

NO: **R271**

COUNCIL DATE: **December 19, 2016**

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: **December 14, 2016**

FROM: **General Manager, Planning & Development
General Manager, Engineering**

FILE: **6630-01**

SUBJECT: **NEXUS Program For Development Process Improvements**

RECOMMENDATION

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

INTENT

This report provides Council with an update on proposed development process improvements that will form part of the NEXUS program for developers in Surrey.

BACKGROUND

The City of Surrey has been recognized as one of the leading municipalities in which to do business. More than 30% of the growth taking place in the Metro Vancouver region is taking place in Surrey, and demand for new housing, commercial, and industrial space remain strong. As such, an effective and reliable review process of development applications is important to ensure that housing product remains affordable and that critical timelines for commercial and industrial projects are met for applicants and clients.

As part of Council's priorities for 2016, City staff was asked to review the development process with the intent of developing a fast track process for applications, commonly referred to as a "NEXUS" process for developers. Over the past few months, staff have been holding a series of internal meetings, stakeholder meetings, and presentations to members of Council which sought comments and direction.

DISCUSSION

The NEXUS program is proposed to consist of two main streams, designed to accelerate six to eight development projects. One stream will consist of accelerating projects that are consistent with and an integral part of the City's strategic plans, such as those noted in the Mayor's annual State of the City Address (for example: LRT, key City Centre enhancements). The second stream will consist of projects which provide a significant economic benefit to the City (for example: a large employer that would be expanding or relocating in Surrey from another municipality and would support the economic development strategy of the City, targeting a job to residents ratio of 1:1 and may therefore qualify for an expedited process).

Staff believe they could accommodate between six to eight NEXUS type development projects in the first year, depending on their complexity. These projects would be handled by an experienced, results oriented City team that is empowered to make decisions. This proposed number of projects eligible for the NEXUS program currently coincides with the number of projects that would have qualified over the past few years, according to the criteria mentioned for both qualification streams. Should more projects be submitted above the six to eight per year that could be eligible for the NEXUS program, staff would evaluate available resources that could be assigned to those projects and would also seek Council's guidance in prioritizing such projects. The qualified projects will be assigned to the NEXUS team by the Planning & Development and the Engineering Departments' General Managers.

In addition to implementing a NEXUS development process, the continuous improvements of the review and processing of development applications and permits are also proposed to be continued.

Continuous Improvements

With this in mind, staff started to take on some key initiatives that will allow enhancements and changes that are required in order to implement some of the proposed changes.

AMANDA Tracking System

Early in 2016, the AMANDA tracking system, which is the internal backbone of the development process, was upgraded to a much needed web version. This change, which took place in the background and was completed in September 2016, was critical; and, it will now allow for the timely and efficient roll out of additional on-line services. In the past, the system programming language was not compatible with HTML language used for web applications, making web offerings complicated and costly due to the additional programming required for web conversions. The new updated version, which is now using HTML programming, will allow staff to easily and quickly add new features and services on-line, as well as making upgrades or changes more convenient and cost efficient.

In addition to the AMANDA tracking system upgrades, staff have also ensured that all web applications currently offered are now done using "responsive web", which means whether you are using a phone, a tablet, or a computer, the web display will adjust according to your device to make the experience much more user friendly. This improvement allows our customers to self-serve easily, from anywhere.

Project Schedules

Other improvements that have been implemented include pre-application meetings with the applicant, their consultants, and key City staff to highlight early on in the planning phase the requirements that would be attached to an application, along with a proposed schedule that includes realistic milestones and deliverables required to meet those milestones.

Surety Bonds

Council also approved a pilot program, for up to three land development projects on a first-in-first-selected basis, for the use of a surety bond, from acceptable surety companies with a minimum of A+ level from A.M. Best Rating Services, in a form acceptable to the City.

This would be an alternate form of security to cash or Letter of Credit for Servicing Agreements in which the developers have been qualified by an acceptable surety bond insurer.

Performance Measures

Staff is proposing the roll out of land development project feedback forms to measure developer, consultant, and contractor satisfaction, to seek out continuous improvements.

On-Line Services

Staff propose to enhance the design process by expanding electronic design submission, review, and permit issuance, allowing clients to submit electronic applications, including drawings.

Leadership and Empowerment

It is also very important to consider the workforce within the City that is involved in the development review process. Like many other organizations that are facing a wave of baby boomer retirements, key departments have implemented leadership plans to ensure proper knowledge transfer. Providing training opportunities to staff, creating mentorship programs, and ensuring that financial resources are available will allow proper hand over of key positions to qualified replacement candidates.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

The NEXUS development process and continuous improvements initiative will help to achieve some of the Sustainability Charter 2.0 goals and desired outcomes. In doing so, these initiatives will help to achieve the following Charter desired outcomes (DO):

Inclusion

DO25: Surrey has a culture of collaboration and innovation to solve complex social problems.

Built Environment and Neighbourhoods

DO3: The City Centre is a dynamic attractive and complete metropolitan area and important international destination, and is one of North America most livable and desirable downtowns.

Economic Prosperity and Livelihoods

DO2: Qualified education, training and skills development programs are available in the City, which help to create a highly skilled workforce.

DO16: Surrey's businesses are active participants in the community and create economic value in a way that generates value for society.

Infrastructure

DO21: The City has excellent communications infrastructure that provides affordable and effective connectivity across the community.

CONCLUSION

Staff are proposing a pilot NEXUS development applications review process that would target projects that are consistent and an integral part of the City's strategic plans, such as those noted in the Mayor's annual State of the City Address (for example: LRT; key City Centre enhancements). As well, those which provide a significant economic benefit to the City (for example: a large employer that would be expanding or relocating in Surrey from another municipality and would support the economic development strategy of the City, targeting a job to residents ratio of 1:1 and may therefore qualify for an expedited process).

Original signed by
Jean Lamontagne
General Manager,
Planning & Development

Original signed by
Fraser Smith, P.Eng., MBA
General Manager,
Engineering