



Office of the Commissioner  
Corporate Services Department

## MEMORANDUM

To: Members of Committee of the Whole

From: Paul Freeman  
Chief Planner

Date: May 29, 2020

Re: Development Activity during COVID-19 Emergency

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Planning and development activity is continuing during the COVID-19 emergency through remote work supporting the provision of housing, institutional, commercial, and industrial development and ensuring planning policies and applications are advanced. This memo provides an overview of some of this work in the Community Planning and Development Services division of Planning and Economic Development.

### **Development Activity has continued through the COVID-19 emergency**

While there was an initial pause as municipalities adjusted to closed front counters and working remotely, all local municipalities continue to accept and process development applications. Municipalities were able to quickly pivot to accepting electronic submissions through email, ftp sites, flash drives or established online portals. In addition to processing applications, staff continue to advance planning policies and projects. Many municipalities are now holding virtual statutory public meetings or are targeting resumption.

All development applications are provided to York Region electronically and processed through the Region's YorkTrax application tracking system. This in-house system has been built over the last two years and allows staff on-line to fully review development applications, share documents, collaborate and use the analytic and mapping capabilities integrated from the Region's YorkMaps system. YorkTrax recently won the MISA (Municipal Information Systems Association) 2020 Excellence in Municipal Systems Award in recognition for innovation, demonstrated improvement of service and a high level of collaboration between IT and other departments.

Table 1 below compares the number of development applications between Q1 2019 and 2020 during the COVID time period. The volume of applications for the first quarter remained the same as last year. While the number of new applications slowed slightly since COVID began (likely due to local municipalities pivoting to electronic submissions and the Provincial shutdown), application resubmissions and responses to Regional comments have increased. Development fees received provides another indicator of development activity. As of May 25<sup>th</sup>, Regional fees collected are similar to this time last year.

**Table 1 – Summary of Development Applications During COVID-19**

DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION	NEW APPLICATIONS			
	Q1 Comparison		Comparison (March 16 to May 25)	
	2019	2020	2019	2020
Pre-Consultations	153	132	113	64
Local Official Plans	14	22	17	9
Zoning Bylaw Amendments	33	39	26	14
Site Plan	71	66	67	42
Engineering Applications	17	4	8	8
MECP (Environmental Compliance Approval)	8	11	12	11
Draft Plan of Subdivision	13	9	7	5
Subdivision Clearance	1	7	0	4
Block Plan	1	2	1	1
Draft Plan of Condominium	7	7	6	1
Condo Clearance	12	6	10	4
Adjacent Municipalities	2	2	0	0
MZO (Circulated for comment)	1	0	1	0
Consent	40	27	9	9
Minor Variance	128	156	78	60
<b>TOTAL New Applications</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>RESUBMISSIONS</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>RESPONSES</b>				
Comment Letter Sent	32	114	30	90
Condition Letter Sent	13	7	19	8
Partial/Final Approval Letter	2	29	29	21
Clearance Letter	2	9	13	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>122</b>
Response Provided (No Regional Interest)	132	173	142	132
<b>FEE COMPARISON</b>	<b>Comparison (Jan 1 to May 25)</b>			
	<b>2019</b>		<b>2020</b>	
Fees Revenue	\$1,224,667.43		\$1,132,854.02	

## **Municipalities continue to advance planning activities including secondary plan development and Official Plan reviews**

In addition to development application review and approvals, notable projects continue to progress with ongoing involvement by Community Planning and Development Services staff working remotely:

- King Township New Official Plan
- Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan
- Markham Centre Secondary Plan
- Keswick Secondary Plan
- Stouffville Lincolnville Secondary Plan
- East Gwillimbury Employment lands Secondary Plan
- Newmarket Urban Area OPA and Mulock Station Secondary Plan
- Ongoing LPAT Proceedings – Vaughan Yonge/Steeles Secondary Plan, Stouffville OPA 136 mediation, Richmond Hill Yonge Bernard KDA, East Gwillimbury Rice/Mount Albert mediation

This work is in addition to the Municipal Comprehensive Review and components such as defining employment lands and major transit station areas involving local municipal staff.

## **Construction activity is comparable to previous years with the restrictions being lifted**

Development and construction activity continues to return to similar levels to last year, as construction sites reopen. The spring season usually has phased starts entering into the full construction season. With the province lifting all restrictions for construction on May 19<sup>th</sup>, staff is noticing a larger start up all at once based on high demand for pre-construction meetings.

Construction Site Activity:

- Before COVID-19 (March 16) – approximately 135 construction sites were open/active (winter season is typically slower);
- During COVID-19 (March 17 – May 1) – approximately 45 construction sites were open/active (approx. down to 30% of normal activity);
- After the Province lifted initial restrictions (May 4 – May 18) – approximately 150 construction sites have been active. It is expected this number will increase to over 200 sites prior to summer based on the Road Occupancy Permits being processed at this time. Higher numbers are expected during this construction season with the further construction restrictions being lifted on May 19th.

York Region construction coordinators maintain a full schedule of construction site visits to enable progress through the various construction stages including pre-construction inspection/meetings, during construction inspections, inspection for security reduction at substantial and full completion of construction.

Building permit issuance is an additional indicator of construction activity across the Region and provides a comparison to normal operations last year. Based on the number of permits for new buildings compared to last year, there has been a slight overall increase in unit numbers and construction value for residential development illustrated in Table 2 with the largest increase in apartment building construction shown in Table 3. There has, however, been a decrease in non-residential building permits with construction values decreasing across the commercial, industrial and institutional sectors (Table 4).

**Table 2: All Residential Permits January-April 2019 and 2020 Summary**

Year	Number of Permits Issued	Number of Units created	SQFT	Construction Value (000)
2019 (Jan-April)	1,294	1,149	3,185,070	\$435,594.16
2020 (Jan-April)	1,447	2,199	4,403,692	\$519,877.87

Source: Monthly Building Permit Reports

**Table 3: Residential Units Created by Type January-April 2019 and 2020**

	2019	2020	2019 to 2020 Growth	Growth Share
Condominium Apartment Building	514	1,118	604	57.9%
Duplex/Accessory Dwelling Unit	15	17	2	0.2%
Mobile Home	1	0	-1	-0.1%
Rental Apartment Building	0	362	362	34.7%
Residential Addition/Alteration	1	6	5	0.5%
Semi-Detached House	36	18	-18	-1.7%
Single Detached House	237	334	91	8.7%
Townhouse/Row	345	344	-1	-0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,149</b>	<b>2,199</b>	<b>1,050</b>	

Source: Monthly Building Permit Reports

**Table 4: All Non-Residential Permits January-April 2020 and 2019 Summary**

Year	Number of Permits Issued	Construction Value (000)
2019 (Jan-April)	1,113	\$317,087.98
2020 (Jan-April)	665	\$146,682.51

## **Development review and construction activity continues to be managed effectively and efficiently through YorkTrax**

Processing of development applications is continuing effectively during the COVID-19 emergency. The YorkTrax application tracking system has been instrumental to enable business as usual for staff working from home and on the road for inspections. YorkTrax will continue to be updated with enhancements creating work efficiencies with local municipal partners. The semi-annual development activity report scheduled for September 2020 will provide a further assessment of development activity and the impacts of the COVID-19 emergency.

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