

**Subject: Planning and Development Process Review Update****APPROVALS:****Jamie Doyle**\_\_\_\_\_  
Director\_\_\_\_\_  
Chief Administrative Officer**Recommended Motion:**

THAT Administration proceed with the Planning and Development's Process Review project and upon completion, a report of its findings and recommendations be presented to Council, and

THAT Administration bring forward other organizational red tape reduction project updates to Council on an as-needed basis.

**Summary:**

In support of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's red tape reduction initiative, Administration has undertaken projects and actions that have been aimed at enhancing customer service and reducing unnecessary steps and procedures across the organization. Specifically, in 2020, the Planning and Development Department budgeted for a departmental Process Review to begin in the summer of 2021. Planning and Development recognizes the importance of stakeholder engagement and have met with key stakeholders from the inception of the project and will continue to do so moving forward.

Planning and Development is in the process of retaining a consultant to work with staff to review and recommend improvements to all processes across the entire department (including Community Development Planning, Safety Codes, and Land Administration Branches).

**Background:**

On April 13, 2021, Council passed the following motions:

THAT Administration work with the Wood Buffalo Development Advisory Committee, and organizations including the Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce, to bring forward to Council within 60 days an update on the Red Tape Reduction Plan, including but not limited to, any updates to the Planning and Development Department's permit application process; and

THAT Administration brings forward to Council, within 60 days, an update on all actionable steps from the Red Tape Reduction Plan with accelerated implementation to improve the Planning and Development department’s permit application processes and response times.

Administration recognizes the importance of continual improvement and commitment to reducing red tape. This is echoed by the Government of Alberta’s prioritization of red tape reduction in assisting with provincial economic recovery from low oil prices and COVID-19.

Planning and Development is a public-facing department with thousands of interactions with residents, stakeholders, and businesses on an annual basis. While the department provides a high level of service to our Region, Planning and Development is aware of real and perceived public/investor concerns and areas for improvement. Common concerns include confusing or duplicated steps required for permitting, unnecessary processes and inefficiencies, time lags and delays, and miscommunication of processes/requirements, which may deter investment and hinder economic growth.

As part of the creation of a new Land Use Bylaw, Planning and Development performed a benchmarking exercise to determine how the Municipality's permit processing times compared with other jurisdictions in Alberta. The table below provides average processing times for a variety of popular development permit types, and it is important to note that they are based on the submission of a complete application. Time spent waiting for additional information to be provided at any point throughout the process is not included. Administration made every effort to collect as much information as possible, but where the data was unavailable in a certain jurisdiction, it is listed in the table as N/A or not available.

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Single Detached Dwelling</b>	<b>Accessory Building</b>	<b>Secondary Suite</b>	<b>New Commercial or Industrial</b>	<b>Change of Use</b>
RMWB	2 days	2 days	3 weeks *	4 weeks *	3 weeks *
Edmonton	2-3 weeks	Immediate	6-8 weeks	4-6 weeks	3 weeks
Grande Prairie	N/A	2 weeks	2 weeks	N/A	N/A
Red Deer	N/A	6 weeks	6 weeks	8 weeks	2 weeks

Medicine Hat	6 days	8 days	8 days	4 weeks	11 days
St. Albert	10 days	12 days	12 days	13-21 weeks	N/A
Beaumont	2-4 weeks	1-2 weeks	N/A	4-6 weeks	2+ weeks
Calgary	6-10 weeks	6-10 weeks	6-10 weeks	10-14 weeks	1-10 weeks

*\*Processing time includes a 2-week circulation period, where feedback on the proposed development is collected from appropriate internal and external stakeholders.*

To better understand and address these concerns, Planning and Development budgeted for a departmental Process Review during the 2021 Operating Budget process. Following budget approval, a scope of work was created in collaboration with stakeholders and a Request for Proposal was issued. Planning and Development is currently in the process of retaining a consultant firm to conduct a rigorous, systematic, objective, impartial, and expert-based evaluation of their processes. The firm will work closely with a team of dedicated staff.

Ultimately, the Process Review is aiming for improved customer service, reduced frustration from applicants, clearer communication/expectations of both applicants and staff, and reduced and streamlined processes/steps. In doing so, Planning and Development aims to reduce red tape and better facilitate property improvement and investment in the Region.

The project is expected to be completed by Q1 2022 and the consultant has been instructed to identify “quick-wins” that can be implemented in real-time so that residents and businesses can start to realize the benefits of the more streamlined processes as soon as possible. It is important to note that prior to undertaking this process review, Administration has been working to address issues that are known to cause concern among the public, such as the Change of Use permitting process. In response to these concerns, Administration is bringing forward an amendment to the Land Use Bylaw that will offer a new process for Change of Use permit applications. Through this amendment, permits would not be required in many cases, but where they are required, the process will be streamlined by reducing the time it takes to review and issue a decision.

### Stakeholder Engagement

Planning and Development values feedback from stakeholder groups, residents, and businesses. This honest input has been a driving force behind the Process Review project.

Planning and Development has had many meetings with the Wood Buffalo Development Advisory Committee and continues to meet with other groups such as the Fort McMurray Construction Association, Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce, BILD Wood Buffalo, and the Northeastern Alberta Aboriginal Business Association. The input that was received in these meetings had a direct impact on the scope of work that was developed. Moving forward, regular and meaningful engagement with stakeholder groups, residents, and businesses is crucial to the success of this project (this includes opportunities for confidential/anonymous input).

**Budget/Financial Implications:**

Planning and Development's Process Review Project was originally budgeted for \$100,000. This was based on a limited scope to include one (1) of the three (3) branches. Based on an increased scope to include all three (3) branches, a condensed schedule, and a better understanding of project costs, the scope of the work has been increased and is now budgeted to be \$250,000.

**Rationale for Recommendation:**

As with many government regulatory functions, processes are often seen as “getting in the way” and are perceived by the end-user to add little value. By having efficient, intuitive processes and clearly communicating the requirements and expectations to staff and the public, Planning and Development aims to reduce red tape and better facilitate property improvement, investment, and responsible growth in our Region.

**Strategic Priorities:**

Responsible Government

**Attachments:**

**Planning and Development Process Review and Permitting Updates Presentation**