

Online application portal and streamlined permit process

Recommendation:

That the report dated March 25, 2025, titled “Online application portal and streamlined permit process” be received for information

**Report Purpose and
Summary Statement:**

To provide council with an update on the new online application portal. This initiative is a piece of the overall Development Services Optimization project, which aims to make organization wide changes to technology, process, policy, and bylaws to streamline and expedite building and development permit processing times.

Strategic Alignment:

Liveable Community; Diversified, Thriving Economy;
Governance & Corporate Excellence

Online application portal and streamlined permit process

BACKGROUND:

In August 2024, we began an 18-month project called Development Services Optimization. This project is essential for modernizing Maple Ridge's development processes and aligning them with the city's strategic goals. The improvements will attract top developers, stimulate economic growth, and help create a thriving, vibrant community. Deliverables of the overall project include:

- End to end process redesign for Building, Planning, Development, Engineering and Zoning
- Implementation of redesigned processes and workflows, including task automation where possible
- Policy and Bylaw review and simplification, making it easier for clients to understand requirements, to reduce confusion, delays and ensuring a smoother, more efficient experience for developers and residents
- Improved reporting capabilities

Throughout the duration of this 18-month project, we will implement incremental changes which will cumulatively result in significant transformation.

On March 10th, the city went live with an online application portal for citizens and developers to apply for a single permit type, new residential home building. This will quickly be followed by tenant improvements, then planning, development and engineering applications.

ANALYSIS:

Project Description:

The City of Maple Ridge is excited to announce the launch of an online building permit application portal. This initiative is complemented by a comprehensive overhaul of our internal processes, incorporating automated workflows and enabling concurrent digital plan reviews. Key benefits of this project include:

- Enhanced Transparency: Applicants can track the status of their applications in real-time via the portal, ensuring clarity and open communication.
- Improved processing speed through the implementation of:
 - Streamlined processes that reduce redundancy and expedite approval times.
 - Simultaneous digital reviews that allow for faster cross-departmental collaboration.
 - Automated workflows that optimize resource allocation and task completion.

Discussion:

The new online building permit application portal addresses several key challenges previously faced by both developers and city officials in the permit application process:

1. Lack of Transparency:

- **Problem:** Applicants often struggled with limited visibility into the status of their applications, leading to frequent inquiries and dissatisfaction.
- **Solution:** The portal provides real-time updates, giving applicants comprehensive access to the progress and status of their applications, reducing uncertainty and enhancing communication.

2. Inefficient Processing Times:

- **Problem:** Manual and segmented processes often resulted in delayed permits, slowing down development projects and creating bottlenecks.
- **Solution:** The integration of streamlined processes, simultaneous digital plan reviews, and automated workflows significantly accelerates processing times, facilitating quicker application turnaround.

3. High Administrative Burden:

- **Problem:** Managing a large volume of applications using traditional methods imposed a substantial workload on staff, increasing the likelihood of errors and inefficiencies.
- **Solution:** Automation reduces manual tasks, decreases the risk of error, and optimizes resource allocation, allowing staff to focus on more strategic activities.

4. Siloed Collaboration:

- **Problem:** Departments working in isolation could lead to miscommunication and delays due to the sequential nature of plan reviews.
- **Solution:** Concurrent digital reviews promote collaboration across departments, ensuring faster and more coherent decision-making processes.

This tool transforms the permitting process into a more transparent, efficient, and collaborative system, greatly benefiting both city operations and developers.

Strategic Alignment:

The online building permit application portal contributes to the strategic goals of a Liveable Community, a Diversified, Thriving Economy, and Governance & Corporate Excellence in the following ways:

1. Liveable Community:

- **Efficient Development Approvals:** Faster permit processing accelerates the time from application to construction, helping to bring projects to completion more quickly. This allows for timely development that aligns with community needs such as housing, amenities, and infrastructure.
- **Transparency and Engagement:** By giving residents and developers clear insight into the application process, the portal promotes trust and community involvement, encouraging developers to partner with community members in a collaborative development process.

2. Diversified, Thriving Economy:

- **Attracting Development:** An efficient and transparent permit process is attractive to developers looking for reliable municipal partners, thus encouraging more diverse types of projects and investments.
- **Streamlined Processes for Business Growth:** Reducing the time and effort needed for permit approvals allows businesses to focus more resources on expanding operations, fostering economic development and diversification within the community.
- **Promoting Innovation:** The use of digital tools and automated workflows positions the city as a forward-thinking, innovative place to do business, which can attract tech-savvy firms and industries.

3. Governance & Corporate Excellence:

- **Enhanced Operational Efficiency:** Automation and digital processes streamline internal operations, reducing costs and increasing the speed of services the city provides, which exemplifies high standards of corporate excellence.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** The portal provides valuable data on application trends and processing times, which can inform strategic planning and policy-making, enhancing governance effectiveness.
- **Accountability and Transparency:** Real-time updates and a clear view of application statuses demonstrate a commitment to transparency and accountability, key pillars in corporate governance.

Conclusion:

By providing this online portal, Maple Ridge not only advances its strategic goals but also reinforces its commitment to creating a vibrant, inclusive, and efficiently managed community.

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Online application portal and streamlined permit processes.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Mar 17, 2025

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

Carolyn Mushata, Director of Legislative Services and Corporate Officer

Scott Hartman, Chief Administrative Officer