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

Date: 3/29/2022 3:05:36 PM

Subject: [March Update from the Development Application and Permitting Modernization Task Force](#)

Attachments: DBL - Memo to Mayor & Council - March Update from Permitting Task Force 2022.pdf

Dear Mayor and Council,

Please see the attached memo from Andrea Law, General Manager of Development, Buildings, and Licensing. This memo (RTS 14674) provides an update from the Development Application and Permitting Modernization Task Force. A brief summary is as follows:

- Staff have cleared a backlog of more than 500 applications for single family homes, duplexes and laneway homes. 450 are now being processed.
 - Staff review times per application have been reduced by approximately 75%, resulting in much greater throughput
 - Applicants are now contacted within two to three business days from application submission **(15-16 weeks faster)**
 - Initial plan review now occurs at application intake **(2 weeks faster)**
- Laneway applications now receive initial review **3 months faster**
- Staff created a fast track process for low complexity renovations – the Direct to Inspections Process – and can now issue permits in as little as two weeks for simple renovations **(7 weeks faster)**
- To support eligible businesses seeking a change in use or occupancy, a dedicated fast-track online enquiry and application page will be launching this spring.

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

Best,
Paul

Paul Mochrie (he/him)
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The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), S^kwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

MEMORANDUM

March 29, 2022

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Paul Mochrie, City Manager
Armin Amrolia, Deputy City Manager
Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk
Lynda Graves, Administration Services Manager, City Manager's Office
Maria Pontikis, Chief Communications Officer, CEC
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: March Update from the Development Application and Permitting Modernization Task Force

RTS #: 14674

The purpose of this memo is to provide an update from the City Manager's Development Application and Permitting Modernization Task Force "Task Force" that has been formed pursuant to direction provided by Council on March 31, 2021. This is the fourth update in the bi-monthly cadence set by Council. With the December memo containing a fulsome update of the activities of the Task Force, including data and metrics, this update will focus on new initiatives with an update on low density housing (i.e., single family, duplex and laneway) applications and licensing.

The next Council presentation and report will provide a substantive update on the achievements and progress of the Task Force as well as any additional policy recommendations for Council consideration.

Summary of New Operational Initiatives

The following table summarizes initiatives implemented by the Task Force since the last Council update in December 2021.

Table 1 – Implemented Operational Initiatives

#	Processing stream	Initiative	Benefits	Impacted application
1	Low-density housing	Combining the intake and plan review processes	2 weeks saved per application	2,500+ applications per year
2	Low-density housing	Plan review efficiencies	75% reduction in staff review time per application (30 minutes v. 2 hours); 300% increase in throughput	2,500+ applications per year
3	Low-density housing	Confirming receipt of application with customers	Applicants contacted within 2-3 days post-submission (as compared to previous 16 weeks)	2,500+ applications per year
4	Laneways	Creating a stand-alone laneway stream	75% reduction in review time per application* (4 week review time as compared to previous 16 weeks)	500+ applications per year
5	Low complexity commercial & residential renovations	Fast Track Process for Low Complexity Renovations	7 weeks saved per application	200 applications per year

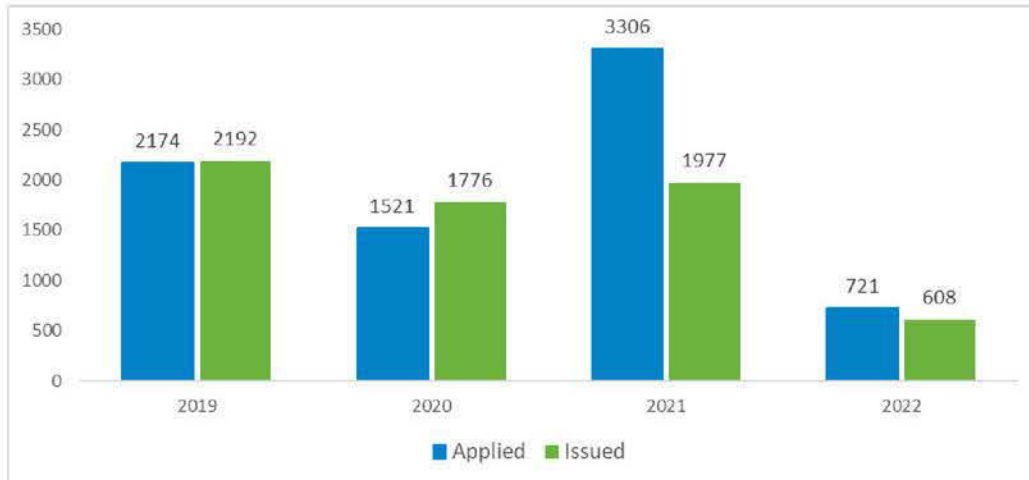
**In September, staff noted a 6 weeks savings per application. Additional streamlining has results in an additional 6 weeks savings per application.*

† Estimate based on average of 2020 and 2021 data

Low-Density Housing

The following chart shows low-density housing permit applications from 2019 to 2022. In 2021 applications doubled over 2020, and 2022 is on track to have a similar number of applications to 2021 based on the first two months of data.

Chart 1 – Low-density Housing Applications



Low-density housing applications include single-family houses, duplexes and laneways. They represent the highest volume of housing applications the City receives.

In the December update, staff noted the unprecedented increase in low-density housing applications that resulted in a backlog of over 500 unprocessed applications. In response to the increase in applications and growing backlog, staff implemented a number of process improvements.

Since the last update, DBL staff have worked diligently to reduce the intake backlog, and have completed the initial review of all 500 applications, with 450 accepted for processing. The remaining applications are with the applicant to provide additional information before staff can accept them into the processing stream.

Process efficiencies

In response to the backlog of applications, staff immediately implemented process improvements to increase throughput, while ensuring quality applications.

The first step was to combine the application intake and plan review process. This reduced the overall review time by 30 minutes and allowed staff to communicate with applicants and request any outstanding requirements 2 weeks faster.

To address capacity constraints, DBL staff implemented process changes and developed tools that significantly condensed the plan review time from an average to 2 hours per application down to 30 minutes. This allows each staff member to review up to 13 applications per week versus the previous 4 to 5.

Customer service

Staff are continuing to focus on providing improved customer service. Many applicants have noted that after submitting an application it can be months before hearing anything back from

the City. Staff now contact all low-density applicants within 2 to 3 days of submission to provide an application number and request any additional documentation that is required prior to review.

Standalone Laneway Stream

Stand-alone laneway applications are for a new laneway house only. These are the simplest and fastest low-density applications to process. Previously, these submissions would go into the same general queue as the more complex single family and duplex applications, which could mean longer average wait times before processing. To process laneways quicker, staff created a stand-alone stream. The creation of this new stream has reduced the time of initial submission to full plan review from 16 to 4 weeks.

Fast Track Process for Low Complexity Renovations

Historically all renovations were categorized as either low or high complexity and processed accordingly. Staff have created a fast track process for the least complex applications that allows a Building Inspector to review and approve the project on the job site, eliminating the need for a detailed plan review prior to inspection and approval – the Direct to Inspections Process

The Direct to Inspections Process is now the fastest renovation permit in Vancouver, allowing applicants to receive a permit in as little as two weeks.

The Direct to Inspections Process applies to low complexity applications, such as office renovations and simple kitchen or bathrooms alterations. This new stream removes a step in the process, which reduces the time from application to inspection by 7 weeks. Staff have been surveying applicants on this new process and early feedback has been very positive with applicants noting the process is considerably faster.

In addition to issuing permits faster, this initiative reduces the workload of plan reviewers, allowing them to focus their efforts on more complex applications.

Tenant Improvement Program (TIPs)

The City of Vancouver has a Tenant Improvement Program (TIPs), which allows for buildings that meet certain criteria to qualify for an expedited review when applying for a building permit. To qualify under the TIPs program, a building must be constructed in 2007 or later and meet other criteria specific to the Vancouver Building By-Law.

This program is especially critical for office buildings that are subject to high tenant turnover and evolving office models resulting from the pandemic. Efficient and consistent permitting for this segment of the market is particularly critical as we enter the pandemic recovery period.

Staff will be expanding on and improving internal processes, building new tools to track TIPs eligible buildings and working with industry to support building owners wanting to participate in the program.

Licensing Update

The 2021 license renewal season (typically November to end of February) was extraordinarily challenging for applicants and staff because of a number of factors related to the pandemic. Staff made several changes to prepare for the recent renewal season, including staffing increases approved by Council in the fee update and the implementation of a license application and tracking system. The application tracking system has allowed staff to streamline and categorize queries and applications more efficiently.

At this time last year, there was a six-month backlog of license applications whereas this year our backlog is currently three months as of March 21, 2022. Staff expect to have the renewal backlog substantially addressed by end of Q2, 2022.

Recently, staff opened up in person appointments to applicants to help resolve issues and provide tailored services for more complex applications.

The challenges experienced in 2021 highlighted the need to better leverage technology and streamline processes to be more efficient. Staff are exploring opportunities as part of the digital transformation program to transform the license application and review process.

An example of a new process that leverages technology is the implementation of change of use relaxations approved by Council in October 2021. In order to fast track the review and approval for these applications, staff have created a process that identifies these applications and automates the review so these businesses can get their licenses faster.

Next Steps

Development Permit Improvement Project

To date, the improvements delivered by the Task Force have been primarily focused on high volume permits, such as renovations, low-density housing applications, and business licenses in an effort to capture the quick wins. Staff have made significant progress in these areas, which is reflected in the data and early feedback from customers.

The Development Permit process is complex, spans across many City departments and interacts with multiple layers of existing Council policy. It is also the mechanism that delivers the most units of new housing in the city.

Under the auspices of the Permitting Modernization Task Force, and building on the work that has been done to streamline the rezoning process, the City Manager has initiated a project to improve the Development Permit process for complex projects. This work will involve other members of the City Leadership Team including both Deputy City Managers and the General Managers of PDS, DBL and Engineering. The project will include a forensic review of recently completed projects to identify potential short and long-term improvement opportunities

Next Council Update

The next Council update is currently scheduled for June 7th, which will mark one year since the first Task Force update.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Law'.

Andrea Law
General Manager, Development, Buildings and Licensing

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