

Planning and Development Red Tape Reduction Task Force

Report to Priorities Committee

Background

At the September 24, 2019, Council meeting, Council approved the following motion:

“THAT Administration prepare a report identifying opportunities for red tape reduction with a goal of streamlining departmental operations and increasing efficiencies in order to improve the business climate within Strathcona County with consideration given to:

- streamlining the permitting process;
- reviewing departmental policies that create bottlenecks;
- striking a task force that includes members of the Chamber of Commerce and the Urban Development Institute to identify opportunities for red tape reduction; and
- reporting back to council by the end of the second quarter of 2020.”

Background cont'd

As a result of the motion being passed, Bylaw 43-2019, a Bylaw to establish the Planning and Development Red Tape Reduction Task Force was approved at the December 10, 2019 Council meeting.

Background cont'd

Also at the December 10, 2019, Council meeting, the following members of the public were appointed to the Task Force:

Cathy Olesen – Chamber of Commerce President

Todd Banks - Chamber of Commerce – Executive Director

Darwin Holm - Contrast Homes

Russell Dauk - UDI

Nicole Matos - Rivet Management

Seana Almer - Sherwood Park Mall

Sumita Fons - Kinder Morgan/Pembina

Len Walters - Coventry Homes

Blair Buchholtz - public member

A total of seven Task Force meetings were held, with the first meeting held on January 14, 2020. At that meeting, Todd Banks was named as Chair, and Seana Almer was named as Vice-Chair.

Meeting summaries

January 14, 2020

- The Task Force received an orientation and presentation on requirements and details regarding serving on a Council Committee.

February 5, 2020

- The Task Force received a presentation on the County's permitting process by administration and discussed the processes in place with the members of administration to address Part II 7 (a) and (c) of Bylaw 43-2019.
- The Task Force discussed the process of placing items for future discussion in a parking lot.
- The Task Force selected the following comparator municipalities to address Part II 7 (b) of Bylaw 43-2019: Parkland County, City of Leduc, Fort Saskatchewan, Edmonton, St. Albert and Spruce Grove.

Meeting summaries cont'd

March 4, 2020

- The Task Force went through the list of items raised for discussion resulting from the presentation at the previous meeting and clarified each point for administration's review.

June 4, 2020

- The Task Force reviewed the survey questions that were to be sent to the comparator municipalities.
- The Task Force discussed possible impacts the COVID-19 virus may have to business and development in the future.

Meeting summaries cont'd

July 22, 2020

- The Task Force reviewed comparator municipality responses to the survey questions.
- The Task Force discussed preparing a final report on findings, including any recommendations to administration or Council, as appropriate, on process improvement to address Part II 7 (d) of Bylaw 43-2019.

September 1, 2020

- The Task Force reviewed and discussed the draft final report and provided feedback.

September 10, 2020

- The Task Force reviewed the final report with feedback incorporated.

Recommendations of the Task Force

The Task Force provides the following recommendations:

1. Development permit application process
 - a. Maintain development permit exemptions for minor developments
 - b. Maintain and continue to grow facilitation services
 - c. Continue to provide conditional development permit approval to help facilitate applicants getting financing in advance of expending costs for finalizing engineering details
 - d. Reduce the amount of securities currently required and reduce the length of time held

Recommendations cont'd

2. Building permit (and safety codes) application processes

- a. Continue to process applications concurrently
- b. Maintain next day inspections

3. Signage

- a. Allow for new technologies such as digital messaging (photos/images with a six second delay between).
- b. Develop consistent sign regulations

Recommendations cont'd

4. Technology

- a. Further develop the online platform (ePermits), by adding additional application types with a priority for high volume applications such as Single-Family Homes.
- b. Add the ability to schedule inspections for all permit types on ePermits
- c. Add a portal for landowners (and applicants) to check the status of an application in process.

Observations of the Task Force

Through the various meetings and discussions of the Task Force, several items were identified which were not part of the terms of reference of Bylaw 43-2019. The following are items which the Task Force wished to identify which may potentially benefit from an analysis outside of the scope of this Task Force:

1. Review Strathcona County's land development processes, specifically the County's risk tolerance for development standards that reflect the majority of applicants that will do the right thing.
2. Consider allowing rezoning prior to a Development Agreement being signed.

Observations of the Task Force

cont'd

3. Consider other forms of security (bonds) for Development Agreements (offsite improvements) and consider a grading system for developers based on experience.
4. Work towards municipalities, in the capital region, having similar application processes and interpret the *Municipal Government Act* similarly for exemptions (such as incidental to a pipeline). This was raised in relation to complex industrial applications.
5. Support a provincial appeal process for code interpretations (*Safety Codes Act*). Safety Codes Officers across jurisdictions may interpret things differently and currently there is no ability to appeal the interpretation of a Safety Codes Officer and/or the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ). This is not a municipal jurisdiction.
6. Review and streamline the process of obtaining a water meter installation for new homes (Utility Services).

Summary

The Task Force would like to acknowledge the progress made to date to reduce processes for applicants. These include continued accessibility to information and support, clear information submission requirements, security reductions at various stages, reduced permitting timelines (flexible trained staff that can be mobilized at busy times), enhanced communication with applicants (automated status emails) and improved tracking (deemed complete process).

Summary cont'd

Some members on the task force work in multiple jurisdictions and have indicated that Strathcona County's permitting processes, particularly the inspection program, are among the best in the region. In reviewing permitting processes from comparison municipalities, the Task Force has found that the County's processes and timelines meet and, in some instances, exceed those compared. The current technology (ePermits) provides enhanced service to applicants and its continued expansion has been recommended and highlighted through this process.

The Task Force has emphasized areas for continued support and growth along with opportunities for further improvement.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the members of the Task Force for the time taken from your busy schedules to attend meetings and all the input and feedback provided during the process and in the preparation of the final report.

As well, thank you to the representatives from administration for their help and information provided to the Task Force.

And thank you to Council for the opportunity to be a part of the Task Force and to present this report today.

Questions?

Planning and Development Red Tape Reduction Task Force