

A REVIEW OF THE  
**SITE PLAN APPROVAL**  
PROCESS IN ONTARIO

*For the Ontario Association of Architects*

*October 2013*



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) issued a proposal call to design and undertake a consultation exercise with its members on their experiences with the site plan approval process and practices in Ontario. In response, the planning firm of Bousfields Inc. (Bousfields), in partnership with Altus Group Economic Consulting (Altus), was retained by the OAA to undertake a consultation exercise, highlight municipal best practices and make recommendations on potential improvements to the site plan approval process.

Section 41 of The *Planning Act*, R.S.O. 1990 sets out regulations for site plan control and provides municipalities with a broad scope of power to approve applications within site plan control areas. The approval process is meant to be a technical review that addresses issues such as building layout, massing, access, parking and landscaping to ensure that development proceeds in a safe, efficient and aesthetically pleasing manner. Municipalities implement Section 41, and expand on certain elements, through their official plan and site plan control by-law. Within the context of this legislative framework, the OAA has identified the need to explore and resolve concerns around the timing, procedure and cost of the site plan approval process in Ontario.

To address these concerns, Bousfields and Altus undertook a five-task research approach based on issues identified by the OAA to understand the way architects, targeted municipal planners and representatives of the development industry experience the site plan approval process in municipalities throughout Ontario. These perspectives were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively to create a more accurate picture of the process, validate key concerns and confirm best practices.

The research comprised of:

- Task 1 – primary research regarding the site plan approval practices of small, medium and large municipalities across Ontario
- Task 2 – consultation with practicing members of the OAA via an online survey
- Task 3 – consultation with targeted municipal planning directors from municipalities (where input was received from the architects) via an online survey
- Task 4 – roundtable discussion with representatives of the development industry
- Task 5 – economic research and modelling regarding the costs associated with the current site plan process

It is noted that this research does not represent a comprehensive stakeholder review. The findings of this research, which are included in this report, are intended to begin a conversation about the site plan approval process as it is currently administered in Ontario.

### Key findings from Task 1 – Implementation in Targeted Ontario Municipalities

A review of 31 representative Ontario municipalities indicated that although the basic framework for site plan approval is generally consistent, the various ways of implementing the site plan approval process are unique to each municipality. Variation exists with regards to the areas subject to site plan control, the pre-application consultation process, submission requirements, the degree of public consultation required, and the decision-making authority.

### Key findings from Task 2 – Consultation with Members of the Ontario Association of Architects

The survey generated a total of 146 complete responses, resulting in a sample of approximately 10% of the OAA membership. The respondents provided data on 477 development applications. Based on their experiences, the research indicated that:

- Over 35% of applications took over 9 months to obtain approval
- Approximately 50% of all applications required 3 or more resubmissions before approval
- For 73% of applications that went to a pre-application consultation meeting, the respondents felt that the meeting either accelerated the process or had no impact on the timing
- For 65% of applications that went to a review committee meeting, the respondents felt that the meeting delayed the timing
- The top three reasons impacting the timing of site plan approval were: circulation time of submission between departments; slow/lack of response from municipal staff; conflicting comments from different departments and agencies
- The top three comments most that respondents frequently received from municipalities were related to: grading and servicing; landscaping; and off-street vehicular loading and parking
- The respondents indicated that for 17% of applications, the process positively impacted the integrity of the building design, 55% of applications were not impacted, and 28% of applications were negatively impacted
- The top 5 categories of concern with the site plan approval process included: amount of time required; lack of municipal expertise; subjectivity; lack of coordination; and unnecessary submission requirements
- No single Ontario municipality stood out as being overwhelmingly positive in terms of their site plan approval process
- The top three aspects contributing to a positive site plan approval experience included: good coordination between reviewing departments; clarity regarding submission requirements; and clarity regarding what developments require site plan approval
- The top 5 ideas for improvement included: improve leadership and coordination; impose time frames on process; clarify requirements; standardize process; and make departments and reviewers more accountable

### Key findings from Task 3 – Consultation with Planning Directors in Representative Ontario Municipalities

The survey of the targeted planning directors (or their representative) generated 10 responses. Based on their experiences, the research indicated that:

- Most municipalities were undergoing, or had recently completed, a review of their site plan approval process
- The majority of applications took less than 9 months to obtain approval
- The majority of applications obtained approval with less than 3 resubmissions
- Pre-application consultation meetings were considered to accelerate processing time of an application
- The top three elements impacting the timing of site plan approval were: slow/lack of response from applicants with respect to suggested revisions; incomplete application; and slow/lack of response to circulation time frame from departments/outside agencies
- The top three elements most frequently commented on were: landscaping; grading and

servicing; and off-street vehicular loading and parking facilities

- Most respondents felt that, where subdivisions and/or condominium processes are also required, there was no overlap in the scope of the process
- The top three positive aspects of the site plan approval process were: requirement for a pre-consultation meeting; clarity regarding submission requirements; streamlining of different application types

#### Key findings from Task 4 – Consultation of Development Industry Representatives

The roundtable discussion included 18 representatives of the development industry. The following key themes emerged from the conversation:

- Efficient and coordinated processes created positive experiences
- Strong leadership, good internal and external communication and a clear understanding of how to obtain site plan approval appear to be key contributors to experiences that are considered positive
- Frustrations from the process are largely due to delays in the process which result in unpredictable extra costs
- More objective process, with clearer indications of requirements and expectations would improve efficiency

#### Key findings from Task 5 – Economic Valuation of Process

The research indicated that the fees for site plan applications and resubmissions can be substantial, vary significantly from one municipality to the next, and that there is no consistent method and approach to calculating or charging site plan application fees. The costs associated with the time spent getting from site plan application to approval affects applicants, municipalities, other levels of government, existing communities and end users (home buyers, office tenants, etc.), and can be summarized as follows:

- Applicants – additional taxes on vacant land, carrying costs of financing, and inflation on construction costs (labour and wages)
  - For a 100-unit condominium apartment building, each additional month would cost the applicant \$193,000, or roughly \$1,930 per unit per month, which will likely get passed on to new home buyers
  - For a 50,000 square foot office building, each additional month would cost the applicant roughly \$113,000 or roughly \$2.25 per square foot per month which will likely get passed on to the eventual tenants of new office space
- Municipalities and Existing Communities – delayed tax revenue from newly developed building and lost spending by residents on retail shops, restaurants and service providers in a community:
  - For a 100-unit condominium apartment building, the time spent in site plan review process costs the municipality and existing community a combined \$159,900 to \$241,600 per month
  - For a 50,000 square foot office building, the time spent in site plan review costs the municipality between \$4,100 and \$16,000 per month or roughly between \$0.08 and 0.32

per square foot, which will likely get passed to the eventual tenants of the new office space and delay the arrival of 250 new job opportunities

- End Users – additional development charges can get passed on to buyers, lost equity for new home buyers by not beginning to pay a mortgage sooner, and increased rent costs from persons who had been renting and will have to rent for a longer period of time
  - For a 100-unit condominium apartment building, the time spent in the site plan review process would cost the end-users a combined \$44,000 per month, or roughly \$443 per unit per month
  - For a 50,000 square foot office building, the time spent in the site plan review process would cost end-users (office tenants) a combined \$7,000 per month, or roughly \$0.14 per square foot per month

### Recommendations

The research highlights that while the *Planning Act* sets out the basic parameters for site plan approval, the process is not being implemented consistently by municipalities. This results in unpredictability, confusion and frustrations for applicants and consultants as the process differs considerably among (and often within) municipalities. The research also highlighted particular concern with the length of time, and consequently the cost, associated with the site plan approval process.

A number of participants indicated that they thought Section 41 of the *Planning Act* was not being implemented effectively and that changes were needed. In our opinion, the issue is not with the legislative framework, which already provides for, among other matters, pre-consultation, delegation, an appeal period, limited appeals and required tools to implement control over exterior design, but rather with the way in which the process is administered. It is our opinion that there is an important leadership role the Province can play in implementing the site plan approval provisions of the *Planning Act*, specifically through the issuance of a Provincial Guideline. The Guideline could clarify the purpose and intent of the site plan approval process as well as formalize the process of setting site plan application fees. The Guideline could set out “best practices” based on the experience of municipalities. The following best practices are recommended:

- a. Streaming Site Plan Applications and Exempting Certain Developments
- b. Pre-application Consultation Meeting
- c. Dedicated Staff Person/Project Manager
- d. Dedicated Site Plan Team
- e. Streamlined Process for Resubmission
- f. Delegated Approval
- g. Provision of Implementation Options
- h. Alternatives to Site Plan Approval

The insight and recommendations gained through this research are intended to stimulate further discussion between the affected professions, the municipal sector, the development industry in general, and the Province in order to enable a more effective site plan approval process for all parties involved.



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Study Objectives

The Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) issued a proposal call to design and undertake a consultation exercise with its members on their experiences with the site plan approval process and practices in Ontario and quantify the associated costs. In response, the planning firm of Bousfields Inc. (Bousfields), in partnership with Altus Group Economic Consulting (Altus), was retained by the OAA to undertake a consultation exercise, highlight municipal best practices and make recommendations on potential improvements to the site plan approval process.

The OAA is a self-regulating organization governed by the *Architects Act*, which is a statute of the Government of Ontario. The OAA is dedicated to promoting and increasing the knowledge, skill and proficiency of its members, and administering the *Architects Act*, in order that the public interest may be served and protected. Within the context of this mandate and through ongoing communication with its members, the OAA has identified the need to explore and resolve concerns around the timing, procedure and cost of the site plan approval process in Ontario.

As outlined in **Section 1.2** of this report, Bousfields and Altus undertook a multi-task research approach based on the issues identified by the OAA. The research sought to canvass the opinions of the architects and to verify the opinions with representatives from the development industry and, to a certain extent, municipal planning representatives. These perspectives were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively to create a more accurate picture of the process, validate key concerns and confirm best practices. Although the study was initiated and monitored by the OAA's Practice Advocacy Coordination Team (PACT), Bousfields and Altus analyzed the data and determined conclusions independently.

It is noted that this research does not represent a comprehensive stakeholder review. The findings of this research, which are included in this report, are intended to begin a conversation about the site plan approval process as it is currently administered in Ontario. The insight and recommendations gained through this research are intended to stimulate further discussion between the affected professions, the municipal sector, the development industry in general, and the Province in order to enable a more effective site plan approval process for all parties involved.

### 1.2 Research Methodology

The research was divided into five research tasks, which are summarized below. The findings of each research stage are separately presented in **Section 2** of this report.

#### *Task 1*

Primary research was undertaken regarding the site plan approval practices of small, medium and large municipalities across Ontario, as well as representative municipalities outside of Ontario. Research included: an overview of the approach to determine the scope of developments requiring site plan approval; pre-application consultation requirements; submission requirements; fee structure; advertised circulation timelines; reporting processes; decision-making authority/delegation; and inclusion of public consultation processes.

#### *Task 2*

An online survey for practicing members of the OAA was designed and administered to receive input from architects regarding their experience with the site plan approval process. The consultation included general questions as well as questions relating to specific site plan applications.

### *Task 3*

To achieve a balanced perspective on the challenges associated with the site plan approval process a survey was designed and administered to a targeted group of municipal planning directors (from municipalities where input was received from the architects).

### *Task 4*

A roundtable discussion was hosted with representatives from the development industry (including planners, development managers and landscape architects) based on the input received from the architects. This was a semi-structured consultation exercise intended to allow a more detailed exploration of challenges, opportunities and potential solutions.

### *Task 5*

Altus was responsible for the economic research and modeling, which involved a review of the current site plan process, and the associated costs to the various affected parties including direct and indirect costs to applicants, municipalities, existing communities and end users.

## **1.3 Research Limitations**

The survey of the OAA members (Task 2) generated opinions from approximately 150 individuals and data on almost 500 application experiences. The survey information should not be considered as statistically significant but rather as a dataset providing some empirical insight on certain elements of the site plan process based on the respondents' actual experiences. Similarly, while the opinions provided by the municipal staff (Task 3) and the representatives of the development industry (Task 4) provide insight into the site plan approval process from the perspectives of the limited sample consulted, the data generated should not be considered as an accurate representation of the entire population.

The response of each group consulted was based on their knowledge of the process from their point of view. The process is inevitably experienced differently based on the objectives of each stakeholder. This may help to explain why in some cases the research results appear contradictory. This variance in perceived experience does not mean the respondents provided incorrect information, but it could highlight that there are some fundamental issues and tensions associated with the site plan approval process, which could potentially be addressed through improvements to the system.

Despite these realities, the research revealed common themes. The findings indicate that all parties have degrees of frustration with the site plan approval process as it currently exists in Ontario. **Section 2** further details that the responding OAA members indicated that the process takes too long and there is uncertainty regarding what is required to obtain site plan approval. The representatives of the development industry expressed concern with the unpredictable timelines and costs associated with the process. A number of municipal staff respondents indicated a desire for their process to become more efficient, and many municipalities were initiating, or had recently initiated, a review of their site plan process.

Therefore, it is our opinion that from the perspective of those consulted, the research is timely and the resulting recommendations as outlined in **Section 3** of this report, can be relevant for all parties involved in the site plan approval process.

## **1.4 Legislative Background for Site Plan Approval**

The *Planning Act*, R.S.O. 1990, provides a number of tools to regulate land use development in Ontario and sets out the statutory framework under which these tools are to be used. Section 41 sets out regulations for site plan control and provides municipalities with a broad scope of powers when dealing

with the approval of plans and drawings for development within site plan control areas. As per Section 41 of the *Planning Act*, site plan control provides a process by which to approve plans or drawings associated with development. The approval process is meant to be a technical review that addresses issues such as building layout, massing, access, parking and landscaping in order to ensure that development proceeds in a safe, efficient and aesthetically pleasing manner. Municipalities implement Section 41, and expand on certain elements, through their official plan and site plan control by-law.

The site plan approval process builds upon the permitted zoning, which in turn, implements the official plan. The official plan and zoning establish the policy and regulatory framework regarding land use, height, density, parking, setbacks and other provisions. The *Planning Act* anticipates and requires public policy debate for official plans and zoning by-laws, with public notice, requirement for decision-making by municipal councils, and rights of appeal for a person or agency to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB).

The regime for site plan control is fundamentally different. Section 41(6) expressly states that nothing in Section 41 is deemed to confer on municipal councils the power to limit height or density. Section 41(13) provides for the delegation of approval to a committee of Council or an appointed officer of the municipality. Further, there is no requirement for a public process, nor is such a process anticipated as Section 41(12) does not provide for a third party appeal. The structure of Section 41 reinforces the notion that the site plan approval process is intended to be a technical and predictable process.

The *Planning Act* requires that a municipality approve the plans or drawings within 30 days after they are submitted, and if this condition is not met the application may be referred to the OMB (Section 41(12)). The landowner may also appeal to the OMB if unsatisfied with requirements made by the municipality or the terms of agreement.

In addition to provisions specifically regarding site plan control, Section 69 of the *Planning Act* deals with the fees that a municipality may impose to recover the costs associated with processing development applications, and states that the tariffs should be designed to meet only the anticipated costs to a municipality in respect of the processing of each application type. Section 69(1) of the *Planning Act* provides that municipalities cannot treat planning review fees as a revenue source, and should only be charging fees that reflect the costs of undertaking the site plan application review. Section 69(2) of the *Planning Act* provides that, where it is unreasonable to require payment of the fees, a municipality can reduce or waive the amount of fees applicable.



## 2.0 RESEARCH RESULTS

### 2.1 Task 1: Implementation in Representative Ontario Municipalities

To gain insight on how the site plan approval process is being implemented throughout Ontario in practice, a research matrix was prepared for a mix of small, medium and large local municipalities located in Ontario. The selection was meant to be representative of the range of municipalities in Ontario, and reflect the diversity of municipalities in which OAA members practice. A total of 31 Ontario municipalities were reviewed. In addition, 3 municipalities outside of Ontario (Halifax, Edmonton and Vancouver) were reviewed in order to highlight alternative approval tools and approaches. Data was compiled based on six categories. The database detailing the municipal process in each Ontario municipality reviewed is included in **Appendix A**<sup>1</sup>. A review of the different ways that municipalities throughout Ontario administer their site plan processes indicate that, while there are a number of common practices by municipalities, there is no accepted “standard” approach and the process varies widely. The key findings in each category are included in the subsections below. In addition, Altus reviewed fee structures and requirements in different municipalities and their findings are outlined in **Section 2.5** of this report.

#### 2.1.1 Areas Subject to Site Plan Approval

Municipalities typically exempt certain types of development from site plan approval (See **Appendix A**). The types of developments exempted from the process are different in each municipality. The exemptions are included in most municipalities’ site plan control by-law, although some municipalities are not as explicit and may require the applicant to confirm with the Planning Department whether a particular development is subject to site plan approval. In general, development typically exempted includes smaller residential buildings (e.g. single detached, semi-detached duplex or triplex dwellings), agricultural related buildings, small industrial buildings and small accessory buildings or additions. Projects that propose only minor physical changes or that will be erected only for a temporary period also may be exempt from the process. The research indicated there are no consistent exemptions.

#### 2.1.2 Pre-application Consultation Requirements

Section 41(3.1) of the *Planning Act* requires that council permit applicants to consult with the municipality before submitting plans and allows Council to require applicants to consult with the municipality. Approximately half of the municipalities reviewed (16 out of 31 in Ontario) require a pre-application consultation meeting for a site plan submission. Some municipalities only require such meetings for complex applications. The purpose of the meeting is to identify submission requirements and in some cases, provide preliminary comments. At the pre-consultation meeting, certain municipalities stream the applications based on their level of complexity. The research revealed that there is no consistency in the requirements or process of the pre-application consultation.

#### 2.1.3 Submission Requirements

There is a significant variation in submission requirements among municipalities. There is a wide variation in the types of reports and types of drawings required from basic drawings to detailed urban design and servicing briefs. Most municipalities have a standard list of submission requirements, while others generate the list of necessary material only after the pre-consultation meeting. The submission requirements for larger municipalities generally tend to be more complex in terms of the different types of studies or reports required.

<sup>1</sup> Recent as of September 2013

The number of copies required for each plan or report also varies widely among municipalities, ranging anywhere from 5 copies of the site plan for smaller municipalities to 55 copies for larger cities. The number of required copies can also differ based on location, such as for sites located on a major road, particularly where there is an upper-tier municipality<sup>2</sup> or when public consultation is required. Most municipalities reference a requirement for a digital copy of all the submitted reports and plans.

#### **2.1.4 Public Process**

There is no statutory requirement for a public process in the site plan approval process. However, some (but not most) municipalities have requirements for public consultation/input. This could take the form of a public notice or formal public meeting. Public meetings are typically required on the basis of the size of the proposal, location, surrounding land uses or whether there is particular interest in the application. The requirement for a public process does not appear to relate to the size of the municipality. Some municipalities have an option for public consultation if requested by the ward councillor.

In addition, some municipalities require the posting of a sign on the property outlining the nature of the site plan application and providing a contact at the municipality to obtain further information.

#### **2.1.5 Timing Between Submission and Approval**

Slightly over half of the municipalities reviewed (17 out of 31) note the anticipated timelines for the site plan approval process on their website or application information package. The times listed refer to the time between submission and approval being granted.

Most municipalities provide a timeline of approximately 3 months. Some municipalities refer to aspects of the process that would add delays such as the municipal requirement for a public meeting. Others specify differing timelines based on the complexity of the application. Although the *Planning Act* requires that a municipality grant approval within 30 days, the timelines reviewed suggest approval typically takes longer.

#### **2.1.6 Decision-Making Body**

Although the *Planning Act* allows for site plan approval to be delegated to a committee of council or an appointed officer, many municipalities require the application to go to Council or a Committee of Council for approval. In many municipalities, only minor approvals are delegated to staff. The size of the municipality does not seem to have an impact on whether the approval is delegated to staff, with certain larger municipalities having delegated approval with the option to “bump-up” to Council, while other large municipalities require most applications to be approved by Council.

#### **2.1.7 Alternative Approval Methods**

In addition to reviewing the site plan approval process in Ontario municipalities, a few select cities across Canada were reviewed to determine their approach for this type of approval. The cities investigated include Halifax, Vancouver and Edmonton.

Halifax has a site plan approval process similar to the Ontario process, based on Nova Scotia’s provincial planning framework outlined in *The Municipal Act*. The Halifax model has requirements for pre-application consultation, municipally mandated public consultation, and the involvement of a design review committee (for certain developments).

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<sup>2</sup> The research was limited to lower- or single-tier municipalities. The Ontario Municipal Act, 2001 defines a lower-tier municipality as “a municipality that forms part of an upper-tier municipality for municipal purposes.” A single-tier municipality means a “municipality, other than an upper-tier municipality, that does not form part of an upper-tier municipality for municipal purposes”.

The City of Vancouver operates under a development permit system. An application for development is reviewed concurrently with the relevant zoning by-law regulations, relevant land use policies and design guidelines. Approval is delegated to staff. City Council is not normally involved in the development permit process, although the Director of Planning may refer an application directly to Council for advice before making a decision. Edmonton has a similar development permit approval system, which is performance-based in accordance with the relevant zoning by-law regulations. A valid development permit is required prior to applying for a building permit.

Notably, our review also highlighted that Ontario municipalities have the option to establish a development permit system in all or part of a municipality. The Development Permits Regulation came into effect in Ontario on January 1, 2007 (Ontario Regulation 608/06). The regulation was based on the pilot testing of the development permit system in five Ontario municipalities, including the Township of Lake of Bays (which Bousfields undertook for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in 2000). The development permit system operates within the policy context set out in the official plan and is implemented through a development permit by-law that combines the zoning, minor variance and site plan approval processes and requires the issuance of a development permit as a planning approval. To date, to the best of our knowledge, only Lake of Bays has implemented a development permit system.

### **2.1.8 Key Findings from Task 1: Implementation in Representative Ontario Municipalities**

Although the basic framework for site plan approval is consistent among the 31 municipalities reviewed, the research revealed that significant variation exists in terms of submission requirements, the process elements both pre- and post- submission, and the approval authority. The various ways of implementing the site plan approval process are generally unique to each municipality, and not based on the geographic location or size of municipality.

## **2.2 Task 2: Consultation with Members of the Ontario Association of Architects**

To obtain the opinion of architects throughout Ontario, an online survey was developed and circulated to practicing members of the OAA. The respondents were contacted via e-mail directly by the OAA. The survey was delivered to 1,477 firms that have membership with the OAA<sup>3</sup>. A total of 146 complete responses were received, resulting in a sample of approximately 10% of the OAA membership. The survey questions are included in **Appendix B**.

A total of 146 complete responses were received. These respondents represented firms ranging from 1 to 35 architects (an average of approximately 3 architects per firm), approximately 40% of which had different disciplines also working at the firm. The following sections detail the results and key findings obtained through the survey. An analysis of the survey findings is included in **Section 3** of this report.

Each respondent was able to provide information on up to five development applications. Consequently, the survey data includes information on 477 development applications. Respondents were asked to provide information on applications that were exclusively for site plan approval, and not for applications that were combined with rezoning, official plan amendment or subdivision approval applications.

The development applications were differentiated based on municipality. Respondents entered the last five municipalities from which they obtained site plan approval. Respondents could provide data on any municipality in Ontario. The five municipalities most frequently identified by the survey were: Toronto (83 applications), Mississauga (45), Brampton (22), Ottawa (21) and Markham (14). For data analysis, the municipalities were divided into “Large Municipality” and “Medium Municipality” and Small Municipality”. A

<sup>3</sup> Statistic provided by the OAA staff

Large Municipality is defined as one that has a population over 150,000 people, a Medium Municipality is one that has a population between 50,000 and 149,999 people, and a Small Municipality is one that has a population of 49,999 people or less, as per the Canada 2011 census.

The development applications were also differentiated based on the development type. Respondents could classify their application based on the following categories:

- Medium Attached Residential
- Apartment Building
- Small Commercial (less than 1,000 square metres)
- Medium Commercial (1,000-5,000 square metres)
- Large Commercial (greater than 5,000 square metres)
- Small Institutional (less than 1,000 square metres)
- Medium Institutional (1,000-5,000 square metres)
- Large Institutional (greater than 5,000 square metres)

The most frequent development types identified through the survey were Medium Commercial (87 applications), followed by Small Commercial (79) and Apartment Building (76). The least frequent development type was Large Institutional (28). For each application, respondents were able to detail their experience on the specific project regarding: the length of time between submission and approval; the number of submissions required; the involvement of different parties; and the impact of different parties' involvement on the time between submission and approval, as well as on the quality of design.

Following questions relating to a specific development application, the respondents were asked to provide more general opinions about the site plan approval process. The answers provided were not to be based on a certain municipality or type of development.

The results of the survey are detailed in Subsections 2.2.1 to 2.2.5, and the key findings of the survey are included in Subsection 2.2.6 of this report.

## **2.2.1 Timing for Approval**

### **2.2.1.1 Processing Time**

The time between submission and approval for each site plan application was analyzed according to development application type and the size of municipality where the application was made. **Chart 1** indicates the timelines based on development application type, according to the experience of the architects surveyed. **Chart 2** indicates the timelines based on the size of municipality. An overall category is included in both for comparison.



Chart 1: Time between submission and approval, based on development application type

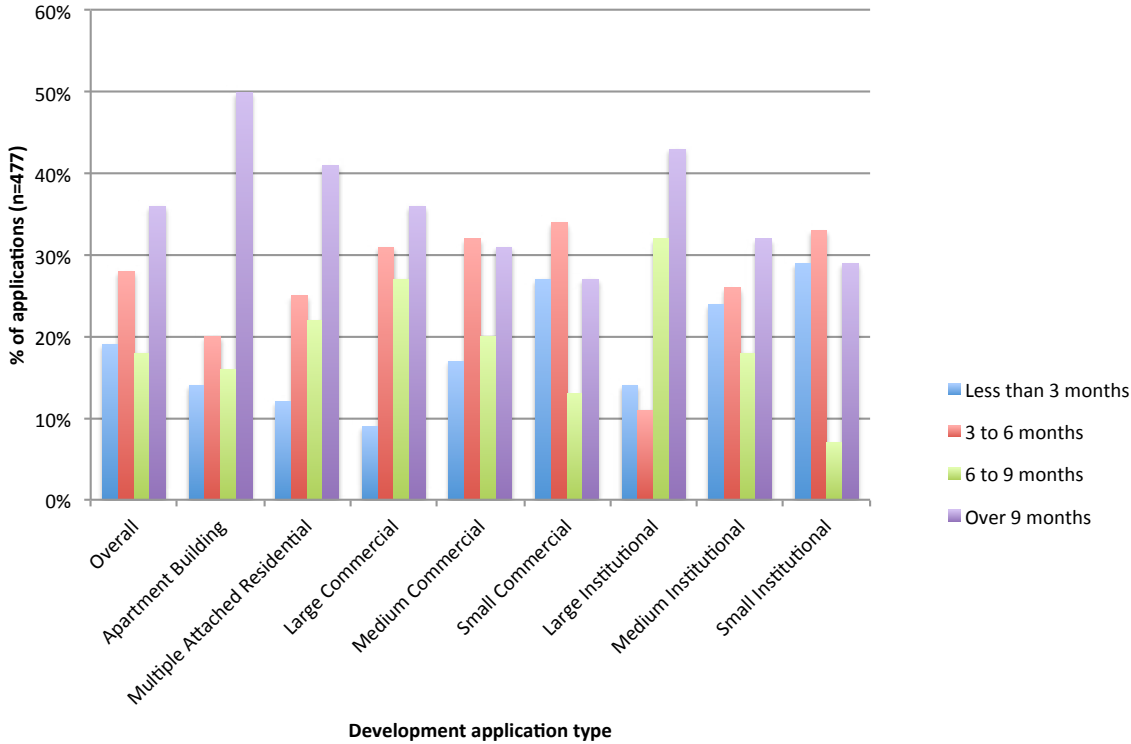
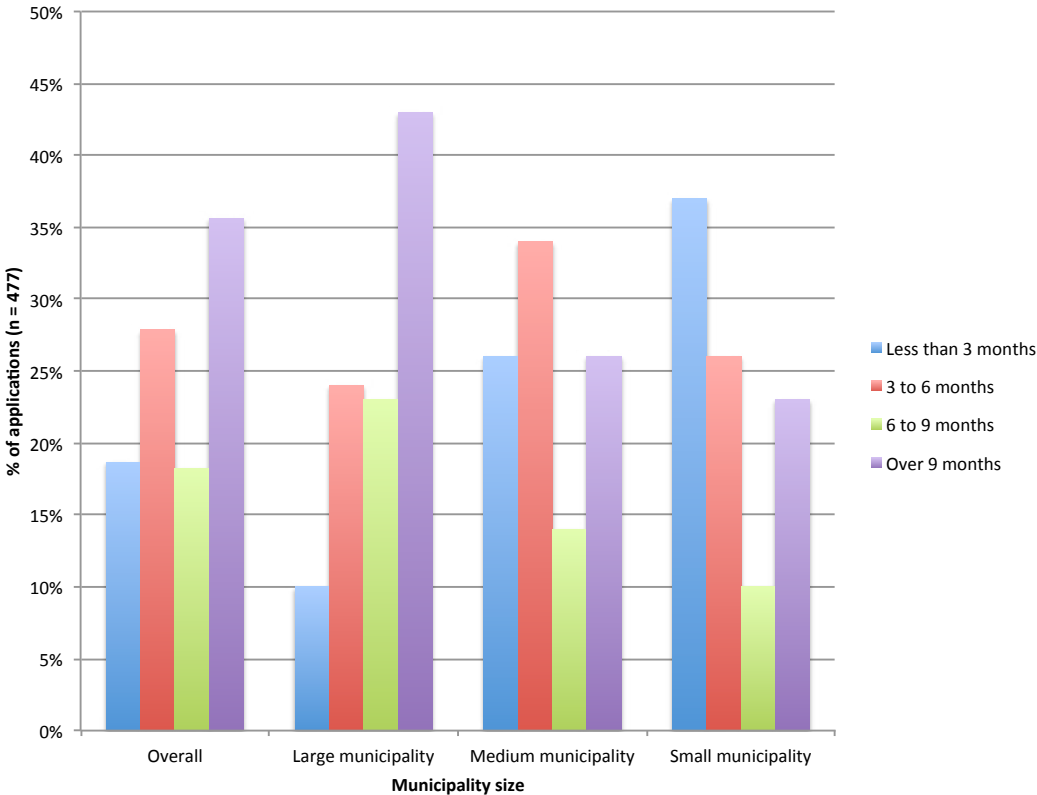


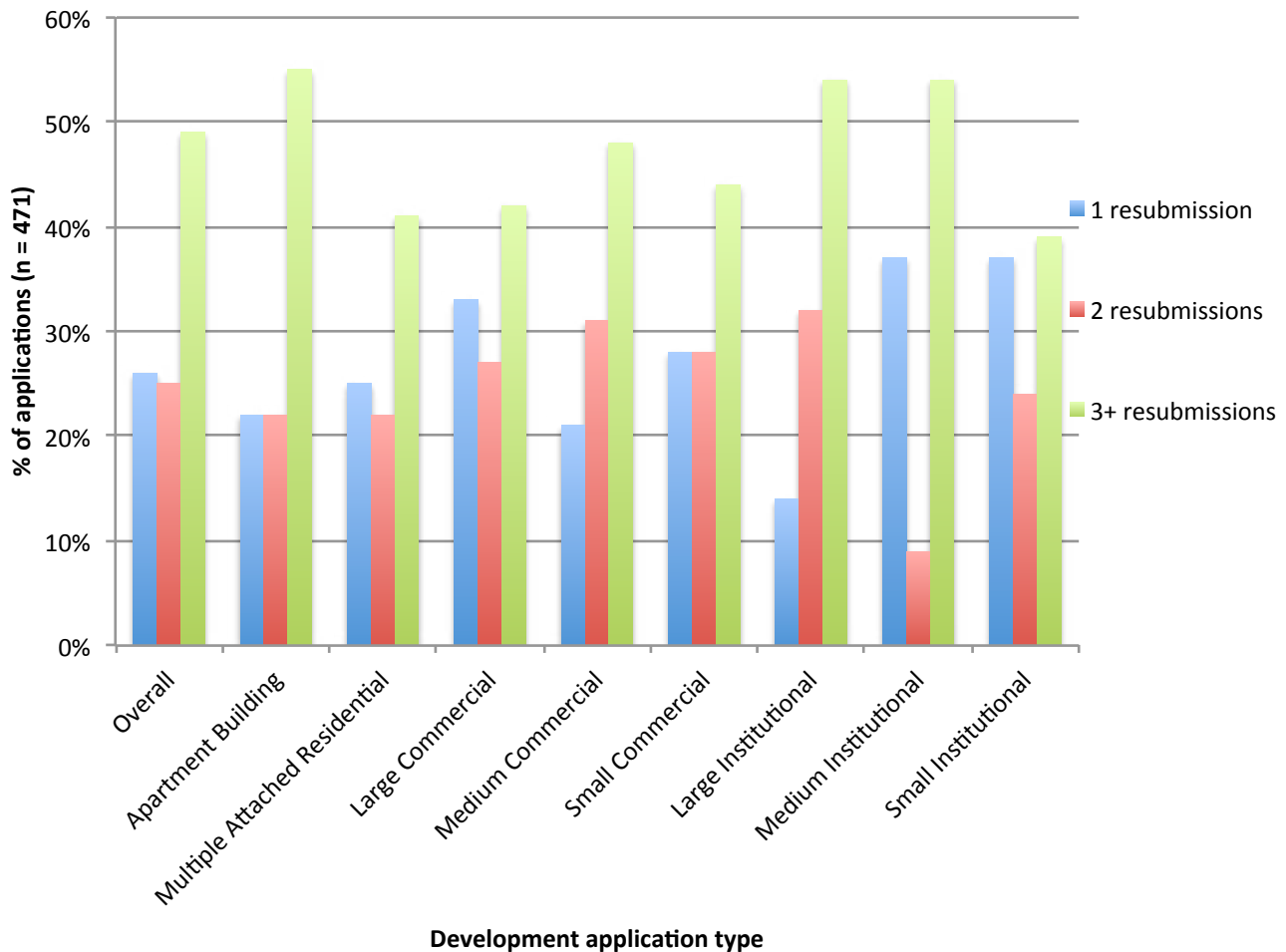
Chart 2: Time between submission and approval, based on municipality size

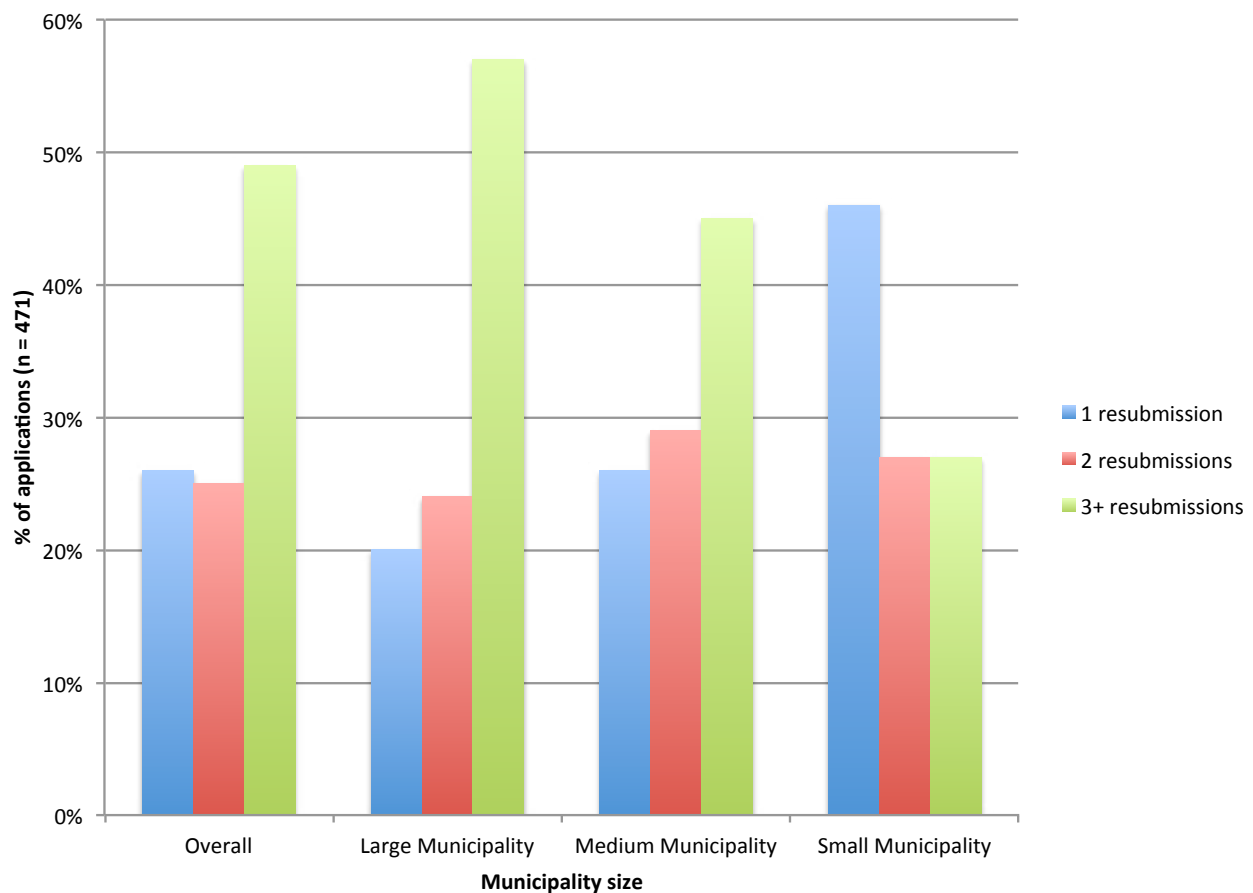


### 2.2.1.2 Required Resubmissions

The number of resubmissions required for each site plan application was analyzed according to the type of development application and the size of municipality where the application was made. **Chart 3** indicates the number of required resubmissions based on development application type, according to the architects surveyed, while **Chart 4** indicates the number of required resubmissions based on the size of municipality. An overall category is included for comparison.

**Chart 3: Number of resubmissions required, based on application type**



**Chart 4: Number of resubmissions required, based on municipality size**

### 2.2.1.3 Impact of Meetings on Timing

For each application, the respondent could indicate whether the project went to a pre-application consultation meeting or a review committee meeting (e.g. a design review panel or site plan review committee), and how these meetings impacted the timing of the site plan approval process. Of all 477 applications included in the survey data:

- 81% of applications went to a pre-application consultation meeting
- 73% of those surveyed said the pre-application consultation meeting either had no impact on the timing or accelerated the timing
- 46% of applications went to a review committee meeting
- 65% of those surveyed said the review committee meeting delayed the timing

In addition, 35% of the applications went to a public consultation meeting.

### 2.2.1.4 Impact of Site Plan Approval Process on Design

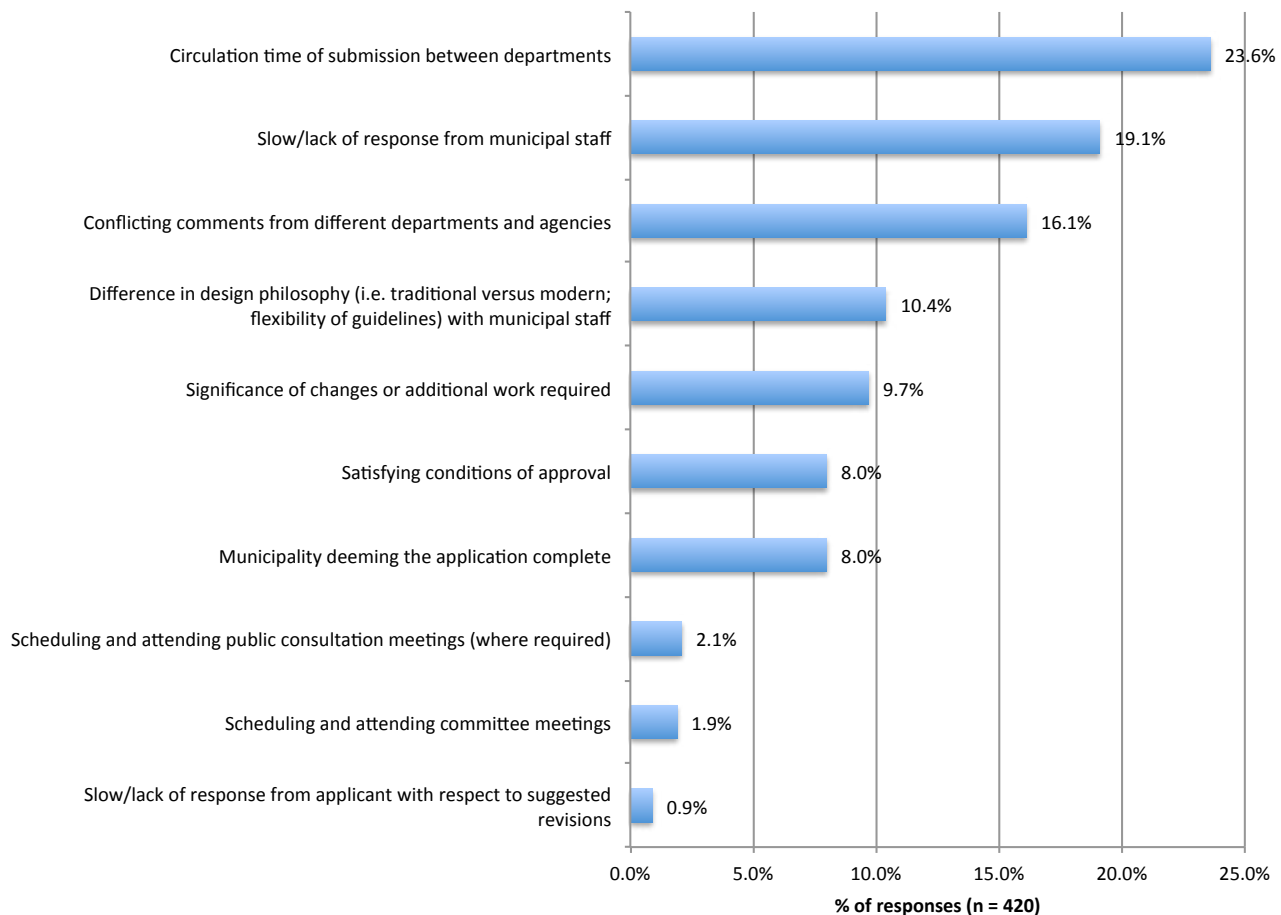
For each application, the architects were asked to comment on the “overall impact of site plan approval on integrity of building design”. In the opinion of the architects consulted, of the 477 applications included in the survey data:

- 55% thought the process did not impact the integrity of building design
- 28% thought the process negatively impacted the integrity of building design
- 17% thought the process positively impacted the integrity of building design

### 2.2.1.5 Reasons Impacting Timing

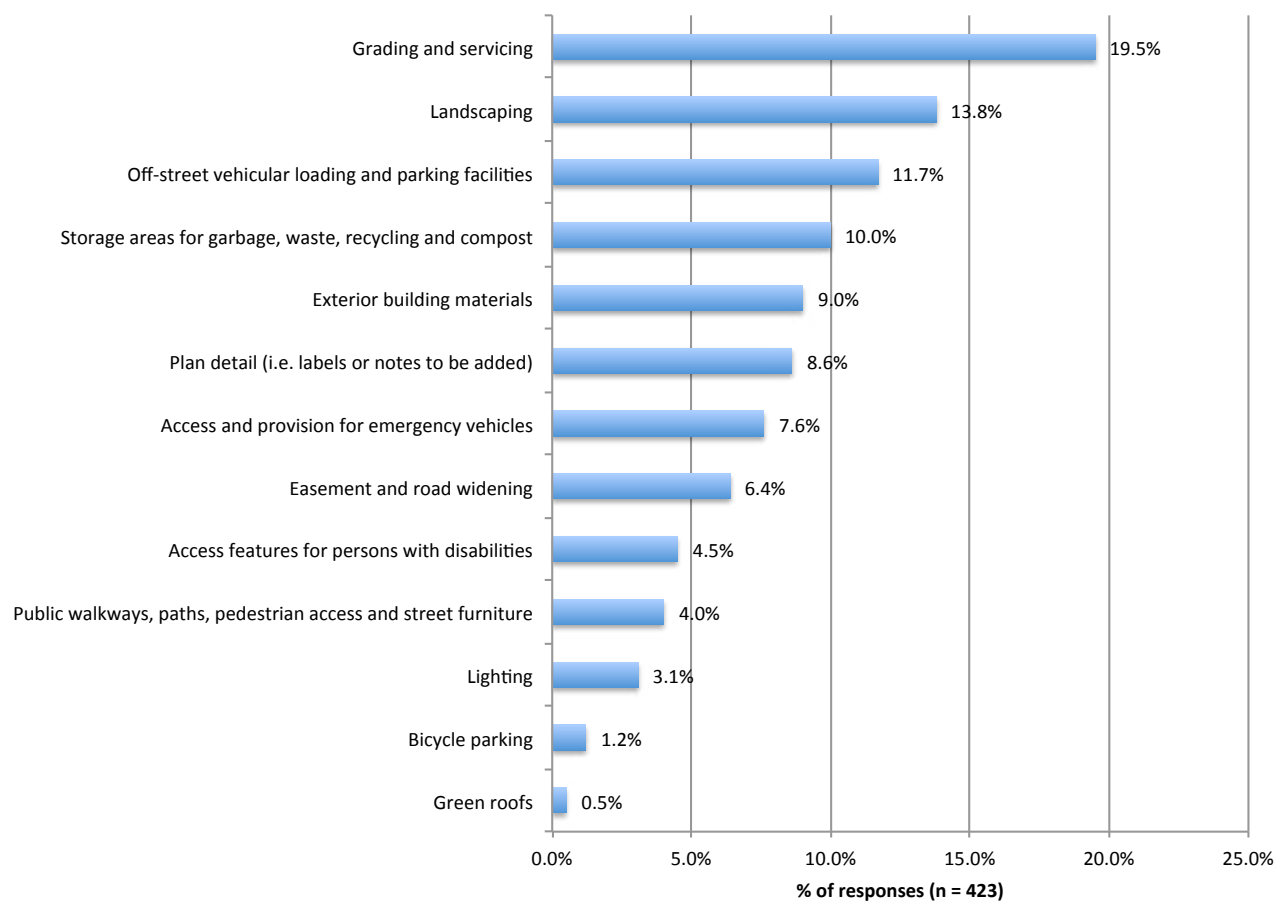
Respondents to the survey were asked, independent of a specific development application: “Based on your experience, what are the top three (3) elements that affect the timing of site plan approval once the application has been submitted?” The responses, in order of frequency, are illustrated in **Chart 5**.

**Chart 5: Reasons impacting the timing of site plan approval**



### 2.2.2 *Elements Frequently Commented On*

Respondents to the survey were generally asked: “Which are the top three (3) elements required for site plan approval you most frequently receive comments on from municipalities?” The responses, in order of frequency, are illustrated in **Chart 6**.

**Chart 6: Elements most frequently commented on by municipalities**

## 2.2.3 Concerns with the Site Plan Approval Process

### 2.2.3.1 Overall Concerns

Respondents were asked the open question of: “What is your primary concern with the site plan approval process in Ontario.” Answers were categorized based on common themes. The top 5 categories of concern expressed by the architects, ranked based on the frequency of reference, were:

1. *Amount of time required* (e.g. delays, disproportionate amount of time spent based on size of project, lack of legislated time frame)
2. *Lack of municipal expertise* (e.g. comments made by inexperienced staff or staff out of discipline, staff not fully aware of the process)
3. *Subjectivity* (e.g. approval based on opinions of reviewers rather than standard requirements, different planners within the same department handling the process differently, inconsistency between different municipalities)
4. *Lack of coordination* (e.g. comments received haphazardly, departments dependent on other departments’ comments before proceeding, conflicting comments among departments that are not prioritized based on their importance)
5. *Unnecessary submission requirements* (e.g. amount of detail required at too early a stage, increasing demand for different drawings and studies)

Other concerns include: the potential for political influence in what should be a technical review; that the process and fees make site plan approval a negative process and delays investment in an area; and the difficulty for architects to budget a fixed price for services due to unpredictable length of process.

### 2.2.3.2 Concerns Following Approval of Site Plan Application

Respondents were asked: “Have you ever been required to alter an approved site plan due to information obtained at a later date? If yes, please describe the nature of the information and the resulting approval process.”

31.5% of respondents answered “yes” to this question. The descriptions of the nature of the new information include:

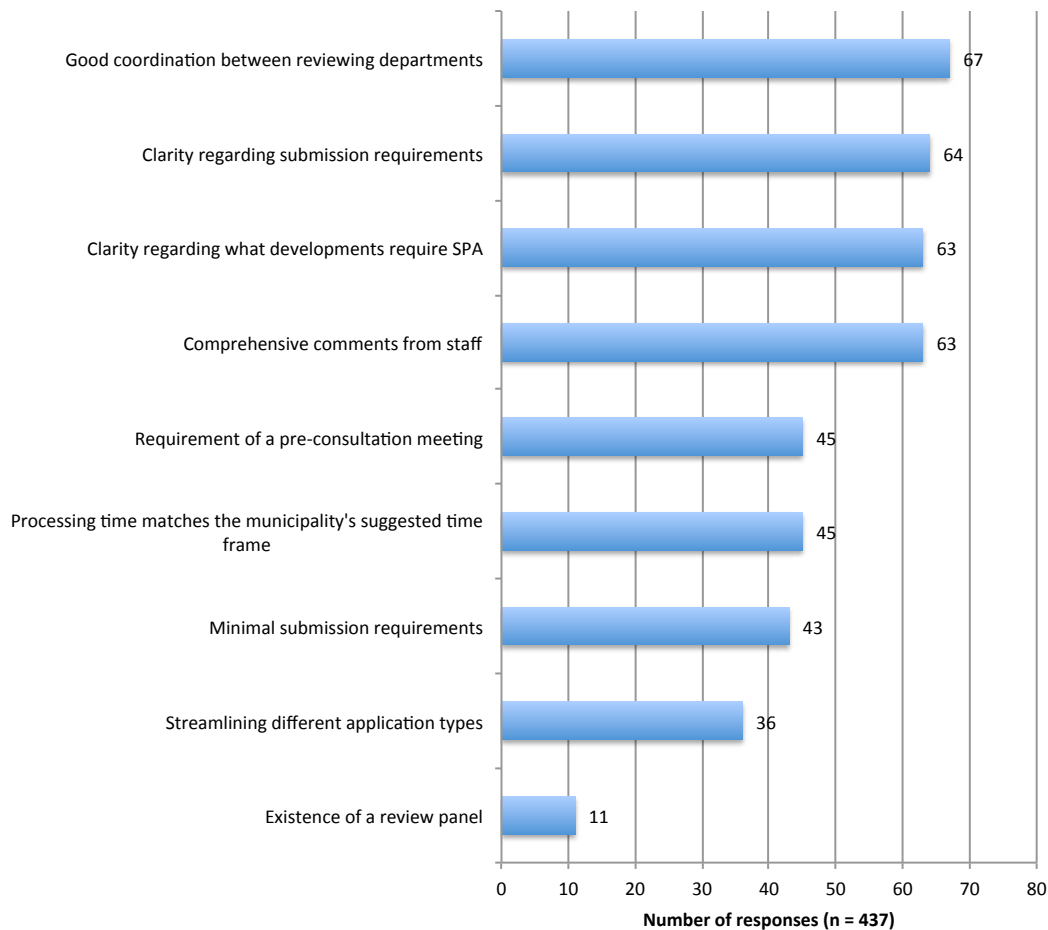
- missing or incorrect information not picked up by reviewing department
- increased or changed requirements from a reviewing department
- issues adhering to urban design guidelines
- re-configuration of plan by the applicant
- issues complying with the zoning by-law
- failure of inspection approval

## 2.2.4 **Best Practices**

### 2.2.4.1 Aspects of a Positive Site Plan Approval Experience

Respondents were asked: “Out of all Ontario municipalities you have worked in, where have you had the best experience with the site plan approval process”. This question was intended to highlight any municipality that particularly stood out in their procedure and, consequently, could be further investigated for recommended best practices. There was no overwhelming response for one municipality versus another; however, the follow-up questionnaire to planning directors provided some further information on the respective processes in the various municipalities.

Based on the municipality where respondents had their best experience, the following question was asked: “What made this experience positive?”. The respondents could check as many as applied. The responses, in order of frequency, are illustrated in **Chart 7**.

**Chart 7: Aspects contributing to a positive Site Plan Approval experience**

#### 2.2.4.2 Ideas for Improvement

Respondents were asked the open question of: “Please suggest one way you believe the site plan approval process could be improved”. Answers were categorized based on common themes. The top 5 ideas for improvement in the opinion of the respondents were as follows, ranked based on the frequency of reference to the category:

1. *Improve leadership and coordination* (e.g. assign an authority to each application, coordinate responses between the reviewing authorities before releasing the comments to the consultants)
2. *Impose time frames on process* (e.g. legislate timing, provide comments more quickly, prohibit exceptions)
3. *Make clear requirements* (e.g. effective pre-consultation meetings with firm checklist, clear guidelines or design manuals to adhere to)
4. *Standardize process* (e.g. consistency across municipalities, understanding scope as per statutory requirements)
5. *Make departments and reviewers more accountable* (e.g. clear indications as to who has not provided comments, agencies should be accountable, requirement that staff be properly trained)

Other suggestions included: less detail required; the involvement of fewer departments; less political

interference; and the removal of exterior building design from what can be commented on.

### **2.2.5 Findings from Task 2 – Consultation with Members of the Ontario Association of Architects**

The survey asked OAA members to provide their opinion of the site plan approval process based on their individual experiences in different municipalities. Based on their experiences and opinions, the following key pieces of data were generated:

- Overall, approximately half of all applications took 6 months or more to obtain approval, with 35% of all applications requiring over 9 months before approval
- Larger development application types required longer processing times. Over 40% of Apartment Building and Large Institutional applications required longer than 9 months
- Applications in large municipalities took longer to process than in medium or small municipalities. In large municipalities, approximately 45% of the applications took longer than 9 months to obtain approval. In medium and small municipalities, only 25% of applications took longer than 9 months to be approved
- Overall, approximately half of all applications required 3 or more resubmissions before approval.
- Larger development application types required more resubmissions. Over 50% of Apartment Building, Large Institutional and Medium Institutional applications required 3 or more resubmissions
- Applications in large municipalities required more resubmissions than applications in medium municipalities, which in turn required more resubmissions than in small municipalities. Approximately 55% of applications in large municipalities required 3 or more resubmissions, while in medium municipalities 35% of applications required 3 or more resubmissions and in small municipalities only 25% required 3 or more resubmissions
- For 73% of applications that went to a pre-application consultation meeting, the respondents felt that the meeting either accelerated the process or had no impact on the timing (i.e. no negative impact on timing)
- For 65% of applications that went to a review committee meeting, the respondents felt that the meeting delayed the timing
- The top three reasons impacting the timing of site plan approval were: circulation time of submission between departments; slow/lack of response from municipal staff; conflicting comments from different departments and agencies
- The top three comments most that respondents frequently received from municipalities were related to: grading and servicing; landscaping; and off-street vehicular loading and parking.
- The respondents indicated that for 17% of applications, the process positively impacted the integrity of the building design, 55% of applications were not impacted, and 28% of applications were negatively impacted
- The top 5 categories of concern with the site plan approval process included: amount of time required; lack of municipal expertise; subjectivity; lack of coordination; and unnecessary submission requirements
- No single Ontario municipality stood out as being overwhelmingly positive in terms of their site plan approval process
- The top three aspects contributing to a positive site plan approval experience were: good coordination between reviewing departments; clarity regarding submission requirements; and clarity regarding what developments require site plan approval
- The top 5 ideas for improvement included: improve leadership and coordination; impose time



frames on process; clarify requirements; standardize process; and make departments and reviewers more accountable

## 2.3 Task 3 - Consultation with Planning Directors in Targeted Ontario Municipalities

To supplement the information provided by the OAA members, a survey was sent to the Directors of the Planning Departments of 17 targeted municipalities (based on the municipalities for which the architects had provided input). The survey sought to understand the municipal perspective and to learn from municipal planners' experiences regarding best practices. The questions, which were similar to the survey questions for the OAA members, are included in **Appendix C**. A total of 10 responses were received. See **Section 3** of this report for further analysis of the site plan approval process from the perspective of the Directors, or their representatives, who responded to the survey.

Notably, most of the municipalities (7 out of 10) in the sample had recently revised their site plan approval processes or are currently initiating a review of their processes. The reasons precipitating this review included:

- to improve efficiency and quality of applications
- to update outdated site plan control by-law
- to improve customer service
- to improve efficiency both internally and externally of the site plan review process
- to exempt small residential development from the site plan approval process

### 2.3.1 Timing for Approval

#### 2.3.1.1 Processing Time

The respondents were asked to indicate the general timing of approval for each development application type (based the same 8 categories used for the OAA survey). **Chart 8** lists the number of respondents who indicated the processing time for each development type. Note that one respondent did not provide information on this topic; therefore, the chart compares only 9 municipalities.

**Chart 8: Time between submission and approval, based on development application type**

Development Application type	Less than 3 months	3 to 6 months	6 to 9 months	Greater than 9 months
Multiple Attached Residential	3	3	3	0
Apartment Building	2	3	4	0
Small Commercial	5	1	3	0
Medium Commercial	3	2	4	0
Large Commercial	3	1	2	3
Small Institutional	5	1	3	0
Medium Institutional	3	3	3	0
Large Institutional	2	1	5	1

### 2.3.1.2 Resubmission Requirements

The respondents were asked to generally indicate the number of resubmissions required for each development application type. **Chart 9** below lists the number of respondents who indicated the number of resubmissions required before approval for each development type. Note that one respondent did not provide information on this topic; therefore, the chart compares only 9 municipalities.

**Chart 9: Required number of resubmissions, based on development application type**

<b>Development Application type</b>	<b>1 resubmission</b>	<b>2 resubmissions</b>	<b>3+ resubmissions</b>
Multiple Attached Residential	1	7	1
Apartment Building	1	4	4
Small Commercial	2	6	1
Medium Commercial	1	6	2
Large Commercial	1	2	6
Small Institutional	3	4	2
Medium Institutional	1	6	2
Large Institutional	1	3	5

### 2.3.1.3 Impact of Meetings on Timing

Most of the municipalities (7 out of 10) required a pre-application consultation meeting with site plan approval applicants. The respondents' opinion was that the pre-application consultation meeting decreased processing time. Their comments indicate that a pre-application consultation meeting is intended to accelerate processing time as applicants are aware up front of major issues or concerns that need to be addressed.

Most municipalities required that site plan approval applications (7 out of 10) go to a review committee. There was mixed feedback regarding how this meeting impacted processing time. Comments included that reviewing committees can:

- cause delays due to requirements for reports, public notices and scheduling of meetings
- improves the speed by verifying that the overall concept is supported
- time frames should not be extended as the processes run concurrently

### 2.3.1.4 Reasons Impacting Timing

Respondents to the survey were asked: "Based on your experience, what are the top three (3) elements that affect the timing of site plan approval once the application has been submitted?" The responses, ranked based on frequency of answer choice, are listed below.

1. Slow/lack of response from applicant with respect to suggested revisions
2. Incomplete application

3. Slow/lack of response to circulation time frame from departments/outside agencies
4. Significance in changes or additional work required by applicant
5. Satisfying conditions of approval
6. Length of permitted circulation time for the departments/outside agencies
7. Scheduling and attending committee meetings
8. Scheduling and attending public consultation meetings
9. Conflicting comments from different departments/outside agencies

### **2.3.2 Elements Frequently Commented On**

Respondents to the survey were asked: “Which are the top three (3) elements required for site plan approval you most frequently provide comments on?” The responses, ranked based on frequency of answer choice, are listed below.

1. Landscaping
2. Grading and servicing
3. Off-street vehicular loading and parking facilities
4. Public walkways, paths, pedestrian access and street furniture
5. Plan detail (i.e. labels or notes to be added)
6. Storage areas for garbage, waste, recycling and compost
7. Architectural design
8. Exterior building materials
9. Access features for persons with disabilities.

### **2.3.3 Overlapping Processes**

Based on the information provided by the respondents, only two municipalities required that site plan approval applications go to a formal public meeting, although an additional municipality made reference to the holding of a “public information centre”.

Respondents were asked “where a subdivision and/or condominium process is also required, do you feel that there is overlap in the scope of the process?” Of the 10 respondents, half felt there was no overlap, while 2 thought there was overlap and the remaining 3 did not respond.

### **2.3.4 Best Practices**

Respondents were asked the question: “What aspects of your municipality’s site plan approval process do you consider the most positive and believe could be applied to improve the process in other municipalities? (check all that apply)”. The responses, ranked based on frequency of answer choice, are listed below:

1. Requirement of a pre-consultation meeting
2. Clarity regarding submission requirements
3. Streamlining different application types

4. Existence of a design review panel or site plan committee
5. Comprehensive staff comments
6. Good coordination between reviewing departments
7. Processing time matches the municipality's suggested time frame
8. Clarity regarding which developments require site plan approval

Respondents were asked the open question: "What aspects of the site plan approval process, if any, do you have concern with? In what way(s) do you think this can be improved?". Responses referenced themes including the following:

- more realistic time frames
- broaden the municipality's powers with respect to architectural control
- scale back requirements for smaller projects
- ensure applicants fulfill commitments made during site plan approval phase in construction

### **2.3.5 Key Findings from Task 3 – Consultation with Planning Directors**

The survey asked Planning Directors, or their representatives, to provide input on the site plan approval process in their municipality. The following is a summary of the key findings based on their responses:

- Most municipalities were undergoing, or had recently completed, a review of their site plan approval process
- In their opinion, for each development application type, the majority of applications took less than 9 months to obtain approval. Large Commercial and Large Institutional developments were referenced as applications taking longer than 9 months to obtain approval
- In their opinion, for each development application type, the majority of applications obtained approval with less than 3 resubmissions. Apartment Buildings, Large Commercial and Large Institutional developments were most frequently referenced as applications requiring 3 or more resubmissions before approval
- Pre-application consultation meetings were considered to accelerate processing time of an application. It was uncertain how a review committee impacted the processing time of an application
- The top three elements impacting the timing of site plan approval were: slow/lack of response from applicant with respect to suggested revisions; incomplete application; and slow/lack of response to circulation time frame from departments/outside agencies
- The top three elements most frequently commented on were: landscaping; grading and servicing; and off-street vehicular loading and parking facilities
- Most respondents felt that, where subdivisions and/or condominium processes are also required, there was no overlap in the scope of the process
- The top three positive aspects of the site plan approval process were: requirement of a pre-consultation meeting; clarity regarding submission requirements; streamlining of different application types

## 2.4 Task 4: Consultation with Representatives of the Development Industry

On April 26, 2013, 18 representatives of the development industry attended a roundtable event at the Bousfields Inc. office. The representatives were presented with the key findings of the architects survey and broken into two groups of 9 to discuss the site plan approval process. Each discussion was facilitated by a partner at Bousfields, who were directly involved in the research and the preparation of this report, and each discussion included a representative from Altus. One representative of the OAA rotated between the two groups as an observer.

The discussion was structured around the following three questions:

1. Consider a site plan approval application you were previously involved in. What made this experience positive? What made it negative?
2. Once an application has been submitted, what are some of the significant costs you incur (directly or indirectly) during the period before gaining site approval?
3. What do you think would be the most effective way to improve the site plan approval process?

Minutes were taken throughout the discussion. The option to submit handwritten comments was given, and three comment sheets were submitted at the end of the event. The general comments relating to each question are outlined in the following subsections. Further analysis on the key findings are included in **Section 3** of this report.

### 2.4.1 Findings of Task 4

#### 2.4.1.1 Positive and Negative Experiences

Based on their experiences, the representatives of the development industry considered the following items to be positive aspects of the site plan approval process:

- Staff understanding the intent of the site plan approval process and working with an applicant to find “middle ground”
- Staff providing consistent responses on similar issues
- Scoped submission requirements based on application
- Existence of a development application review committee which has all players at the table (including outside agencies) and can turn around comments quickly
- Delegating approval authority to Planning Director so applications do not need to go to Council
- Streamlined processes for smaller or more minor developments which have faster and/or mandated turnaround
- Targeted circulations for resubmitted material
- Staged approval to provide applicants with partial permits
- Reduced requirements for applications nested in a plan of subdivision (e.g. only an urban design review, with reduced fees and number of parties circulated to).

Based on their experiences, the representatives of the development industry considered the following

items to be negative aspects of the site plan approval process:

- Receiving comments regarding issues that were dealt with at the rezoning stage (e.g. built form, setbacks)
- Receiving conflicting comments between departments, or with agencies, especially when no single department can overrule or be prioritized
- Lack of communication between departments
- Timing of circulation and delay in circulation
- Number of circulations required
- Inconsistent process between districts of post-amalgamated cities
- Requirement for public consultation meetings, which provide false expectations to public and cause an additional step in scheduling meeting, providing notice, etc.
- Unqualified or inexperienced municipal staff commenting
- Recent inclusion of industrial developments to the site plan approval process make it challenging for the sector as developers are often inexperienced with the process; this can also discourage economic development as plant expansions, etc. can be time sensitive
- Small changes can require new submission and recirculation, which causes delay
- Temporary sales offices often put through the site plan approval process
- Ability of applicant to appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board does not seem to be an effective way to regulate timing
- Design opinions of staff can slow down process if difference in opinion
- Professional architects or other consultants often miss things on first submission
- Municipalities do not cap fees; this can be prohibitive for development, and does not always reflect service provided
- Duplication of conditions when a subdivision and site plan combined
- Municipalities ask for things outside of their power to see what they can get (e.g. City of Toronto Act gives additional powers but other municipalities also implementing similar standards)
- Guidelines being used as policy
- Process is politicized, but it is supposed to be technical review

#### 2.4.1.2 Post-Submission Costs

The representatives of the development industry were asked to discuss both direct and indirect costs of the site plan approval process on their development. The following comments were received:

- The cost and timing of certain items requested is very expensive and not always needed (e.g. 3D modeling)
- As time between application and approval increases, carrying costs rise due to increased development charges, increased construction costs, and increased property taxes
- If closing deadlines are missed because of unforeseen delays in the site plan process, developers can incur a penalty of \$7,500 per unit
- Resubmission costs are unpredictable and may not have been factored in initial budget (e.g. additional costs for architect or engineering consultants)
- Lack of clear requirements for submissions can cause significant unanticipated costs in

resubmissions

- End users are impacted as the cost of residential units increase based on developers trying to recoup their costs
- Multinational companies more wary of investing in Ontario due to frustration with the length and uncertainty of the approval process
- Public process causes delays and additional costs, due to input on design or other variables, despite no statutory requirement

#### 2.4.1.3 Ideas for Improvements

The discussion regarding ideas for improvement resulted in the following comments and suggestions:

- Have a delegated team to deal specifically with site plans at regular meetings and who provide timely responses
- Have a targeted/limited recirculation process for resubmissions
- Exempt more properties from the process, such as industrial properties not on major roads, single family houses and temporary sales trailers
- Have a different process for development that is nested within a registered plan of subdivision (e.g. an urban design/streetscape review, with reduced fees and number of circulation parties)
- Consider mechanisms for enforcement of plans other than site plan agreements, which take a long time to get from municipalities
- Allow for “fast tracked” minor applications with defined approval time frames
- Allow for phased approvals to provide partial building permits
- Establish clear provincial guidelines on the site plan process
- Determine caps on fees
- Establish rules about when a public consultation meeting can be required and what the focus of the public involvement should be
- Ensure staff are adequately trained in technical areas
- Make the urban design process less subjective/based on individual taste
- Have a case manager to add accountability to the process
- Coordinate earlier consultation with technical services/engineering/water and applicant
- Coordinate earlier communication with external agencies and applicant
- Include strict timelines for agencies and departments with a disclaimer that after a certain period they can no longer comment
- Increase use of technology (e.g. electronic circulation and posting of comments with applicants able to access comments, and agencies signing off via PDF).

#### **2.4.2 Results of Task 4 – Consultation with Representatives from the Development Industry**

The roundtable discussion highlighted that the representatives of the development industry have frustrations with the site plan approval process, many of which resonate with the opinions of the OAA members who responded to the survey. The representatives of the development industry also had positive experiences, some of which also resonated with the OAA members’ experiences. In general, some key themes emerged from the conversation:

- Efficient and coordinated processes created positive experiences
- Strong leadership, good internal and external communication and a clear understanding of how to obtain site plan approval appear to be key contributors to experiences that are considered positive
- Frustrations from the process are largely due to delays in the process which result in unpredictable extra costs
- A more objective process, with clearer indications of requirements and expectations would improve efficiency.

## **2.5 Task 5: Economic Valuation of Process**

Altus has completed an economic valuation of the direct and indirect costs associated with the site plan process. This section discusses the economic findings.

### **2.5.1 Application Costs**

We have undertaken research on the costs associated with a site plan application, to assess the costs associated with both the original submission and subsequent resubmissions.

The municipalities we reviewed use a variety of methods in calculating the fees that apply to a site plan application. In addition to a base fee, many municipalities also impose a variable fee, which is applied either on a per unit, per m<sup>2</sup>, or per hectare basis, and do not have a variable fee of any kind. Some municipalities cap their fees at a certain point, while others allow the variable fee to be applied for each and every unit under application.

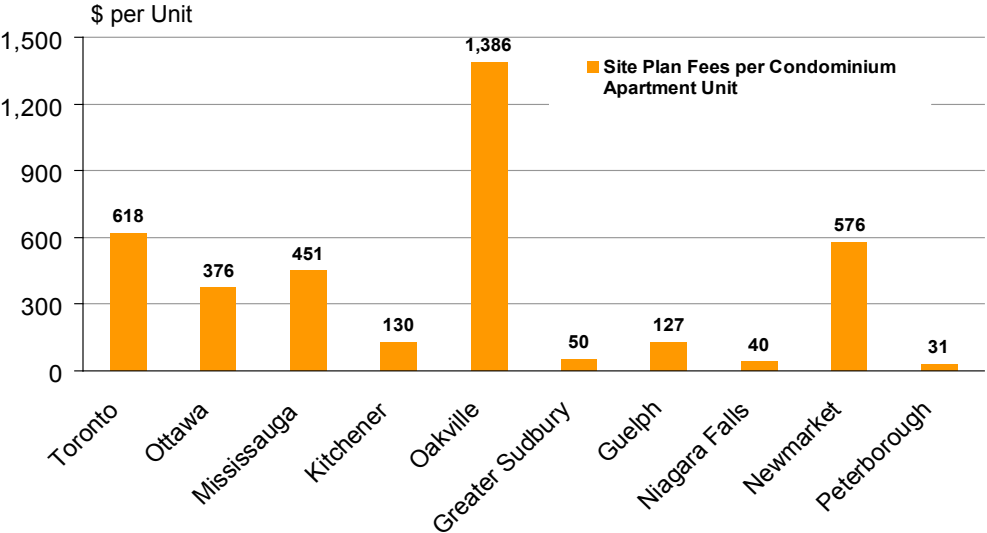
Given the variety of fee structures used we have used a hypothetical residential condominium apartment and office developments to see what the total application fees would be for a site plan application with two resubmissions.

**Chart 10** shows the site plan fees that would be applicable to a 100-unit residential condominium apartment building subject to site plan - the fees applicable among the 10 municipalities reviewed range from \$31 / unit in Peterborough to \$1,386 / unit in Oakville.



Chart 10

### Site Plan Application Fees for Hypothetical Condominium Apartment Development

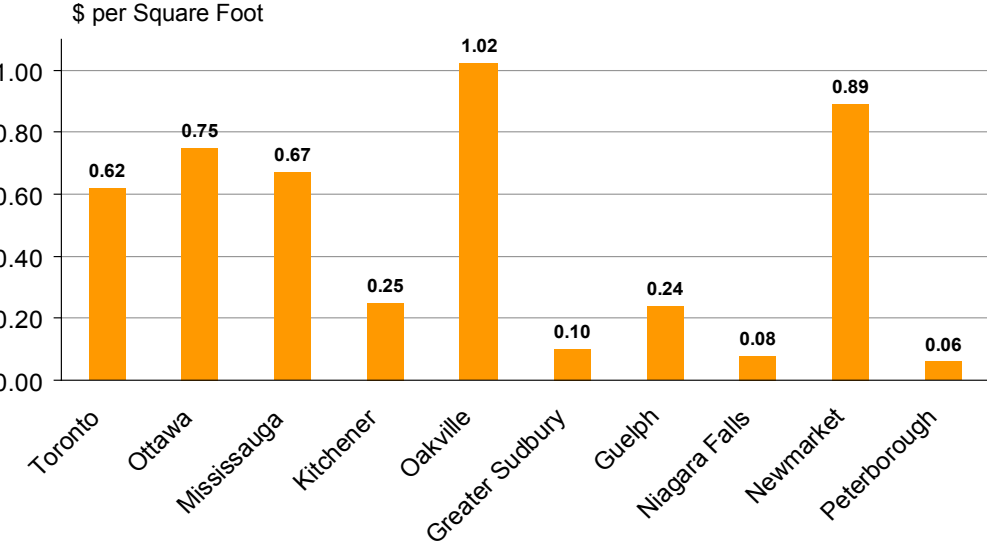


Note: Calculation based on 100 unit condominium apartment building, average unit size of 1,000 square feet and 2 resubmissions required  
Source: Altus Group Economic Consulting

Chart 11 below shows the fees that would be payable for a 50,000 square foot (4,645 square metre) office building. The fees range from \$0.06 / ft<sup>2</sup> in Peterborough to \$1.02 / ft<sup>2</sup> in Oakville.

Chart 11

### Site Plan Application Fees for Hypothetical Office Development



Note: Calculation based on 50,000 square foot office building, with 2 resubmissions required  
Source: Altus Group Economic Consulting

## 2.5.2 Costs of Processing Time

We have undertaken a variety of calculations that attempt to estimate some of the costs of site plan processing time for applicants, municipalities and end-users. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of the costs of the time spent between site plan application and approval, but is a sampling of some of the most readily quantifiable costs, based on available data.

In order to make “apples-to-apples” comparisons, and given the difficulty in estimating and making assumptions regarding typical site plan timelines, where possible, we have put all of our estimates on a “per month” basis. Each estimate can be extrapolated to quantify the impacts over a certain number of months by multiplying the impact per month by the number of months that a development would be subject to the site plan process.

### 2.5.2.1 Costs for Site Plan Applicants

While the costs incurred by applicants during the site plan review process will be paid for by applicants, where the market will bear it, they will often be incorporated into the price of new homes and therefore passed on to new home buyers.

#### **Additional Taxes**

For applicants, each additional month spent in the site plan review process pushes back the time when the land owner can turn over their buildings to the eventual owner (residential condominium buyers, for example). The additional time spent in the site plan review process means that the land owner/developer must pay additional taxes on the existing use and/or vacant land.

While we will often use the hypothetical 100-unit condominium development in estimating the various indirect costs of site plan review, in estimating the additional taxes paid by a developer, instead we have put the dollars per month estimates on a “per acre” basis, which controls for the range of densities such a building would have in different parts of the province.

Once a development is otherwise approved and entering the site plan process, the land would typically be re-appraised based on highest and best use, so for a residential condominium development, the taxes payable on the land would reflect a residential condominium land value. Based on the average value of high-density land sales in select municipalities<sup>4</sup>, and the applicable tax rates for each municipality, we have estimated the cost per acre, per month of the taxes payable on the vacant land.

For example,

- In Mississauga, each additional month would cost roughly \$1,122 in taxes per acre, per month
- In Toronto (outside of Downtown), each additional month of delay would cost roughly \$2,645 per acre, per month

#### **Carrying Costs of Loans**

During the approvals process, applicants will have typically obtained financing for their project, and will pay interest on the construction loan until all proceeds from sales have been received. For a 100-unit condominium building, each additional month would add approximately \$97,700 per month in costs

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4 RealNet Canada

related to the construction loan, including \$41,400 for additional interest related to the construction loan, and \$56,300 for the opportunity cost of the equity.<sup>5</sup> On a per unit basis, this would be equal to \$977 per unit in additional costs, which would likely get passed on to the home buyers. As these costs are not specific to any municipality, these impacts would be the same in each of the municipalities reviewed.

For the 50,000 square foot office building, each additional month would add approximately \$50,800 in carrying costs, including \$21,500 for the additional interest per month, and \$29,300 for the opportunity cost of the equity. The additional carrying costs amount to \$1.02 / ft<sup>2</sup>, and would likely get passed on to future tenants of the office building through increased rents.

### Construction Cost Inflation

When a development is in the site plan review process the costs associated with the construction of the building can increase. This could include the costs of both materials and labour.

#### Materials

The construction costs for building typically increase over time. Chart 12 shows the recent increases in construction costs for apartment, office and institutional buildings. Since 2008, construction costs have increased between 7.6% and 11.9%. This translates to an average monthly increase in construction costs of 0.13% for apartment buildings, 0.17% for office buildings and 0.20% for institutional buildings.

### Chart 12

**Construction Cost Index, Apartment, Office and Institutional Structures, 2008-2012**

Year	Apartment Building	Office Building Index (2002=100)	Institutional Building
Q1 2008	134.8	135.9	136.1
Q4 2012	145.1	149.5	152.3
	<i>Percent</i>		
% Increase 2008-2012	7.6%	10.0%	11.9%
Average Monthly % Increase	0.13%	0.17%	0.20%

Source: Altus Group Economic Consulting based on Statistics Canada

Based on the hard construction costs of each hypothetical building, we were able to model the average monthly increase in construction costs as a result of site plan processing time. For the apartment building, each additional month would add approximately \$27,800 in increased construction costs, or approximately \$278 per unit, which would likely get passed on to the new home buyers.

For the office building, each additional month would see construction costs increase by costs increase by just over \$20,000, while the institutional building costs would increase by nearly \$71,100 per month (see **Chart 13**). On a per square foot basis, this amounts to \$0.40 / ft<sup>2</sup>, for the office building, and \$0.47 / ft<sup>2</sup> for the institutional building, and would likely get passed on to future office tenants through increased rents.

### Chart 13

#### Estimate of Monthly Construction Cost Escalation

	Apartment Building (100- units)	Office Building (50,000 ft <sup>2</sup> )	Institutional Building (150,000 ft <sup>2</sup> )
	<i>Dollars</i>		
Hard Costs	21,500,000	12,000,000	36,000,000
	<i>Percent / Month</i>		
Average Monthly Construction Cost Escalation	0.13%	0.17%	0.20%
	<i>Dollars / Month</i>		
Construction Cost Escalation / Month	27,791	20,096	71,099

Source:

Altus Group Economic Consulting based on Statistics Canada

#### Labour Costs

Based on Statistics Canada, the hourly wage of various contractors involved in the construction of a building increase by an average of \$1.98 per hour per year. On a per month basis, this would be a \$0.16 per hour increase for each contractor involved in the project (see **Chart 14**).

### Chart 14

#### Average Hourly Wage, Select Construction Trades, 2008-2012

Year	Carpenter	Crane Operator	Cement Finisher	Electrician	Plumber	Total / Average
	<i>Dollars per Hour</i>					
2008	47.63	45.45	41.19	47.1	47.72	45.82
2012	52.73	51.51	48.48	57.41	58.47	53.72
Increase 2008-2012	5.10	6.06	7.29	10.31	10.75	7.90
Average Annual Increase	1.28	1.52	1.82	2.58	2.69	1.98
Average Monthly Increase						0.16
	<i>Percent</i>					
% Increase 2008-2012	10.7%	13.3%	17.7%	21.9%	22.5%	17.2%
Average Annual % Increase	2.6%	3.2%	4.2%	5.1%	5.2%	4.1%

Source: Altus Group Economic Consulting based on Statistics Canada

Based on Altus models, the construction of a 100-unit apartment building would generate 227 person-years of employment. The 227 person-years of employment is equivalent to 227 persons working for one year each. Assuming that each of the various types of workers included in the estimate of 227 person-years would be subject to a similar increase in wages, each month of delay would add roughly \$65,771 per month in labour costs, or approximately \$657 per unit, which will get passed on to new home buyers.

For the hypothetical office building, approximately 139 person-years of employment would be generated in the construction of the building and in industries supplying materials to the construction industry. Based on this estimate, each additional month of delay would add approximately \$40,274 in additional labour costs, or approximately \$0.81 / ft, which would likely get passed on to new office tenants through increased rents (see **Chart 15**).

## Chart 15

### Estimate of Additional Wage Costs per Month

	<u>Apartment Building</u>	<u>Office Building</u>
	<i>Person-Years</i>	
Person-Years	227	139
	<i>Days per Year</i>	
Average Working Days per Year	220	220
	<i>Hours per Day</i>	
Average Hours per Day	8	8
	<i>Person-Hours</i>	
Total Person Hours	399,520	244,640
	<i>Dollars per Hour</i>	
Average Monthly Increase in Wages	0.16	0.16
	<i>Dollars per Month</i>	
Total Monthly Increase in Wage Costs	65,771	40,274

Source: Altus Group Economic Consulting based on Statistics Canada

### Costs of Additional Studies/Resubmissions

When a project requires resubmissions, often the studies that a developer submitted as part of the original submission need revision, amendment, and there may also be new studies required as new issues arise during the review process. Each new or revised study needed to meet resubmission requirements has a cost to the developer, as they will need to pay external consultants to prepare these studies.

However, it is difficult to assess the cost of these additional studies and revisions - there is simply too much variance in the potential additional study costs, as the requirements of each resubmission are not known until requested by the municipality.

#### 2.5.2.2 Cost to Municipalities and Existing Communities

##### **Delayed Tax Revenue**

While municipalities will still receive tax revenue before a building is completed on what was in place before the new development, a completed building provides more tax revenue than it does while in the development process (which is often vacant land, even if that land becomes re-appraised during the development process).

After accounting for the property tax revenues the municipality would receive from the site even during the additional month(s) of processing time (assuming site is vacant land), the costs to the municipality in terms of delayed tax revenue per month ranges from:

- \$14,700 to \$23,900 per month for the 100-unit residential condominium apartment building (depending on municipality), or \$147 to \$239 per unit
- \$3,600 to \$15,000 per month for the 50,000 square foot office, or between \$0.07 and \$0.30 / ft<sup>2</sup>

The wide ranges in delayed tax revenues per month represent the variance in both tax rates, and

assessed values for residential, office (and the assumed existing vacant land) in the municipalities we have reviewed.

### ***Lost Economic Development and Jobs (Construction and Permanent Jobs)***

While there were examples raised at the developer's roundtable discussion of lengthy site plan processes that did influence decisions to develop in certain municipalities, it is generally unclear the degree to which the process would affect a developer's decision to proceed with development. However, the cost and unpredictable nature of the site plan review process could at least delay the arrival of a key employer, which can delay the spinoff effects for a local economy in terms of supporting existing businesses and suppliers, as well as employing residents of that community and surrounding area.

While it is difficult to quantify what the spin-off effects of a new employer in a municipality are, we are able to determine the amount of employment that our hypothetical developments would generate, both in the construction of the buildings, and in permanent employment.

#### ***Construction-Related Employment***

For example, our hypothetical developments would generate a significant amount of construction-related employment in the construction of the developments:

- A 100-unit condominium building (average size of 1,000 ft<sup>2</sup> per unit), generates 135 person-years of employment in the construction of the building, and 92 person-years of employment in industries that supply materials and services to the construction industry
- A 50,000 square foot office building generates 94 person-years of employment in the construction of the building, and 45 person-years of employment in industries that supply materials and services to the construction industry

Accommodating new jobs can contribute to building a complete community by providing job opportunities for residents. The delayed arrival of new jobs can also delay the economic spin-off effects that these new business and employment opportunities would create.

#### ***Permanent Employment***

The hypothetical office and institutional developments would generate permanent employment. Based on established ratios of square footage to employment in office and institutional buildings, our hypothetical non-residential buildings would generate the following permanent jobs:

- The 50,000 square foot office development would generate approximately 250 new permanent jobs
- The 150,000 square foot institutional building would generate approximately 300 new jobs

### ***Lost Retail Spending***

A delay in development of the 100-unit condominium building, means that those prospective new residents are not spending money in local retail shops and services.

The residents of a 100-unit residential condominium building would spend approximately \$4.4 million on goods and services annually.<sup>6</sup> Each month of delay gaining site plan approval results in a loss of \$362,900 in expenditures from the occupants of these new dwellings - in its retail shops, restaurants and service providers. While it is difficult to estimate how much of this spending would occur in the municipality that the new building is built in, it is safe to assume that a significant proportion of the \$362,900 per month

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<sup>6</sup> Approximately \$43,551 per household - includes food, household furnishings and equipment, clothing, transportation, health care, personal care, recreation, reading materials, education, tobacco and alcohol, etc.

would remain in the local community around the condominium apartment building.

### 2.5.2.3 Costs for End Users

#### ***Adjustments on Closing***

Many developers/builders have clauses in their sales agreements whereby the purchaser is responsible for increases in the development charges or municipal fees applicable to their unit since the builder first paid the development charges applicable at the time of gaining building permits. Some agreements may have a cap on how much these adjustments can be, but some may not.

One of the largest municipal fees that an applicant will pay are development charges, which increase regularly, and can be one of the larger adjustments made at closing of a new home purchase. There are two types of increases to development charges – a full DC by-law update, or annual indexing of DC rates to account for inflation.

#### *DC By-law Updates*

A development charge by-law, once passed, expires after five years. Before a development charge by-law expires, a municipality will calculate new DC rates based on the capital needs associated with the housing forecast over a certain planning horizon. While a developer will typically pay the development charges at the first above-grade building permit, if the development charge rates applicable to the development increase before occupancy, these additional rates will apply, and can be added to the closing cost adjustments payable by the new home buyer.

The increases to a development charge as a result of a DC by-law review can be significant. For example, the following summarizes some recent increases to DC rates:

- **Peel Region:** in 2012, Peel Region increased their development charges from \$12,592 to \$27,788 per large apartment, and from \$8.75 / ft<sup>2</sup> to \$19.57 / ft<sup>2</sup> for non-industrial development
- **City of Toronto (proposed):** the DC rates in the draft DC by-law (to be considered at an October 2013 Council meeting) would see the DC rate for a large apartment increase from \$12,412 to \$23,036 per unit, and for non-residential increase from \$13.11 / ft<sup>2</sup> to \$17.30 / ft<sup>2</sup>
- **City of Markham/York Region:** the proposed DC rates, as calculated in the City's April 2013 DC Background Study would increase the DC per large apartment from \$12,138 per unit to \$14,672 per unit. Additionally, the York Region DC's have also recently increased (in mid-2012) from \$19,939 to \$25,061. The combined upper-tier and lower-tier DC rates for a large apartment will have increased by \$7,656 per large apartment. Both the City and Region DC rates would apply to development in the City of Markham

#### *DC Indexing*

In addition to a full development charge by-law update, municipalities are also permitted to "index" their development charge rates on a regular basis, to keep pace with inflationary costs. Most municipalities index their development charge once per year. Typically, this results in an increase to the DC rate of between 1% and 3%. Over the past seven years, the average increase to the Statistics Canada index required (by the *Development Charges Act*) to be used for indexing has been 2.5% per year. For every \$10,000 paid per unit in development charges, this would increase the costs to the end-user on closing by \$250 per unit. Using the current DC's in some of the municipalities reviewed in this study, a 2.5% indexing would result in the following DC rate increases:

- In Brampton, a 2.5% increase would add \$1,062 per large apartment unit (combined increase to City and Peel Region DCs)

- In Markham, a 2.5% increase would add \$925 per large apartment unit (combined increase to City and York Region DCs)
- In Toronto, a 2.5% increase would add \$310 per large apartment unit (increase to City DCs)

### *Combined Average Monthly Impact of DC By-law Updates and DC Indexing*

Over the March 2009 to January 2013 period, DC rates for large apartment units in the GTA have increased from an average of \$22,500 to \$28,100, or \$5,600 per unit.<sup>7</sup> This increase reflects regular updating of DC by-laws and indexing of DC rates. On average, the increase of \$5,600 per unit over the March 2009 to January 2013 period is equivalent to a monthly increase per month of \$120 per large apartment.

For the 100-unit condominium apartment building, an average monthly increase of \$120 per unit would mean that end-users can expect to pay a combined total of \$12,000 for each additional month of site plan processing time to cover increased DC rates, through their closing cost adjustments. Given that DC rate increases tend to occur either in small amounts once per year, or in large amounts once every five years, for some new home buyers, an adjustment on closing to account for increased DC's will be much higher than the average. For others not caught with rates subject to a full by-law update, the increase is likely to be much lower than the average.

For office development charges, for municipalities that charge DC's on new office buildings, the average DC rate has increased from \$8.46 / ft<sup>2</sup> to \$13.31 / ft<sup>2</sup> over the March 2009 to January 2013 period, or an increase of \$4.85 / ft<sup>2</sup>. This is equal to an average increase per month of \$0.11 / ft<sup>2</sup>. For the 50,000 square foot office this would mean that DC's would increase an average of \$5,274 per month.

### **Lost Equity for First Time Home Buyers**

For many first time home buyers, additional months of site plan review time are costly due to the inability to begin paying their mortgage sooner. For each month an application spends in the site plan review process, these prospective new home buyers are not paying their mortgage and are not building equity in a new home, but are likely continuing to rent their existing home.

Assuming a first-time home buyer is still renting, and is able to rent up until the month they are able to occupy their new home, for a new condominium unit with a purchase price of \$430,900<sup>8</sup>, the first month not being able to pay their mortgage results in a loss of equity of \$618 (this excludes the interest costs that would be included in the mortgage payment).<sup>9</sup> The amount of lost equity per month would increase with each additional month that they are not able to begin mortgage repayment, as a greater proportion of each subsequent monthly payment consists of principal repayment.

### **Increased Rents for First Time Home Buyers**

In addition to the equity lost by first-time home buyers from not being able to begin mortgage payments, for those first-time home buyers who are still renting their dwelling, additional time spent in a rental contract may cause the rental rate to increase. The provincial government has adopted a Rent Increase Guideline, which caps the annual rent increase at 2.5%. Based on the average rent for a rental apartment in the Greater Toronto Area of \$1,095 per month<sup>10</sup>, a 2.5% increase would add \$27 per month to each tenant's rent.

7 BILD Summary of Development Charge Rates, March 2009 and January 2013

8 RealNet Canada, price shown is the average price for high-rise units in the Greater Toronto Area as of July 2013

9 Based on a 25-year mortgage, 5.14% interest (TD Canada Trust quoted rate for 5-year fixed mortgages), monthly payment with 10% down. The mortgage payment, including mortgage insurance would equal \$2,312 per month. For the first month, the interest component of that mortgage payment would equal \$1,694, while the principal repayment portion would equal \$618.

10 CMHC, Rental Market Report, Greater Toronto Area, December 2012



## Increased Office Rents

Over the 2004-2012 period, gross office rents for Class A office space (including net rent and operating costs) in the Greater Toronto Area have increased by an average of 1.1% per year, from \$37.22 per ft<sup>2</sup> to \$40.57 per ft<sup>2</sup>.<sup>11</sup> This equates to an average increase of \$0.41 per square foot per year. On a per month basis, this would mean that rents would increase by \$0.03 per square foot per month. For the 50,000 square foot office building, each additional month spent in the site plan process, would on average increase total gross rents payable by \$1,744 per month.

Further, although it is difficult to quantify, the delay in completing a given building may exacerbate any existing office space supply shortages, and as a result, increase the rents for other existing office space in a city. When there are office space supply shortages, prospective tenants looking to occupy space in a city may need to bid up the asking price for the existing space that is available, in order to secure that space.

### 2.5.3 Total Impacts

**Chart 12** summarizes the various costs associated with the time spent in the site plan review process, that we have attempted to model in this report.

#### Chart 12

##### Summary of Selected Costs of Each Month of Site Plan Processing Time

	Residential - 100 Unit Condominium Apartment		Office - 50,000 Square Foot Building	
	Low	High	Low	High
<i>Municipalities and Existing Communities</i>				
<i>Dollars per Month</i>				
Delayed Tax Revenue	14,710	23,884	4,126	15,993
Lost Retail Spending for Local Businesses/Services	145,169 <sup>2</sup>	217,753 <sup>2</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
Total Municipalities	159,879	241,637	4,126	15,993
<i>Jobs</i>				
Permanent Jobs			250	250
<i>Applicants</i>				
<i>Dollars per Month</i>				
Additional Taxes	1,122	2,645	1,122	2,645
Carrying Costs of Financing	97,700	97,700	50,800	50,800
Cost Inflation - Construction	27,791	27,791	20,096	20,096
Cost Inflation - Wages	65,771	65,771	40,274	40,274
Total Applicants	192,384	193,907	112,292	113,815
<i>End Users</i>				
Development Charges	12,000	12,000	5,275	5,275
Lost Equity	30,905 <sup>1</sup>	30,905	n.a.	n.a.
Increased Rents - Existing Tenants/New Home Buyers	1,350 <sup>1</sup>	1,350	n.a.	n.a.
Increased Rents - New Office Space	n.a.	n.a.	1,744	1,744
Total End Users	44,255	44,255	7,019	7,019

<sup>1</sup> Assuming 50% of occupants of condominium apartments are first-time home buyers that are currently renting their dwelling

<sup>2</sup> Assuming that between 40% and 60% of new retail spending would remain in the community where the building is located

Source: Altus Group Economic Consulting

In total, for a 100-unit condominium apartment building, each month of site plan processing time costs the various stakeholders between \$396,500 and \$479,800. The combined impact of the time that a development is spent in the site plan review process on new home buyers amounts to roughly \$2,375 per

unit, per month<sup>12</sup>.

For the 50,000 square foot office building, each month of site plan processing time costs the various stakeholders between \$123,400 and \$136,800, along with delaying the 250 jobs that would be available to residents of the surrounding area. Assuming these costs get passed on to new office tenants in the form of increased rents, the combined impact amounts to between \$2.50 and \$2.70 per square foot. If we assume a 6-month site plan review process, these costs would add between 6%-7% to the overall construction cost of the office building.<sup>13</sup>

As these additional costs will likely be passed on to new office tenants, they can have impacts on businesses at key stages in their development – either on new businesses using a new office building to begin operation, or on expanding or relocating businesses moving into new buildings.

#### **2.5.4 Key Findings of Task 5**

Based on the review of both the costs paid for site plan applications, and some of the indirect costs of the time involved in the site plan review process, we are able to summarize our research as follows:

- The fees for site plan applications and resubmissions can be substantial, and vary significantly from one municipality to the next
- There is also a wide range of fee structures used by municipalities – there is not one consistent method and approach to calculating or charging site plan application fees
- There are significant costs associated with the time spent in the site plan review process, some of which we have attempted to quantify
- The costs associated with the time spent getting from site plan application to approval affects applicants, municipalities, existing communities and end users (home buyers, office tenants, etc.)
- The below summarizes our modelling of some of the costs of time spent getting from site plan application to approval:
  - Applicants – additional taxes on vacant land, carrying costs of financing, and inflation on construction costs (labour and wages)
    - For a 100-unit condominium apartment building, each additional month would cost the applicant \$193,000, or roughly \$1,930 per unit per month, which will likely get passed on to new home buyers
    - For a 50,000 square foot office building, each additional month would cost the applicant roughly \$113,000, or roughly \$2.25 per square foot per month which will likely get passed on to the eventual tenants of new office space
  - Municipalities and Existing Communities – delayed tax revenue from newly developed building and lost spending by residents on retail shops, restaurants and service providers in a community:
    - For a 100-unit condominium apartment building, the time spent in site plan review process costs the municipality and existing community a combined \$159,900 to \$241,600 per month

<sup>12</sup> Excludes the amount of estimated lost retail spending, as that would not be a cost incurred by new home owners but by the businesses in the surrounding community.

<sup>13</sup> Based on Altus Group Cost Guide 2013 and estimated construction cost of office buildings of \$240 per square foot

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- For a 50,000 square foot office building, the time spent in site plan review costs the municipality between \$4,100 and \$16,000 per month, or roughly between \$0.08 and 0.32 per square foot, which will likely get passed to the eventual tenants of the new office space and delay the arrival of 250 new job opportunities
  - End Users – additional development charges can get passed onto buyers, lost equity for new home buyers by not beginning to pay a mortgage sooner, and increased rent costs from persons who had been renting and will have to rent for a longer period of time
    - For a 100-unit condominium apartment building, the time spent in the site plan review process would cost the end-users a combined \$44,000 per month, or roughly \$443 per unit per month
  - 9. For a 50,000 square foot office building, the time spent in the site plan review process would cost end-users (office tenants) a combined \$7,000 per month, or roughly \$0.14 per square foot per month



## 3.0 ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 3.1 Key Findings

Based on the findings of the research that was done on behalf of the OAA, our review of the site plan approval process and how it is administered across Ontario, it is evident that while the *Planning Act* sets out the basic parameters for site plan approval, the process is not being implemented consistently by municipalities. This results in unpredictability, confusion and frustration for applicants as the process differs considerably among (and often within) municipalities.

The overwhelming concern identified by the OAA respondents and the representatives of the development industry was with the length of the process. The lack of clarity and consistency contributes to delays in the process and the financial risk to applicants. The economic modeling undertaken by Altus indicates that the longer the process takes, the more significant the economic impact on the applicants, the end user, the municipality and the province.

The OAA respondents indicated in the survey that, based on the applications they worked on, more than one third took longer than 9 months to receive approval. This is significantly longer than the 30-day appeal period provided for in the *Planning Act*, which implies an expectation that approval within 30 days is achievable. The representatives of the development industry indicated similar experiences, with very few saying they received site plan approval within the timelines noted on a municipality's website or application package. In addition, the sample of municipal staff also indicated many applications take longer than 3 months, the typical time indicated by many websites.

The overall research shows that the majority of applications take at least two resubmissions before approval, with certain types of larger developments (apartments, large commercial and large institutional) taking 3 or more resubmissions.

As indicated in the findings section, the research shows a number of reasons for delay. Although the top reasons given for delay (post-submission) differed among the various parties, circulation time and slow/lack of response from the different parties involved were identified as key reasons affecting timing by all parties. The architects also indicated that "difference in design philosophy" was the fourth top element affecting timing, although just over half of the architects (55%) thought the site plan process did not impact the integrity of the building design, while 28% thought it had a negative impact.

Other issues related to timing included satisfying conditions of approval, having an application deemed complete, and scheduling and attending public meetings and committee meetings (where required), although it is noted that most municipalities do not require a public process. It is notable that the municipal planners ranked "slow/lack of response from applicant with respect to suggested revisions" as the top reason for delay, while the architects ranked it last as a reason for delay, clearly showing a difference in perception on this issue.

A final key concern that emerged from the survey was a general lack of leadership within the process and, in particular, the absence of a "point person" who could settle conflicts between the applicant, professional staff, and commenting departments and agencies. Without strategies for prioritization or consensus building, applications can go through multiple rounds of resubmissions causing lengthy delays, resubmissions and additional costs.

### 3.2 Recommendations for Improvement

The existing tensions and frustrations associated with the site plan approval process are to some

extent inevitable, as the process involves various participants who approach the process from their own particular perspective and with different objectives. In this regard, some of the comments on the process go beyond aspects that can be addressed by policy or practice and deal more with the “people” than the “process” and, as such, some frustrations are unavoidable. While it is impossible to design a perfect system, it is our opinion there is an opportunity to improve the manner in which the process is currently being administered.

A number of participants indicated that they thought Section 41 of the *Planning Act* was not being implemented effectively and that changes were needed. In our opinion, the issue is not with the legislative framework, which already provides for, among other matters, pre-consultation, delegation, an appeal period, limited appeals and required tools to implement control over exterior design, but rather with the way in which the process is administered.

There is, however, an opportunity for the Province to play a leadership role in implementing the site plan approval provisions of the *Planning Act*. One mechanism would be through the issuance of a Provincial guideline. Various Ministries have issued guidelines to implement Provincial Legislation. For example, the Ministry of the Environment has published several D-Series Guidelines, which are documents supplementary to the Environmental Protection Act which provide guidance on land use policy details. Similarly, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has issued guides and handbooks addressing brownfield development, community improvement planning and the development permit system, while the Ministry of Transportation has issued the Transit-Supportive Guidelines.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing could issue a guideline to address and clarify the intention of Section 41 and the preferred methods of implementation, which would help to address many of the issues identified in this study. There are a number of potential theme areas that could be included in the guideline, as outlined below. While further consultation and investigation would be required with a wide variety of stakeholders, the following theme areas could serve as the basis for further discussion on a guideline document (referred throughout the remainder of this report as “the Guideline”) that could bring greater clarity and consistency to the site plan approval process.

### **3.2.1 Clarifying the Purpose of Site Plan Control**

The proposed Guideline could go beyond the *Planning Act* provisions to explicitly state the purpose of the site plan control provisions. This would assist in clarifying what the site plan approval process is intended to regulate.

The Guideline could also deal with the issue of design, which has been raised by a number of parties. Section 41(4)2(d) of the *Planning Act* gives additional site plan approval powers to municipalities if they have official plan policies relating to exterior design. The Guideline could clearly outline the extent to which a municipality can control exterior design without such official plan policies.

Currently, the Ministry provides limited information on exterior design provisions on its website. It shows what can be addressed with and without the additional powers provided by the *Planning Act*. This type of information, in greater detail, would assist all parties in understanding the appropriate level of commentary on the issue of design. It appears that certain municipalities go beyond the scope of the “base” provisions and deal with character, appearance, scale and design features, as well as certain sustainable design provisions, while not having the requisite official plan policies.

In addition, the Guideline could provide direction on the appropriate content of the official plan policies needed to exercise control over exterior design. In order to reduce subjectivity and provide additional

clarity in the process, it is our opinion that official plan policies relating to exterior design should be directed towards achieving clearly expressed and specific design objectives as opposed to providing a general policy permission to review exterior design without any stated parameters or objectives. This would provide a clearer understanding for applicants of the expectations of the exterior design review process as well as providing additional predictability and objectivity in the process.

### **3.2.2 Preferred Methods of Implementation - “Best Practices”**

The Guideline could set out preferred methods of implementing site plan approval, based on the experiences of municipalities. Through our research, a number of effective practices were identified and reviewed. Some of these practices are procedural and relatively easy to implement, while others deal with more fundamental issues, such as the role of the public and Council. The following best practices are recommended and further detailed in this Section:

- a. Streaming Site Plan Applications and Exempting Certain Developments
- b. Pre-application Consultation Meeting
- c. Dedicated Staff Person/Project Manager
- d. Dedicated Site Plan Team
- e. Streamlined Process for Resubmission
- f. Delegated Approval
- g. Provision of Implementation Options
- h. Alternatives to Site Plan Approval

It is recognized that this is not an exhaustive list of the best practices, nor would all such practices apply to every municipality in the province. Some municipalities already include one or more of these practices in their site plan approval process, and these municipalities could be referenced by the Guideline to specifically highlight effective implementation strategies.

#### **3.2.2(a) Streaming Site Plan Applications and Exempting Certain Developments**

As evidenced by our research, most municipalities exempt certain types of development from the site plan approval process through their site plan control by-laws. Generally, low-density residential and agricultural development is exempt. In many municipalities, industrial development is generally exempt unless it is on a major road or adjacent to a significant feature. In addition, temporary uses are often exempt or are able to through a streamlined or fast-tracked process. The Guideline could provide direction on the types of development that would most benefit from the site plan approval process.

Many municipalities also stream the applications by size/type/location, with applications being classified as “minor” or “major”. There are generally fewer required reports, shorter timeframes and in some cases reduced fees associated with “minor” applications.

In our opinion, the streaming of site plan applications is a preferred practice as the complexity of the application should be reflected in the type of review involved. This is particularly true for municipalities where approval is not delegated and/or where there is public input.

In addition, it was noted that there is often duplication in the overall planning approval system. For example, the draft plan of subdivision process generally addresses issues related to servicing, grading, access and landscaping. While a number of municipalities provide for exemptions or a streamlined process for a site plan approval application within a registered plan of subdivision, others require the application to go through a full review, requiring the submission of a wide range of studies. In our opinion, the Guideline should provide for an alternate, streamlined process for applications within registered plans

of subdivision.

It was also noted that, in some municipalities, all industrial development was subject to site plan approval, causing frustration and lost opportunities for plant expansions, which are often time sensitive. In our opinion, there should be a streamlined approach for such applications, particularly in interior locations which are not visible from major roads.

### 3.2.2(b) Pre-application Consultation Meeting

Most municipalities have a requirement for a pre-application consultation meeting, as evidenced from our review of municipal practices and confirmed by our survey of the municipal staff. The different parties consulted in our research generally considered a pre-application consultation meeting a positive practice. All of the municipal staff respondents indicated that having such a meeting assisted the overall timing of site plan application processing. Notably, not all of the OAA respondents felt that the meeting accelerated the timing of the process, however, we acknowledge that the format of pre-application consultation meetings varies among municipalities.

Elements of pre-application consultation meetings that are considered to positively impact the process include:

- A formal meeting request process, with regularly scheduled meetings
- Representation from all commenting departments (and outside agencies if possible)
- Initial input, comment or direction provided at the meeting
- List of required studies or drawings generated at the meeting
- Guidelines and/or formal terms of reference provided or available for each study, report or drawing required
- Individual contact information provided for questions during the preparation of studies, reports or drawings.

In our opinion, pre-application consultation can significantly improve the overall process by improving the first submission. The pre-application consultation meeting can reduce the number and scope of resubmissions by:

- Clarifying submission requirements
- Addressing exterior design expectations
- Addressing technical issues (i.e. grading, landscaping, parking and access), which are among the top comments received
- Identifying other issues of concern

Section 41(3.1) of the *Planning Act* provides municipalities with the power to require pre-application consultation meetings.

### 3.2.2(c) Dedicated Staff Person/Project Manager

One of the elements that contributed to a positive site plan approval experience was having a dedicated staff person or project manager who is responsible for the site plan application file from pre-application to final approval. The project manager is the point of contact with the applicant, commenting departments and agencies, and is responsible for reviewing and resolving conflicting comments from the circulation.



### 3.2.2(d) Dedicated Site Plan Team

Many municipalities have a dedicated site plan team or committee of key staff from various departments that meets on a regular basis and provides timely, coordinated and consistent feedback on site plan applications. This committee often includes outside commenting agencies. The benefit of having a dedicated team is that issues and conflicting comments can be dealt with on a comprehensive, timely basis. In most cases, the applicant is invited to attend the meeting and is given feedback and the opportunity to discuss issues. This practice has the potential to significantly reduce circulation time as issues are discussed and addressed by all relevant departments at the outset of the process. In this regard, two of the major elements that contributed to delay in the approval process were the length of the circulation process and the need to resolve conflicting comments among departments. If applicants have a venue to discuss comments with staff from the various departments, the response time to suggested revisions should be reduced, which was identified as another key element affecting timing.

In addition, it was noted by participants that it is important for the commenting individuals to be properly trained and qualified to provide comments on site plan applications. Where this is not possible, opportunities for third party review should be available.

### 3.2.2(e) Streamlined Process for Resubmissions

The surveys found that circulation times to commenting departments was a major element causing delay. Although many municipalities require a full resubmission package and full re-circulation, a number of municipalities have streamlined the resubmission process in order to shorten the process. Practices to improve circulation times for resubmissions include:

- Recirculating only to the departments that commented or who are affected by changes
- Recirculating only those plans/reports that have changed since the last submission
- Clearly identifying the specific elements of the plans/reports that have changed
- Providing for electronic circulation of revised plans to relevant departments for sign-off prior to submitting final sets of plans for approval
- Electronic sharing of comments
- Requesting shorter timelines to review re-circulated plans/documents
- Where staff site plan teams or committees are in place, having the resubmission considered at a team meeting for sign-off from the various departments

### 3.2.2(f) Delegated Approval

As noted previously in this report, the site plan approval process is intended to be a technical and predictable review process. The majority of municipalities have some form of delegated approval to a staff person, usually the planning commissioner/director. Many municipalities, including some of the largest ones, have delegated approval for all applications. This practice streamlines the process and reduces the need for staff reports and additional meetings. Delegating approval also recognizes the technical nature of the process and relies on professional staff, rather than elected politicians and/or the public, to approve the plans.

Where approval is delegated to staff, there are often provisions that allow an application to be “bumped-up” to Council should an issue arise. The Ward Councillor generally initiates such a request within a certain period of time from receipt of the application.

Since public policy issues related to land use, height and density have been established prior to the site plan process, delegation of approval authority to staff while providing for a “bump-up” provision to Council implements the intent of site plan control as a technical and predictable process, while recognizing that there may be circumstances where Council may have a special interest in the application or where there is an issue between the applicant and staff that warrants Council’s involvement. The Guideline should provide instructions on what would be considered reasonable “bump-up” provisions.

As noted, some municipalities provide notice of site plan applications to residents and provide for a public meeting. In our opinion, this approach is of concern as it can be seen at odds with the structure of Section 41 of *Planning Act*, which does not provide for third party involvement. It can be especially confusing or frustrating for all parties involved if there has already been a rezoning or subdivision process and decisions regarding land use, density and height have already been made. While providing the public with information is important, the scope of the involvement in the site plan approval process should be clearly understood.

### 3.2.2(g) Provision of Implementation Options

There are a variety of ways in which site plan approval is implemented. Some municipalities require site plan agreements for all applications while others only require them in specific limited circumstances. While a site plan agreement is registered on title and provides the highest level of protection for the municipality, the preparation and approval of an agreement can lead to considerable delay. In most cases, building permits will not be issued until the site plan agreement is signed.

Some municipalities have more than one option for implementing site plan approval depending on the type and scale of the project, with site plan agreements only required where there are certain elements that necessitate an agreement. In our opinion, options should be explored for alternate mechanisms to a site plan agreement such as a letter of undertaking for certain types of applications which provide municipalities with the protection they need without the time and expense of a site plan agreement.

Some municipalities implement site plan approval on a phased or conditional basis. This provides phased building permits once the location of the building and other elements of the process are fixed. This is particularly helpful for developments where there is significant underground work to be undertaken, as it allows for construction to begin while remaining conditions are being fulfilled.

### 3.2.2 (h) Alternatives to Site Plan Approval

The site plan approval process is often initiated concurrently with or following a rezoning or minor variance process. In this respect, the majority of larger developments required a rezoning prior to development. A development permit system is an alternative planning tool that can help streamline the planning approval process by combining zoning, minor variance and site plan approvals into one seamless process. Other benefits of the development approval system include the flexibility to tailor the approval process to the needs of individual municipalities, the integration of regulatory and design considerations into one process, and the emphasis on up-front public consultation at the policy and development criteria formulation stage.

As detailed in Section 2.1.7 of this report, the development permit system is an option for Ontario municipalities. However, although the Development Permit Regulation has been in effect for over five years, based on our knowledge, the Township of Lake of Bays is the only municipality operating under this alternative system. Recently, the City of Toronto has made reference to piloting the development permit system in certain neighbourhoods. The research previously undertaken by Bousfields for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing indicated that there were significant potential advantages associated with

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the use of Development Permit System (as listed in the previous paragraph). Further research is needed to understand why the system has not been more widely implemented and how it could potentially address some of the issues identified in this study. This information could be included in the Guideline to help municipalities make informed decisions regarding all planning tools they can access.

### **3.2.3 Guideline on Application Fees**

The Altus research in **Section 2.5** identified the various approaches used by municipalities to calculate site plan application fees and the significant range of resulting site plan application costs. There appears to be a need for a consistent approach to calculating and imposing site plan application fees. The Guideline could formalize a process for setting site plan application fees, designed to achieve full cost recovery and allow for a greater degree of consistency among municipalities. A clear, accountable, and consistent approach to calculating these fees would be beneficial for all stakeholders in the site plan approval process.



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## 4.0 CLOSING

The review of the site plan approval process has canvassed the opinions of representatives from the Ontario Association of Architects, targeted municipal planning directors and the development industry in general. The research looked at the impact of the site plan approval both qualitatively and quantitatively. Each group had varying perspectives on matters relating to the site plan approval process, and overall the research revealed several common themes, issues and suggestions. The feedback collectively indicates that the process would benefit from a more consistent and predictable implementation process, which would be consistent with the intent of site plan control as detailed in Section 41 of the *Planning Act*.

Based on our primary research and the opinions of those consulted, we recommend that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing consider issuing a Provincial Guideline that would provide municipalities with direction on preferred implementation methods. Such a document would assist in ensuring that municipalities across the Province implement the site plan approval process similarly and effectively, reducing the associated timing and costs. The suggestions in this review are intended to begin a discussion with the affected stakeholders on improvements to the current system. Ensuring a more expedient and efficient review will benefit all parties involved, and should ultimately assist in lessening the frustrations applicants and reviewers alike experience during the process.



# APPENDIX A REVIEW OF SITE PLAN APPROVAL PROCESSES IN REPRESENTATIVE MUNICIPALITIES

## General Submission Requirements

	Type of Approval	List generated by pre-consultation?	Application form	Cover letter	Building Mass Model	Digital Copies	Renderings	Size of Plans	Posted sign required?	Other
<b>Toronto</b>	All applications	No	1 copy		5 copies, either physical or computer generated	1 digital copy of each required item	7 copies of perspective drawings IF project is 4,000 m <sup>2</sup> or greater	Folded to 8.5" x 11"	No	
<b>Ottawa</b>	Requiring public consultation	Yes	1 copy			1 digital copy of each required item		A1-sized paper and folded to 8.5" x 11"	Yes	
	Not requiring public consultation	Yes, if attend	1 copy			1 digital copy of each required item		A1-sized paper and folded to 8.5" x 11"	No	
<b>Mississauga</b>	All applications, except express	Yes (including number of plans/reports)	1 copy	1 copy				Folded to 8.5" x 11"		
	Express	No								
<b>Brampton</b>	All applications	Yes	Yes			1 digital copy of each plan, representing exact copy of the paper submission to be provided				
<b>Hamilton</b>	All applications	Yes	9 copies		optional	1 electronic copy of all information /reports/documents and 1 electronic copy of application form without signatures	optional	Architectural plans folded to 8.5" x 11"		
<b>London</b>	All applications	Yes				1 copy of all information digitally		full size folded to 8.5" x 14"		
<b>Markham</b>	Most applications	Yes				1 copy of all information digitally		Full size		
	Outdoor Patio	Yes						plans can be submitted in 8.5" x 11"		
	Heritage Applications	Yes				1 copy of all information digitally				
<b>Vaughan</b>	Full site application (not minor amendment)	Additional items (base is standard)	3 copies	3 descriptions of proposal		1 set of digital documents	16 colour copies	full size + 3 reduced sets (8.5" x 14")		Other requirements: colour aerial photo (6); parcel abstract (3); building cross sections (3); sign design (5); Landscape Cost Estimate (3); Architectural Materials Board (1); Exterior Photometric Lighting Plan (6)

General Submission Requirements

	Type of Approval	List generated by pre-consultation?	Application form	Cover letter	Building Mass Model	Digital Copies	Renderings	Size of Plans	Posted sign required?	Other
Kitchener	All applications	Yes	1 copy			1 set of digital documents required				
Windsor	All applications	No. Optional drawings may assist in the evaluation of the application and may be required as a condition of site plan application and/or approval.	1 copy				Optional	full size, reduced to 8.5" x 14"		Fire Access Route; Property Deed; Building Cross Section optional
Richmond Hill	Standard Site Plan Application	No	25 copies	Yes		5 copies of digital submission				Legal description (1); Construction Notes/Detail Plan (15); Exterior Cladding Materials and Colour Palette Schedule (5)
	Minor Amendment Applications	6 copies of each revised plan as requested by the Town	1 copy	1 copy						
	Specific Applications	Very specific lists included in Application Guide								
Oakville	All applications	Yes		Yes		All materials must be submitted in PDF format	2 rendered copies of elevations; 2 rendered Landscape Plans	Full size, folded to either 8.5" x 11" or 8.5" x 14"		
Burlington	Full Site Plan Application (directly contact Planning for Minor Modification and Minor Development Applications)	Yes	10 copies			CD with full set of plans in PDF format + AutoCAD Version		Folded to 8" x 14"		Outdoor Storage/Screening Details (4); Fencing Details (5); Rooftop Mechanical Screening Details. Note: additional copies of documents will be required with added circulation.
Greater Sudbury	All applications	No	1 copy	Yes		1 set of digital applications			No	
Oshawa	All applications	No, required drawings and documentation is discussed after initial submission				PDF version of all copies				
Barrie	Delegated	No	Yes							Owner/applicant responsible to erect within 2 days of receipt of application
	Undelegated	No	Yes							Owner/applicant responsible to erect within 2 days of receipt of application
St. Catharines	All applications	No	1 copy					Plotted to 23" x 26" and folded to 8.5" x 14"		
Cambridge	Adjacent to a Regional Road	No	1 original and 5 copies	Yes		1 set of all drawings in PDF format	14 copies	Maximum folded size is 8.5" x 14"		
	Adjacent to a Local Road	No	1 original and 5 copies	Yes		1 set of all drawings in PDF format	12 copies	Maximum folded size is 8.5" x 14"		



## General Submission Requirements

	Type of Approval	List generated by pre-consultation?	Application form	Cover letter	Building Mass Model	Digital Copies	Renderings	Size of Plans	Posted sign required?	Other
Kingston	All applications	Yes, will identify any additional reports	1 copy					Full size (24" x 36") with 1 reduced set at 8.5" x 14"	Applicant responsible for installation and removal of sign (if "bumped-up" need to include notice in newspaper)	
Guelph	All applications	No	1 copy with preliminary submission and 1 copy with formal submission	1 copy responding to any previous comments				Maximum of 24" x 36" folded to a maximum 8.5" x 14"		
Thunder Bay	All applications	No	1 copy							
Pickering	All applications	Yes	10 copies			1 set of plans in AutoCAD format		24" x36" and folded to 8.5" x 11"		5 copies of any supporting reports required
Niagara Falls	All applications	Yes	1 copy			1 set in PDF format for initial review, and in AutoCAD for final submission		Full size, folded to 8.5" x 14" plus 8 11"x17" reduced copies of each drawing for final submission		
Newmarket	All applications	Yes				1 set of electronic copies		Varied		
Peterborough	All applications	No						Maximum of 33" x 47", folded to 8.5" x 14" + 1 reduced set of all drawings (8.5" x 11")		
Sault Saint Marie	All applications	No	1 copy					Full size + 4 copies of each plan at 8.5" x 14"		
Sarnia	Standard	No - list of reports generated after initial submission						Preferably 20" x 24"		
	If abutting a County Road	No - list of reports generated after initial submission						Preferably 20" x 24"		
Caledon	Full Site Plan	No	1 copy	1 copy				Folded to 8.5" x 11"		
	Site Plan Amendment		1 copy	1 copy				Folded to 8.5" x 11"		
	Director's Approval Major		1 copy	1 copy				Folded to 8.5" x 11"		
	Director's Approval Minor		1 copy	1 copy				Folded to 8.5" x 11"		
	Exemption		1 copy	1 copy				Folded to 8.5" x 11"		
Timmins	All applications	No	7 copies			Yes	None stated			
Owen Sound	All applications	Yes	1 copy			Submit digital copy	24" x 36"			
North Bay	All applications	Yes	1 copy				24" x 36"		Existing Site Conditions can be shown on New Site Plan	

Plans Required

	Type of Approval	List primarily generated by pre-consultation?	Plans required												
			Site Plan	Context Plan	Survey	Floor Plans	Roof Plan	Elevation	Landscape	Servicing	Grading	Parking	Tree Preservation	Lighting	Other Plans
Toronto	All applications		20 copies	20 copies	20 copies of Topographical Surveys; 20 copies of Boundary Plan of Survey	20 copies	20 copies	20 copies site and building elevations; 1:50 scale detailed coloured elevation plan IF greater than 5 storeys; 20 copies site and building sections	7 copies	20 copies Public Utilities Plan	20 copies	20 copies underground garage plans	7 copies		
Ottawa	Requiring public consultation	Yes	55 copies	3 copies	2 copies			3 copies	55 copies (can combine with site servicing)	55 copies (can combine with landscape)	55 copies	2 copies of parking garage layout			
	Not requiring public consultation	Yes, if attend (encouraged to contact staff)	35 copies	3 copies	2 copies			3 copies	35 copies (can combine with site servicing)	35 copies (can combine w/ landscape)	35 copies	2 copies of parking garage layout			
Mississauga	All applications, except express	Yes (including number of plans/reports)	4 copies required for pre-application meeting (19 copies for DARC)	19 copies required for pre-application DARC meeting	4 copies required for pre-application meeting (19 for DARC)	Required number determined at pre-application meeting	Included with floor plans	Required number determined at pre-application meeting	Included in site plan, also include Park Concept Plan	Required number determined at pre-application meeting	Required number determined at pre-application meeting	Included in site plan			
	Express	No	3 copies	photographs showing existing site condition and relation of proposed work to adjacent buildings/streets				3 copies	information regarding trees and landscape areas that are to be removed/alter ed, additional proposed planting						
Brampton	All applications	Additional documents (base is standard)	25 copies for initial circulation (1 additional copy if adjacent to a provincial right-of-way, conservation area or other municipality), followed by 7 copies for final submission		Yes	3 copies		6 copies	5 copies	7 copies	7 copies				
Hamilton	All applications	Yes (and number of copies required)	9 copies + 1 copy reduced to 11" x 17"	Site Location Map	5 copies	included in site plan		9 copies + 1 copy reduced to 11" x 17"	included in site plan	yes	yes	included in site plan		yes	
London	All applications	Yes	14 copies + 1 reduction		1 copy			4 copies + 1 reduction	4 copies + 1 reduction		8 copies + 1 reduction				
Markham	Most applications	Yes	20 copies + 1 reduction		1 copy			11 copies + 1 reduction	4 copies	4 copies	4 copies				
	Outdoor Patio	Yes	8 copies		1 copy			8 copies							
	Heritage Applications	Yes	15 copies + 1 reduction		1 copy			11 copies + 1 reduction	4 copies	4 copies	4 copies				
Vaughan	Full site application (not minor amendment)	Additional documents (base is standard but could be modified)	20 copies + 3 reductions		3 copies	6 copies + 3 reductions		3 copies building sections; 15 colour rendered drawings; 6 black and white elevations (+3 reductions of each)	8 copies of Landscape Plan + 3 reductions	4 copies + 3 reductions	4 copies + 3 reductions				Erosion Sediment Control Plan (4)
Kitchener	All applications	Yes	20 copies of concept plan for pre-application; 30 hard copies, 1 letter-sized digital copy and 1 hard copy print out of digital file					5 copies							
Windsor	All applications	No. Optional drawings may assist in the evaluation of the application and may be required as a condition of site plan application and/or approval.	10 copies + 1 black line reduction		2 copies	5 copies + 1 black line reduction		5 copies + 1 black line reduction	Optional	Optional	Optional				
Richmond Hill	Standard Site Plan Application	No	25 copies (once a dtg. Has signed off, they are not circulated on a resubmission)	5 copies		5 copies		15 copies	15 copies	15 copies	15 copies	8 copies if applicable	5 copies	5 copies	Erosion and Sediment Control Plan (15)
	Minor Amendment Applications	6 copies of each revised plan as requested by the Town	6 copies of revised plan												
	Specific Applications	Very specific lists included in Application Guide													
Oakville	All applications	Yes (beyond base set)	30 copies (14 copies for amendment applications deemed "minor")		15 copies	15 copies + 8 copies of Ground Floor Plan only	Included in Floor Plans		15 copies	15 copies	15 copies		8 copies		8 copies of Truck Turning Plan; 8 copies of Queuing Plan

Plans Required

	Type of Approval	List primarily generated by pre-consultation?	Plans required												
			Site Plan	Context Plan	Survey	Floor Plans	Roof Plan	Elevation	Landscape	Servicing	Grading	Parking	Tree Preservation	Lighting	Other Plans
Burlington	Full site plan application	No	12 copies		2 copies	4 copies	3 copies of rooftop mechanical screening details	4 copies	10 copies	11 copies	11 copies		5 copies	1 copy of light details/photometric	4 copies of Fire Route Plan; 4 copies of Fencing Details; 5 copies Common Element Condo Plan
Greater Sudbury	All applications	No	15 copies												
Oshawa	All applications	No, required drawings and documentation is discussed after initial submission	26 copies for initial review + 18 copies for complete submission			8 copies		4 copies	16 copies	16 copies	16 copies				16 copies Sediment and Erosion Control Plan; 8 copies Photometric Plan
Barrie	Delegated	No	20 copies an additional 10 11"x17" reductions if greater than 5,000 m2			1 copy		20 copies	20 copies	20 copies	20 copies		20 copies	20 copies	
	Undelegated	No	20 copies, an additional 10 11"x17" reductions if greater than 5,000 m2, and 30 copies of reduced 11"x17" copies.			20 full size copies and 30 reduced copies		20 full size copies and 30 reduced copies	20 full size copies and 30 reduced copies	20 full size copies and 30 reduced copies	20 full size copies and 30 reduced copies		20 full size copies and 30 reduced copies	20 full size copies and 30 reduced copies	
St. Catharines	All applications	No	15 copies					15 copies	15 copies	As required by municipality	As required by municipality			As required by municipality	
Cambridge	Adjacent to a Regional Road	No	14 copies + 1 copy of reduced site plan			14 copies		14 copies	14 copies	14 copies	14 copies			14 copies	Salt Management Plan
	Adjacent to a Local Road	No	12 copies + 1 copy of reduced site plan			12 copies		12 copies	12 copies	12 copies	12 copies			12 copies	Salt Management Plan
Kingston	All applications	Yes, will identify any additional reports	26 copies		2 copies	7 copies		7 copies	10 copies	10 copies	8 copies	Included in Site Plan	10 copies	2 copies	7 copies of final Site Plan drawings required before final approval
Guelph	All applications	No	10 copies for preliminary submission, 10 copies for formal submission			5 copies		5 copies	6 copies	6 copies	6 copies				
Thunder Bay	All applications	No	7 full sized and 2 reduced (11"x17")	1 copy											
Pickering	All applications	Yes	10 copies + 1 reduced 8.5" x 11" copy; 8 and 6 copies for subsequent submissions or 5 copies for a minor amendment to existing approval			1 copy		4 copies + 1 reduced 8.5" x 11"	10 copies	10 copies	10 copies			10 copies	
Niagara Falls	All applications	Yes	10 copies for initial review, and 7 copies for final submission		5 copies for initial review, and 7 for final submission			5 copies for initial review, and 7 for final submission	5 copies for initial review, and 7 for final submission	5 copies for initial review, and 7 for final submission	5 copies for initial review, and 7 for final submission				
Newmarket	All applications		15 full size copies, 15 copies of 8.5"x11" and 2 copies of 11"x17"		15 full size copies, 15 copies of 8.5"x11" and 2 copies of 11"x17"			15 full size copies, 15 copies of 8.5"x11" and 2 copies of 11"x17"	15 full size copies, 15 copies of 8.5"x11" and 2 copies of 11"x17"	8 full size	8 full size	15 full size copies, 15 copies of 8.5"x11" and 2 copies of 11"x17"	15 full size copies, 15 copies of 8.5"x11" and 2 copies of 11"x17"		
Peterborough	All applications		9 copies		1 copy			9 copies	included with site plan	included with site plan	included with site plan			included with site plan	
Sault Saint Marie	All applications		12 copies					12 copies	12 copies	12 copies					
Sarnia	Standard	No - list of reports generated after initial submission	5 copies					5 copies	5 copies	5 copies	included in site plan	included in site plan	included in site plan	included in site plan	
	If abutting a County Road	No - list of reports generated after initial submission	6 copies					6 copies	6 copies	6 copies	included in site plan	included in site plan	included in site plan	included in site plan	
Caledon	Full Site Plan		14 copies		1 copy	5 copies		5 copies	12 copies		14 copies	included in site plan	included in landscape plan	included in landscape plan	
	Site Plan Amendment		14 copies		1 copy	5 copies		5 copies	12 copies		14 copies	included in site plan	included in landscape plan	included in landscape plan	
	Director's Approval Major		8 copies		1 copy	5 copies		5 copies	12 copies		14 copies	included in site plan	included in landscape plan	included in landscape plan	
	Director's Approval Minor		5 copies		1 copy	5 copies		5 copies	12 copies		14 copies	included in site plan	included in landscape plan	included in landscape plan	
	Exemption		4 copies												
Timmins	All applications		7 copies					7 copies	7 copies	7 copies	included in required plans submitted	included in required plans submitted			
Owen Sound	All applications	No	10 copies + 1 11"x17" reduction						yes	yes	yes		potentially	Engineering Package providing plan details	
North Bay	All applications		10 copies	2 copies of Existing Site Conditions Plan				Included in site plan	Included in site plan				Included in site plan	Included in site plan	

A REVIEW OF THE SITE PLAN APPROVAL PROCESS IN ONTARIO

Reports Required

	Type of Approval	Reports required							
		Engineering	Arborist	Transportation	Environmental	Heritage	Planning	Urban Design	Other
Toronto	All applications	Servicing Report (5); Stormwater Management Report (5); Noise Impact Study (5); Vibration Study (5); Geotechnical Study (5)	Arborist/Tree Preservation report and/or Declaration (5)	Traffic operations Assessment (5); Transportation Impact Study (5); Loading Study (5); Parking Study (5)	Environmental Impact Study (5); Contaminated Site Assessment (5); Energy Efficiency Report (5); Natural Heritage Impact Study (5)	Heritage Impact Statement (5); Archeological Assessment (5)		Sun/Shadow Study (5); Pedestrian Level Wind Study (5); Urban Design Guidelines (5)	Architectural Control Guidelines (5); Green Development Standards Checklist (5); Accessibility Design Standards Checklist (5)
Ottawa	All applications	Site Servicing Study (6); Servicing options Report (5); Hydraulic Watermain Analysis (3); Stormwater Management Report (6); Composite Utility Plan (2); Geotechnical Study (4); Groundwater Impact Study (6); Wellhead protection Plan (6); Erosion and Sediment Control Plan (8); Hydrogeological Analysis (5); Noise/Vibration Study (5); Reasonable Use Study (5); Roadway Modification Plan (5/3/5)	Tree Conservation Report (5)	Community Transportation Study and/or Transportation Impact Study (12)	Record of Site Condition (4); Agronomy and Soil Capability study (5); Phase 1/2 Environmental Site Assessment (5); Mine Hazard Study (4); Impact Assessment of Adjacent Waste Disposal/Farmer Landfill Site (6); Assessment of Landform Features (7); Mineral Resource Impact Assessment (4); Environmental Impact Statement (11)	Cultural Heritage Impact Statement (3); Archeological Resource Assessment (3)	Planning Rationale with Design Statement (4); Minimum Distance Separation Brief (3)	Sun/Shadow Study (3); Review by Urban Design Review Panel	
Mississauga	All applications, except express Express	Slope Stability Study; Functional Storm Drainage Report; Storm Water Management Study; Acoustical Feasibility Study; Vibration Analysis; Geotechnical Report	Arborist report	Parking Use Study; Traffic Impact Study; Traffic Safety Impact Study; on-street parking analysis	Environmental Impact Study; Site Remedial Studies (Phase I/II) ESA; Remedial Work Plan, etc.; Air Quality Study	Archeological Assessment; Heritage Impact Statement		Urban Design Study; Sun/Shadow/Wind Study; Condominium Type	
Brampton	All applications	Storm Water Management Report (3)	Tree Survey						
Hamilton	Major and complex - determined at pre-application consultation Minor				A scoped Environmental Impact Statement is the only requirement				
London	All applications							Urban Design Brief, submitted 3 weeks prior to the upcoming monthly Urban Design Panel	
Markham	Most applications Outdoor Patio Heritage Applications	Stormwater Management Report (2); Sanitary Design Calculation (2); Noise Study; Geotechnical Study/Soil Report; Functional Servicing Study		Traffic Impact Study	Environmental Site Assessment				
Vaughan	Full site application (not minor amendment)	Stormwater Management Report (6); Functional Servicing Report (6); Pedestrian Level Wind Impact Study (3)	Tree Inventory and Preservation Study/Arborist Report/Edge Management/Restoration Plans (6)		Phase I ESA (6); Environmental Site Screening Checklist (3)			Urban Design and Sustainable Design Brief (4)	Waste Collection Design Standards (3)
Kitchener	Stamp plan approval Site plan revision Development agreement	Engineering Consultant Compliance letter				Heritage Impact Assessment Heritage Impact Assessment Heritage Impact Assessment			
Windsor	All applications		Tree Survey Optional					Shadow Plan optional	
Richmond Hill	Standard Site Plan Application Minor Amendment Applications Specific Applications	Stormwater Management Report (5)	Tree Preservation Report						
Oakville	All applications	Stormwater Management Report (8)	Arborist Report (8)	Traffic Impact Study (8)		Heritage Impact Assessment (5) IF subject site is a heritage property or within/abouts a heritage district			
Burlington	Full site plan application	Noise Study (2); Siltation Control Details (1); Lighting Details/Photometric (1)	Letter from Arborist confirming tree preservation methods	Traffic Impact Study (2); Bicycle Rack Details (4)	Phase 1 ESA (2); MOE Record of Site Condition (2); Site Screening Checklist (2)				
Greater Sudbury	All applications								
Oshawa	All applications	Noise Study (6)		Traffic Study (12)	1 Environmental Site Assessment required at initial submission stage				6 other copies of whatever deemed necessary
Barrie	Delegated Undelegated	Functional Servicing Report or Design Brief; Noise Study		Traffic Analysis					
St. Catharines	All applications								
Cambridge	Adjacent to a Regional Road Adjacent to a Local Road	Stormwater Management Report (4)		Traffic Impact Study (4); Record of Site Condition	Traffic Impact Study (2); Record of Site Condition				
Kingston	All applications	Servicability Report (3); Stormwater Management Report (4); Noise and/or Vibration report (2); Geotechnical Report (2); Hydrogeology report (3)		Traffic Impact Report (3)	Environmental Site Assessment (2)			Urban Design Report (2)	
Guelph	All applications	Stormwater Management Report (3)							Building Code Analysis Form; Application for Accessible Parking Spaces; Application for Fire Route
Thunder Bay	All applications								Submit 5 copies of all required supporting reports
Pickering	All applications								
Niagara Falls	All applications								
Newmarket	All applications	Stormwater Management Report (3)	Arborist Report (3)	Traffic Impact Study	Phase 1 ESA (3); Environmental Impact Study		Planning Rationale		Site Plan Accessibility Checklist; Development Standards Checklist
Peterborough	All applications								
Sault Saint Marie	All applications								
Sarnia	Standard If abutting a County Road			Traffic Impact Study					
Caledon	Full Site Plan Site Plan Amendment Director's Approval Major Director's Approval Minor	Stormwater Management report (1 copy) Stormwater Management report (1 copy) Stormwater Management report (7 copies) Stormwater Management report (7 copies)							Consultant Landscape Architect Letter of Conformance; Consultant Engineer Letter of Conformance

Reports Required

	Type of Approval	Reports required							
		Engineering	Arborist	Transportation	Environmental	Heritage	Planning	Urban Design	Other
	Exemption								
Timmins	All applications								
Owen Sound	All applications	Storm water Management Report							
North Bay	All applications	Stormwater Management Report required where any development is subject to Stormwater Management considerations							Special requirements for properties located along unserviced shoreline of Trout Lake

Note that in addition to the 31 municipalities reviewed in this database, 3 municipalities outside of Ontario (Halifax, Edmonton and Vancouver) were also reviewed.

Site Plan Categories

Municipality	Type of Application	Description of Application Type	Developments Excluded
Toronto	Quick	Applications that require limited circulations for comment and generally require standard approval conditions. For example, Site Plan Control applications for detached dwellings created by consent.	New buildings exempt (subject to further conditions as per by-law 774-2012): detached dwelling, semi-detached dwelling, duplex, a triplex, fourplex, row house or townhouse project including 4 dwelling units or less, certain industrial, manufacturing or warehouse buildings, ancillary residential buildings or those that are less than 50 m2, temporary buildings or structures. Additions to existing buildings exempt: residential, commercial/institutional/mixed-use/office less than 600 m2, industrial less than 600 m2. Interior Alterations for Use Conversions also permitted.
	Routine	Applications that are smaller in scope and have issues that are not highly complex or controversial (i.e. stand-alone Site Plan Control applications)	
	Complex	Applications that involve large developments with significant community impact and/or multiple approval processes and usually require reporting to City Council. Typically, these are Site Plan applications that are concurrent to applications such as an Official Plan or Zoning By-law amendment application, etc.	
Ottawa	Manager Approval	If not delegated to staff (see requirements below) . Public consultation applies to new free-standing construction of 250 m2 or greater; an adjoining addition to an existing building that will be 50% greater in size than existing; changes resulting in the provision of 10 parking spaces or more; the installation of drive-through.	Single detached, semi-detached duplex, triplex dwellings, additions to street townhouses, accessory buildings under 200m2, agricultural buildings, special needs housing/group homes and bed and breakfast establishments, pumping stations, communication towers of certain heights above ground level, Transitway buildings, temporary buildings and alterations, and community buildings in a park.
	Staff Approval	Staff delegated authority applies only to: the additional, deletion or relocation of accessory buildings, structures, etc.; modifications to internal pedestrian or vehicular circulation, parking or loading areas, change in building foot print of less than 200 m2; extensions of less than 12 months to the time limit to sign a site plan control agreement; extension of less than 12 months to the time limit to obtain a Building Permit	
Mississauga	Standard/Major Revision	New multi-unit residential, commercial and industrial development, and large additions to existing buildings or new buildings on a site	Detached dwellings having direct frontage on a public road; semi-detached dwellings having direct frontage on public road; lands within an Employment zone; all development on lands zoned RM5-45 and RM5-46 (exceptions to this rule - encouraged to call Mississauga staff to ensure whether lands within SPC area)
	Infill Housing	New dwellings, replacement housing and additions	
	Minor Site Plan Applications	minor building alterations or site revisions	
	Site Plan Approval Express		
Brampton	No distinction	N/A	Lower density development (i.e. single and semi-detached, duplex, triplex dwellings and buildings containing less than 5 dwellings) and agricultural buildings are exempted from site plan control. Projects that propose only minor physical changes to a site (i.e. patio enlargement) or building exterior (i.e. new door/window) may not require a comprehensive review via a full site plan application submission.

## Site Plan Categories

Municipality	Type of Application	Description of Application Type	Developments Excluded
Toronto	Quick	Applications that require limited circulations for comment and generally require standard approval conditions. For example, Site Plan Control applications for detached dwellings created by consent.	New buildings exempt (subject to further conditions as per by-law 774-2012): detached dwelling, semi-detached dwelling, duplex, a triplex, fourplex, row house or townhouse project including 4 dwelling units or less, certain industrial, manufacturing or warehouse buildings, ancillary residential buildings or those that are less than 50 m <sup>2</sup> , temporary buildings or structures. Additions to existing buildings exempt: residential, commercial/institutional/mixed-use/office less than 600 m <sup>2</sup> , industrial less than 600 m <sup>2</sup> . Interior Alterations for Use Conversions also permitted.
	Routine	Applications that are smaller in scope and have issues that are not highly complex or controversial (i.e. stand-alone Site Plan Control applications)	
	Complex	Applications that involve large developments with significant community impact and/or multiple approval processes and usually require reporting to City Council. Typically, these are Site Plan applications that are concurrent to applications such as an Official Plan or Zoning By-law amendment application, etc.	
Ottawa	Manager Approval	If not delegated to staff (see requirements below) . Public consultation applies to new free-standing construction of 250 m <sup>2</sup> or greater; an adjoining addition to an existing building that will be 50% greater in size than existing; changes resulting in the provision of 10 parking spaces or more; the installation of drive-through.	Single detached, semi-detached duplex, triplex dwellings, additions to street townhouses, accessory buildings under 200m <sup>2</sup> , agricultural buildings, special needs housing/group homes and bed and breakfast establishments, pumping stations, communication towers of certain heights above ground level, Transitway buildings, temporary buildings and alterations, and community buildings in a park.
	Staff Approval	Staff delegated authority applies only to: the additional, deletion or relocation of accessory buildings, structures, etc.; modifications to internal pedestrian or vehicular circulation, parking or loading areas, change in building foot print of less than 200 m <sup>2</sup> ; extensions of less than 12 months to the time limit to sign a site plan control agreement; extension of less than 12 months to the time limit to obtain a Building Permit	
Mississauga	Standard/Major Revision	New multi-unit residential, commercial and industrial development, and large additions to existing buildings or new buildings on a site	Detached dwellings having direct frontage on a public road; semi-detached dwellings having direct frontage on public road; lands within an Employment zone; all development on lands zoned RM5-45 and RM5-46 (exceptions to this rule - encouraged to call Mississauga staff to ensure whether lands within SPC area)
	Infill Housing	New dwellings, replacement housing and additions	
	Minor Site Plan Applications	minor building alterations or site revisions	
	Site Plan Approval Express		
Brampton	No distinction	N/A	Lower density development (i.e. single and semi-detached, duplex, triplex dwellings and buildings containing less than 5 dwellings) and agricultural buildings are exempted from site plan control. Projects that propose only minor physical changes to a site (i.e. patio enlargement) or building exterior (i.e. new door/window) may not require a comprehensive review via a full site plan application submission.

Site Plan Categories

Municipality	Type of Application	Description of Application Type	Developments Excluded
	Development agreement	Projects which must have facilities or matters provided for under the planning act (widening's, access ramps, landscaping, storage, etc.)	
Windsor	Major Development	Construction of a new building / addition greater than 10,000 sq. m	single detached, semi-detached, duplex and double-duplex dwellings, small commercial and combined commercial-residential buildings and additions; small industrial and institutional buildings and additions; alterations within an existing building; temporary buildings and structures; building features and mechanical elements; parking areas containing less than 5 spaces; signs
	Standard development	Construction of building between 301 and 10,000 sq. m; parking lot with more than 25 spaces	
	Minor Development	Construction of stand alone building less than 300 sq. m; changing use to existing building requiring changed façade only; parking lot with 5 to 25 spaces	
Richmond Hill	Standard Site Plan Application	All development proposals for new developments and for development proposals which are subject to an existing Site Plan agreement involving a major addition or alteration	Low density residential development; development of buildings containing agricultural operations
	Minor Site Plan Amendment Application	Lands already subject to an existing site plan agreement involving a minor addition or alteration.	
	Specific applications	There are specific submission requirements for: Lands abutting Lake Wilcox; lands located within the Snively Street Area; lands located within the Oak Ridges moraine Area; lands located within the Town's Residential Infill and Infill Bonus Areas; Temporary Tents and Structures; Outdoor Patios; Sales Trailers/Pavilions; Sustainable Building Design	
Oakville	No distinction	N/A	Development of buildings and structures for agricultural purposes; temporary structures that will be erected and used for a maximum of six consecutive months; residential freehold street townhouse units approved as part of a registered plan; low density residential
Burlington	Full application	Major project	Single family and semi-detached dwellings.
	Minor modification	Minor or straightforward proposal to modify a previously approved site plan application	
	Minor development	minor or straightforward proposal with no previous approval of a site plan application on file	
Greater Sudbury	No distinction	N/A	Excluded zone areas: lands zoned R1 (Single Residential), R2 (Double Residential), P (Public Park), RU (Rural), A (Agricultural reserve) and lands that are located in any of the Industrial Zones located more than 152.4m (500 feet) from the nearest Residential Zone and from the nearest Municipal Arterial Road or Provincial highway. In terms of excluded classes of development (unless through the rezoning, variance or severance processes): single family dwellings, two family dwellings, triplex dwellings, fourplex dwellings, buildings accessory



## Site Plan Categories

Municipality	Type of Application	Description of Application Type	Developments Excluded
Oshawa	No distinction	N/A	Residential buildings with two or fewer units (located outside the Oak Ridges Moraine); farm buildings; floor or erosion control structure; mineral aggregate extraction (wayside pits and quarries); temporary building or structure; buildings on lands owned or leased by a wide range of government bodies (as listed in By-law No. 137-89)
Barrie	Undelegated	Projects that can be delegated to the Director of Planning Services or the Manager of Development Planning (if it complies with development standards). Typically includes projects less than 5,000 m <sup>2</sup>	Proposals for minor additions or development that have no significance <u>may</u> be exempted from site plan review and approval
	Delegated	Plans requiring Council Approval	
St. Catharines	No distinction	N/A	Residential with less than five dwelling units, industrial properties not abutting a residential zone or fronting onto a street opposite a residential zone, residential use within an agricultural area
Cambridge	Lands adjacent to a Regional Road	See left	single family dwellings; two-family dwellings; detached triplexes; buildings which are accessory to such buildings; farm buildings
	Lands adjacent to a Local Road		
Kingston	Full Site Plan Applications	All types of residential, industrial, commercial and institutional developments, including renovations, additions, parking lots and patios	Residential development containing less than four dwelling units; street townhouses approved as part of a plan of subdivision.
	Minor Site Plan Control Application	Applications regarding 1 and 2 family dwellings, group homes, and applications with less than 300 m <sup>2</sup> of floor area that result from an approval of a rezoning request	
Guelph	No distinction	N/A	Low-density residential (single-detached dwellings); farm related development; buildings or structures used for flood control or conservation purposes; and the working areas of licensed pits or quarries
Thunder Bay	No distinction	The City of Thunder Bay does not apply "Universal Site Plan Control". Generally only highly visible locations, land sold by the City and land that has been subject to previous Zoning Amendment is subject to Site Plan Control.	See left
Pickering	No distinction	N/A	Residential development of one or two dwelling units per lot, except on properties of historic or architectural value / listed / designated; agricultural and farm-related buildings or structures that are used in farming operations

Site Plan Categories

Municipality	Type of Application	Description of Application Type	Developments Excluded
Niagara Falls	No distinction	N/A	Any residential development proceeding by plan of vacant land condominium; residential building with less than 3 units; accessory buildings or alteration to residential buildings; development on government owned land; structures erected for purposes of floor or erosion control; buildings permitted in the JS 6 zone, agricultural buildings (except for greenhouses greater than 2000 sq. m), any buildings permitted as part of any extractive industrial use.
Newmarket	Full Site Plan Review	Undertaken for all "major" developments (medium and high density residential development; industrial, commercial and institutional development abutting residential properties exceeding 5,000 square feet in size; development being undertaken by public authorities and/or agencies; development applications within a Community Improvement Plan Area and Special Policy Area.	Minor additions or developments that, in the opinion of the Director of Planning, have no significance; detached commercial and industrial accessory structures not exceeding square feet of GFA; exceptions pursuant to Section 41 of the Planning Act
	Delegated Site Plan Review	Undertaken for everything else (any industrial, commercial or institutional building not abutting residential; any industrial, commercial or institutional building abutting residential but not exceeding 5,000 square feet; development not being undertaken by public authorities; development not within a CIPA or an SPA; any parking area not abutting residential.	
Peterborough	N/A	N/A	Residential development with four units or less; non-residential development with a building floor area less than 100 sq. m; industrial development which consists of an expansion of an industrial building by up to 10% (to a maximum of 500 sq. m); any agricultural development including farm-related buildings.
Sault Saint Marie	No distinction	N/A	Unknown
Sarnia	N/A	N/A	Single, semi-detached and duplex dwellings, and farm related classes of development.
Caledon	Full Site Plan	No approved site plan, new building or addition is greater than 50% of existing GFA, proposal may cause substantial alterations to SWM and traffic	See Exemption Stream
	Site Plan Amendment	approved site plan exists, amendment required	
	Director's Approval Major	Approved site plan exists, modifications may require review, building additions are between 30 - 50% of existing GFA, proposal may create minor alterations to SWM and traffic	
	Director's Approval Minor	No site plan exists, minor modifications may require review, proposal doesn't alter SWM or traffic	
	Exemption	Addition will not exceed 10% of existing GFA or 25 m2 if no site plan exists, or does not exceed 30% of existing GFA if site plan exists AND does not have any (or any additional) negative impact on SWM and/or traffic	

## Site Plan Categories

Municipality	Type of Application	Description of Application Type	Developments Excluded
Timmins	New Site Plan Control Application		Lands designated as a Resource Development Area; developments less than 930 m <sup>2</sup> in the City's Downtown Commercial Zone; minor modifications that are acceptable to the Director of Community Services Department
	Amendment to Existing Site Plan Control		
Owen Sound	Residential (Major)	multiple residential in excess of 4 units	Single detached, semi-detached, duplexes and converted dwellings containing 2 or less units, or where development is an addition of <30 sq. m to an existing Building and floor area is not increased above 5% and building is not located in shaded are on Schedule (harbour areas); accessory buildings to singles, semis, duplex and towns. The city reserves the right to require site plan approval for al aforementioned developments if they are to be included in the plan of subdivision or plan of condominium when registered.
	Commercial (Major)	Industrial, commercial and institutional development and	
	Residential or Commercial (Minor)	i) Consideration of architectural control of residential buildings where a separate process such as subdivision approval has considered other detailed site design matters; ii) Application meets criteria for delegated authority under s. 6 of SP By-law; iii) existing parking lot reconfiguration; iv) SPA amendment w/in 2yrs of original approval; v) change of use within existing building (no change to floor area or height)	
North Bay	N/A	N/A	Railway, open space, Rural (Zone A) and Rural Estate (Zone RRE)

	Type of Approval	Pre-consultation required	Timelines Noted on Municipality Website	Public Meeting Required?	Reviewing committee	Approval Body
Toronto	Quick	No	3 months from a complete application submission	At the discretion of the Chief Planner, staff can hold a meeting with the local community concerning Site Plan Control applications. Opportunities for public consultation associated with "bumped-up" applications		Two types of review procedures: Delegated Approval (decision made by Chief Planner and designates) OR any application can be "bumped-up" if City Councilors request it to be reported to City Council for its decision.
	Routine	No	4 months from a complete application submission			
	Complex	No	9 months from a complete application submission			
Ottawa	Manager Approval	Yes	14 weeks from time of submission until Planning and Environment or Agricultural and Rural Affairs Committee Meeting review and make a decision. An extra 2 weeks required if a Community Information and Comment Session is held	Public notification and Community Information and Comment Session may be required		Manager (Director)
	Staff Approval	No	12 weeks from time of submission until Planning or Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee Meeting review and make a decision	No public notification required		Staff
Mississauga	All types of applications except express	Yes	Not stated		Development Application Review Committee (DARC) for some major site plan applications, which happen once a week	Development and Design Division of the Planning and Building Department
	Express Applications	Yes	2 - 3 days			
Brampton	All applications	Yes	Not stated	No	Site Plan Committee meetings held weekly. Comments compiled by project planner and forwarded to the applicant	Director of Planning and Land Development Services. Council approval is not required.
Hamilton	All applications	Yes	Not stated		Applicant, owner and commenting departments and agencies are invited to a meeting with the Development Review Committee (approximately 4 weeks after application deemed complete). The application is either approved, deferred or refused at the DRC meeting.	Manager of Development Planning
London	Administrative	Can be satisfied at Initial Inquiry	Applications will be able to move through revisions in an expedited timeline.	No		Development Approvals Business Unit
	Basic	Yes	Applications will be able to move through revisions in an expedited timeline.	No	During consultation phase, an internal liaison group meets to determine consensus prior to consulting with the applicant. Following submission of application, the liaison group meets again to establish corporate consensus regarding approval and conditions prior to meeting with the applicant.	
	Standard	Yes	3 months, with an additional 5 weeks if a Public Meeting is required.	Yes - when a proposed site plan occurs on a property that has a holding provision for a public meeting, when a council resolution exists requiring a public meeting, or where an official plan policy requires a public meeting		
Markham	All applications	Yes	2 to 6 months	No	May go to the Development Services Committee for review	City Council, recommendation for delegation to the Commissioner of Planning for certain classes of development
Vaughan	Major	Yes; in process of making certain developments exempt from PAC	3 - 5 months			City Council approves applications for high density residential developments, commercial development, employment development on arterial roads or abutting a highway, and street townhouse dwellings. Approval for all other development types is delegated to Commissioner of Planning, and designate.
	Minor	Yes; in the process of making certain developments exempt from PAC				Development planning department
Kitchener	All applications	Yes	4 - 8 weeks	Public Participation Policy applies to new commercial development within certain districts, and requires that the application be circulated to all immediately adjacent low-rise residential land owners and Neighbourhood Association where appropriate.	Full site plan or Major Change to a Site Plan requires a meeting with the City's Site Plan Review Committee (every week)	Delegated
Windsor	Standard/Major Development	Yes	Minimum of 8 weeks	Site Plan Review Committee		Council delegated its site plan approval authority except for in City-owned lands, Downtown BIAs, development north of Riverside Drive, any development of lands identified in a resolution of Council requiring site plan approval.
	Minor Development	Yes				
Richmond Hill	All applications	Yes	None stated		Potentially reviewed by the Development Application Review Committee	Council delegates power to Commissioner of Planning and Development, except to define classes of development which may be undertaken without site plan approval

Submission and Review

	Type of Approval	Pre-consultation required	Timelines Noted on Municipality Website	Public Meeting Required?	Reviewing committee	Approval Body
Oakville	All applications	Yes	None stated		Site Plan Committee	Council's powers are delegated to the Director of Development Services, except for where the property is for residential use or mixed commercial and residential use, or abuts a residential use, or is within 26 metres of a residential use separated by a non-residential use, or where site plan approval is a condition of approval of a variance or consent, or where site plan approval by the Site Plan Committee is required by Council.
Burlington	Full site plan application	Yes	None stated			Delegated to the Director of Planning and Building, but can become undelegated to Council if generating high level of public input and concern
Greater Sudbury	All applications	No	None stated			
Oshawa	All applications	No	None stated		Site Plan Approval Review Committee	City staff
Barrie	Delegated	No	Two weeks for pre-consultation; 2 weeks between submission of complete Application & Fee and Site Plan Review Committee Meeting; 6-8 weeks for Delegated Site Plan Control to be processed. Total of 8 - 10 weeks	Public Notice Sign erected within two days of the city's receipt of the application. Councilor is provided with a copy of the site plan application, drawings and reports. The Councilor may request the applicant meet with the local ratepayers group if such a group exists.	Site Plan Review Committee	All developments may be granted site plan approval by the director of planning services
	Undelegated ("bumped up")	No	Two weeks for pre-consultation; 2 weeks between submission of complete Application & Fee and Site Plan Review Committee Meeting; 15 weeks for Conditional Agreement to be approved. Total of 17 weeks			The approval may be "bumped-up" to a Council approval where in the opinion of the Director of Planning Services, an application has a high profile or high municipal interest; a ward councillor requests that the application be reviewed and approved by council; or city staff and the applicant are unsuccessful in negotiation a settlement of an issue and/or conditions.
St. Catharines	All applications	No	None stated	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Cambridge	All applications	No	6 - 8 weeks on average. Processing time will be longer if Council approval of the site is required.			Commissioner of Planning Services has delegated authority. When the Planning Services Department recommends refusal, an applicant may request a Public Meeting for a decision by City Council.
Kingston	All applications	Yes	None stated	City prepares a sign to be posted on the property to advise the public that an application has been submitted, describe proposal, and provide contact for information. If the application is "bumped-up", notice is published in the local newspaper		Council delegates approval to the Director of Planning and Development unless they have been "bumped-up" to the Planning Committee through a motion of Council (the Committee can refer it back to the director for final approval).
Guelph	All applications	No	With a complete package, can achieve a turnaround time of 20 days		Site Plan Review Committee (meets every two weeks)	Manager of Development Planning, on behalf of the General Manager of Planning Services
Thunder Bay	New Site Plan Control Agreement	No	6 weeks			Majority approved by the General Manager of Development Services
	Addendum to an existing site plan agreement	No	None stated			
Pickering	All applications	No	4 weeks minimum, with an additional 2 weeks for each re-submission with a re-circulation.	No	Development Application Review Team Meeting (first Wednesday of every month)	Director of Planning and Development
Niagara Falls	All applications	Yes	3 - 4 months	No		Director of Planning, Building and Development
Newmarket	Full Site Plan Approval	Yes	None stated	Site Plan Review Committee requires a Public Information centre be held for any development being undertaken by public authorities and/or agencies, unless otherwise directed by Council. SPEC may request a PIC be held for any other Full Site Plan Review application.	Reviewed by Staff Development Review Team and considered by the Site Plan Review Committee (regularly scheduled meetings)	Council
	Delegated Site Plan Approval	Yes	None stated			Delegated to Staff Development Review Team. Any member of council may request that a delegated site plan review application be "bumped-up" to a Full Site Plan Review application
Peterborough	All applications	No	None stated	No	Unknown	Delegated to the Director of Planning & Development Services (or his or her designate) except for: non-residential development or mixed use development having a building floor area greater than 2,500 sq. m, except if located in specific industrial parks; residential development containing more than 50 dwelling units; development where SPA stipulated as a requirement of a rezoning application; or any development of a group home where a rezoning is required.
Sault Saint Marie	All applications	No	None stated	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Sarnia	All applications	No	2 - 8 weeks for smaller scale and complexity, 3 - 4 months for complex issue. Approvals from Ministry of Transportation access permits or Ministry of Environment servicing approvals will require 8 to 10 weeks from time of submission.	No	Site Plan Review Committee (multi-disciplinary, provides recommendations to Director)	City Council has delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building
Caledon	All applications	Yes	2 - 3 months	No		Manager of Development of the Planning and Development Department
Timmins	All applications	No	None stated	No		City Council, unless approval has been delegated to the Director of Community Services and Development (e.g. development that is less than 930 sq. m)
Owen Sound	All applications	No	None stated	No		City Council except when delegated to Director of Community Services, or an alternative staff person designated by the Director in his/her absence. Delegated applications are those that are generally less than 100 sq. m and do not increase the GFA of an existing building more than 25%, accessory buildings, or areas where a master site plan has been approved.
North Bay	All applications	Yes	2 - 4 weeks	No	Development Application Review Team (with external and internal representatives, meets bi-weekly)	Delegated





# APPENDIX B SURVEY OF MEMBERS OF THE OAA

The following questions were included in an online SurveyMonkey format.

**Question1: Please provide the following information about your firm.**

Note that the name of your firm is collected and used only for the purpose of awarding the draw prize of two tickets to the OAA Celebration of Excellence (awards banquet) and to verify that responses have not been duplicated (one survey per firm). Once the prize has been awarded and the survey responses are finalized, your firm’s name will be removed from other data you submit in the survey. The remaining data will be used in aggregate and responses of participants will never be attributed to your firm.

Name of firm:	
Number of architects:	
Number of disciplines (other than architects):	

**Question 2: Please list the last five (lower-tier) municipalities you have obtained Site Plan Approval (SPA) from:**

- Municipality 1:
- Municipality 2:
- Municipality 3:
- Municipality 4:
- Municipality 5:

**Question 3: Using the same municipalities from Question 2, please provide the following details of your experience in the corresponding rows. If you have submitted multiple applications to the same municipality, please consider one project only.**

*Please fill out information for all municipalities listed in Question 2. Please check one box per criteria only.*

Municipality 1

Development type:

- Multiple attached residential
- Apartment building
- Small Commercial (less than 1000 m2)
- Medium Commercial (1000 – 5000 m2)
- Large Commercial (greater than 5000 m2)
- Small Institutional (less than 1000 m2)
- Medium Institutional (1000 – 5000 m2)
- Large Institutional (greater than 5000 m2)

Time between submission and approval

- Less than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- over 9 months

Number of resubmissions required

- 1 resubmission
- 2 resubmissions
- 3+ resubmission

Pre-consultation required?

- Yes
- No

Impact of pre-consultation on processing time

- Delayed
- Accelerated
- No change
- N/A

Subject to panel or committee review?

- Yes
- No

Impact of committee/panel on processing time



- Delayed
- Accelerated
- No change
- N/A

Public meeting required?

- Yes
- No

Overall impact of SPA on integrity of building design?

- Positive
- Negative
- No change

Municipality 2

Development type:

- Multiple attached residential
- Apartment building
- Small Commercial (less than 1000 m2)
- Medium Commercial (1000 – 5000 m2)
- Large Commercial (greater than 5000 m2)
- Small Institutional (less than 1000 m2)
- Medium Institutional (1000 – 5000 m2)
- Large Institutional (greater than 5000 m2)

Time between submission and approval

- Less than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- over 9 months

Number of resubmissions required

- 1 resubmission
- 2 resubmissions
- 3+ resubmission

Pre-consultation required?

- Yes
- No

Impact of pre-consultation on processing time

- Delayed
- Accelerated
- No change
- N/A

Subject to panel or committee review?

- Yes
- No

Impact of committee/panel on processing time

- Delayed
- Accelerated
- No change
- N/A

Public meeting required?

- Yes
- No

Overall impact of SPA on integrity of building design?

- Positive
- Negative
- No change

Municipality 3

Development type:

- Multiple attached residential
- Apartment building
- Small Commercial (less than 1000 m2)
- Medium Commercial (1000 – 5000 m2)
- Large Commercial (greater than 5000 m2)
- Small Institutional (less than 1000 m2)
- Medium Institutional (1000 – 5000 m2)
- Large Institutional (greater than 5000 m2)

Time between submission and approval

- Less than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- over 9 months

Number of resubmissions required

- 1 resubmission
- 2 resubmissions
- 3+ resubmission

Pre-consultation required?

- Yes
- No

Impact of pre-consultation on processing time

- Delayed
- Accelerated
- No change
- N/A

Subject to panel or committee review?

- Yes
- No

Impact of committee/panel on processing time

- Delayed
- Accelerated
- No change
- N/A

Public meeting required?

- Yes
- No

Overall impact of SPA on integrity of building design?

- Positive
- Negative
- No change

Municipality 4

Development type:

- Multiple attached residential
- Apartment building
- Small Commercial (less than 1000 m2)
- Medium Commercial (1000 – 5000 m2)
- Large Commercial (greater than 5000 m2)
- Small Institutional (less than 1000 m2)
- Medium Institutional (1000 – 5000 m2)
- Large Institutional (greater than 5000 m2)

Time between submission and approval

- Less than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- over 9 months

Number of resubmissions required

- 1 resubmission
- 2 resubmissions
- 3+ resubmission

Pre-consultation required?

- Yes
- No

Impact of pre-consultation on processing time

- Delayed
- Accelerated
- No change
- N/A

Subject to panel or committee review?

- Yes
- No

Impact of committee/panel on processing time

- Delayed
- Accelerated
- No change
- N/A

Public meeting required?

- Yes
- No

Overall impact of SPA on integrity of building design?

- Positive
- Negative
- No change

Municipality 5

Development type:

- Multiple attached residential
- Apartment building
- Small Commercial (less than 1000 m2)
- Medium Commercial (1000 – 5000 m2)
- Large Commercial (greater than 5000 m2)
- Small Institutional (less than 1000 m2)
- Medium Institutional (1000 – 5000 m2)
- Large Institutional (greater than 5000 m2)

Time between submission and approval

- Less than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- over 9 months

Number of resubmissions required

- 1 resubmission
- 2 resubmissions
- 3+ resubmission

Pre-consultation required?

- Yes
- No

Impact of pre-consultation on processing time

- Delayed
- Accelerated
- No change
- N/A

Subject to panel or committee review?

- Yes
- No

Impact of committee/panel on processing time

- Delayed
- Accelerated
- No change
- N/A



Public meeting required?

- Yes
- No

Overall impact of SPA on integrity of building design?

- Positive
- Negative
- No change

**Question 4: Which are the top three (3) elements required for Site Plan Approval you most frequently receive comments on from municipalities?**

*(Please check only 3)*

- Access and provision for emergency vehicles
- Access features for persons with disabilities
- Bicycle parking
- Easement and road widening
- Exterior building materials
- Grading and servicing
- Green roofs
- Landscaping
- Lighting
- Off-street vehicular loading and parking facilities
- Plan detail (i.e. labels or notes to be added)
- Public walkways, paths, pedestrian access and street furniture
- Storage areas for garbage, waste, recycling and compost

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Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 5: Based on your experience, what are the top three (3) reasons that affect the timing of Site Plan Approval once the application has been submitted?**

*(Please check only 3)*

- Municipality deeming the application complete
- Circulation time of submission between departments
- Conflicting comments from different departments and agencies
- Difference in design philosophy (i.e. traditional versus modern; flexibility of guidelines) with municipal staff
- Scheduling and attending committee meetings
- Scheduling and attending public consultation meetings (where required)
- Significance of changes or additional work required
- Slow/lack of response from applicant with respect to suggested revisions
- Slow/lack of response from municipal staff
- Satisfying conditions of approval

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Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 6: Have you ever been required to alter an approved site plan due to information obtained at a later date? If yes, please describe the nature of the information and the resulting approval process.**

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**Question 7: Out of all Ontario municipalities you have worked in, where have you had the best experience with the Site Plan Approval process?**

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**Question 8. What aspects made this experience positive? (check all that apply)**

- Clarity regarding what developments require site plan approval
- Streamlining different application types (e.g. standard, complex, minor)
- Requirement of a pre-consultation meeting
- Clarity regarding submission requirements
- Minimal submission requirements
- Good coordination between reviewing departments
- Existence of a design review panel or site plan committee
- Comprehensive comments from staff
- Processing time matches the municipality's suggested time frame

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Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 9: What is your primary concern with the Site Plan Approval process in Ontario?**

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**Question 10: Please suggest one way you believe the Site Plan Approval process could be improved**

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## APPENDIX C SURVEY OF TARGETED PLANNING DIRECTORS

*The following questions were included in an online SurveyMonkey format.*

### Question 1: Please provide the following introductory details

What municipality are you representing: \_\_\_\_\_

Has your municipality recently revised its Site Plan Approval process? (Y/N): \_\_\_\_

Is your municipality initiating a review of the Site Plan Approval process? (Y/N): \_\_\_\_

If yes to either, what precipitated the revision or review? (please type N/A if not applicable):

\_\_\_\_\_

### Question 2: Which are the top three (3) elements required for Site Plan Approval you most frequently provide comments on?

- Access and provision for emergency vehicles
- Access features for persons with disabilities
- Architectural design
- Bicycle parking
- Easement and road widening
- Exterior building materials
- Grading and servicing
- Green roofs
- Landscaping
- Lighting
- Off-street vehicular loading and parking facilities
- Plan detail (i.e. labels or notes to be added)
- Public walkways, paths, pedestrian access and street furniture
- Storage areas for garbage, waste, recycling and compost

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Other: please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question 3: Based on your experience, what are the top three (3) reasons that affect the timing of Site Plan Approval once the application has been submitted?**

- Incomplete application
- Length of permitted circulation time for the departments/outside agencies
- Conflicting comments from different departments/outside agencies
- Slow/lack of response from applicant with respect to suggested revisions
- Slow/lack of response to circulation time frame from departments/outside agencies
- Difference in design philosophy (i.e. traditional versus modern; flexibility of guidelines) with applicant
- Significance of changes or additional work required by the applicant
- Scheduling and attending committee meetings
- Scheduling and attending public consultation meetings (where required)
- Satisfying conditions of approval

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Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question 4: In your municipality, does the Site Plan Approval process include a required pre-consultation meeting?**

- Yes
- No

If yes, what is the impact on processing time? \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 5: In your municipality, are Site Plan Approval applications subject to a panel or committee review?**

- Yes
- No

If yes, what is the impact on processing time? \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 6: In your municipality, are Site Plan Approval applications subject to a public meeting?**

- Yes
- No

If yes, what is the impact on processing time? \_\_\_\_\_



**Question 7: What aspects of your municipality's Site Plan Approval process do you consider the most positive and believe could be applied to improve the process in other municipalities? (check all that apply)**

- Clarity regarding what developments require site plan approval
- Streamlining different application types (e.g. standard, complex, minor)
- Requirement of a pre-consultation meeting
- Clarity regarding submission requirements
- Minimal submission requirements
- Good coordination between reviewing departments
- Existence of a design review panel or site plan committee
- Comprehensive comments from staff
- Processing time matches the municipality's suggested time frame

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Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question 8: For each of the building types listed in the left hand column below, please indicate general timing and number of submissions required**

Multiple attached residential

Time between submission and approval

- Less than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- over 9 months

Number of resubmissions required

- 1 resubmission
- 2 resubmissions
- 3+ resubmission

Apartment building

Time between submission and approval

- Less than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- over 9 months

Number of resubmissions required

- 1 resubmission
- 2 resubmissions
- 3+ resubmission

Small Commercial (less than 1000 m2)

Time between submission and approval

- Less than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- over 9 months

Number of resubmissions required

- 1 resubmission
- 2 resubmissions
- 3+ resubmission

Medium Commercial (1000 – 5000 m2)

Time between submission and approval

- Less than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- over 9 months

Number of resubmissions required

- 1 resubmission
- 2 resubmissions
- 3+ resubmission

Large Commercial (greater than 5000 m2)

Time between submission and approval

- Less than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- over 9 months

Number of resubmissions required

- 1 resubmission
- 2 resubmissions
- 3+ resubmission

Small Institutional (less than 1000 m2)

Time between submission and approval

- Less than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- over 9 months

Number of resubmissions required

- 1 resubmission
- 2 resubmissions
- 3+ resubmission

Medium Institutional (1000 – 5000 m2)

Time between submission and approval

- Less than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- over 9 months

Number of resubmissions required

- 1 resubmission
- 2 resubmissions
- 3+ resubmission

Large Institutional (greater than 5000 m2)

Time between submission and approval

- Less than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- over 9 months

Number of resubmissions required

- 1 resubmission
- 2 resubmissions
- 3+ resubmission

**Question 9: Where a subdivision and/or condominium process is also required, do you feel that there is overlap in the scope of the processes?**

- Yes
- No

Please specify:

**Question 10: What aspects of the Site Plan Approval process, if any, do you have concerns with? In what way(s) do you think this can be improved?**





