

NO: R023

COUNCIL DATE: **FEBRUARY 2, 2015**

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: **February 2, 2015**

FROM: **General Manager, Planning and Development**

FILE: **4520-01**

SUBJECT: **e-Government – On-Line Plumbing Permits**

RECOMMENDATION

The Planning and Development Department recommends that Council receive this report as information.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to advise Council about the implementation of a new City e-Government initiative, the first phase of "On-Line Plumbing Permits" that was activated on January 6, 2015. This initiative will allow licensed plumbing contractors to apply and pay for most new single family residential plumbing permits over the Internet, via the City's website.

BACKGROUND

The City of Surrey is committed to increasing customer service and efficiency through eGovernment. As part of ongoing improvements and streamlining of the delivery of services by the City, Planning and Development Department and Information Technology staff have collaborated to design the first phase of a customized, web-based (on-line) plumbing permit application process.

DISCUSSION

The primary goal of the first phase of the On-Line Plumbing Permits initiative is to provide licensed plumbing contractors, who do plumbing work in Surrey, with a convenient and user-friendly way in which to conduct business utilizing the Internet. A thorough review of the current plumbing permit application process was completed and modifications to existing procedures, practices and forms were undertaken to accommodate moving to a fully automated business environment.

The first phase of the new initiative allows licensed plumbing contractors to apply, and pay using a credit card, for most new single family residential plumbing permits for a:

- single family dwelling;
- single family dwelling with a secondary suite;
- duplex dwelling;

- garage/coach house;
- detached garage; and
- workshop.

More complex plumbing permit applications related to single family dwellings with hydronic heating, and commercial and multi-family permits are currently not available online, but will be made available in the future as additional services are implemented in successive phases in collaboration with the industry.

Highlights of some of the benefits and advantages related to the implementation of the new system are provided below.

Key Elements of the On-Line Plumbing Permits Application System

Customer Service

- Offers licensed plumbing contractors a fully secure system to apply and pay for permits using a credit card (access to the system is only possible with a user ID and individual PIN number);
- Provides licensed plumbing contractors the flexibility to apply for plumbing permits at any time of the day (i.e., outside of regular City Hall business hours);
- The system is user-friendly, having aids such as drop-down menus, and also provides contractors with the ability to view the status and historical list of their plumbing permits and associated fees paid, which can be printed and used for record/accounting purposes; and
- Enables permit applications to be done in batches and at various times, whereby the contractor can input application data for an individual permit, save the input data and log-off, later to return and complete either the application or fee payment process.

Permit Process Elements

- Automation of the application/payment process has created process efficiencies that will provide ongoing benefits in terms of automatically creating/updating the City's electronic building records stored in the Amanda database, thus eliminating the manual input of information by staff; and
- Workflow demands will be reduced by automation through decreased volumes of telephone inquiries, manual permit issuance and the physical processing of permit fee payments.

Other Key Elements

- All of the design work related to the permit application/payment process, forms, web pages, Amanda modifications and a web "shopping cart" feature were done in-house, rather than by external vendors, through collaboration between staff in the Planning and Development Department and Information Technology Division;
- The introduction of this initiative contributes to ongoing improvements to the delivery of customer service and the overall reduction of "red tape" by the City;

- The system supports the City's positive image as a customer service-focused organization and contributes to its reputation as an attractive place to work and do business; and
- The system creates a solid platform from which further advances can be made in the automation of the permits and inspections request process, ultimately leading to the automation of all on-site inspections and approvals.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

The On-Line Plumbing Permits system will reduce the use of paper and the need for trips to and from City Hall by applicants, supporting the objectives of the City's Sustainability Charter; more particularly, scope action items:

- SC1: Enhance accessibility to information;
- EC7: Promote sustainable building and development practices; and
- EN2, EN11: Reduce waste and GHG emissions.

CONCLUSION

The primary goal of the first phase of the On-Line Plumbing Permits e-Government initiative was to provide licensed plumbing contractors with a convenient and user-friendly way in which to conduct business with the City, utilizing the Internet.

The first phase of the On-Line Plumbing Permits system will offer licensed plumbing contractors self-service capability for permit applications for most new single family residential plumbing permits and will serve as the corner stone for expanded e-business opportunities in the building permits and inspections functions, which will include more complex plumbing permit applications related to commercial and multi-family permits, as well as single family dwellings with hydronic heating being made available in the future.

Original signed by
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