



Staff Report for Committee of the Whole Meeting

Date of Meeting: October 4, 2023

Report Number: SRCM.23.16

Department: Office of the City Manager
Division: Strategy and Transformation

Subject: **SRCM.23.16 - Streamline Development Approval Fund Final Reporting**

Purpose:

To provide Council with a summary of work completed with the grant funding received from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing Streamline Development Approval Fund, as required by the funding agreement between the Province and the City.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That SRCM.23.16 be received for information.

Contact Person:

Ashley Dickinson, Coordinator, Strategy and Government Relations

Lise Conde, Manager, Strategy and Government Relations

Report Approval:

Submitted by: Anthony Iannucci, Chief Transformation Officer

Approved by: Darlene Joslin, City Manager

All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), City Solicitor (as required), Commissioner, and City Manager. Details of the reports approval are attached.

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Background:

In January 2022, Premier Ford announced a provincial investment of over \$45 million in a new Streamline Development Approval Fund (SDAF). This fund was created to support Ontario's 39 largest municipalities to implement actions to speed up development approvals with the goal of building more housing more quickly. In March 2022, the City of Richmond Hill executed a transfer payment agreement with the provincial Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for \$1 million in grant funding from this fund. The City committed to using the grant funding on two main development approval improvements:

- Implementation of an e-permitting system to digitize various development and permit application processes; and
- Temporary staff hired to deal with backlogs of applications related to development approvals.

As a requirement of the transfer payment agreement, the City also committed to reporting the results of this funding to Council by November 1, 2023.

It is important to note that this grant opportunity was launched prior to a number of other efforts from both the federal and provincial governments to accelerate the delivery of housing supply, including the provincial requirement for a municipal housing pledge and the opening of the federal Housing Accelerator Fund. However, the SDAF funds from the Province were used to accelerate implementation of the City's online permit approval system and meaningfully advance many land-use planning applications, which contributes overall to the City's success and positioning in relation to these later initiatives.

The launch of the new Richmond Hill Permits portal enables an efficient and convenient system for applicants to submit, track and pay for permits, plans and licenses.

Funds received through the Streamline Development Approval Fund supported implementation of the new "Richmond Hill Permits" portal (<https://permits.richmondhill.ca/>), launched in February 2023. This user-friendly public facing, web-based portal allows residents, businesses and developers to apply online for select planning applications, building and engineering permits, and various business and professional licenses. The portal removes the need to physically attend Municipal Offices to submit documents and render fee payments. This is a service enhancement for Richmond Hill's community that enables a more efficient and convenient way for applicants to submit, track and pay for permits, plans and licenses.

In addition to providing the public with a convenient and user-friendly way to submit and track applications, the development of this portal assisted the City in ensuring each of the specific application processes are standardized and efficient.

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The City of Richmond Hill used approximately \$540,000 of the \$1 million SDAF grant to offset costs associated with the Richmond Hill Permits portal development and implementation, as well as to complete ongoing revisions, refinements and updates to the portal after the February launch. The SDAF funding enabled the City to add additional resources to this project, which ultimately accelerated the launch of this web portal to the public. While the realized impacts of this online portal are just beginning to be observed and tracked, it is expected that this system will result in faster and more convenient permit/plan/license processes for staff and the community.

The hiring of temporary staff resulted in faster and more efficient review processes, and an increase in development application approvals.

In addition to the above noted Richmond Hill Permits portal, the City used approximately \$460,000 of SDAF to fund four contract positions in support of addressing a backlog of development applications and improving development application processes. Two of these positions were housed in the Infrastructure Planning and Development Engineering division, and two in the Development Planning division.

The hiring of temporary staff in the Infrastructure Planning and Development Engineering division resulted in a significant improvement in the turnaround time required to review and comment on development applications. On average, staff were able to complete the technical review of engineering submissions in support of development applications approximately 70% more quickly as a result of changes associated with the SDAF contract staff. More specifically, the traffic and transportation development application review process decreased from an average of 81 days without the SDAF-funded staff, to 21 days with SDAF-funded staff. The technical review of engineering submissions for single family home site applications dropped from an average of 25 days without the SDAF-funded staff, to 9 days with SDAF-funded staff.

This process efficiency resulted in a significant improvement in the amount of time between an applicant's development application submission, and the City's review and comment back to that applicant. The addition of staff has also helped with file management/workload by increasing existing staff's capacity to expedite the review of other development applications in the queue, thus reducing the lag time on all types of residential development engineering reviews.

The temporary contract positions in the Development Planning division allowed for a dedicated resource to the Richmond Hill Permits portal project (above) to accelerate the implementation of the web portal, while maintaining senior level staff resources responsible for the approval of complex residential development applications.

The SDAF-funded contract staff also enabled the Development Planning division to address a backlog of site plan applications. In the reporting period with SDAF-funded staff, 93 site development applications were approved, compared to 36 site plan

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applications that were approved in the preceding 12 month period without SDAF-funded staff.

It is important to note that there are various influencing factors related to the issuance of approvals of development applications beyond the City's control (e.g. applicant response time; quality of information submitted, etc.). However, generally, funding from the SDAF enabled staff to refine the internal development application commenting process, resulting in a more efficient and consistent process that had the effect of yielding an increased number of approvals contributing to the provincial objective of building homes faster.

In addition, the temporary hiring of staff funded by the SDAF enabled the City to expedite implementation of the Richmond Hill Permits portal, as it allowed the City to dedicate a planning development staff resource to the project to accelerate the project timeline.

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

The City received a funding allocation of \$1 million from the provincial Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing through the SDAF to allocate to initiatives that improve the development application approval process. This funding was used to offset costs associated with the temporary staff and to accelerate the project noted above. There are no additional financial implications associated with this report.

Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities 2020-2022:

Pursuit of grant funding is in support of the Fiscal Responsibility Strategic Priority, as the City works to maximize revenue opportunities and limit tax rate impacts to residents.

Climate Change Considerations:

The Richmond Hill Permits portal digitizes several processes related to planning applications, building and engineering permits, and various business and professional licenses, removing the need for citizens to physically attend the City's Municipal Offices to submit documents and render payments. As a result, there is a reduction in GHG emissions which contribute to climate change that would have been associated with applicants commuting to and from the Municipal Offices.

Conclusion:

In 2022, the City of Richmond Hill was awarded \$1 million in funding via the Streamline Development Approval Fund (SDAF) from the provincial Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. This funding was used in support of work to accelerate and improve development application related processes. The Richmond Hill Permits portal was launched in February 2023 and allows applicants to complete various development related applications, permits and payments online that formerly required in-person attendance at the City's Municipal Offices. This results in a faster and more efficient

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exchange of information through various types of development application processes. Temporary staff were hired in the Infrastructure Planning and Development Engineering division, and the Development Planning division, to address a backlog of development applications, and improve and streamline development application review processes. This staff report provides Council with a summary of the use of SDAF in accordance with the requirements of the transfer payment agreement.

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRCM.23.16 - Streamline Development Approval Fund Final Reporting.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Sep 24, 2023

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Lise Conde - Sep 21, 2023 - 12:45 PM

Anthony Iannucci - Sep 22, 2023 - 6:43 AM

Darlene Joslin - Sep 24, 2023 - 8:50 PM