August 13, 2024

To: Planning & Development Services Customers
From: Debra Hamilton, Planning & Development Service, The City of Calgary

To our customers,

I wish to acknowledge that I have been hearing concerns from our customers, both directly and indirectly regarding development and building permit approvals, specifically around timelines and customer experience.

These concerns matter to me and to the Planning & Development Services leadership team. We are committed to providing quality customer service, a predictable process and timely approvals in service of Calgary being a great place to make a living, a great place to make a life.

As you are working hard to meet increasing demand for new homes and businesses to match the growth in our city, we have been scaling up our capacity to address the increase in volumes.

Looking at our historic Q1 and Q2 development permit volumes, there has been a 34% increase from 2019 to 2024. And, in Q2 of this year alone, we received a 35% increase in residential building permit applications compared to the same quarter last year. We monitor and react to noticeable permit volume increases through both recruitment and process efficiencies. While recruitment has proven an effective strategy historically, similar to other municipalities across Canada, we are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit experienced city builders and leaders. We ask for your patience as we take action to hire and train new staff.

These volumes, along with increasing application complexity and resourcing gaps (up to 25% vacancy on some teams) have resulted in slower permit processing timelines. And while we are maintaining, on average, 80% of decisions within established decision timeline targets, we acknowledge there are slower permit processing times for many of you, and we recognise your frustration with these delays.

In addition to hiring, we are making significant progress on bylaw and policy reform. Rezoning for Housing came into effect August 6, 2024, and a reduction in land use applications for low-density residential amendments will create some capacity for our planning teams. With the ongoing City Building Program work, including the new Zoning Bylaw, we are also looking to simplify regulations and improve consistency on The City's development expectations. We welcome industry's continued participation in this work.

As we work through current challenges, we are committed to collaborating with you, our industry partners, to deliver the best outcomes for Calgarians. We value your input; we hear your feedback and are on course to introduce fresh solutions to address both of our needs.

You can also assist us in managing these unprecedented volumes by ensuring your application is complete upon submission. Incomplete submissions can be a major source of delays. If you are experiencing specific permit processing time or review challenges, I encourage you to first reach out to your assigned File Manager/Safety Codes Officer to solve the matter.

Knowing hiring is not the only solution, we are focused on process improvements and need to be working collaboratively – City and industry together - on innovative solutions. I am happy to set up opportunities for us including our September city industry advisory committees.

I want to personally thank you for your understanding as we move through these next few months. I am listening, I understand your concerns and improvements are coming.

Sincerely,

Deb Hamilton