

Streamline Development Approval Fund – Final Report

Date: October 26, 2023

This report provides information regarding the Municipality's Streamline Development Approval Fund (SDAF) initiative, which used Provincial funding to modernize, streamline, and accelerate residential development approvals. The report provides information on how the Municipality allocated its approved SDAF grant, the projects undertaken, and their associated outcomes. This report forms a component of the Municipality's final report to the Province, to be submitted by November 1, 2023.

Background

The SDAF is a \$45 million provincial program designed to assist Ontario's largest municipalities modernize, streamline, and accelerate processes for managing and approving housing applications. The Municipality of Clarington (Municipality) was approved to receive an allocation of up to \$1 million of this funding. Eligible expenses must be incurred between January 19, 2022 and November 1, 2023. There is no municipal cost-sharing requirement.

SDAF Projects

The Municipality's SDAF allocation has been used to support six project areas directly related to the purpose of program, each of which are briefly described below. Project areas include:

- Development Review Process Transformation
- Development Review Digital Transformation
- Development Review Guidelines
- Retaining Resources to Clear Application Backlog
- Advancing Neighbourhood Planning
- Addressing Legislative Changes under the Ontario Heritage Act

Development Review Process Transformation

The Municipality retained the services of a professional consulting firm to assess the current land development approvals processes and provide recommendations for improving efficiency and effectiveness, taking a customer-centric approach. The review built on previous continuous improvement efforts and to sought to maximize the benefits of the Municipality's concurrent digital transformation.

The consulting team assessed the current development approvals process through the review of background information and extensive internal and external consultation, including:

- 8 engagement sessions with agencies and development industry representatives;
- 10 process review working sessions with staff from across the Planning and Infrastructure Services Department; and
- 4 additional working sessions with senior staff to analyze the findings of the process review and validate recommendations.

A rapidly evolving Provincial regulatory framework occurring while the process review was being undertaken was considered to the greatest extent possible.

The result of the comprehensive assessment includes 75 process improvement recommendations organized into the following seven themes and categories, and a five-year performance improvement plan:

- Process Improvement – Towards LEAN
 - Refine the pre-consultation process
 - Improve the application intake process
 - Coordinate the technical reviews
- Building Resource Capacity
 - Right-size application processing capacity
 - Training
- Coordination with External Partners
 - Address regulatory impacts
 - Communication
- Measuring Performance and Setting Targets
 - Build key performance indicators
 - Set timeframe targets
 - Reporting and monitoring
- Modernization Technology
 - Fully commit to the AMANDA software system
 - Optimize and automate the AMANDA software system
- Organization Design and Role Alignment
 - Who does what?
 - Optimize role alignment
- General
 - Administrative
 - Communications and customer service

The Municipality's Planning and Infrastructure Services Department, who is responsible for the Municipality's land development processes, has begun implementation of several of the recommendations. Immediate action on some of these was necessary in

response to regulatory changes being made by the Province. Other recommendations were acted on through concurrent SDAF supported projects areas.

Development Review Digital Transformation

The Municipality is undergoing a digital transformation with the design, build, and implementation of a Municipal Business Solution (MBS). The purpose of the MBS is to replace the Municipality's existing land development software, LDO, which is now at the end of its life.

The Municipality retained the services of a professional services firm for the development and implementation of the MBS. The AMANDA software application was subsequently selected as the Municipality's primary development application and work flow management software. A portion of the Municipality's SDAF grant was allocated to supporting implementation of the AMANDA software across the Municipality's land development and building processes, the development of guidance materials, and user training for staff.

The new AMANDA software offers a fully integrated electronic process for land use planning applications that carries information through the whole process from the point of the initial application through pre-consultation, to the processing of building permits, and the eventual release of securities for the subdivision works and site plan. Use of the AMANDA software launched on November 7, 2022, with 17 planning, three engineering, and five building processes administered by the Planning & Infrastructure Services Department.

The AMANDA software allows planning and building permit applications to be submitted in an online public portal. The Citizen Portal tool integrates with the AMANDA software, replacing paper-based applications and offering online payment options. To date, five of the Planning & Infrastructure Services' processes are available for online application through the Citizen Portal. Resource constraints and a changing policy and regulatory environment for land use planning in the Province has delayed the necessary updating of forms and documents for the remaining processes. Planning and Infrastructure Services is committed to making the remaining processes available on the public portal.

The expected benefits resulting from the new MBS, which contribute to a reduction in development application review times include:

- The ability for development Proponents to apply for and submit all the documentation required to obtain a development approval or building permit electronically, at any time of the day, and the associated elimination of printing and travel costs for applicants;
- Automated emails, generated documents, and advanced reporting capabilities;
- Improved collaboration and integration across Municipal Departments and commenting agencies with electronic file sharing and documentation of results throughout the workflows;

- A streamlined filing system;
- Improved customer service for real estate agents, lawyers, developers, home builders, residents, and Municipal staff by allowing easier access to files associated to a property; and
- Customizable, allowing for adaptation as needs or requirements change, or continuous improvement opportunities are identified.

To support software implementation, the Municipality retained external support to develop software procedure manuals for each of the processes integrated into the AMANDA system. These internal manuals provide step-by-step instruction to guide staff through the entire life cycle of each process. Several training sessions were conducted for staff, which were recorded for review as needed by staff at any time, and for the training of new staff.

Development Review Guidelines

To support the Municipality's review and proper evaluation of development applications, the Municipality requests Proponents to prepare studies, reports, and other information. The required documents are identified by the Municipality and external agencies during the application pre-consultation process. The Clarington Official Plan requires that the requested documents be prepared in accordance with any applicable standards or specifications. The Terms of Reference for any study that is required must be approved by the Municipality or the appropriate agency prior to the preparation of the study.

While information requirements are outlined in the Clarington Official Plan, they are general, often resulting in incomplete submissions and multiple rounds of review and resubmission. To address this challenge professional consulting services were retained to prepare guidelines outlining the Municipality's requirements for the following:

- Applicant-led public consultation
- Environmental Impact Studies / Natural Heritage Evaluations (EIS/NHE)

In addition, training sessions to educate staff on the EIS/NHE Terms of Reference guidance document and how to review an EIS/NHE against a Terms of Reference was also provided.

Applicant-led Public Consultation Guidance Document

The development of guidelines for Applicant-led public consultation is an important component of the Municipality's approach to implementing Provincially mandated Planning Act changes resulting from Bill 109, More Homes for Everyone Act, 2022. The Municipality now requires all Official Plan Amendment and Zoning By-law Amendment applicants to undertake consultation with the public prior to application submission. Proponents are required to submit with their application a report indicating what was heard during the public engagement process and how the comments and concerns of the public have been addressed.

The applicant-led public consultation guidance document provides clarity on the Municipality's expectations as it relates to the approach, timelines, accessibility expectations, and notification and documentation requirements, and will be posted on the Municipality's [Development Guidelines](#) webpage.

EIS / NHE Terms of Reference Guidance Document

EIS' and NHEs are types of environmental studies that may be required prior to development to examine the natural features of a property and the ecological functions they provide. They outline potential environmental impacts of the proposed development and recommend mitigation measures.

EIS/NHEs are amongst the studies most frequently requested in support of development applications, often with wide ranging approaches being used by developers and their consultants. With the removal of Conservation Authorities from Planning Act processes, clear requirements and review direction, and training for staff is increasingly important.

The EIS/NHE Terms of Reference guidance document assists Municipal staff and development proponents to appropriately scope natural heritage assessments for development applications, referencing industry standards and best practices, and will be posted on the Municipality's [Development Guidelines](#) webpage.

These new guidance documents will provide an immediate benefit to staff and applicants by providing clarity and consistency in these components of the development approvals process at the Municipality. Other expected benefits include:

- Reduced applicant confusion and frustration;
- Reduced time spent by staff providing information to applicants for each application;
- Improved quality and complete submissions from applicants, reducing review efforts; and
- Supporting staff training and ensuring continuity if staff changes.

Retaining Resources to Clear Application Backlog

The Planning and Infrastructure Services Department has been experiencing staffing challenges and vacancies in areas relating to development approvals. As a result, the Department experienced a lack of processing capacity for an application volume which is increasing as a result of continued growth in Clarington.

The SDAF allowed the Municipality to use the services of external consultants to carry out the planning reviews for four large subdivision development applications, as well as the engineering review for one applications. Statutory Public Meetings were held and Municipal and agency review comment letters were provided to the applicants. Resubmissions by the applicants are pending.

SDAF was also used to support the hiring of a temporary part-time Planner for an 18-month period. This individual complemented the existing Development Review Team supporting all components of residential development applications, providing training and support to staff, and assisting in updating development application procedure manuals and forms. With market conditions making it difficult to fill vacancies, this individual has been essential to helping address a backlog of applications and support onboarding of new, less experienced staff.

Advancing Neighbourhood Planning

The Municipality's Secondary Plan program is an important part of planning for new residential growth in Clarington, with the majority of forecasted growth being accommodated in Secondary Plan areas. Secondary Plans are policy documents that provide development policies at a neighbourhood level to guide growth. They provide more specific land use policy direction for an area than the general designations of the Clarington Official Plan.

Since initiation of the Secondary Plan program in 2017, Council has adopted three Secondary Plans and adopted one Subwatershed Study. Nine other Secondary Plans and one Subwatershed Study continue to progress.

A portion of the Municipality's SDAF was allocated to support the advancement of Secondary Plan updates for key urban centres in Bowmanville. This includes the Bowmanville East Urban Centre Secondary Plan and the Bowmanville West Urban Centre and Major Transit Station Area Secondary Plan. Both Secondary Plan updates are supported by external consultants and are funded by the Municipality, except for the Goodyear portion of the Bowmanville East update, funded by the landowner.

Updated Secondary Plans for Bowmanville East and Bowmanville West will re-shape these existing neighbourhoods to support:

- The restoration and adaptive reuse of historical industrial lands;
- The revitalization and accommodation of new housing types in existing business districts;
- A mix of housing types with higher densities and increased building heights to support the GO Train Bowmanville Extension; and
- Clarington's Municipal Housing Pledge to implement 13,000 units by 2031 as required by the Province.

Changing regulatory and local context since initiation of these Secondary Plans introduced additional parameters that the Municipality must respond to in completing these updates. Completion of these Secondary Plans is needed to process development applications and accelerate unique development and intensification opportunities within these neighbourhood areas.

Addressing Legislative Changes under the Ontario Heritage Act

Changes to the Ontario Heritage Act introduced under the More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022 (Bill 23) requires a non-designated (listed) property on the Municipal Heritage Register to be removed after two years if no notice of intent to designate has been issued. For properties that were listed on the Municipal Heritage Register at the time the Ontario Heritage Act changes came into force, this work must be completed prior to January 1, 2025.

The Municipality faces a resource challenge to review and update the Municipal Register in the short-term and eliminate the risk of losing valuable cultural heritage resources. The Municipality retained professional consulting services to complete designation reports for seven of the 55 properties listed on the Municipal Heritage Register. The properties selected were considered of higher value from a cultural heritage perspective and are within areas that may be subject to proposed land development.

In addition to fulfilling an important resource need, a necessary assessment of the heritage value of these properties has been completed, confirming whether their Cultural Heritage Value warrants designation under the Ontario Heritage Act, affording the property owners more certainty in the development approvals process. Funding required to complete similar assessments for the remaining 48 properties listed on the Municipal Heritage Register will be brought to Council as a component of the 2024 multi-year budget process.

Financial Considerations

The Municipality was able to fully utilize the \$1 million funding allocation provided through the SDAF to enhance and modernize the Municipality's land development and building construction processes. The table below summarizes the Municipality's SDAF expenditures across the six project areas outlined in this report.

Project Area	Expenditures* (net HST)
Development Review Process Transformation	\$143,500
Development Review Digital Transformation	\$588,500
Development Review Guidelines	\$26,200
Retaining Resources to Clear Application Backlog	\$161,500
Advancing Neighbourhood Planning	\$50,000
Addressing Legislative Changes under the Ontario Heritage Act	\$30,300
Total Expenditures	\$1,000,000

* Amounts shown have been rounded for the purposes of this report and may be adjusted slightly following receipt and payment of all final invoices.

In Summary

The SDAF has provided an opportunity for the Municipality to leverage Provincial funding to undertake several projects to enhance and streamline the development review process. Funds allocated to the Municipality have been used to:

- Undertake a comprehensive review of processes;
- Adopt modernized workflow software;
- Address a backlog in development applications and document updates;
- Develop new guidelines to standardize and better communicate the Municipality's expectations and requirements;
- Train staff;
- Advance updates to Secondary Plans in key growth intensification areas; and
- Respond to legislative changes and improve development process certainty.

In alignment with the Municipality's commitment to continuous improvement and modernization, Departments will continue to work to advance additional process improvements and technological solutions to streamline and accelerate residential development in Clarington.

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