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To: ["Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"](#)

Date: 10/27/2021 6:18:50 PM

Subject: [Council Memo - Daylighting Building Permit Wait Times and DBL Digital Transformation - Update \(RTS 14353\)](#)

Attachments: [Memo - Daylighting Building Permit Wait Times and DBL's Digital Transformation - Update \(RTS 14353\).pdf](#)

Dear Mayor and Council,

Please see the attached memo from Andrea Law, regarding Daylighting Building Permit Wait Times and DBL's Digital Transformation – Update (RTS 14353). The purpose of which is to :

- Provide an update on Member's Motion B.4 (Daylighting Building Permit Wait Times)
- Provide an update on DBL's Digital Transformation program

Should you have any questions, please contact Andrea Law (Andrea.Law@vancouver.ca).

Thanks,

Karen

Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager (she/her)
karen.levitt@vancouver.ca

The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the x̱m̱əθ̱ə̱Jam/Musqueam, ᱫᱷᱚᱴᱚ/Squamish and sə̱lilwə̱tə̱/Tsleil-Waututh nations.

MEMORANDUM

October 26, 2021

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Paul Mochrie, City Manager
Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk
Lynda Graves, Administration Services Manager, City Manager's Office
Maria Pontikis, Director, Civic Engagement and Communications
Anita Zaenker, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office
Neil Monckton, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office
Alvin Singh, Communications Director, Mayor's Office
Theresa O'Donnell, General Manager, Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability
Lon LaClaire, General Manager, Engineering Services

FROM: Andrea Law
General Manager, Development, Buildings and Licensing

SUBJECT: Update on Daylighting Building Permit Wait Times & DBL's Digital Transformation Program

RTS #: 14353

The purpose of this memo is to provide an update on Member's Motion B.4 (Daylighting Building Permit Wait Times) from the February 10, 2021 meeting of the Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities as well as general update on the work to date and planned efforts of Development, Building and Licensing's (DBL) Digital Transformation program.

Context: Current Design and Philosophy Applied to the City of Vancouver's Permitting Services

The City of Vancouver's permitting services are customer activated, meaning that processing efforts are applied as and when we are engaged by a customer. Operationally this presents a few challenges, some of which have been noted in the Member's Motion B.4 (details in Appendix A), including resource availability at any given moment, availability of required experience and expertise depending on the nature of the request, fluid and flexible processes used to try and accommodate micro spikes in volume resulting from a customer's readiness to continue with their request.

To be sure, there are challenges with the current design of some of the processes used to support our permitting services as well as known limitations with our existing technologies and the data they produce. Furthermore, it is a significant challenge to introduce new technologies and digital processes in a manner and pace that support better customer and staff experiences as well as provide the long term foundation for deeper, faster and more accurate insights into the performance of our services, without exacerbating staff burnout and customer fatigue.

The resolution of these challenges requires a multi disciplined approach. This multi disciplined approach is already underway through a number of initiatives across DBL and PDS and is further strengthened with Council's recent actions: support for regulatory re-design, establishment of the Permit Modernization Task Force, introduction of a moratorium on new motions with a direct impact on permitting services and support for a number of recommendations that have come from the Permit Modernization Task Force.

Daylighting Building Permit Wait Times

With respect to the specific desired outcome of posting *easy to-access information showing current projected wait times for various building permit types*, one of the long term goals of the Digital Transformation program is to continually improve the accuracy of our data and predictability of our insights. In the near to medium term, we are focused on making the information we do have more accessible and useful for planning purposes. The two near to medium term stages build on one another and have an increasing dependency on deliverables within the Digital Transformation program.

As processing times are determinant of a number of city and customer factors (see Appendix B for details), the Digital Transformation program will continue to take steps towards the ultimate goal of service predictability in keeping with our improvements in digital workflow, data quality and the use of advanced data and analytical models.

Stage 1: Expand Existing Permit Open Dataset (CoV's Open Data Portal)

Key Activities:

- Update existing permit dataset with processing time information
- Establish four (4) customer friendly building permit categories
- Link existing permits with one of the above customer friendly permit categories
- Update existing permit dataset with customer friendly permit categories
- Simplify and automate the publication of the permitting open data dataset
- Publish weekly updates to the permit open data dataset
- Aggregate and publish to Cov's Open Data a monthly median processing time per customer friendly permit category

Experience Improvements:

- Permit data will be easier to analyze through the use of customer friendly categories
- Permit processing times will be available at the individual permit and customer friendly category levels for building permits
- Access to a monthly view of median building permit processing times by customer friendly categories

Timeline: Dec 2021

Accessibility / Channel: City of Vancouver's Open Data Portal

Stage 2: Increasing Accessibility of Enhanced Building Permit Open Data

Key Activities:

- Design & develop building permit processing time metrics using customer friendly categories
- Create an automated data pipeline to publish building permit processing time metrics to Vancouver.ca

Experience Improvements:

- Users that are not familiar with CoV's Open Data portal will be able to obtain quick insights into building permit processing times via Vancouver.ca

Timeline: March 2022

Accessibility / Channel: City of Vancouver's Open Data Portal & Vancouver.ca

Stage 3: Evolution of Customer Friendly Building Permit Categories & Enhanced Open Data Dataset

Key Activities:

- Identify additional customer friendly categories based on common request / project descriptions
- Add new customer friendly categories to building permit open data dataset
- Update or create new metrics using the new customer friendly categories for use on Vancouver.ca

Experience Improvements:

- Building permit processing time data will be more relatable to a wider variety of customer requests / projects

Timeline: Q3 2022

Accessibility / Channel: City of Vancouver's Open Data Portal & Vancouver.ca

DBL's Digital Transformation Program

The initial stage of this program started about eighteen (18) months ago with the introduction of the Electronic Plans (ePlan) project. Since the program's inception it has focused on addressing a number of key themes related to the modernization the City's suite of permitting and licensing services including: customer centricity; digital planning and delivery optimization; data and insights orientation; and information transparency and process simplification. In keeping with these themes the program's benefits to date include:

Electronic Plan (ePlans): 7 of 8 permit types now use a full digital lifecycle for plans (previously paper based) from online submission to reviews, stamping, sealing and ultimately, approvals

- Customer saving of time and costs related to trips made to submit paper plans, address plan deficiencies and pick up issued permits
 - Eliminates non-value adding time for customers including travel time and waiting time (line-ups)
 - Reduction in transportation related costs (fuel, vehicle maintenance, parking)
 - Reduced customer costs related to the production, printing and shipping of paper plans
- Improved Collaboration: electronic plans are able to be accessed at any time by involved parties (internal and external), making it easier to review and comment
- 311 Channel Shift & Increased Use of Vancouver.ca
 - Reallocation of 2-3 staff from general phone enquiry to higher value work supporting more advanced / complex permitting enquiries
 - Wait times for an enquiry centre staff to handle complex inquiries and application intakes reduced from 4 weeks to 10 days (50% reduction)
 - Reduction of over 95% in calls to the DBL Phone Centre
 - Shift of chat services to 311 allowing DBL Concierge and enquiry centre staff to focus on plan requests and complex inquiries
 - Improved ability to provide customers with a status on their inquiry / application (web-form tracking reference number is now provided)
 - Improved customer service in general by directing inquiries to the appropriate resource / team more efficiently
 - Customers are able to send inquiries, applications and supporting documentation 24/7 and are no longer restricted to Service Centre hours of operation
- Certain trade permits are being issued automatically without any intervention by staff
- Introduction of customer appointment bookings for virtual and in-person meetings (part of Services Centre re-opening strategy)

We are now at the next stage of evolution in the Digital Transformation program, best illustrated by the City's recent proposal (and award) of an Interactive Digital Development Application (IDDA) process.

IDDA will bring together digital regulations and conditions with existing geo-spatial data and digital journeys to provide timely, accurate, predictable and consistent experiences for customers and staff. While the customer journey (*I have an idea / want to do something* through

to *submitting an application*) is a key focus within IDDA, the critical enabling components are oriented around digital rules and workflow. Given the current level of complexity surrounding the policy framework (design, approval and implementation) impacting our permitting services today, success with IDDA will see an increase in the efficiency of the development approval process and improvement in the speed of permit issuance.


Building off of IDDA and aligning with the program’s strategic delivery framework (Appendix C), it is reorganizing to deliver against core objectives through efforts across seven (7) foundational components. The program’s choice of these components is purposeful, striking a balance between inter-dependency, speed and agility. The components are able to be progressed to varying degrees at any given time based on a number of factors including: experience and expertise available; available funding; costs, staff and customer change readiness; and availability of viable digital technologies and services. Below is a summary of the seven (7) foundational components / core program initiatives:

Foundational Component / Initiative	
Journey & Service Design Framework	Efforts focused on defining or redefining core permitting and licensing services and their associated user journeys (interactions and experiences) for staff, customers and authorized third parties.
Online Customer Management	Design and development of a suite of tools and services that support managing customers and their authorized users digitally across the entire customer and project / request lifecycles: from creating accounts, providing auditable / trackable support, status updates and project close-out.
Data, Analytics & Insights	The exploration, experimentation, validation and construction of data and analytics models, tools, and best practices to facilitate the use of data in data driven decision making and actionable insights.
Digitization of By-laws	A set of workflows (create, modify, approve, demise), data models and services that enable us to capture our by-laws in an electronic manner that allows them to be easily and accurately consumed by a variety of digitally accessible methods, applications and services.
Digitization of Business Rules	Focus on establishing a digital, data centric repository of business rules, supported by digital workflows (create, modify, approve, demise) to enhance visibility and traceability of business rules applied to current (largely manual) and future (digitally driven) decisions, including conditions under which routing to a manual process (staff / authorized agent) is preferred. Digital rules would also be easily and accurately consumed by a variety of digitally accessible methods, applications and services, most notably a decision engine platform.
Digital Decision Framework	The design, development and or acquisition of a suite of services or platform that is able to take digitized by-laws and

	business rules and deliver either decisions or recommendations that are used to support both digital and omni-channel user journeys (based on user input).
Digital Workflow Management	Design, development or acquisition and configuration of a suite of services or platform that supports multiple digital workflows (rules based routing, auditing, approvals and publishing) for management of by-laws and business rules that support the design and delivery of our permitting and licensing services.

1 Property information search

Customer **selects** the location of their development project. "Info bubble" Provides **details of district regulations** that apply to address/lot.



2 Determining what type of development is being requested

Customer is **guided through a interactive Q & A** and presented with options relating to their request and informed about required permits.

Permits

The questions on this page determine which permits you will need for your project. Questions marked with * Please answer the following questions, which could change the zoning clearance at your selected location.

Type of construction

- New construction
- Addition
- Interior remodel
- Site development (e.g. RV recreation, parking)
- Demolition
- No construction work

PERMITS

Possible Incentives Opportunity

Is your use greater than 5,000 square feet?

Yes
 No

Is your use greater than 10,000 square feet?

Yes
 No

3 Development costs

Customer is **provide** the cost of the development permits required for the selected development project.

Fees

The questions on this page are used to estimate your permit fees. Please answer all questions to ensure accurate results. Questions marked with a * are required.

Will you change the business type of the building? *

No

Do you have detailed information about your electrical work? *

No

Estimated cost of building construction, excluding the value of any trades, fire, plumbing, or site work. *

PERMIT FEES	
Building Permit	\$3,021.68
Electrical Permit	\$100.00
State Vendor License	\$25.00
Total Cost	\$2,354.68

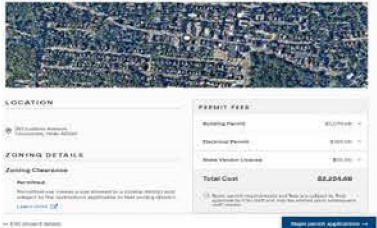
* This fee estimate has been finalized. Please note that the City reserves the right to modify fees based on additional staff information.

4 Online application submission & fee payment

Customer may choose to **apply & paid online** for required permits

Summary

Please confirm that the information below is correct prior to paying for your permits.



PERMIT FEES	
Building Permit	\$3,021.68
Electrical Permit	\$100.00
State Vendor License	\$25.00
Total Cost	\$2,354.68

* This fee estimate has been finalized. Please note that the City reserves the right to modify fees based on additional staff information.

[Apply online Application](#)

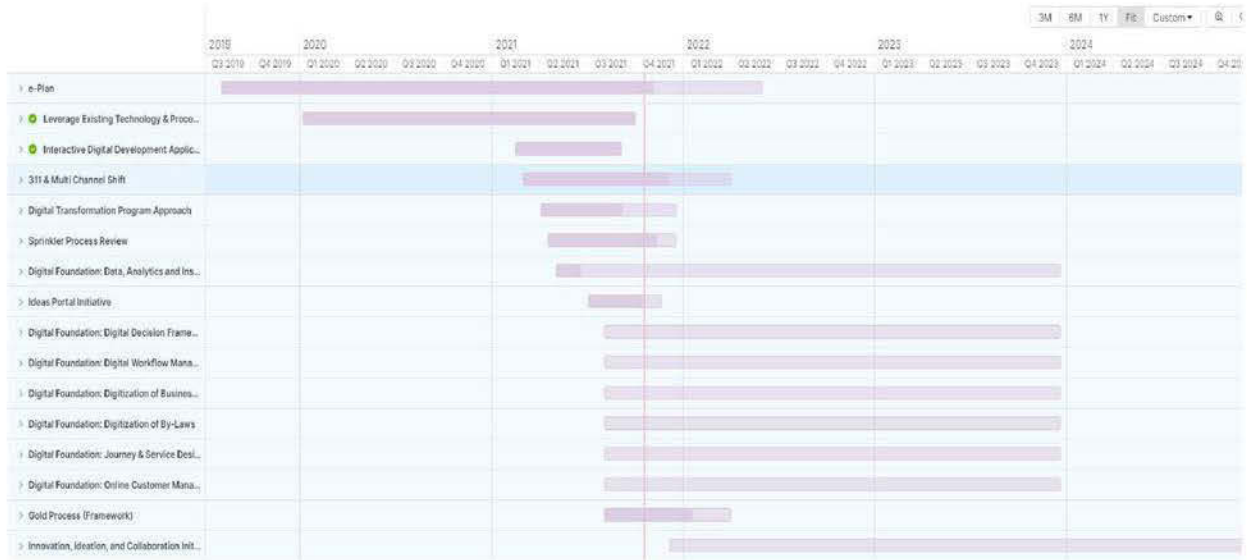
5 Confirmation

Customer is provided with a case number for application tracking

The seven (7) foundational components based on IDDA are not only required to fulfill the promise of IDDA as visualized above but are key to supporting efficient, transparent and effective delivery of full permitting and licensing experiences (reviews, inspections, occupancies, completions).

A dedicated DBL team for the Digital Transformation program has been established along with committed resource support from Technology Services. Furthermore, the program will maintain close alignment with other in-flight efforts including those of the Permitting Modernization Task Force and PDS' Regulation Redesign and Development Process Review efforts.

The following is a high level timeline of the Digital Transformation program and current initiatives. Note: as the program executes, new initiatives may be added and existing ones updated to reflect evolving scope.



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Appendix A: Daylighting Building Permit Wait Times (Member's Motion B.4)

At the Council meeting on February 9, 2021, Council referred the following motion to the Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities meeting on February 10, 2021, in order to hear from speakers. The Chair called for speakers and none were present.

WHEREAS

1. The City of Vancouver continually works to make Vancouver's homes and buildings safer, healthier, greener, and more accessible, including reviewing permit applications and enforcing regulations in a fair and consistent manner, and working to decrease the length and complexity of the permit process by introducing – among other measures – online services and more efficient procedures and processes;
2. Construction projects and any change of land use or occupancy on private property require a building permit. All projects must comply with the Vancouver Building By-law to meet life safety, livability, accessibility, and sustainability requirements. Building permits are the tool the City uses to achieve these requirements;
3. The City has a Small Business Commercial Renovation Centre (CRC) for small business owners planning a renovation or looking to move or start a business in Standing Committee of Council on Policy and Strategic Priorities Minutes, February 10 and 18, 2021 20 Vancouver. The CRC offers assistance to help customers make an informed decision about the suitability of a business property or the viability of a proposed renovation;
4. Despite various strategies and measures implemented by the City of Vancouver over time to improve permit wait times such as the Commercial Renovation Centre launched in February 2017 (as a 'one stop shop' for small businesses to get dedicated support), investments in technology to improve transparency, workflow, and overall customer experience, increased staff to address backlogs and specific areas of need, as well as conducting stakeholder engagements, policy inventories, high-level process and decision-making reviews, and data and metrics reviews, the duration and clarity surrounding permit wait times continue to be an impediment to those wishing to invest in existing and/or open new businesses in Vancouver;
5. At a public hearing on June 25, 2020, Council approved amendments to clean-up, clarify, and consolidate our land use regulations and related land use documents to make them more user-friendly. These amendments represent incremental changes toward a set of simplified zoning regulations and are intended to help simplify and streamline permit reviews in combination with permit processing improvements;
6. Likewise, on July 24, 2020, Council enacted the amendments to the zoning regulations noted above, and on September 15, 2020, Council gave final approval to the various consequential amendments related to the City's land use documents. The updated and simplified land use regulations and policies are intended to result in review processes that are more streamlined;
7. With reference to the City's "Regulation Redesign" initiative – a comprehensive ongoing review of the City's land use regulations and related policy documents – staff are scheduled to report back to Council in the Winter of 2021 with regulatory updates related to the drafting and refining of new zoning by-laws, the development of an implementation plan for introducing new

by-laws, and the communication protocols and procedures for developing regulations and policies, along with related public engagement opportunities. The timeline for implementation of the above-noted report items is scheduled for 2022;

8. Despite the foregoing, and despite the various strategies and measures implemented by the City to improve permit wait times, a lack of clear information and general uncertainty regarding permit wait times continues to be an issue, especially in terms of transparently communicating wait times to the general public and small businesses wishing to expand or open. For example, the CRC webpage on the City's website shows "permit processing times as of January 1, 2021" but only for one permit category – namely, for "Minor commercial renovation" work;

9. Likewise, the CRC webpage notes a target to issue 95% of "minor commercial renovation" permits within seven weeks, yet only 44% of these applications have been accomplished within the seven-week target in the last three months; further there is no clear information given regarding the average wait time;

10. The impact of delays and/or permit processing times that are longer than expected causes a range of financial hardships for small businesses, not the Standing Committee of Council on Policy and Strategic Priorities Minutes, February 10 and 18, 2021 21 least of which are having to carry extra months of lease costs without any revenue, delaying the projected timeline for opening to the paying public, and generally impacting the financial well-being and sustainability of a business (especially considering the added layers of uncertainty due to COVID-19); and

11. Making clear, transparent information available to small businesses would help them to plan more effectively, for example in negotiating leases by knowing the length of time they will have to plan for carrying costs along with other matters relevant to opening or expanding a small business (while recognizing that wait times could be subject to change for a number of reasons such as the completeness of a permit application, questions that arise, and the volume of instream applications to be processed).

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Vancouver City Council direct staff to post easy to-access information on the City's website that would show current projected wait times for various building permit types in as close to real-time as possible, so that businesses planning to make improvements and/or changes to their premises (where a permit is required), or people planning to open a new business that would require permits, can have greater clarity and ability to plan appropriately and achieve success.

Appendix B: Factors Impacting Processing Times and Predictability

As mentioned, one of the long term goals of the Digital Transformation program will be to continually improve the accuracy of our data and predictability of our insights. As the program moves forward, it will look to address (to the extent possible at any given time) one or more of the factors that are challenging our ability to provide consistent predictability with respect to the performance of our permitting and licensing services.

- Data, Process & Technology Factors:
 - staff resource availability and staff experience levels (vacancies, vacations, absences, turn-over, ramp-up, knowledge transfer, up-skilling)
 - system statuses vary by permit type
 - largely limited to data available in a single system
 - inconsistent use of established processes and systems
 - regular use of free text to track statuses and other progress related information limits simple and efficient analytical insights from that information
 - use of internal system classifications such as *processing stream* and *type of work* typically do not reflect customer project types or desired outcomes
 - unclear milestones with respect to when a process starts
 - for example, a customer's call to the City to discuss what might be possible vs. when the customer formally submitted an application vs. when that application passed an internal checkpoint for readiness
- External Factors:
 - customer motivations for engaging with the City – enforcement related or actions that may result in increased fees vs. customer motivated to complete the project
 - number of in-stream applications submitted at any given time
 - customer financing arrangements and other factors specific to the customer
 - completeness of the application
 - site and project specific requirements impacts application requirements (number of reviews, conditions, design decisions, etc.)

Appendix C: Overview of the Digital Transformation Program’s Strategic Framework

Program Vision and Strategic Objectives:

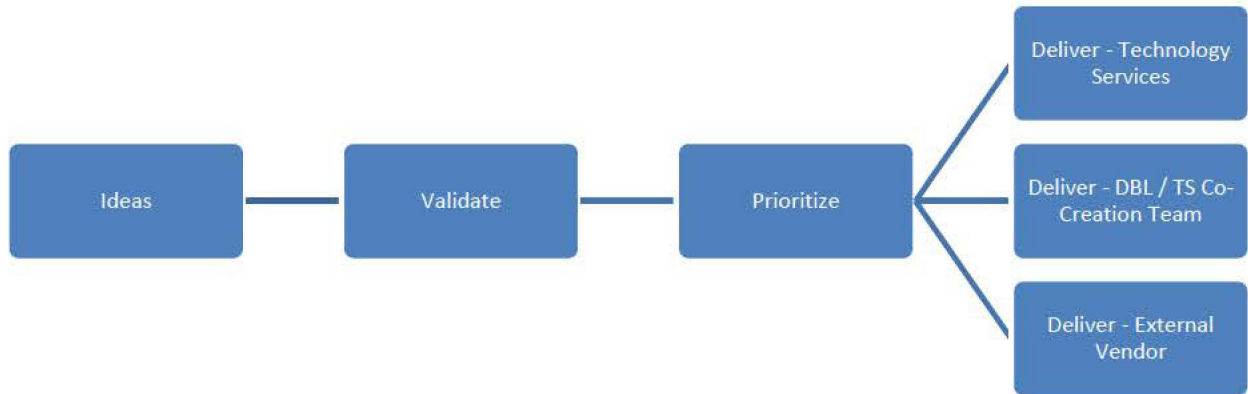
Use a simplified and digital first regulatory approach to rapidly and cost-effectively pivot to a modern, digitally led ecosystem that supports efficient, transparent and predictable permit and licensing experiences.		
Simplify, streamline and modernize the regulations, policies and conditions that apply to the various development, building and trades permits as well as the licensing services available to our citizens and businesses.	Create an information rich, real-time, transparent environment for interacting with the City before, during and after a permit and / or licensing decision has been made.	Provide a flexible governance and operational framework that allows for and effectively supports customer requests that are considered atypical uses of the City's land, businesses and residences.

Program’s Strategic Framework:

Mission	Support the balanced (city strategic priorities and individual, commercial and community interests) development and use (residential, commercial, industrial) of lands across the City of Vancouver
Opportunity	Shift towards customer centric, digital and insights driven design and delivery of our core permitting & licensing services through a right channel, right time approach on a customer by customer basis.
Approach	<p>5-Pillars:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage greenfield thinking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ we do not assume the current way of doing something cannot be done differently ▪ Embed rapid ideation & validation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ develop a culture of proof – there are lots of ideas of how we might improve – we test them before committing to them ▪ Create small & discrete services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ look for opportunities to break larger services into smaller ones – help speed up design and build and enhance reusability ▪ Actively manage in complexity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ challenge the assumptions and value whenever doing anything that creates complexity in a rule, decision, service design or process ▪ Design with and for insights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ understand what information is useful, why and how we would use it
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ permit and licensing services are largely reliant on human driven systems and knowledge centres (data, rules, logic, processes and integration) ▪ some City strategies and policy objectives use one or more permit or licensing services to achieve desired outcomes – adds both volume and complexity to existing processes ▪ bespoke regulatory framework (Vancouver specific by-laws) adds complexity to process rules and steps ▪ simplifying our processes and decisions may create unintended or undesired consequences across one or more City strategies, objectives or operational considerations (Financial, HR, etc.)
Resources	Create a collaborative, multi-disciplined core resource pool of internal (CoV) and external Business, Digital and Technology subject matter experts (SME).

Appendix D: Overview of the Digital Transformation Program's Engagement & Delivery Framework

Program Delivery Approach Framework



Using the learnings from previous City projects as well as more recently the experience with digital transformation efforts in the ePlan and 311 Channel Shift projects, we are incorporating three new elements into the Digital Transformation program:

- Staff Ideation & Engagement
 - there is a wealth of knowledge, experience and perspectives across the resources involved in the Permitting and Licensing program – the creation and sharing of ideas is viewed as an opportunity to embed transparency and generate engagement
 - resources will be invited to share their ideas, comment on the ideas of others, vote for ideas they think should be progressed and be able to track the progress of ideas
- Innovation Practice
 - use of different technologies and services to better understand and assess impacts of proposed changes
 - prioritized ideas will undergo a rapid validation or proving exercise
 - will help to minimize inefficient and ineffective resource, time and financial commitments
- Three (3) delivery streams
 - provides flexibility, agility and speed by progressing work in parallel
 - allows the program to allocate certain deliverables to parties best suited to the work
 - for example, a deliverable that may be used by multiple departments across the CoV would make sense to be delivered by Technology Services