to construct a project schedule on which the two parties can jointly manage the process. In some areas of the process, there is no system in place to allow the City's management to know what commitments are made by staff and therefore they are not able to take corrective action in a timely fashion. This applies equally to developers who should ensure that their consultants are submitting completed work to City standards when promised. A system to jointly manage the individual applications needs to be developed for use by the City and developers.

The project scheduling as proposed in this report is not currently being used in any of the Lower Mainland Cities or Municipalities. It would need to be developed jointly by the City and the development industry as a tool to be used by both parties and would be refined over time by monitoring its results.

In order for all parties to clearly understand the process, an expansion of the Engineering Department's Customer Manual to address the involvement of each department and the inter-relationships between departments would be very helpful to all. Documentation of the process and the development of checklists would minimize some of the confusion that causes delays.

It would be helpful if the City identified one individual who would be the point person for each file within the City. This person will assist the developer with problems in any department or between departments.

The accessibility to project status information by developers through access to their project files on the AMANDA system would allow for better management of the process.

JKJ Management Ltd.

Municipal & Development Consultant