



City of Hamilton

Report for Information

To: Chair and Members
General Issues Committee

Date: May 6, 2026

Report No: PED26072

Subject/Title: Innovation in Planning Approvals – Bloomberg Harvard
Innovation Track and Bloomberg Implementation Accelerator
Program Updates

Ward(s) Affected: City-Wide

Recommendations

That Report PED26072 respecting the City of Hamilton's participation in the Bloomberg Harvard Innovation Track Program and the Bloomberg Implementation Accelerator Program **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- This report provides an update on initiatives developed through the City's participation in the Bloomberg Harvard Innovation Track and Bloomberg Implementation Accelerator Programs.

- These initiatives support improvements to the development approvals process, advancing Council’s commitment to facilitate the construction of 47,000 housing units by 2031.
- City staff participated in the Bloomberg Harvard Innovation Track Program in 2023/2024, resulting in two ongoing pilot programs: the All4One Site Plan Process and the First Wave Application Portal. This report provides an update on the status and preliminary results of these pilots.
- In 2025/2026, City staff participated in the Bloomberg Implementation Accelerator Program that resulted in the development of a “Big Bet” prototype for a Planning Application Information Website and a “Quick Win” Minor Variance Information Brochure. This report outlines the status and next steps for these two initiatives.

Financial Considerations

There are no budget impacts or costs associated with the recommendation. The City of Hamilton will have access to up to \$20,000 USD from the Bloomberg Centre for Public Impact to assist with implementation of the “Big Bet” and “Quick Win” projects developed through the Bloomberg Implementation Accelerator Program.

Background

As outlined in Report PED25047, the City of Hamilton participated in the 2023/2024 Bloomberg Harvard Innovation Track Program after the Mayor put forward an application and a challenge for staff to improve the development approvals process.

The program included internal and external consultation, generating 821 ideas that were refined into eight key themes. Staff selected two ideas for development as pilot programs: the All4One Site Plan Process and the First Wave Application Portal.

In 2025, the City was accepted into the Bloomberg Implementation Accelerator Program, a program designed to accelerate cities' progress on launching initiatives that improve residents' lives. Through the program, staff were coached on how to accelerate the design, development, and implementation of a "Quick Win" idea and a prototype for a "Big Bet" idea. Staff selected a Minor Variance Information Brochure as the "Quick Win" idea and a Planning Application Information Website as the "Big Bet" idea.

Analysis

Bloomberg Harvard Innovation Track Initiatives

All4One Site Plan Process Pilot

Launched in the Fall of 2024, the All4One Pilot is a cross-departmental approach intended to accelerate the development approvals process and improve communication and collaboration between City approving groups and applicants.

The All4One Pilot commits to reducing municipal processing timelines by:

- Providing a Formal Consultation/Pre-Assessment document in 14 days;
- Providing Conditional Site Plan approval in 30 days of receiving a complete application; and,
- Reducing the commenting deadline to 14 days for all technical submissions to clear conditions of Site Plan approval.

Currently, four development applications are progressing through the All4One Pilot. Of these, three have received Conditional Site Plan approval within an average processing time of 28 days processing time, exceeding the 30-day target. The remaining application is expected to apply for Site Plan Control shortly and will be processed under the same All4One timeline expectations.

To meet these timelines, staff determined that Site Plan applications under the All4One Pilot should be processed within 86 days from Pre-Assessment to clearance of conditions, representing a 139-day reduction compared to standard processing timelines.

For the first three applications, staff achieved the same milestone in an average of 102 days. Overall, the All4One Pilot has reduced processing time by 123 days (46%) compared to previous standards.

A project-specific review demonstrates that two of the three All4One applications met the All4One processing targets, while one experienced delays due to factors such as addressing additional requirements outside the standard requirements, stakeholder comment timing, and staffing changes. (See Appendix "A" to Report PED26072 for further details.)

Questionnaire Results

In February 2026, City Planning staff circulated an anonymous questionnaire to all owners, applicants, agents, and city stakeholders involved with the All4One Pilot to receive feedback on the objectives of the Pilot, increasing communication, reducing processing timelines, increasing transparency, and enabling staff to find creative solutions to complex issues. The questionnaire was circulated to 52 people for one week and 20 responses were received. Respondents were asked to rate statements based on the initiatives objectives on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

Owners, applicants and agents generally agreed that the Pilot met its objectives, with an average response of 4 out of 5, while internal stakeholders reported more neutral responses (neither agree nor disagree), with an average response of 3.2 out of 5.

The questionnaire also provided an opportunity to include comments and recommendations in an open, written format. Of the 20 responses, 13 provided written feedback. Comments were generally supportive of the All4One Pilot project. Multiple responses noted that the Pilot has allowed for open communication between the

applicant and stakeholders, that two-hour Development Review Team meeting blocks have proven helpful, that enabling staff to work on creative solutions has removed common barriers and that the development process has been faster.

Some respondents found that shortened review times sometimes led to unpredictable comments and that changes in staffing, holidays, and vacations sometimes led to delayed comments. Further, respondents suggested that meetings be prescheduled with relevant stakeholders at key intervals to reduce delays due to availability and that the Development Review Team meetings be reviewed to ensure greater efficiency. Please see Appendix "B" attached to Report PED26072 for further details.

Development applications progressing through the All4One Pilot will continue to be monitored through final Site Plan approval. Once final Site Plan approval has been provided, an assessment of lessons learned will occur to identify which aspects can be applied to other steps in the development application process to help streamline approvals in those areas. To collect more complete data from a larger sample of applications, staff will scale the All4One Pilot to the end of 2026 and expand it to include priority economic development projects, in addition to affordable housing developments.

First Wave Application Portal Pilot (AI)

The First Wave Portal pilot included testing and validating artificial intelligence (AI) technology to review low density residential zoning compliance applications for conformity with the City of Hamilton's zoning regulations. The tool identified where designs may not conform with zoning rules and generated clear, easy-to-read reports for staff. These reports included both a summary and detailed outline of every rule or regulation that had been checked, supported by a pass, fail, or undetermined status, commentary, and calculated any missing measurements/dimensions.

Through the First Wave Portal pilot, staff identified several potential long-term benefits of implementing AI technology, including:

- Automating time-consuming and repetitive tasks;

- Improving accuracy and consistency in zoning compliance reviews;
- Reducing manual data entry in zoning compliance responses;
- Minimizing human error;
- Providing concise, plain language responses to complex zoning regulation;
and,
- Increasing staff capacity to focus on complex, high-priority applications and customer service.

As a next step, the City is investigating a two-year pilot project to expand upon the success of the First Wave Portal pilot. This pilot will allow staff to work with an artificial intelligence tool that assists in the zoning compliance review of low-density and medium-density residential types. It is anticipated that the AI tool would be utilized internally while it is built, tested and validated using applications submitted to the City, with real-time reviews compared against the current manual review process.

Once this stage is completed, the tool can be piloted on the City's website allowing external customers the opportunity to pre-submit an application for a quality and standards check. At this point, it has been identified that staff resources will be required to continue monitoring the AI reviews, findings and reports provided to the external customer to ensure they meet City standards, as well as to work with the AI tool provider to address any deficiencies.

By focusing first on low-density and medium-density residential types, which are considered common, well-defined, building types, the City can ensure a smoother rollout, collect feedback from both internal and external customers, and measure clear value from the technology early on.

Anticipated future benefits for customers include:

- Faster decisions on applications, helping projects move ahead more quickly;
- Clearer feedback and fewer delays, with less back-and-forth between applicants and staff;
- More consistent reviews across submissions, regardless of project size;

- Greater certainty and transparency in the approval process, helping to strengthen trust and customer satisfaction.

As part of an expansion, the City is also exploring AI technology that provides customers a description of the type of land use and built form permitted on a selected property. The AI technology generates a summary of planning policies and regulations, as well as building regulations that apply to properties that may be of interest. Simplifying complex rules and regulations provides an improved information gathering experience for customers who interact with many different City departments - such as planning, building, engineering, economic development, and housing - by giving a user consistent information no matter where they enter the process.

The expansion of the First Wave Portal is anticipated to begin in Q2 2026.

Bloomberg Implementation Accelerator Initiatives

“Big Bet” Planning Application Information Website

The City’s “Big Bet” initiative is the implementation of a Planning Application Information Website that will allow members of the public to access descriptions, status updates and supporting plans and documents for development applications submitted to the City under the *Planning Act*. Currently the Planning Division makes planning application information available to the public on request through email, phone or at the Planning counter at Hamilton City Hall. By providing application information on a website, many residents, business owners, real estate agents and investors will be able to access it on demand using their home computer or mobile device. Links to the website can be provided on public notice signs and letters allowing access to more detailed information.

The website will include search and map functions to help users to find applications of interest. Anticipated benefits of the website include:

- Improved access to application information and documentation for residents participating in public consultation processes, allowing them to be better informed of changes that are occurring in their neighbourhood;
- Better access to development information for developers, business owners and investors considering properties in Hamilton; and,
- Reduced staff time spent responding to information requests, allowing staff to focus more directly on core duties, including processing development applications.

Through the Implementation Accelerator program, City staff developed two prototypes: a mock-up version of the website (attached as Appendix “C” to Report PED26072), and storyboards showing how residents and business owners may use the website. The prototypes were presented to testing groups including Councillor’s assistants, Economic Development Staff, and the Senior Management team. Feedback from the testing sessions was used to further develop the website mock-up.

The next steps for the website are to create a working prototype of the website using the City’s Engage Hamilton platform. The prototype will be developed using a software feature purchased through seed funding from the Centre for Public Impact. IT and Communications staff have been engaged to ensure the website meets security and accessibility requirements. Staff anticipate launching the website to the public by Q4 2026.

“Quick Win” Minor Variance Information Brochure

The City’s “Quick Win” initiative was to plan, prepare and launch something within the project time for the Implementation Accelerator program. Staff reviewed items that may benefit the greatest number of people and decided on an information brochure about what a Minor Variance was (attached as Appendix “D” to Report PED26072). This information is intended to be used both by staff and members of the public who are unfamiliar with Minor Variance applications. The project team worked to ensure the document created was in plain language and included examples to assist with the

understanding of when they may need a Minor Variance and what is able to be considered in a Minor Variance application.

The brochure was provided to staff at forward facing front counters in City Hall for staff information as well as to be provided to people who may have questions. The next step for the project is to complete similar brochures for other Planning applications.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Priority 3: Responsiveness & Transparency

- 3.1: Prioritize customer service and proactive communication.
- 3.2: Get more people involved in decision making and problem solving.
- 3.4: Modernize City systems.

Previous Reports Submitted

- [PED25047](#) – Innovation in Planning Approvals (Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative – Innovation Track Program)

Consultation

The Bloomberg Harvard Innovation Track project team consisted of staff from the Planning and Economic Development Department, Public Works Department, Community Engagement Division, and the Mayor’s Office. They engaged with over 60 internal and external collaborators, including members of the development industry, non-profit housing operators and external commenting agencies. Staff continue to engage with these groups through the implementation and evaluation of the Pilot programs.

For the Bloomberg Implementation Accelerator program, the project teams consisted of staff from the Planning, Community Initiatives and Water and Wastewater Planning Divisions. Staff from the Economic Development Division, City Councillor Offices and the PED Senior Leadership Team were consulted through testing of the “Big Bet” Prototype. Communications and IT staff are engaged to assist with development of the Planning Application Information Website. Committee of Adjustment members were consulted as part of the prototype testing for the Minor Variance Information Brochure.

Appendices and Schedules Attached

Appendix A: All4One Site Plan Processing Timelines Diagram

Appendix B: All4One Pilot Survey Results

Appendix C: “Big Bet” Planning Application Information Website Mock-Up

Appendix D: “Quick Win” Minor Variance Brochure

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