




INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Open for Business Sub-Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	January 31, 2024
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Citizen Facing Portal - Planning Services (PED24038) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

COUNCIL DIRECTION

Not Applicable.

INFORMATION

Background

In January 2022, the Provincial government announced the launch of the Streamline Development Approval Fund to support Ontario's largest municipalities in modernizing, streamlining, and accelerating processes for managing and approving housing applications. The funding was made available to implement initiatives that will streamline development approvals such as e-permitting systems, temporary staff to address backlogs, online application portals and other projects aimed at unlocking housing supply.

Observations and Issues

When looking at the online service offerings in the development application process at the City of Hamilton, there are several opportunities for improvement that could enhance the applicant experience. The development application process at the City of Hamilton involves many steps, and though most of these steps include online components, they often require multiple online tools to be used by applicants and staff

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which can cause frustration and inefficiencies when submitting applications. Most of these tools involve one-way communication where an applicant submits documents but is not able to receive feedback as their application moves through the approval process. Some steps in the process, like fee payment, continue to be manual and can rely on the applicant needing to visit City Hall in person.

Outcome

Using funding from the Streamline Development Approval Fund, the City of Hamilton's Planning Division in collaboration with the Information Technology Division created new online planning service options for applicants. The online planning services are available to applicants through the City of Hamilton's Citizen Facing Portal which is a City-wide initiative to expand the number of City services available online. Customers can register to access City services online using their current email accounts.

Once logged in to the Citizen Facing Portal, applicants can use the following planning services:

- Create and submit a Formal Consultation – Site Plan application;
- Book a Development Review Team meeting;
- Create and submit a Site Plan application;
- Pay application fees online with a credit card for these Site-Plan related applications; and,
- Receive updates from the City of Hamilton on the status of an application.

Anticipated benefits for applicants using the online planning services include:

- Guided user experience with multi-step forms that make it easy for applicants to start an application and return to it later to complete and submit as needed;
- Drop-down options, buttons, and real-time form validation will simplify form completion and improve data accuracy;
- Instant access to online help material;
- Flexibility in selecting preferred meeting dates; and,
- Automated notifications to keep applicant informed of progress and when their action is needed.

The online planning services were tested with industry users and their feedback was incorporated back into the service design. A full-scale launch of the online planning services is anticipated by the end of Q1 2024.

To ensure the online planning services meet the needs of applicants, users will be able to provide their feedback online or contact the Planning Division's online services support staff. Moving forward, the Planning Division will continue to look for opportunities to make a broader range of planning services available online to customers through the Citizen Facing Portal.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

None.