Development Review Process Assessment

City of Markham
Development Services Committee
December 9, 2019

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Project Overview

Overview of the Development Review Process Assessment

Leadership

- The Commissioner of Development Services sponsored the assessment and retained KPMG to support the work.

- Gladki Planning Associates (GPA) acted as subject matter experts with experience navigating Ontario's planning processes.

- The assessment is funded via the Province of Ontario's Audit and Accountability Fund.

Objectives

The purpose of the review was to ensure the process:

- ✓ Is efficient and effective;

- ✓ Provides clarity, certainty and transparency to applicants and the public; and,

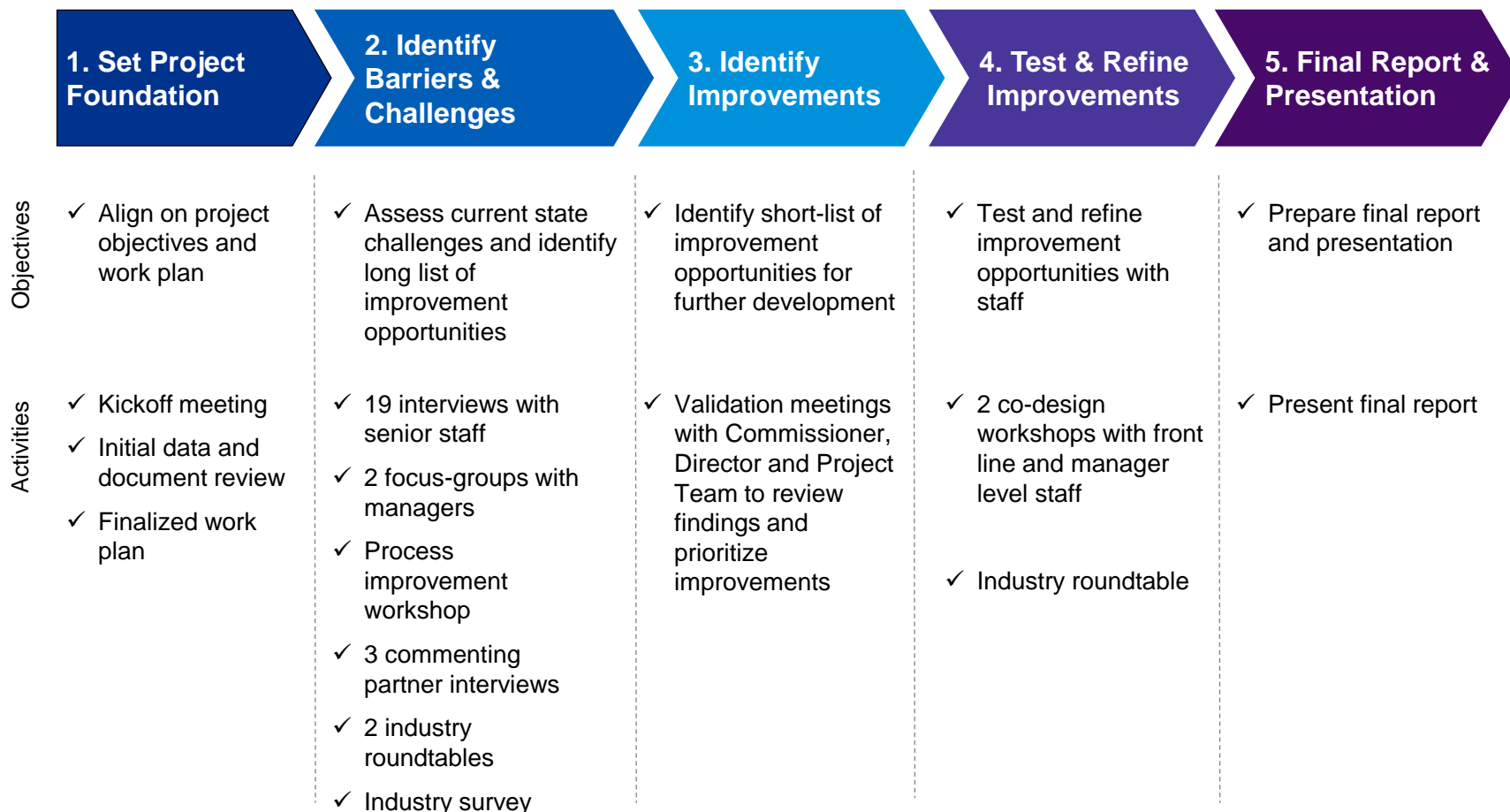- ✓ Produces good city-building outcomes.

Scope

Our scope focused on four development application types:

- Official Plan Amendments (OPA);

- Zoning By-Law Amendments (ZBA);

- Site Plan Control Applications (SPC); and,

- Plans of Subdivision (PS).

Approach and Work plan

Our work took place over approximately nine weeks beginning in late September. We worked collaboratively with Markham staff to build a robust evidence base and identify improvement opportunities.

	1. Set Project Foundation	2. Identify Barriers & Challenges	3. Identify Improvements	4. Test & Refine Improvements	5. Final Report & Presentation
Objectives	✓ Align on project objectives and work plan	✓ Assess current state challenges and identify long list of improvement opportunities	✓ Identify short-list of improvement opportunities for further development	✓ Test and refine improvement opportunities with staff	✓ Prepare final report and presentation
Activities	✓ Kickoff meeting ✓ Initial data and document review ✓ Finalized work plan	✓ 19 interviews with senior staff ✓ 2 focus-groups with managers ✓ Process improvement workshop ✓ 3 commenting partner interviews ✓ 2 industry roundtables ✓ Industry survey	✓ Validation meetings with Commissioner, Director and Project Team to review findings and prioritize improvements	✓ 2 co-design workshops with front line and manager level staff ✓ Industry roundtable	✓ Present final report

Extensive Internal & External Stakeholder Engagement

Our work is anchored in a substantive evidence base consisting of eight main sources of information, including: document review, internal and external stakeholder engagement, a process improvement workshop and a co-design process.

30+ Industry Stakeholders & Commenting Partners

50+ City of Markham Staff Engaged

35+ Hours of Consultation

40+ Documents Analyzed

City of Markham stakeholders engaged included:

- Mayor's Office
- Chief Administrative Officer
- Commissioner's Office (Development Services, Community and Fire Services)
- Planning and Urban Design
- Development Engineering
- Economic Growth, Culture and Entrepreneurship
- Building Standards
- Environmental Services
- Operations
- City Solicitor

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Findings

Core aspects of the process are working well but there is room for improvement

The team-based, district model is working well.

Staff and industry stakeholders indicated that the current model is working well and encourages collaboration and cooperation with industry and across disciplinary lines.

" *Markham's process is one of the best in the GTA. When working with other municipalities, we tell them to go to Markham and check out their approach. That is what good looks like."*

First-in-class staff expertise and experience.

Internal and external stakeholders consistently emphasized that development review staff demonstrate best-in-class technical skills and development review experience and are committed to city-building excellence.

" *Markham continues to position itself as a leader in community building. It has skilled planning staff who work in the best interest of effective long-term city-building.*

Strong reputation for excellent customer service.

Markham has a reputation for customer service excellence that sets the City apart from its GTA peers. From senior staff to the frontline, staff are responsive and customer-focused.

" *Markham staff are highly responsive. You can pick up the phone and get in touch with junior and senior-level staff alike and discuss the details of your application.*

Summary of Challenges

We identified 30 challenges impacting the efficiency and effectiveness of the development review process. A summary of those findings is included below across each layer of our assessment framework.

Process
Contradictory and late-stage comments, which extend timelines and cause applicant and staff frustration.

People & Organization
Unclear roles and responsibilities, which contribute to re-work and an underpowered application lead that results in ineffective file and project management.

Governance
Inaccurate development review timelines that decrease the transparency and predictability of the development review process.

Technology & Information
An underdeveloped online application portal that is not applicant-friendly.

Customer
Varying application quality and premature escalations that increase staff workloads and re-prioritize applications.

Recommendations for Improvements

Our assessment identified 21 recommendations to overcome challenges and improve process efficiency and effectiveness across each layer of our assessment framework.

Outcomes

Process

People & Organization

Governance

Technology & Information

Customer

✓ Empowered frontline staff and enhanced customer service.

✓ Reduced duplication and fewer conflicting/contradictory comments.

✓ Streamlined circulation processes and accelerated review timelines.

✓ Reduced application churn and re-work.

✓ Improved line-of-sight into process performance and application pipeline.

Recommendations: Process, People & Organization, Governance

Process

- Develop criteria to structure the re-circulation process to reduce late-stage comments and increase review cycles.

- Establish standardized in-person meeting and governance structures to support to reduce contradictory comments and enhance project management.

- Develop an escalation protocol to reduce the re-work and disruption associated with unnecessary escalations.

People & Organization

- Empower the lead Planner to be fully in charge of all aspects of file management and operational decision making to enhance application and project management.

- Define and document development review-related roles and responsibilities to reduce process inefficiencies.

- Implement an easy-to-use file transfer protocol to reduce the process disruption associated with absences and turnover.

Governance

- Establish a performance measurement framework to improve the management and evaluation of the development review processed. The framework should identify measures as well as how they'll be collected and used in process-related decision-making.

Recommendations: Technology & Information, Customer

Technology & Information

- Improve the contents of the City's online development review portal to help improve application quality and the customer/applicant experience with the development review process.

- Ensure the rollout of ePLAN is adequately resourced to enable a smooth transition and maximize the potential of the new system.

Customer

- Measure customer satisfaction with the development review process to track performance and contribute to continuous improvement.

- Establish formal two-way learning and mentorship opportunities for staff and industry to improve application quality and facilitate collaboration and collegiality.

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Thank You

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