



A Generic Model to Expedite the Development Process in Municipalities

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Summary

Expediting the urban development process in order to offset opportunity costs resulting from bureaucratic delays and, at the same time, to protect the interests of the community is one of the Economic Development Professional's challenges.

This article addresses this issue by:

- a) evaluating and analyzing four municipal models which expedite the development process,
- b) by conducting and analyzing a questionnaire survey in order to provide further insight into the problems associated with the development process,
- c) by identifying several key factors of a generic model which expedite the development process.

Timing, effectiveness and client satisfaction are key factors of the generic model which can be adjusted to fit any municipality.

The Generic Model identifies the need for the creation of and the commitment to a Council policy to expedite the development process. The Chief Administrative Officer as chairman would be to set up a "Development Review Team" whose primary objective should be to fulfil the municipality's corporate goal. The members of the Team should be the key participants from every department involved in the development approval process.

The role of the Economic Development Professional is to demonstrate to Council the need for a Development Re-

view Team to help them achieve their corporate objectives.

The following is a summary of the author's research paper presented to the University of Waterloo in partial fulfillment of the research requirements for the degree of Masters of Applied Environ-



mental Studies (M.A.E.S.) in Industrial Development. Copies may be sourced to the author or the University of Waterloo library.

Introduction

How can the urban development process be expedited to offset opportunity

costs resulting from bureaucratic delays? This is one of the challenges in the nineties for most municipalities and the Economic Development Professionals.

The development process in medium and large municipalities in Southern Ontario has frequently caused undue tension among Council members, staff, and the development industry. The private development sector seems to be constantly complaining about the lack of a "fast track" policy to address its concerns for the simplification of the development approval process. In some cases, the private development sector has decided not to pursue a project because of the lengthy approval process and a poor staff and Council attitude towards development in general. This has caused great concern among economic development professionals whose primary responsibility is to promote the image of their community as a place in which to invest.

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How can the Economic Development Professional serve as the catalyst and coordinator among all the players in the development approval process and expedite the approval of various applications so that municipal corporate goals are achieved and the community's interests are protected? Which model and what kind of city policy should municipalities adopt in order to expedite the develop-

ment process? What vehicle should be used to "review" the efficiency of the process? These and other questions are of major concern for the development industry, municipal councils and economic development professionals.

The intent of this article is to serve as background and guide to economic development professionals who wish to achieve a major component of their mandate expediting the development process. The article will also provide recommendations to help solve a problem which has been addressed in professional seminars but for which solutions have not been suggested. It will analyze and evaluate current models adopted by municipalities and establish a generic model to expedite the development process.

Establishing A Generic Model

Four existing models to expedite the development process were identified and evaluated for this study. They were from the Cities of Waterloo, Des Moines (Iowa), Mississauga and Scarborough. Subsequently a series of personal interviews and a questionnaire were used as a basis to identify key concerns regarding the development process in these cities.

Key strengths and weaknesses of all four models were identified. The evaluation criteria were efficiency, timing and the level of satisfaction of the private sector. This analysis proved to be useful in

the creation of a generic model (Figure 1.)

The author feels that the models used by the Cities of Waterloo and Des Moines Iowa are far superior to those used by the Cities of Mississauga and Scarborough. The reasons include volume of work, size of community, number of submissions, and other city administration factors.

The Waterloo model is flexible, allowing the Planning Commissioner to approve site plans and thereby shortening the approval time; i.e. instead of waiting for Council approval one week after the Site Plan Review Committee meeting, plans could theoretically be approved the same day they were reviewed. In addition, since the Planning Commissioner has approval authority, tight time deadlines and immediate reporting to Council

Figure 1.

SUMMARY OF KEY FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A GENERIC MODEL

Client Evaluating Criteria					
City	Efficiency	Timing	Satisfaction	Advantages	Disadvantages
Mississauga	Good	Good	Medium	-Co-ordination -Committee -Some co-operation	-No policy -Developers -Not invited to meeting
Waterloo	High	Excellent	High	-Co-ordination -Committee -Co-operation -Applicant invited to meeting	-No policy -Architects are volunteers
Des Moines	High	Excellent	High	-Policy -Co-ordination -Committee -Co-operation	-None -Cost of operation
Scarborough	Poor	Poor	Low	-Some co-operation	-No policy -No co-ordination -No co-operation -No committee
Generic Model	High	Excellent	High	-Policy -Co-ordination -Committee -Co-operation -Applicant entitled to participate at meeting	-None

are eliminated (although Council is periodically brought up-to-date). The need for applicants to attend council for final approval is also dispensed with.

The Planning staff of the City of Waterloo has revised the method of site review allowing certain plans to be reviewed by way of internal staff circulation and other plans to be reviewed by the Site Plan Review Committee. This split review has shortened the approval time considerably for "minor" applications, since these plans no longer have to wait to go to a Site Plan Review Committee meeting. With only "major" plans going to the Site Plan Review Committee, reduced overall meeting workload for the Committee was ensured. The problem with this approach is deciding which plans must go to Site Plan Review Committee and which plans should not. Perhaps this is one of the weaknesses of Waterloo's model.

Survey of Developers and Professionals

A questionnaire was designed to identify several key factors affecting the expediting of the development process. The questionnaire's purpose was twofold: first, to gather information from the development industry on how they view the development process and identifying the areas of delay, and secondly, to gather information which would be used to identify what the EDP should do to expedite the process. The questionnaire was sent to 500 developers, and 250 engineers, architects, planning consultants and lawyers in Southern Ontario.

The following is a summary of the results of the questionnaires returned (20% return - 18% from developers and 2% from consultants and other professionals).

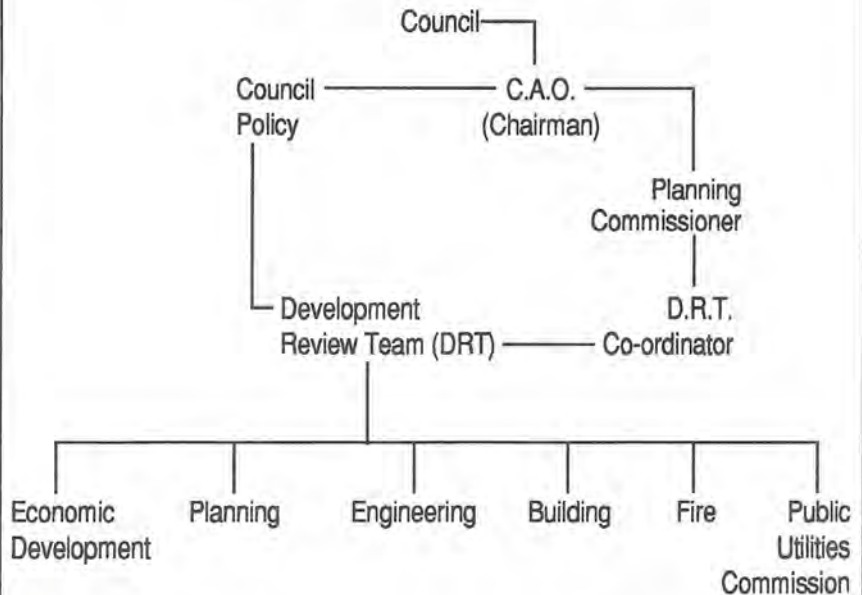
a) 85% of the respondents believed that the site plan process was the lengthiest, most frustrating, time-consuming, and costly of all development processes.

b) 98% of the respondents felt that the establishment of a Development Review Committee made up of municipal officials from various city departments whose mandate would be to expedite development was an excellent idea.

c) According to 95% of the respondents, the Building, Planning, and Works

Figure 2.

A Generic Model for the Expediting of the Development Process



Notes

1. Council policy authorizes the establishment of a DRT sending a positive image to development interests.
2. The DRT should meet regularly (biweekly).
3. The DRT co-ordinator is a planner who has been charged with organizing meetings and setting agendas. This person reports to the Planning Committee.
4. The Planning Commissioner reports directly to the CAO and to Council.
5. Although the CAO is the Chairman of the DRT, his presence will not be required.
6. The DRT will make recommendations to the Planning Commissioner who will make the final decision.

Departments were the areas where they felt their applications were delayed.

d) 90% of the general comments with respect to minimizing interventions from various city departments and agencies indicated the following:

- Council should establish a clear policy to expedite the development process.
- Political interference in the development process should be minimized, if not eliminated (until Council meeting).
- Political input should be at and during Council meetings or Planning Committee meetings and not during the development of the plan or its design.
- Staff should enforce deadlines during the circulation process.
- The attitude of staff and politicians towards development in general should be positive.

- Staff should be concerned with the costs of the delays to the development industry.

- Departments should have clear policy statements that do not conflict with each other. In addition, departments should communicate and co-ordinate their efforts. Perhaps there should be a lead department taking on the responsibility of expediting the development process.

The interviews revealed several outstanding concerns about the various approaches used by municipalities to expedite their development process. The summary of the advantages and disadvantages of the evaluation of the four community models are shown in Table 1 indicating that there is a need for an approach which would establish the principles of communication and co-ordination among the various city departments involved in the development process.

A Generic Model for Expediting the Developing Process

As stated earlier, no single model has all the advantages for expediting the development process. Nevertheless, it is suggested that the generic model proposed is reasonably efficient and can be adopted by all communities.

The first step towards the implementation of the generic model should be the commitment of Council and staff. Coun-

cil should set a policy statement identifying the need for a "Development Review Team" (DRT) whose primary goal would be to provide quality service for quality development that would benefit the citizens of its community. Once such a policy has been established, staff can then deal with the directives of Council with full authority to establish such a team.

The second step is the selection and co-ordination of such a team. The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of the municipality should take the lead. The CAO is responsible for authorizing and establishing a team of individuals from all municipal departments who deal with the development process. In most cases,

the departments would include Planning, Building, Economic Development, Public Utilities, Fire, and in some cases, the City's Solicitor. In addition, the CAO should select a co-ordinator who would be responsible for administering and co-ordinating the team (Figure 2).

The third step is to issue a mission statement with clear goals and objectives for the team. The mission statement could include some of the words which are embodied in the corporate mission statement.

The team might consider some of the following actions:

1. Reviewing a certain number of applications in order to determine the length of time for approvals.
2. Accelerating the site plan development process, so that submissions could be approved within a month from the date of application?
3. Conducting a client audit in order to verify client satisfaction and the Team's effectiveness.

The fourth step in the process is for the CAO in co-operation with other department heads, to establish a clear set of action plans for the DRT to achieve.

The fifth and final step is to co-ordinate the first meeting among team members and outline the terms of reference. At this time all the municipal departments would have an opportunity to understand better how each works and how in their particular field they can minimize delays such as the ones encountered in the past.

The DRT should also consider the possibility that some plans could be reviewed by way of internal staff circulation and other plans could be reviewed by the full team. The reasons for this are twofold:

- a) The split review would shorten the approval time for certain "minor" applications, since plans would not necessarily be reviewed by the team;
- b) By sending only certain "major" plans to the DRT, the Team's workload would be reduced, freeing up time for other priorities in the work schedule. The Team's staff should set criteria for determining which plans must go to the DRT, and which plans should not. These criteria should be developed and approved by Council at the Team's initial operation stage.

Figure 3.

Features, Advantages & Benefits

The generic model has several advantages and beneficial features

Features	Advantages	Benefits
1) A Team approach	Improved communication & co-ordination	An increase in the efficiency & effectiveness of the development approval process
2) Regular meetings	Staff forced to communicate and co-ordinate work meet deadlines	-submissions are treated fairly and with top priority
3) Co-ordination and communication	Centralized co-ordination with increased communication among staff	An increase in staff morale, public service, quality & quantity of work
4) Private Industry satisfaction	Better co-operation on projects & closer professional relationship between staff and private industry	on A better "development image" for municipality

It must be noted that, as part of the generic approach, the applicant should be invited to attend the DRT meeting. This is a crucial step, one which the City of Waterloo has implemented most effectively.

The generic model tries to emphasize the advantages and minimize the disadvantages of four models analyzed and evaluated by the author (Figure 3).

1) The generic model proposes that Council policy be established mandating all city departments to expedite the development process;

2) The CAO shows leadership by setting clear goals, objectives and action plans for the DRT to follow;

3) A co-ordinator is appointed to serve as the chair-person of the team;

4) Representatives of various departments with a direct involvement in the process become part of the DRT;

5) The DRT separates minor and major applications and considers only those which require a team approach;

6) For each application presented to the DRT, the applicant is advised to attend the meeting and answer any questions that arise during the review, and the applicant agrees to make modifications to the plans consistent with the recommendations of the Team;

7) A client audit is undertaken at year's end to determine the effectiveness of and the client's satisfaction with the DRT.

The key to implementation of the generic model is the full commitment of a council and staff who have jointly recognized the need to expedite the development process. Having a development policy and a DRT provides an overall benefit to the community by enticing prospective investors.

Investors would feel confident and safe when developing their project in an organized and efficient community that focuses its attention on minimizing developmental delays and maximizing corporate municipal objectives by protecting the community's interests.

The EDP's role in his/her community is to identify the challenge of expediting the development process, and to lead staff and Council to adopt the "Generic Model for the Expediting of the Development Process" so that they can implement it in order to achieve their corporate municipal goals. This paper outlines one way to

achieve this goal; the economic development professional may wish to personalize the process by modifying the model.

Author's Note

The City of Vaughan has identified this challenge and prompted the CAO to establish a Development Review Committee to find ways of streamlining their municipal development process and to help the development community understand the development process by publishing a "Development Guide" which focuses on a step by step process of various development approvals.

For example, each development step including Official Plan, Re-zoning, Subdivision, Site Plan and Building Permit has a flow chart detailing to the applicant the steps for final approval, the bottlenecks they should be aware of (i.e. provincial ministries or regional departments), and a time frame indicating that if everything is equal, the applicant will receive the approval by a date established by staff.

To produce and publish a "Development Guide" the resources include a \$15,000.00 budget as well as time of some staff members from the departments that participate in the Development Review Team. Meetings should be scheduled on a bi-weekly basis with the intent to conclude and implement the Development Review Team within 6 to 8 months.

The Economic Development Professional plays a pivotal role in assisting the CAO to co-ordinate the DRT if there is Council and CAO commitment. Everyone, including the City and the development community gains by the successful implementation of a well organized municipal development approval process.