

Staff Report

Report To: City Council

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Meeting Date: October 7, 2024

Report Code: CS-24-085

Subject: Proposed County of Grey Centralized Planning Service Model

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CS-24-073, respecting comments on the County of Grey's proposed centralized planning service model, City Council:

1. Directs staff to provide a copy of this report in response to the County's request for comments and City Council's resolution on the matter, to Grey County Planning Staff, the County Clerk, the County's CAO and Deputy CAO;
2. Requests that the County implement the direction provided by County Council in considering Report PDR-CW-03-24 Planning Efficiencies Report and stop commenting on development applications within Primary Settlement Areas, including Owen Sound, to reduce duplication in the planning process unless there is a matter of particular relevance to the County;
3. Requests that the County develop a centralized planning service model that excludes Owen Sound as a fully serviced Primary settlement area;
4. Requests that the County consider a hybrid, phased approach to this model that would start with lower tiers that would benefit from

the model, especially for municipalities with sole practitioner planners or consultants, with opportunity for monitoring, feedback and evaluation;

5. Requests that the County, together with the City, consult with the Province on the proposed centralized planning services model prior to implementation and share any comments and/or feedback that may be received through this consultation with member municipalities; and
6. Requests that the County undertake an analysis of the Planning Ecology role examining implementation compared to financial performance, the volume of applications and offsetting fees and how the model is being received and implemented, and other matters considered relevant by County staff.

Highlights:

- On February 8, 2024, County of Grey Planning Staff presented Report [PDR-CW-03-24](#) to Grey County Council, respecting a Planning Efficiencies Discussion Paper developed by County Staff in consultation with staff from the nine member municipalities. The discussion paper provided the County and municipalities with recommendations and suggestions for implementation to create potential efficiencies in the planning process.
- On June 27, 2024, Grey County Council considered a report from County Staff (PDR-CW-27-24) in a closed session. Council directed County Staff to engage local municipal CAOs and Planning staff in discussion on a proposed centralized planning service delivery model and share the confidential report with member municipalities.
- A second closed meeting of Grey County Council, together with all lower-tier municipal Councils and CAOs, was held on August 8, 2024, to discuss the proposal. An open report ([PDR-CW-52-24](#)) was presented to Grey County Council on September 12, 2024, recommending that correspondence be sent to each member municipality in Grey County requesting feedback on the proposed centralized planning service model by October 18, 2024.
- This report provides an analysis of the County proposal by providing:
 - an overview of the planning framework in the Province, County of Grey and City of Owen Sound;

- a description of the City’s integrated Development Team model and current roles of the City’s Planning & Heritage Division;
 - a Description of the recent provincial changes in planning legislation;
 - an analysis by City staff of the benefits of the proposed centralized planning service model as identified by the County staff report; and
 - feedback on those topics requested by the County, as outlined in Report PDR-CW-52-54.
- Staff recommend that City Council request that the County develop a centralized planning service model that excludes Owen Sound and uses a phased approach that would start with lower tiers that would benefit from the model, especially for municipalities with sole practitioner planners or consultants, with opportunity for monitoring, feedback and evaluation.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

[Strategic Plan](#) Priority: This report supports the delivery of Core Service.

Climate and Environmental Implications:

There are no anticipated climate or environmental impacts.

Previous Report/Authority:

[County Report PDR-CW-03-24 \(February 8, 2024\)](#) – Planning Efficiencies Report including Draft Planning Efficiencies Discussion Paper

County Report PDR-CW-27-24 (June 27, 2024 – Closed Session) – Centralized Planning Service Delivery Model

[County Report PDR-CW-52-24](#) (September 12, 2024 – Open Session) – Investigating a Model for Planning Efficiencies and Shared Service Delivery

Background:

Previous Report on Planning Efficiency and Centralized Planning Service

On February 8, 2024, County of Grey Planning Staff presented Report [PDR-CW-03-24](#) to Grey County Council, respecting a Planning Efficiencies Discussion Paper developed by County Staff in consultation with staff from the nine member municipalities. The discussion paper provided the County and municipalities with recommendations and suggestions for implementation to create potential efficiencies in the planning process.

County process change recommendations include, among other matters:

- Limit County comments on Niagara Escarpment development permit applications, site plan control applications, minor variance applications, and municipal applications in settlement areas where there is no corresponding County application. More fulsome County comments, or technical comments could still be provided where: planning ecology comments are needed, where an application is on/or adjacent to a County Road or County-owned facility or where municipal staff have specifically requested additional comments.
- Delegate the approval of plans of subdivision/condominium to County staff, where there is municipal support for the application.
- Adopt a policy where public meetings are still required for plans of subdivision/condominium.
- Provide education and public consultation process changes to streamline the public process.

Recommendations for municipal process changes include, among other matters:

- Review existing pre-submission consultation by-laws and official plan policies with the goal of creating a transparent, thorough, effective, and finite process.
- Provide preliminary technical comments and direction as part of the pre-submission consultation process, but detailed analysis and peer reviews should not be mandatory during this process.
- Consider implementing pre-submission consultation application fees in a stratified manner.
- Process development applications concurrently where this can be achieved.
- Delegate certain planning approvals to municipal staff such as validation certificates, consents, temporary use by-laws, lifting of holding provisions, or minor zoning by-law amendments.

- Consider partnering with the County and neighbouring municipalities on staffing resources in order to fill gaps in the planning and development review process.
- Work with public works, operations, and asset management staff to maintain and refine capital infrastructure planning to reflect the growth needs of our communities and support future growth.

Many of the recommendations for municipal process efficiencies came from interviews with municipal staff, including City staff. All seven points have been implemented by the City, including the establishment of a comprehensive pre-consultation process and the delegation of certain Planning Act applications to City Staff, including undisputed consents, as defined by the City's Delegation of Powers and Duties By-law (see Staff Report [CS-21-120](#) and [CS-22-084](#)).

The Planning Efficiencies Discussion Paper briefly suggests examining other service delivery models of two-tier and single-tier municipalities across the Province to determine if Grey County and member municipalities should be considering alternative approaches.

Report PDR-CW-03-24 was approved by County Council, and Staff were directed to proceed with the County planning efficiencies recommendations outlined in the report, share the report with member municipalities, and continue to consult with member municipalities in Grey, as well as agencies, and the development community, to look for further areas for improvement to County or municipal planning processes.

To date, the County has not acted on the direction provided by County Council in February of 2024 to limit comments on applications within the City that are not on a County road or do not include a natural heritage feature or other county-specific interest.

On June 27, 2024, Grey County Council considered a report from County Staff (PDR-CW-27-24) in a closed session. Council directed County Staff to engage local municipal CAOs and Planning staff in discussion on a proposed centralized planning service delivery model and share the confidential report with member municipalities.

A second closed meeting of Grey County Council, together with all lower-tier municipal Councils and CAOs, was held on August 8, 2024, to discuss the proposal. County staff were directed in the closed session to further investigate the centralized planning service model.

City Planning & Heritage Staff were informed of the proposed centralized planning model in a meeting of Grey County Planners on August 9, 2024. Based on that presentation, comments on the proposal were to be submitted to the County by the end of September.

More recently, on August 21, 2024, a media release was issued by the County providing information that the potential servicing model was being investigated. An open report ([PDR-CW-52-24](#)) was presented to Grey County Council on September 12, 2024, recommending that correspondence be sent to each member municipality in Grey County requesting feedback on the proposed centralized planning service model by October 18, 2024.

City Staff appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback and information on which City Council can make a decision.

This report provides an analysis of the County proposal by providing:

- an overview of the planning framework in the Province, County of Grey and City of Owen Sound;
- a description of the City's integrated Development Team model and current roles of the City's Planning & Heritage Division;
- a Description of the recent provincial changes in planning legislation;
- an analysis by City staff of the benefits of the proposed centralized planning service model as identified by the County staff report; and
- feedback on those topics requested by the County, as outlined in Report PDR-CW-52-54.

Overview of the Provincial Land Use Planning Framework

In order to readily understand the proposed centralized planning service model, it is important to understand the current framework of the land use planning system in Ontario and how it informs the relationship between the County and its nine member municipalities.

Land use planning plays an important role in the development of complete communities. Through good planning, we work to manage and encourage growth and development while addressing important social, economic, and environmental issues.

Municipalities have been identified as key players in the land use planning system in Ontario. Land use planning and the decisions related to planning affect most other municipal activities, including servicing, transportation, building, parks, environment, bylaw enforcement and emergency services,

including fire. Decisions related to land use planning have a profound impact on growth and development and generating new revenue for municipalities. Good planning contributes to long-term, orderly growth and the efficient use of services.

The responsibility for planning in Ontario is shared between the Province and municipalities, including single-, upper-, and lower-tier municipalities. The Province sets the rules and overall policy direction for planning through the [Planning Act](#) and the [Provincial Policy Statement \(PPS\)](#).

The Ontario Planning Act

The *Planning Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13 is provincial legislation that sets out the ground rules for land use planning in Ontario. It describes how land uses may be controlled and who may control them. The purpose of the Planning Act is to:

- provide for planning processes that are fair by making them open, accessible, timely and efficient;
- provide for a land use planning system led by provincial policy;
- integrate matters of provincial interest into provincial and municipal planning decisions by requiring that all decisions be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement and conform/not conflict with provincial plans;
- encourage cooperation and coordination among various interests; and
- recognize the decision-making authority and accountability of municipal councils in planning.

The *Planning Act* provides the basis for considering provincial interests, preparing official plans and policies that will guide future development, establishing streamlined planning processes that emphasize local autonomy in decision-making, regulating and controlling land uses through zoning by-laws and minor variances, and dividing land into separate lots for sale or development through a plan of subdivision or consent.

Provincial Policy Statement

Under the *Planning Act*, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing may issue provincial statements on matters related to land use planning that are of provincial interest.

The [Provincial Policy Statement, 2024 \(PPS\)](#) applies provincewide and contains policy direction related to:

- growth and development;
- the use and management of resources;
- the protection of the environment; and
- public health and safety.

Municipalities are the primary implementers of PPS policies through:

- Official Plans;
- Zoning Bylaws; and
- decisions on other planning matters.

The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) stresses that a coordinated, integrated, and comprehensive approach should be used in dealing with planning matters within municipalities across lower, single, and/or upper tiers. Items noted in the PPS include:

- managing and promoting growth and economic development strategies;
- intensification targets;
- managing natural heritage features;
- waste management;
- natural and man-made hazards like former landfill locations;
- archaeological resource identification; and
- housing needs in accordance with provincial housing policies, including those that address homelessness.

This integrated and coordinated approach reflects the existing approach taken between the City and the County, with the County preparing county-wide policy regarding, for example, natural heritage, mapping former landfills, growth management, and housing.

Through local official plans, municipalities implement the PPS at the local level to achieve the community's economic, social and environmental objectives. Municipal decisions must be consistent with the PPS, which provides local flexibility on how best to achieve the provincial direction.

Recent amendments to the Provincial Policy Statement, now the Provincial Planning Statement, take effect October 20, 2024 and are discussed in this report.

County of Grey

The County, under the authority of [Ontario Regulation 518/98](#), acts in place of the Province. County responsibilities include approving a new Official Plan for the City and commenting on private and City-initiated Planning Act applications, as the Province, focused on the matters noted above that cross municipal boundaries such as natural heritage.

Historically, going back to before 2000, the County provided land use planning services for many of the lower-tier municipalities (not including Owen Sound) and had authority for consents and minor variances, zoning amendments, official plan amendments, and plans of subdivision. Over time, approval authority was delegated from County Council to lower-tier municipalities. Local official plans were added in addition to the County Official Plan to reflect the vision for growth in each community. The delegation of decision-making provided lower-tier municipalities with more control over land use planning decisions within the community where the change was being proposed. Furthermore, it allowed public consultation to be undertaken at the local level by municipal planners working with municipal councils.

When the City rejoined the County in 2001, the City retained all these approval authorities as Council felt having local control and autonomy in planning matters and development was fundamental to the growth and development of the community.

Currently, the lower tiers and County have the following authority relating to municipal planning:

Figure 1: Summary of Upper-tier and Lower-tier Approval Authority in Grey County (Source: County of Grey)

Municipality	Approval Authority		
	Consents, Minor Variances, Site Plans, Zoning By-laws & Zoning By-law Amendments	Official Plans & Amendments	Plans of Subdivision / Condominium
Chatsworth	Yes	N/A	No
Georgian Bluffs	Yes	Township adopts but the County approves	No
Grey Highlands	Yes	Municipality adopts but the County approves	No
Hanover	Yes	Town adopts but the County approves	No
Meaford	Yes	Municipality adopts but the County approves	No
Owen Sound	Yes	City approves most amendments but County approves new plans, five year reviews, and boundary expansions	Yes
Southgate	Yes	Township adopts but the County approves	No
The Blue Mountains	Yes	Town adopts but the County approves	No
West Grey	Yes	Municipality adopts but the County approves	No
Grey County	N/A	County approves most amendments but the Province approves new	Yes for all municipalities except Owen Sound

Municipality	Approval Authority		
	Consents, Minor Variances, Site Plans, Zoning By-laws & Zoning By-law Amendments	Official Plans & Amendments	Plans of Subdivision / Condominium
		plans and five year reviews	

Within the County of Grey, the City has a unique level of autonomy in that it has the authority to approve all planning applications except a new Official Plan, the 5-year Official Plan update, or a boundary expansion; these applications require approval from Grey County. This level of local autonomy has traditionally been a key consideration of City Council to support its vision toward growth and development reflecting local conditions.

City Development Team Approach to Planning Act Applications

In 2016, the City created a “Development Team” model of service delivery. The City’s Development Team is responsible for coordinating planning, building and growth-related engineering approvals in a team by providing integrated service to improve the customer service experience as well as efficiency and coordination. The City’s Engineering Services Division was moved to City Hall after the renovation in 2018 to support the work of the Development Team in growing the community. Positioning Planning and Development Engineering in the same building has allowed the relationships between Planning and Development Engineering staff to strengthen in recent years.

This model has been very well received by the development community. It supports the significant coordination and teamwork required between Planning, Engineering, Building and Corporate Services staff to facilitate positive growth in this community aligned with Council priorities.

Moving planning services to Grey County would disrupt this relationship and may potentially cause significant frustration for the development community as it would disconnect key staff (Planning) from the Development Team.

Current Roles and Responsibilities of the Planning & Heritage Division in Owen Sound

Attachment 1 provides a detailed summary of the roles and responsibilities of the Planning & Heritage Division. In summary, this includes:

Development

- Lead the City's Development Team including coordination between internal City divisions (Fire, Building, Finance, Clerks, Engineering Services, Public Works, By-law Enforcement, Asset Management). Key to this work is a strong working relationship with the development community;
- Process all planning applications from pre-consultation to final approval;
- Preparation and presentation of reports for Council and Committee of Adjustment;
- Detailed review for zoning compliance for building permits and sign permits (300+ per year);
- Review and approve business licence applications;
- Heritage permits;
- Support bylaw enforcement relating to various policy matters;
- Support and coordination around land sale;
- Provide comments on encroachment and other municipal applications; and
- In person inquiries and customer service at the Planning/Building counter.

Policy

- Draft, maintain and implement a wide policy framework including:
 - Official Plan;
 - Zoning Bylaw;
 - Community Improvement Plan (including Façade, Business Start-Up, Accessibility, Brownfield, Vacant Land, landscape);
 - Community Gardens;
 - Sidewalk Patios; and
 - Heritage Conservation Plans.
- The Planning and Heritage Division provides input on other City Plans, and the coordination of these plans with Planning and growth is important. Examples include:

- Transportation studies, including multimodal transportation planning;
- Servicing studies;
- 5-year capital planning for infrastructure, hydraulic reserve capacity allocations and management;
- development charges;
- short-term rental licensing; and
- business licensing, including food trucks.

Community Improvement Plan

The Planning & Heritage Division directly administers the City’s Community Improvement Plan, including the following programs:

- Façade & Structural Improvement Grant Program
- Accessibility Improvement Grant Program
- Start-up Space Leasehold Improvement Grant Program
- Landscaping & Property Improvement Grant Program
- Vacant Building Conversion & Expansion Grant Program

Grant applications are generally staff-delegated except for those that meet the criteria for consideration under the heritage merit category or where the grant funding is expected to exceed \$10,000. These applications are brought forward to the Community Services Committee for consideration, with final approval by City Council.

Agreement Management

The Planning & Heritage Division is responsible for the development, tracking, and administration of agreements related to Planning Act approvals, including site plans, consent agreements, subdivision agreements, and several agreements under the Community Improvement Plan program.

Implementation, monitoring and enforcement of agreements is a collaborative function of the City which is best done by an integrated team. However, it does require a lead division and staff captain to manage the process, including the negotiation of the agreement, logistics of agreement authorization, registration, long-term storage and archiving and finally, completion of the terms of the agreement, including ensuring compliance and the return of applicable securities.

The Planning & Heritage Division is the lead division responsible for the administration of most Planning Act-related agreements and, if not the lead, provides significant support to other divisions as the captain agreements.

Heritage Planning

Through provincial policies, the City maintains a heritage register and ensures that protected heritage property is conserved. Recent changes to the PPS, set to take effect in October, encourage municipalities to develop proactive strategies for conserving significant built heritage resources and cultural heritage landscapes.

In Owen Sound, land use planning has included heritage for several decades. Cultural heritage resources provide social, economic, environmental and educational value that contribute to the City's identity and character. Planning & Heritage staff ensure development is consistent with the PPS and the City OP, respecting cultural heritage resources. Heritage staff maintain the City's Heritage Register, which details properties that have been identified for their design or physical value, associative or historic value and/or contextual value. Heritage staff work with property owners to support the long-term protection and maintenance of these important resources through heritage permits and the CIP program.

The County does not provide this service, and heritage planning does not appear to be considered/included in the new model.

Site Plan Approval

A significant volume of the work for Owen Sound Planning staff relates to processing and managing of Site Plan Approval applications.

Attachment 2 shows the planning applications in the last 5 years (2019-2024 to date).

Site Plan Approval is the final step in the land use planning process prior to the issuance of a building permit. Every site plan report requires significant coordination and consideration of servicing infrastructure. The coordination and integration of planning and development engineering is important to an efficient planning approvals system.

Recent examples of site plan approvals in the City include the servicing considerations for Skydev, Smart Centres (Calloway) or 10th Avenue Estates Inc. Every site plan requires detailed review and coordination to ensure the best use of City resources and life safety considerations for matters such as

fire flows, optimization of infrastructure, transportation networks and stormwater management.

Where infrastructure planning is out of sync with development planning, significant issues with servicing capacity limit a community's ability to accommodate growth and development.

The coordination and cooperation of staff within various City Divisions who support the work of the Development Team is vital to long-term sustainable growth that optimizes the efficient and effective use of infrastructure. Mistakes or errors at the time of site plan approval could result in a development with insufficient water capacity or fire fighting capacity and result in public harm and liability for the corporation.

In 2023, all site plan approval authority was delegated to staff by the Province of Ontario.

Subdivision/Consent Agreements

The City is the approval authority for both consent and plans of subdivision. These types of applications are typically approved subject to conditions such as the detailed design of infrastructure, including appropriate water, sanitary sewer and stormwater management services, road layout, as well as parkland contributions and landscape design. Planning staff facilitate the process of the applicant working with internal and external agencies to achieve the fulfillment of the conditions. At the end of the process, subdivision agreements between the developer and City detail the subdivision design and ensure that construction occurs in accordance with the approved plans.

Coordination between Engineering Services and Planning is key in ensuring that subdivisions are designed and constructed according to the Council's approval.

Staff has been delegated final approval of subdivisions and consents, and the integration of the City's Development Team ensures that the city's long-term interests are maintained through subdivision agreements.

Proposed Centralized County Planning Service Model

The proposed centralized planning service model would see all municipal planners from all nine member municipalities, with the exception of Directors and administrative staff, join the County.

The preliminary planning service delivery model is outlined in the County report (PDR-CW-27-24). Planning services are proposed to be split into development planning and policy planning, with a senior manager overseeing each division.

The County reports states this is “an effort to explore potential opportunities to enhance and improve the efficiency of planning services being provided by the County and member municipalities”.

The stated purpose of the proposed policy division is to assist with lower-tier Official Plan and Zoning By-law updates, noting that the use of specialized consultants would continue to be required for certain technical studies, like Development Charges Background Studies and By-law updates. It is unclear if, but anticipated that, each member municipality would continue to be responsible for the cost of these studies individually.

The development services model is based on a model similar to Bruce County. It is proposed that Grey County would be divided into four (4) hubs, serving Grey’s municipalities as follows:

1. Northwest hub – serving Georgian Bluffs and Owen Sound;
2. Northeast hub – serving Meaford and the Blue Mountains;
3. Southwest hub – serving Chatsworth, Hanover, and West Grey; and
4. Southeast hub – serving Grey Highlands and Southgate.

The staffing model for the hub including Owen Sound and Georgian Bluffs would include the following:

- County Director of Planning (existing);
- Deputy Director/Manager of Development who would oversee all 4 hubs (9 lower tiers);
- One Senior Planner, one Intermediate Planner and one Planning Technician;
- One of the two current planning ecologists is shown in the Owen Sound/Georgian Bluffs hub; and
- Additionally, each hub has a floater planner who would be assigned based on workload.

It is proposed that the approval authority for Planning Act applications would remain the same as currently exists. The City would retain approval authority of all Planning Act applications except a new Official Plan, the 5-year Official Plan update, or a boundary expansion.

Analysis:

This section analyzes the proposed centralized planning service model in consideration of recent legislative amendments to the Planning Act and Provincial Policy Statement. It also provides City Staff comments on the potential benefits of this system as outlined by the County staff report and provides information on the feedback items requested by the County, as outlined in Reports PDR-CW-27-24 and PDR-CW-52-24.

Legislative Authority and Recent Amendments

In 2021, the Province established the Provincial Housing Affordability Task Force to recommend measures to increase housing supply in Ontario. The Provincial task force released their report in 2022 and made 55 recommendations to the province.

In response to this report, the Province has passed a series of amendments to the Planning Act, among other pieces of legislation, with the stated goal of streamlining the development approvals process to increase housing and infrastructure development across Ontario.

Among the legislative amendments was Bill 23, the More Homes Built Faster Act, introduced in 2022. Among other matters, the More Homes Built Faster Act had a stated goal of speeding up municipal processes, with the following statement and direction issued by the Province:

“Speeding up Municipal Processes

In some areas with upper and lower-tier municipalities (for example, the City of Mississauga, which is part of the Region of Peel), both levels of government have input into development approvals. We are proposing to focus responsibility for land use policies and approvals in the local, lower-tier municipality. This would give the public more influence over decisions, clarify responsibilities and improve efficiency.”

Upper-tier planning responsibilities for the Region of Peel, the Region of Halton, and the Region of York were revoked as of July 1, 2024, through Bill 185 with authority remaining with the lower-tier or local level. The Regions of Waterloo, Simcoe, Durham and Niagara are proposed to have their upper-tier planning responsibilities removed on a future date to be named by regulation. This change may also be proposed by the Province for other municipalities where planning occurs at both the upper and lower tier such as

Grey County at a future time however, the provincial focus has generally been in larger urban areas within the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Recently, the Province also introduced a new, 2024 Provincial Planning Statement (PPS) that will come into force and effect on October 20, 2024. Under the 2024 PPS, planning authorities will be required to base population and employment growth forecasts on Ontario Population Projections published by the Ministry of Finance. Under previous iterations of the PPS, the responsibility for the allocation of population, housing, and employment projections was to be undertaken by the upper-tier municipality in consultation with lower tiers. This responsibility now rests with the Ministry of Finance.

The general provincial direction through recent legislative amendments appears to be directing planning responsibilities to lower-tier municipalities. The City and County should work toward fulfilling the spirit of the Provincial direction to focus responsibility for land use policies and approvals in the local, lower-tier municipality, giving the public more influence over decisions, clarifying responsibilities, and improving efficiency. This would also be consistent with the recommendation approved by County Council in report PDR-CW-03-24 on Planning Efficiencies where County comments were to be limited in settlement areas.

Through Staff Report PDR-CW-27-24, County Staff have acknowledged that the proposed centralized planning services model may not result in cost savings or speedier decisions whereas these are both stated goals by the Province. As demonstrated in the balance of this report, the City has a proven track record of processing Planning Act applications within the time period prescribed by the Planning Act and the proposed centralized County planning services model may negatively impact the current level of service.

Planning Staff are recommending that Council request that the County, together with City representatives, consult with the Province on the proposed centralized planning services model prior to implementation and share any comments and/or feedback that may be received through this consultation with member municipalities.

Other recent amendments to the Planning Act have generally removed appeal rights for the public. The removal of these appeal rights puts the onus on local decision-makers to ensure that public concerns are appropriately addressed through the various Planning Act processes. Planning staff that are

accessible to the general public and fundamentally linked to the local municipality where decisions are made are integral to supporting the public interest. This function is best served at the local level.

Review of Anticipated Benefits – Report PDR-CW-27-24 (Closed)

County Report PDR-CW-27-24 (Closed) presented to Grey County Council on June 27, 2024, identified that the proposed centralized planning service model would realize the following benefits:

Staff Recruitment and Attraction (including Retention)

The County Staff Report notes that some municipal CAOs have expressed frustration with their ability to both attract and retain qualified planning staff and that many planners would value working in a larger team environment that a centralized planning service model could provide.

City Staff Comment: City Planning Staff acknowledge that the proposed centralized planning service delivery model could provide real benefits for smaller, more rural lower-tier municipalities that currently have smaller planning departments comprised of only one or two staff members.

Like some other professions, it is acknowledged that provincially there is a shortage of qualified and experienced planners that can make recruitment and retention difficult. The City has not experienced the same challenges associated with staff attraction and retention for full-time positions specific to the Planning & Heritage Division.

Resiliency to Short-term Staffing Changes and Potential Cost Savings

The County Staff Report notes that the proposed centralized planning service model would provide greater resiliency to short-term staffing changes (for example, where a staff member is on leave or a position is vacant), by having a larger team of staff to temporarily fill in. For municipalities that have been unable to attract staff or fill vacant position, many have been utilizing consulting resources which come at an additional cost.

City Staff Comment: As with Staff attraction and retention, the City has not experienced issues in recruitment during short-term staff vacancies (e.g., parental leaves). The City has been able to attract and retain well-qualified staff due to the urban nature of Owen Sound, the diversity of the matters that Planning & Heritage addresses, and the attractiveness of Owen Sound as a regional centre as a place to live and work. The City has used various models to address short-term (one year or less) vacancies, including the use of a consultant or contract position.

The structure of the development team and the support within this team are key elements supporting staff success and retention. As a City Planner, having the opportunity to work on and apply knowledge across a range of applications and processes also benefits retention. Staff do not get pigeonholed into a particular set of tasks, which may be a risk within a larger structure.

The City has also hosted high school and University Co-op students. This has been a positive experience for the students and the City in establishing its reputation as an employer and in developing future staff.

Reducing Duplication

The County Staff Report notes that there is currently duplication in Grey's current planning delivery model. At present, there are instances where a municipal planner and a Grey County planner are working on the related development application. For example, when the County and a member municipality receive a plan of subdivision and zoning by-law amendment applications, then both the County and municipal planner read the same technical reports and background studies to inform their respective planning recommendations. Although the municipal planner is reviewing the application through a municipal lens, and the County planner is reviewing the application through a County lens, it does result in some duplication.

City Staff Comment: City Staff support efforts to reduce duplication and streamline the development approvals process.

As noted in the Background section of this report, the County Planning Efficiency Report (PDR-CW-03-24) presented to Grey County Council in February of this year made recommendations for both the County and municipal staff to achieve planning efficiencies based on, among other things, interviews with other staff.

The City has worked to implement all seven (7) recommendations at the lower-tier level, including establishing a comprehensive pre-consultation process to provide clarity to developers on the requirements for complete Planning Act applications, and the delegation of certain technical planning matters to City Staff including undisputed consents, final approval for draft plan of subdivision, and the execution of technical agreements, including Site Plan and Subdivision Agreements.

The County Planning Efficiency Report made recommendations to achieve planning efficiencies at the County level. This included, among other matters, limiting County comments on Niagara Escarpment development permit applications, site plan control applications, minor variance applications, and municipal applications in settlement areas where there is no corresponding County application. More fulsome County comments or technical comments could still be provided where ecology comments are needed, where an application is on/or adjacent to a County Road or County-owned facility or where municipal staff have specifically requested additional comments.

Grey County approved the recommendation of the County Staff Report (PDR-CW-03-24), which provided direction to Staff to implement the County planning efficiencies recommendations outlined in the report. However, since February 2024, City Planning Staff have continued to receive detailed and lengthy comments from County Staff on development applications where there are no matters of natural heritage or proximity to a County road or facility. Comments received from the County on recent minor variance and infill consent approval applications are attached as Attachment 3.

The comments provided by County Staff result in duplication in the process. Rather than uploading the entirety of planning services to the County, immediate efficiency in the planning process, with no disruption, could be realized by eliminating these comments, particularly within Primary Settlement Areas where the County Official Plan permits a wide range of land

uses and generally defers to the policy direction as provided in the local, lower-tier Official Plan. This would have the added benefit of allowing County staff time to support municipalities that would benefit from County support in their day-to-day planning work.

City Planning Staff recommend that City Council request that the County implement the direction previously provided by County Council to reduce duplication in the planning process by removing commenting on development applications within Primary Settlement Areas, including Owen Sound, as soon as possible. Comments could still be provided by County Staff where a development proposal has frontage or access onto a County Road, abuts County-owned lands, or requires natural heritage review, as noted in the County's Planning Efficiencies Discussion Paper.

In the City's context, the County would still be responsible for approving a new or 5-year Official Plan review, acting as the Province, to ensure that matters of provincial interest that cross municipal boundaries are reflected in that Plan; however, implementation of these policies would be primarily left to City Staff and City Council in making and implementing decisions.

Furthermore, the County Staff Report acknowledges that only a County centralized planning service delivery model has been investigated at this time. The County has not explored a hybrid model and the potential benefits this type of system could provide. For example, fully serviced primary settlement areas that have their own Official Plans, like Owen Sound, could be left out of the model. A hybrid model would allow the County to provide planning services for the more rural lower-tier municipalities like Chatsworth and Georgian Bluffs. Under this approach, the County could work towards developing a single Official Plan for these areas. Given that rural areas are often characterized by agricultural lands, natural heritage and aggregate resources, a centralized County planning service model could provide real benefits as it relates to reducing duplication in policy (i.e., eliminating multiple Official Plans) and providing consistency in the application of policy. Following the consolidation of the Official Plans, the County could also explore consolidating Zoning By-laws for these areas to further improve efficiency and the standardization of rural areas across the County.

Ability to Provide Specialized Skillsets

The County Staff Report notes that having a centralized planning department may lead to specialization within individual planning fields. For example, many municipalities would not be able to justify hiring their own policy planner, but a centralized model could offer the ability to have policy planners on staff who would serve all nine municipalities.

City Staff Comment: The City of Owen Sound has a unique position, serving as an urban regional service centre for many rural areas of the County. As a fully serviced, urban settlement area, the City faces unique challenges as compared to other member municipalities within Grey. Often, when City Planning Staff require specialized advice with a planning matter, we look to peers or consultants with experience in an urban area of practice for this advice, through our professional network.

The City's Official Plan allows the City to pass along peer review costs to the applicant where this is required and staff do not have this skill set. For example, this has been done recently with Transportation studies.

Knowledge Sharing, Training and Problem Solving

The County Staff Report notes that a centralized planning model could provide better information sharing and knowledge application among staff and may also create training efficiencies, in terms of staff learning from one another and taking part in group training opportunities.

City Staff Comment: The Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) is the recognized voice of Ontario's planning profession with over 4,600 members who work in government, private practice, universities, and not-for-profit agencies in the fields of urban and rural development, community design, environmental planning, transportation, health, social services, heritage conservation, housing, and economic development.

There is a large and diverse network of professionals who also support each other through this network.

Recent graduates of University planning programs are required to become a student member of the Ontario Professional Planners Institute while attending university. Once they have completed an accredited planning program and are working in a responsible planning role, they are eligible to apply to the [Professional Standards Board](#) to begin the certification process for a Candidate Membership. To move from candidate to full member can

take 3 years and as many as seven years. During this candidacy period, they are required to work with a mentor Registered Professional Planner and log relevant land use planning experience. The final step to designation includes an in-person oral examination before a panel of peers.

Once a member is qualified, there are professional standards of practice and a requirement for continuous professional learning (CPL) each year, related to planning.

OPPI offers courses and events, digital learning, an open-forum webinar series, and a forum for questions with responses from peers across the province.

The County of Grey does a good job of hosting meetings on a quarterly basis to share information, draft policies and best practices. These meetings should continue as this allows another avenue for information sharing and networking.

The planning profession, like other accredited professional practices, has a well-established network of professionals who support each other and the ongoing professional development of their members.

Consistency in Process and Application of Policy

Lastly, the County Staff Report notes that a centralized planning service delivery model should provide for greater consistency in staff recommendations between municipalities.

City Staff Comment: The [Planning Act](#) (the Act) is provincial legislation that sets out the ground rules for land use planning in Ontario. It describes how land uses may be controlled, and who may control them.

The purpose of the Act is to:

- provide for planning processes that are fair by making them open, accessible, timely and efficient;
- promote sustainable economic development in a healthy natural environment within a provincial policy framework;
- provide for a land use planning system led by provincial policy;
- integrate [matters of provincial interest](#) into provincial and municipal planning decisions by requiring that all decisions be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement and conform/not conflict with provincial plans;
- encourage co-operation and coordination among various interests; and

- recognize the decision-making authority and accountability of municipal councils in planning

The Provincial Policy Statement (to be replaced in October by the Provincial Planning Statement) provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. As a key part of Ontario’s policy-led planning system, the PPS sets the policy foundation for regulating the development and use of land province-wide, helping achieve the provincial goal of meeting the needs of a fast-growing province while enhancing the quality of life for all Ontarians. Municipal official plans are the most important vehicle for the implementation of the PPS and for achieving comprehensive, integrated, and long-term planning.

The consistency required to implement planning locally is provided by the Ontario Planning Act and Provincial Planning Statement. The PPS is to be applied, and decisions must be consistent with this Plan. The PPS notes that municipal Official Plans are the most important vehicle for implementing provincial direction followed by local Zoning Bylaws. Municipal decisions are required to conform to the goals, objectives and policies of local official plans.

The framework exists in Ontario for a consistent interpretation and application of policy.

If the County is seeking more consistency, it could consider reducing the number of Official Plans and making one County Official Plan, as well as potentially one Zoning By-law for areas that are more rural in nature and that are interested in and would benefit from a joint planning model.

Requested Feedback – Report PDR-CW-52-24 (Open)

Report PDR-CW-52-24 presented to Grey County Council on September 12, 2024, requested feedback on the proposed centralized planning service model, including the following key topics:

- Service delivery and customer service
- In-person office hours and location of staff
- Impact on other departments and staff
- Questions on the development application process and reporting to municipal councils and committees
- Financial, IT (software), legal or human resources matters
- Municipal record keeping

- Municipal agreements
- Timelines or transition considerations
- Communications and reporting between County and municipal staff
- Future memorandum of understanding considerations
- Any other feedback or questions

Below, each of these points is discussed in turn. At this time, given the level of unknowns with the proposed centralized planning service model, City Staff are unable to provide full comments on each of the topics requested. Information may be required from other divisions and departments, such as Records Management, IT, and Human Resources.

Service delivery and customer service

As noted in the 'Background' section of this report, the proposed model includes a Director of Planning and a proposed Deputy Director/Senior Manager of Planning. These two positions would be assigned to all four (4) hubs and it can be assumed that 25% of their time would be spent supporting the City and Georgian Bluffs.

A Senior Planner, Intermediate Planner, and Planning Technician are to be assigned to the Owen Sound/Georgian Bluffs hub, together with a Planning Ecologist and a Planning floater.

It merits note, that the Planning Ecologist will not be solely dedicated to the review of development applications within the Owen Sound and Georgian Bluffs hub rather, the nine-member municipalities within Grey currently share the two (2) Planning Ecologists:

1. Planning Ecologist (North) – Georgian Bluffs, Chatsworth, The Blue Mountains, West Grey
2. Planning Ecologist (South) – Owen Sound, Meaford, Hanover, Grey Highlands, Southgate

The Planning Ecologist roles currently exist at the County and were hired in 2023 following the provincial changes to Conservation Authority Mandates so that the County natural heritage policies (part of an upper-tier mandate) could be applied consistently across the county. The local planners were consulted on this model and supported the idea. No one municipality in the County has the volume of work required to support a full-time dedicated person. It merits note, that these planners were intended to be funded through application revenues and not be supported by the tax levy. A review

of these positions, the volume of applications and offsetting fees and how the model is being received and implemented should be completed. Assigning the ecologist to the proposed Owen Sound/Georgian Bluffs hub, further reduces the level of service that would be provided to support Owen Sound, with potential negative impacts on application timelines.

The assignment of Planning floaters to each individual hub is proposed to be determined, based on workload.

The following table details the proposed division of roles within the County model compared to the current City model. The county model is anticipated to provide the City with approximately 2.64 FTE, compared to the current City model, which provides 4.2 FTE staff. The proposed County model may result in nearly a 50 per cent decrease in the hours of full-time staff dedicated to planning and the processing of development applications within the City. This has the potential to result in significant negative impacts on the timely processing of development applications, given that the amount of policy work and volume of development applications currently being experienced in the City provides a sufficient workload for existing staff.

Proposed County Model		Current City Model
Director – shared over entire County (assuming the County director has a significant workload and will not add significant support for each planning hub)		Director of Community Services (spends 40% time on Planning and Development) (0.4 FTE)
Deputy Director/Manager of Development (shared with all 9 municipalities) (0.111 FTE)	Manager of Policy (shared with all 9 municipalities) (0.111 FTE)	Manager of Planning & Heritage 1.0 FTE
Senior Planner (shared with Georgian Bluffs) (0.5 FTE)	Senior Policy Planner (shared with all 9 municipalities) (0.111 FTE)	Senior Planner 1.0 FTE

Proposed County Model		Current City Model
Intermediate Planner (shared with Georgian Bluffs) (0.5 FTE)	Policy Planner (shared with all 9 municipalities) (0.111 FTE)	Junior Planner (1.0 FTE)
Planner/Planning Technician (shared with Georgian Bluffs) (0.5 FTE)		Development Coordinator (0.3 FTE)
Planning Ecologist (shared with 5 of the 9 municipalities) (0.2 FTE)		Planning Ecologist (shared with 5 of the 9 municipalities) (0.2 FTE)
Floater (shared with Georgian Bluffs, or could be assigned to an entirely different hub, based on workload) (0.5 FTE)		Deputy Clerk/Secretary Treasurer of the Committee of Adjustment (0.5 FTE)
2.311 FTE	0.333 FTE	4.2 FTE
Total County Model - 2.644 FTE		Total Current City Model - 4.2 FTE

The table above does not consider the hours of GIS Staff. The City has one GIS Staff person who provides support to the Planning & Heritage Division and the work of the Development Team by preparing schedules and maps for reports and notices as well as maintaining the City's GIS information including planning policy (OP and Zoning), servicing, parks, trees and trails. The County has a GIS Department however, it is unclear how they would be

integrated into the proposed model, if at all. Additionally, while the above table includes FTE hours of Planning Technicians, the City does not include Planning Technicians in considering the compliment of planners.

Given the complexity of planning matters, the County model, which includes the use of technicians who are not normally Registered Professional Planners (RPP) or candidate members, could further reduce the service level.

The amount of staff time in the County model dedicated to policy planning is less than a 0.5 FTE. The County report acknowledges that consultants may be required to support this policy work. This will further prevent the City from directly steering policy development to ensure that it is consistent with the City's long-term strategic vision.

As evidenced in the table above, the service level reductions include fewer staff and staff who have lower qualifications than the current model. Given the complexity of planning applications in the City, this could be a significant issue.

The County Staff Report PDR-CW-27-24 also provides a summary of other County planning staffing models with Grey County noted as having 5 planners. In total, the report indicates that there are 26 planners in Grey County (including lower tiers) to serve a population of 100,905. This is a ratio of 1 planner per 3,880 population. (Note: This ratio does not include directors in lower tiers who have portfolios that extend beyond planning or administrative support).

If this ratio is applied to Owen Sound, the City would have 5.6 planners. The City has 3 planners, which is lower than other Grey County municipalities and the County based on population. The City's Planning & Heritage Division is already operating with an efficient level of Planning Staff, as compared to other Grey County municipalities, and under the proposed centralized planning service model, staffing would be further reduced.

The recent City Service Review analysis of the Planning & Heritage Division by a third party concluded that the cost of this division was in the mid to low range, falling between the 28th and 57th percentile (2018-2020). The City strives to be in the mid-range for costs in comparison to other similar communities. (It should be noted that the funding for the Community Improvement Plan is included in the Planning & Heritage Division costs, which inflated this cost comparison). The City's cost to provide land use planning & heritage is responsible.

The City's Development Team approach implemented in 2016 provides exceptional customer service to the development community.

Planning Staff are also available to answer questions and inquiries at the front counter of City Hall, Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. This level of service differs greatly from other lower tiers in Grey County and predominately benefits members of the public who require basic zoning information to build a deck, shed, or small addition and allows collaboration among staff.

The proposed centralized planning model would result in reduced staff hours to continue to provide this service five (5) days per week and/or would result in customers needing to visit more than one location to obtain the necessary information, thereby reducing the level of customer service and the integrated model which is the centre of the Development Team approach.

Impact on other municipal departments and staff

The potential impact on other municipal departments and staff should be a significant consideration for the City. As a fully serviced settlement area, this report has noted that many development applications within the City require significant coordination with Engineering Services and Public Works and, Building Divisions. Many communities that are more rural in nature use consulting engineers or do not undertake significant engineering reviews of development applications because they are not serviced by municipal water, sanitary sewer and stormwater systems.

The integrated and coordinated work of the Planning & Heritage Division, together with the Engineering Services & Public Works and Building Divisions, is vital. In 2024, from January to August 19 there were 55 meetings relating to development (78 hours of meetings). Only 3 hours did not include Engineering and/or Building together with the Planning & Heritage staff. The Director of Community Services attends these meetings as well and provides significant support in coordinating interests across these divisions and moving applications along within the process.

The proposed model will impact the integrated approach established by the City and may result in a disjointed approach and potentially significant frustration for developers.

The proposed model will also result in a disjointed approach, as the City's divisions, including Building, Public Works, and Engineering, would need to

coordinate with County planners rather than other City staff. This may result in additional time/resources to provide responses, create confusion, and impact consistency in the process, all of which will lead to frustration among staff, Council, the public, and the development community.

The work of the Planning & Heritage Division is described in Attachment 1. This other work of the Planning & Heritage staff may be considered “planning adjacent work”. Municipal planners serve many other roles beyond development application processing and policy review. Planning staff are also responsible for:

- Cultural heritage (as required by the OHA), including administering HPTR program, heritage designations, heritage permits;
- Community improvement plan- Policy development and application processing;
- Sidewalk Patios;
- Administering community garden policy;
- Administering off-street patio guidelines and licensing/agreements
- Building Permit review; and
- Property inquiry requests.

Planning Staff also provide review/input on:

- Parks planning (e.g., Harrison Park Master Plan);
- Development Charges By-law Updates;
- City capital projects (e.g., Downtown River Precinct, Alpha Street Reconstruction);
- Transportation Plans, Servicing Master Plans; and
- Encroachments and potential land sales.

The availability of the Planning staff within the proposed County model to support this work is not clear. It is unlikely that the planning adjacent work would be supported by Planning staff that are employed by the County.

On many special projects, the City uses cross-department, multifunctional teams. This type of team approach, with a variety of educational backgrounds and experience, results in positive project outcomes. Again, if Planning staff were to transition to the County, this type of work may need to be completed by the other City staff or by outside consultants.

Questions on the development application process, and reporting to municipal councils and committees

The model, as currently proposed, provides little information on site plan control and heritage planning.

Site Plan Approval is detailed and is the final step in the land use planning process prior to issuance of a building permit. This step has now been delegated to staff (mandated by the Province), and the coordination and cooperation of staff within various City Divisions who support the work of the development team is critical to long-term sustainable growth that optimizes the use of infrastructure. The result of site plan approval often includes financial considerations through Site Plan and Servicing Agreements. It would be challenging to ensure that County staff are ensuring the best interests of the city were respected in these approvals and that they were integrated with City capital planning.

This detailed and technical process is integral to ensuring proper servicing, transportation considerations, pedestrian connectivity, stormwater management, accessibility, landscaping etc. Due to the technical nature of site plan approvals, this application type is generally always processed by lower-tier municipal staff. County staff comment on site plan approval applications (see notes above re County staff commenting) but otherwise are not involved in the process. Many more rural areas do not use the site plan tool that is fundamental in a more urban context.

Within the Bruce County Model, site plan approval remains with the lower-tier municipalities. For example, the Town of Saugeen Shores, a lower-tier municipality within Bruce County, has a planning staff of four people, at the local level to support the development work around site plan approval, policy development and economic development (i.e., CIP) outside of the County planning system.

It is unclear if the County model would anticipate Site Plan Approval at the County or municipal level. Given that the proposed County model is based on the Bruce County model, it is likely that the City would need to have staff working locally to undertake site plan approval. This would be a cost outside the County model.

As noted, several other matters have been delegated to staff by the Council, including technical Planning Act applications, such as final approval of Plans of Subdivisions and undisputed consents. Significant areas of coordination

and financial considerations would be made difficult with Planning staff as employees of Grey County.

Financial, IT (Software), Legal or Human Resources Matters

The City has various software programs that would require integration. The City is currently undergoing significant expense and effort to acquire and implement the Cloud Permit Planning module. Although several other municipalities are using the Cloud Permit Planning and Building module, there is no guarantee that the proposed County planning model will incorporate the existing lower-tier software applications and may require municipalities to switch to a new system chosen by the County.

It is understood that the City will no longer have control over who is placed in planner positions. Recruitment and hiring will be done by the County HR division, which will select the best candidate for the County team. The recruitment decisions made by the County may not necessarily consider local team dynamics. This may be a concern for the City, as staff are very familiar with processes, local policy, and the public interest and have strong working relationships with other City staff. A new model could significantly and negatively impact this. As was noted earlier, the significant support the Planning team offers other divisions and projects would not likely continue in the new proposed County model.

The County closed report noted: "Although all staff will have a position (not administration, GIS or Directors) moving forward, there may be some roles which staff are appointed into and others for which an internal competition is needed. For example, some entry-level planners may automatically assume an entry-level planner position in one of the new hubs. However, other planners currently in an entry-level role but with a few years' experience may choose to 'compete' for one of the new intermediate planner positions".

City staff are well qualified and experienced and would compete well for any role within the proposed County model. The potential loss of current staff is a concern in terms of continuity and knowledge regarding City policy, process and public interest.

The City makes an effort to invest in the education and development of staff. This supports retention and keeps good people. The last two Directors of Community Services have been developed through the Planning Division. This is a group of staff who have the education and background to become leaders in the corporation.

The Senior and Intermediate/Junior Planners are members of CUPE 1189. The Union may have concerns regarding losing members.

The City's Human Resources Division or Legal Services are best suited to address this issue with Council.

Municipal agreements (e.g., site plan, subdivision agreements)

See previous comments on site plan and subdivision agreements and issues for these to be negotiated by County staff. These are staff-delegated matters, and this could create issues for the Council if this agreement negotiation is done by staff who are County rather than City employees. If Council supports this work being done by City staff, the City can retain the current model or may need to hire new staff to process site plan and subdivision applications, approvals and agreements subsequent to current Planning staff being assumed by the County.

Any other feedback or questions

Comments from City staff include the following:

- A key part of a planner's role and decisions of Council is to understand and consider the public good. Removal of planners from the community that will be impacted by Council's decision on Planning Act matters may have a negative impact on understanding and representing the public interest.
- Provincial direction acknowledges that planning is best done at the lower-tier municipal level.
- The County model proposes separating policy planning from development planning. While this is a practice in larger planning departments, there is a real benefit to having those who undertake development planning also participate in policy development. Knowing how a policy will be implemented and will 'work on the ground' is key to developing good policy. Recently, the City of Kingston has identified the separation of policy planning from development planning as creating issues in the approvals process and timelines.
- Official Plan policies for servicing outside of settlement areas have been important to maintaining the integrity of the urban settlement areas, preventing sprawl and unsustainable growth, and eroding the function of the City as a primary settlement area. The City has made significant investments in the water and wastewater infrastructure and other linear assets. Ensuring that these services are preserved for the

growth of the City is important. If the proposed model moves forward, it could potentially open the door for a review of these policies as policy planning for the City may be done by County staff.

- In the past, the City has appealed decisions of the Township of Georgian Bluffs. If staff are in a hub that includes planning for Georgian Bluffs and Meaford, this has the potential to set staff up to be in some conflicts between political decision-makers that may jeopardize their professional standard of practice as required by OPPI.
- City staff have been hired and practice planning in an urban, fully serviced context. They may not have experience in the types of planning matters that would be common in more rural and agricultural areas, such as Minimum Distance Separations, Pit and Quarry applications, etc. These staff are practicing in an urban area as that is their interest.

Accountability

Staff would be County employees and accountable to Grey County. Currently, the City Manager and Directors establish priorities for staff work plans, and this change will likely result in less control by the City over staff priorities. Being accountable to the County administrative structure will impact staff's relationship with the City Council.

As County staff, planners will have their obligation to that employer and their professional standards. Staff's accountability and willingness to undertake the seamless integration together with other staff like Engineering or Building may be challenging over time.

The current staff has a strong working relationship with their peers in other City divisions. These staff may not be assigned to Owen Sound, which will make interaction much more challenging. Going forward, the City would not be part of the hiring process, and this integration and fit for the City may be challenging or have conflicting objectives.

The direction provided by a County-led planning staff may not align with City interests or the longer-term City Strategic Plan.

Employee Satisfaction

The results of the City’s Employee Engagement Survey show that this group of staff is engaged and satisfied. The transfer of Planning Staff to the County would result in the loss of an educated group that provides input and contribution to cross-departmental projects, including capital projects, parks planning, licensing and regulations and development charges.

Based on the results of the recent staff survey, this is a group of staff who are highly engaged with their job, their work unit and department. They find their work enjoyable and are proud to be associated with their work unit. This group has a high degree of job satisfaction and demonstrates a commitment to the City’s strategic goals.

The Planning & Heritage group contributes significantly and broadly to projects and accomplishments across the City and this would not be possible under the proposed Grey model.

The last two directors of Community Services have come from the planning staff group. This group has the education, knowledge, and skills to be leaders in this organization. Removing this group will drain the City's knowledge, may impact the ability of other divisions and departments, and may remove the capacity for innovation from the staff complement.

Approval timelines

The City has an excellent track record for processing applications consistently within the timelines under the Ontario Planning Act.

Type of Application	Number of Days
Official Plan & Zoning By-law Amendment (concurrently)	120
Zoning By-law Amendment	90
Draft Plan of Subdivision	120
Site Plan Approval	60

Attachment 4 shows the City applications and associated timelines.

Staff has analyzed the County timelines for approval for applications in Meaford and the Town of the Blue Mountains. Based on this group of

applications, the timelines associated with processing development applications appear longer with the County.

While development complexity between applications and geographical areas can vary significantly, the City processes complex applications within the prescribed timelines. This is, in part, due to ensuring that information is submitted early in the planning process through a comprehensive pre-consultation process, which ensures staff and Council have the relevant information required to make a decision.

Director Support

It is assumed that the County Director of Planning currently has a full workload, and it is assumed that the ability of this role to support the work of the County planning team will be limited. The City's Development Team model includes significant support from the Director of Community Services and the Director of Public Works & Engineering. The ability of City leaders to support the work of the City Development Team would be challenging under the County model as staff would not report to them and the priorities of the County planning staff would be directed by the County.

A previous County Model & Phasing

There may be some merit in considering re-establishing a previous County model in which the County provided in-house planning services for some lower-tier municipalities. This hybrid model may be beneficial for municipalities that currently rely on sole practitioner planners or planning consultants and which do not have Engineering divisions because they do not have urban settlement areas serviced by municipal water, sewer and stormwater management systems.

If the hybrid model were to begin with a few municipalities, it would allow the model to be scaled up over time and reviewed to determine how it was being received and working. The City could re-evaluate this model at a later date.

If Council is interested in pursuing this model further, the questions have been identified in this report that should also be addressed.

Financial Implications:

The County report notes that staff can not guarantee that the model would result in cost savings or speedier decisions. It notes while there may be

potential for cost savings from a centralized model that it may be difficult to ascertain for a few years after implementation. It would be most unfortunate to implement this model only to have the cost increase. At that point, it would be hard to reverse the model as significant resources (financial and human) would be required to make this transition.

The Financial section of the County report notes that the County budget will need to be increased to provide a centralized planning service delivery model while the municipalities would see a decrease in their levy by not providing planning services any longer. The County report notes that it is premature to say if the county levy increase would be equally offset by decreasing funding at the municipal level. Any decrease in municipal costs will likely be offset by the County increase.

The County report notes that the goal would be to offset the costs of the centralized planning service delivery model through application fees. This is the current City approach, which aims to minimize the cost to the taxpayer by having development application fees and charges offset this cost as much as possible.

In 2024, the City's budget for Planning & Heritage, supporting the scope of work and activities outlined in Attachment 1 is \$342,566. This includes the \$60,000 for the Community Improvement Plan grants; when that is removed, the cost for Planning is \$282,566. The current budget also includes the costs for the Committee of Adjustment and Heritage. This cost represents 0.8% of the overall City budget. Each year, the division generates significant revenue from fees. Over the last 4 years, revenue has averaged \$171,000 per year.

Through internal allocations, wages of staff from other areas are supported by the City's Planning & Heritage budget, including the City Clerk, Director of Public Works and Engineering, Manager of Engineering Services, Engineering Assistant, Engineering Technologist, Parks Manager, Director of Community Services and Community Services Administrative Assistant. These represent costs for supervision and program support provided by full-time staff that are outside of the Planning Division. If the centralized planning service delivery model proposal is implemented, it is anticipated that the allocation of wage costs will be returned to those "home" areas netting \$15,008 from the planning budget and an additional \$68,200 to the Committee of Adjustment.

When these wages are considered, the net cost removed from the City budget would be \$233,750.

Through the proposed model, three staff positions are anticipated to transition to the County. As a result, the City will no longer be responsible for funding those positions. However, as noted throughout the report, Planning staff perform a number of “planning adjacent” type activities, as well as Heritage Planning and the administration of the Community Improvement Plan.

The proposed model does not clearly define the responsibility for site plan approval. If it mirrors Bruce County, this responsibility remains with lower tiers. This is due to the significant integration with servicing and building at this stage of planning approval. Additional staff may need to be hired at the City to perform those functions (e.g., agreement management). As noted previously, Saugeen Shores has a department of four people, in addition to the assigned Bruce County Planners, that is mainly responsible for Site Plan approvals and policy development.

Planning services detailed in the Memorandum will be funded at the County level. The County report notes that a full financial analysis has not been completed. The City of Owen Sound currently supports approximately 13% of the County levy, with the remainder shared by other municipalities within Grey County. In other words, for every dollar added to the County budget, \$0.13 is borne by ratepayers in the City of Owen Sound.

As part of that process, applicants will pay planning application fees to the County. The County report notes there may be a potential increase to the County levy to cover the increased costs of a larger Planning department. The City’s budget would need to account for the loss of revenue from planning applications. The City would have significantly less control over the fees that would need to be levied for Planning Act matters at the local level as it would appear that the County would recommend the required fees.

Communication Strategy:

The County has requested comments from lower tiers on the proposed County on consolidated model by October 18, 2024.

Consultation:

Consultation was done with staff in the Planning & Heritage, Engineering Services Division and Building Services Division.

Attachments:

1. Scope of Services provided by Planning & Heritage Division staff
2. Planning Applications in Owen Sound, 2019 to present
3. Sample County comments
4. Timelines associated with processing City applications

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