

Report to Planning and Environment Committee

To: Chair and Members
Planning and Environment Committee
From: Scott Mathers, MPA, P.Eng.
Deputy City Manager, Planning and Economic Development
Subject: Initial Planning Application Tracking and Digital Planning
Application Tracking Update
Date: April 30, 2024

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Director, Planning and Development, this report providing an update on the Initial Planning Application Tracking project and Digital Planning Application Tracking program **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Executive Summary

The Digital Planning Application Tracking (DPAT) program has been established to deliver projects aimed at improving existing City systems and business processes to allow the business (Planning and Development) and development industry the ability to track planning applications, timelines, and approval dates throughout the entire duration of an application. As the project team was advancing the DPAT program, it became evident a more immediate solution was needed for the development industry. As such, the Initial Planning Application Tracking (IPAT) project began in Q4 2023 with an objective to expand the Citizen Portal in Q2 2024 that will form part of the foundation for future DPAT works. These works and future projects within the DPAT program support the 'Continuous Improvement and Innovation' actions outlined in London's "Targeted Actions" report for increasing housing supply.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

This project supports the following Strategic Areas of Focus of Council's 2024 to 2027 Strategic Plan for the City of London:

- **Housing and Homelessness** by advancing projects that support a well-planned and growing community; faster/streamlined approvals; and increasing the supply of housing with a focus on achieving intensification targets.
- **Well Run City** by advancing initiatives that ensure Londoners experience good stewardship, exceptional and valued service.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- Planning and Environment Committee, January 09, 2023, Audit and Accountability Fund – Intake 3 – Final Report
- Planning and Environment Committee, January 30, 2023, Streamline Development Approval Fund: Streamlining Development Approvals (2022) – Final Report
- Budget Committee, February 27, 2024, 2024-2027 Multi-Year Budget Reconciliation to the Public Sector Accounting Board (PSAB) Financial Statement Budget
- Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee, April 16, 2024, Targeted Actions to Increase London's Housing Supply: Supporting Council's Pledge for 47,000 Units by 2031

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Streamlining and Continuous Improvement

In 2022, with funding from the Province, the Planning and Development team undertook a review of the major *Planning Act* applications that the City processes. The focus was on mapping the current state of business processes and developing analytics to identify performance. The final report recommended a number of near-term and longer-term initiatives which would support a digital tracking system including implementing a more robust digital file management system; streamlining existing business processes; and defining key milestones and metrics. Staff have brought forward a number of these streamlining improvements to Committee and Council which are continuing to improve upon the timelines for development application approval.

1.2.2 Digital Planning Application Tracking Program

The Digital Planning Application Tracking (DPAT) program is a digital transformation that will deliver a series of projects designed to improve the systems and processes around how planning applications are handled, displayed, and reported. In early 2023, the DPAT project team was established and is comprised of members from both Information Technology Services (ITS) and the Business (Planning and Development).

A discovery project that researched the best path forward for DPAT implementation concluded in December 2023, and has determined that several enhancements need to occur to deliver a complete solution. The first step towards realizing these enhancements is building the framework and integrations that the individual DPAT projects will be dependent upon. In Q4 2023, staff received internal approval to begin advancing the Initial Planning Application Tracking (IPAT) project. Additionally, as part of the 2024 to 2027 Multi-Year Budget process, additional staffing support was included to deliver this program and ensure that future enhancements to the Citizen Portal can be completed following the completion of currently identified DPAT projects.

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Initial Planning Application Tracking Project

The Initial Planning Application Tracking (IPAT) project is advancing as a smaller initiative of the overall DPAT program to deliver an interim solution, which includes updates to the City's existing development and business portal, known as the [Citizen Portal](#). The Citizen Portal allows registered users to apply for building permits and track their progress, which until now, has been used primarily by residents for requests to the Building division.

IPAT is expanding on the Citizen Portal website by adding another tab to include planning applications. The change will result in two tabs being available on the website: one being "My Permit Applications" and another being "My Planning Applications" to differentiate between *Ontario Building Code* permit applications and *Planning Act* applications.

The new 'My Planning Applications' tab uses the same layout as the existing 'My Permit Applications' tab for consistency and ease of use but will have different functionality as part of this initial launch. The primary features that will be available at launch are:

1. **Search Results:** Registered users can efficiently search for their active planning applications. The results are presented in a grid format, offering essential file details at a glance, including the site address, file reference number, file type, status, application date, and a concise application description.
2. **Details View:** When users select an application from the list (by clicking), the Details View appears as a separate pane below the Search Results. In this view, users gain access to additional information about their application, including a more comprehensive description of the application, the name of the current File

Manager assigned to it, the scheduled Committee Date, and a milestone tracker that visually represents the application's progress toward approval.

2.1.1 Framework Considerations

The overall DPAT program is a larger initiative with multiple projects to deliver the full solution. To provide additional value to Citizen Portal users as soon as possible, the IPAT project is starting off with a smaller set of data. The information displayed on the Citizen Portal is dependent on what is currently in the City's AMANDA database and multiple criteria were considered when determining which application types to start with, including data maturity; adjustments required for business processes; the number of applications processed annually; and the value to the development industry. Based on these criteria it was determined that Zoning By-Law Amendments (ZBA) and Site Plan Approval (SPA) applications were the ideal applications to use for the IPAT project. Creating this initial solution will provide the project team with valuable feedback from applicants to allow the portal to be enhanced as part of the DPAT program. Other planning application types will be added as the DPAT program progresses.

Enhancements to the Citizen Portal are the first step towards providing a self-service option, enabling the development industry to track the progress of their planning applications toward approval. The need for improved tracking has been frequently highlighted by industry partners and forms part of the work of the Customer Service and Process Improvement Reference Group.

2.1.2 Timeline for Implementation

Below is the high-level timeline for implementation of the IPAT project:

- Q3 2023 – Solution identified, and technical requirements gathered.
- Q4 2023 – Staff received internal approval to advance IPAT.
- Q1 2024 – Software development and testing.
- Q2 2024+ – Planned public launch of IPAT and feedback gathering period.

Updates to the Citizen Portal as a result of IPAT were completed and communicated to the development industry on April 18, 2024. Additional projects within the Digital Planning Application Tracking program are forecast to begin in Q3 2024.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

3.1 IPAT Project

The Initial Planning Application Tracking project makes use of the existing Citizen Portal software. To maximize value, City Staff underwent essential training with the software vendor, allowing them to complete necessary development work in-house. Furthermore, this approach enables City Staff to implement additional enhancements through the DPAT program.

3.2 DPAT Program

Through the recent adoption of the 2024 to 2027 Multi-Year Budget, the Digital Planning Application Tracking program has capital and operating funds available to advance these projects with a dedicated team.

4.0 Key Issues and Considerations

4.1 DPAT Approach and Change Management

The DPAT program is working towards an enterprise-wide tracking solution for *Planning Act* applications processed by the City. The goal of DPAT is to allow the business and development industry the ability to track planning applications throughout the entire duration from one location. To achieve this several projects will be undertaken to enhance the City's existing systems and business processes, many of which are

complex and interconnected. This means that time is required to fully plan, build, test, deploy, and audit, to ensure accuracy and maintain data security.

To successfully deliver these improvements to existing systems and business processes there is a need for change management throughout the lifecycle of the DPAT program. The Planning and Development division has undertaken a number of continuous improvement initiatives over the past 7 years and is set up to both lead and support change adoption. A component of the DPAT program includes a scoped communication plan to actively distribute information to relevant parties at key milestones, making them aware of the reason for the change and the benefits of successful implementation. As additional projects within the DPAT program are scheduled, City Staff will establish clear timelines for deliverables and the availability of additional enhancements to the public and development industry. These projects are forecast to commence Q3 2024.

4.2 Increasing London's Housing Supply

Projects within the DPAT program directly support the recent "Targeted Actions to Increase London's Housing Supply" report; advancing 'Continuous Improvement & Innovation' actions by streamlining processes and enhancing planning application tracking.

Conclusion

The Digital Planning Application Tracking (DPAT) program and team has been established to undertake a number of projects. The Initial Planning Application Tracking (IPAT) project was successfully completed as of April 18, 2024, and establishes some of the foundational works for the overall DPAT program. IPAT focused on bringing two planning application types (Zoning By-Law Amendments and Site Plan Approvals) to the Citizen Portal through this initial project with other planning application types being added as the DPAT program progresses. Additional projects are planned to start in Q3 2024.

Prepared by: Matt Davenport, P.Eng.
Manager, Development Engineering and Digital Planning Initiatives

Reviewed by: Peter Kavcic, P.Eng.
Manager, Subdivision and Development Inspections

Recommended by: Heather McNeely, MCIP, RPP
Director, Planning and Development

Concurred by: Brendan Pakish
Senior Manager, Enterprise Applications, Reporting and Analytics

Mat Daley
Director, Information Technology Services

Submitted by: Scott Mathers, MPA, P.Eng.
Deputy City Manager, Planning and Economic Development