



ROCKY VIEW COUNTY

DEVELOPMENT APPROVALS TRANSFORMATION PROGRAM

Vision and Roadmap





CONTEXT

The efficiency and quality of government approvals for development projects is a key determinant in realizing the value of development projects. Many of the challenges associated with development approvals are often a result of inflexible and outdated regulations, and an outcome of how governments administer the approvals process.

Delays in the permitting of development may hinder innovation and business investment in the building and infrastructure sector, and temper overall economic growth. There have been several initiatives at all levels of government to transform the regulatory approvals process to lower costs and deliver the benefits of development more quickly.

Federal Government

The Government of Canada recently announced a new Major Projects Office as a central hub to accelerate the assessment, approval, and development of major projects deemed in Canada's best interest. The key focus is on:

- Streamlining federal reviews with the aim of cutting decision timelines from five years to two years.
- Providing a single point of contact to increase accountability and reduce bottlenecks.
- Better coordinating with Indigenous partners to support economic involvement and encouraging best practice in Indigenous engagement.
- Prioritizing infrastructure projects that deepen trade, improve energy and critical minerals production, and strengthen Canada's autonomy, resilience, and security, while also advancing economic benefits and clean growth.
- Better coordinating development project reviews across federal departments and with provincial approval processes.



Alberta

Provincial and municipal development approval processes are commonly seen to be obstructive to economic growth and housing construction, with typical frustrations including:

- The length of time taken to obtain approval.
- The complexity and inconsistency of policies and processes within and between municipalities.
- The disjointed nature of separate approval processes between municipal and provincial level.

Industry representatives (BILD Alberta) estimate that delays associated with development approval processes in Alberta create additional costs that amount to approximately 10% of the overall cost of development. The Canadian Home Builders' Association's 2024 Municipal Benchmarking Study also highlights the impact which municipalities have on the cost and availability of housing, citing high application and development fees, approval delays, and a lack of innovation in municipal processes as key constraints.

The Government of Alberta has emphasized a need to support development and particularly new housing starts through a range of initiatives aimed at reducing bureaucracy in development approvals. For example, in January 2025, the Province released the 'Automatic Yes Toolkit' which promotes a risk-based approach to the tiering of development approvals. Measures within the Toolkit include permit exemptions (Code of Practice) and standardized approvals (Permit by Rule) for lower risk proposals, and guaranteeing decision timelines for complex applications (Shot Clock).

Rocky View County

The County's development approval processes serve as essential tools for facilitating growth and generating municipal assessment revenue. At the same time, these processes are structured to ensure that development occurs in a responsible and sustainable manner by setting standards for land use, building safety, environmental protection, community compatibility, and overall community wellbeing.

On March 25, 2025, Council received the Community Services Division Enhancement Program (DEP) Terms of Reference for information. The Terms of Reference outlined seven areas of focus to transform the County's overall approach to development approvals, with the aim of delivering reduced approval timelines and creating a supportive process for applicants. The scope of the terms of reference has since expanded, and to indicate the intention to transform the County's overall development approvals process, the Program has been renamed to the Development Approvals Transformation Program. This document sets out the overall vision for the overall Program and a roadmap for how this vision will be achieved.

The Program will broaden previous efforts within the County's Planning department and Community Services division to streamline application processes and provide a more collaborative and customer-centered approach in regulating development within the County. In addition to administrative efforts, Council has supported several initiatives in recent years to improve efficiency and clarity in the development process, including:

- Updating the Subdivision Authority Bylaw to delegate more approvals to Administration for a decision.
- Approving several new or amended area structure plans and directing the development of a new municipal development plan.
- Directing the amendment of several sections of the County's Land Use Bylaw to improve the approval process for several development types.



PROGRAM VISION

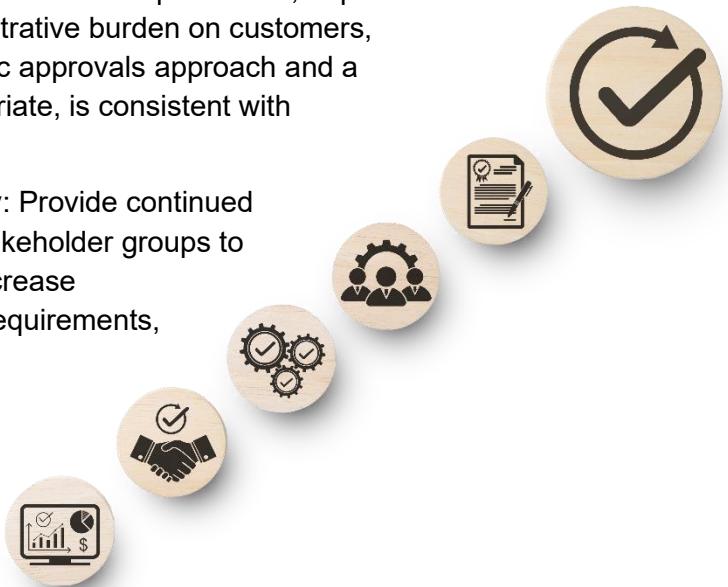
In implementing the Transformation Program, the key driver is to generate increased value for all stakeholders in the development approvals process, and to do so in the most efficient manner possible. This means reviewing how well current and future processes support the strategic and operational goals of the County and development proponents. Administration will focus on creating a development approvals service that is increasingly:

- **Agile:** Emphasizing best practice, innovation and continuous improvement.
- **Aligned:** Incorporating provincial processes, Council's strategic objectives, customer needs, and regional practices.
- **Relevant:** Ensuring that approvals processes are centered only on what is necessary to achieve positive development outcomes and customer satisfaction, in an efficient and simple way.

PROGRAM GOALS

As the County moves towards the future development approvals service envisioned above, projects will be delivered incrementally that meet one or more of the following goals:

- **Approval Timelines:** Reduce the overall average length of time it takes for a development to go through the approval process.
- **Applicant Navigation:** Provide new features to offer clear guidance and support for applicants navigating the development approvals process.
- **Integrated Processes:** Implement a case management approach for each development proposal, bridging each approval step between departments and, where applicable, each level of government.
- **Application Requirements:** Create a tiered approvals system based on the potential risk and complexity of a proposed development. Minimize requirements, duplication and rework on applications to reduce the administrative burden on customers, stakeholders and staff. Promote an automatic approvals approach and a decision-making process that, where appropriate, is consistent with neighbouring municipalities.
- **Customer Engagement and Transparency:** Provide continued opportunities for Council, customers, and stakeholder groups to provide feedback on approval processes. Increase transparency for customers on department requirements, performance data, and application status.





MEASURING SUCCESS

Creating a successful development approvals service will not be determined by the outcome of any one initiative or achievement of a single metric. Rather, it will depend on a sustained effort to implement several improvements and a culture within the organization to adopt a proactive and innovative approach to meeting the needs of customers. However, the following data can be used to indicate whether the Program goals are being met:

- a. The percentage of applications determined within defined application timelines.
- b. The level of customer satisfaction determined through feedback surveys.
- c. The level of staff satisfaction with their involvement in the approvals process, determined through feedback surveys.
- d. The number of subdivision and development permit appeals received.
- e. The percentage of files that receive automatic approval e.g. exempt development approvals or quick building permits.
- f. The percentage of applicants that attend an initial application meeting and/or pre-application meeting.
- g. The level of customer satisfaction with informational materials provided on the approvals process.
- h. The average number of application revisions submitted for each application type.
- i. Categorizing applications to ensure processes relate to the type of development application e.g. residential, large industrial etc.

PROGRAM PROJECTS

The next section provides a roadmap for achieving the vision and goals of the Transformation Program, with the scope and timelines for each project identified. The projects include:

- a. Research and Engagement
- b. Land Use Bylaw Updates
- c. Development Support Services Department
- d. Application Coordination and Navigation
- e. Process Redesign & Policy Updates
- f. Technological Improvements

These projects identified have been prioritized in accordance with the vision and goals of the Transformation Program and the following principles:

- The project requires limited technical support to reduce process complexity and ensure quick delivery.
- The project creates a meaningful and lasting positive change to how the development approvals service is delivered.
- In addition to customer benefits, the project promotes collaboration between departments and with external stakeholders.
- Any technological improvements are of a scope that transform service delivery quickly by focusing on incremental release of new digital services while working towards a comprehensive integrated digital approvals system.



A. RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT

Building on ongoing customer engagement and previous audits of the Planning department, Administration is undertaking several initiatives to clearly identify customer, developer and staff perspectives on improvements to the County's development approvals process. Through engagement with other municipalities and applicants, Administration is also obtaining information on best practice and common approaches to managing development approvals. A summary of the separate initiatives is set out below.



1. Staff Workshops (July 2025):

Sessions were held with the six County departments involved in the development approvals process, asking staff to provide detailed input on what issues they currently encounter with respect to the various processes, policy, technology, and culture aspects of their roles.

Action: The findings are being collated in a report and the list of improvements will be prioritized for incorporation into other projects that form part of the Transformation Program, or, where possible, will be implemented as quick wins across the Community Services division.

2. Building Services Customer Feedback Survey Launch (July 2025):

Following the success of the Planning Customer Feedback Surveys over the past two years, surveys have been expanded to the Building Services department to receive direct feedback from customers proceeding through the approvals process. Feedback will be used to create a Net Promotor Score (NPS) to measure progress and staff will follow up where a low score is given to better understand the concerns of customers.

Action: Once a sufficient sample of feedback surveys have been completed a survey summary report will be prepared for Council and public distribution, likely alongside the Planning department surveys in Q1 2026.

3. Developer and Customer Feedback Sessions (August and September 2025):

Administration is holding several group and individual meetings with consultants, a wide range of developers and builders, and other previous customers to obtain their overall feedback on strengths and weaknesses in the County's processes and common frustrations. Feedback was also sought from these groups on what other municipalities they enjoyed working with and any examples of best practice they were aware of that the County could implement. Administration will continue to seek feedback from stakeholders in the development approvals process throughout the life of the Transformation Program and reports will be prepared collating the feedback received.

Action: The first feedback summary report will be completed by end of Q4, 2025.



4. Municipal Working Group (August and September 2025):

Administration has contacted six other comparable municipalities across Alberta to establish a working group that shares best practice and provides an opportunity to align processes and service level metrics. The first meetings were held at the end of August and the beginning of September, focusing initially on Planning processes, and the group has the potential to broaden to incorporate other service areas in future.

Action: The intent is to produce a summary of best practices, policies, processes and technologies utilized by each participating municipality by the end of Q1, 2026.

5. Adjacent Municipality Comparative Study (September 2025 to January 2026):

Administration will commission a consultant to undertake a separate comparative study on building permit best practices in the Calgary region, engaging in conversations with adjacent municipalities to understand how the County can help provide a consistent set of requirements and a consistent experience (e.g. in processes and technology use) for applicants that work across multiple jurisdictions within the region. The study will also utilize developer and customer feedback that is currently being obtained by Administration, to focus on priority areas from the customer's perspective.

Action: Administration is targeting to complete the comparative study early in Q1 2026.





B. LAND USE BYLAW UPDATES

Adopted in 2020, the County's Land Use Bylaw is the book of rules that impacts most steps in the development approvals process, from land use rezoning to Building Permit stage. Therefore, it is crucial that the document operates effectively in managing the implementation of development. There have been numerous occasions where generic and poorly written sections of the Land Use Bylaw have created delays and frustrations for customers undertaking development in the County. The Bylaw has been drafted with little appreciation of the statutory Municipal Development Plan and area structure plans that guide it.

The Bylaw also fails to recognize the varied development forms and communities that exist across the County; this has contributed to the proliferation of 185 area-specific Direct Control bylaws where development could not be incorporated within the Land Use Bylaw's standard land use districts. Finally, the Bylaw has limited provision for automatic approvals through minor development permits or exempt development approvals, forcing most development proposals, many of which are of a small-scale, to be treated in the same bureaucratic fashion, following a multi-week development permit process to receive approval. This adds unnecessary delays for applicants and reduces staff capacity to focus on larger-scale development projects.

Although several updates have been made to the Land Use Bylaw over the past two years, Administration is proposing significant changes to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the document for the benefit of both applicants and adjacent landowners. The proposed phases of this project are set out below and all phases will include comprehensive engagement with applicants, residents, and other stakeholders in the development process.

- **Phase 1 – Application Tiering (Complete by end of Q1 2026):**

This first phase would establish a framework for categorizing development proposals into tiers, or streams, so that low-risk and non-contentious developments such as signage, accessory buildings, and accessory dwelling units can be approved quickly. Templated approval letters would still provide conditions limiting the scale and scope of any minor development; this would help overcome existing challenges whereby some developments are exempt from requiring a development permit, but no conditions to these exemptions are highlighted to the applicant when proceeding straight to the building permit stage.

The streams of development types are initially proposed to be as follows:

- *Exempt Development Use Agreements (less than 1 week processing)*. Exempt more development from requiring a development permit, subject to the applicant meeting standardized requirements and signing a statutory declaration acknowledging those requirements.
- *Minor Development Permits (4-5 weeks processing, including 3-week appeal period)*. For small-scale development which still may create interest from adjacent landowners and require some technical review, it is proposed to provide quick internal reviews with standard conditions and no requirement for external agency circulation.
- *Regular Development Permits (target less than 12 weeks processing)* – more complex files requiring external consultation and greater technical review that will require a longer processing time; however, efforts will continue to be made to streamline processes as much as possible.



- **Phase 2 – Transitioning from Use-Based Zoning to Performance Zoning (starting Q1 2026)**

As was noted above, there are several gaps in how the Land Use Bylaw manages different uses. Some of these gaps have been addressed in recent Council amendments to provide performance criteria for how uses such as kennels and vacation rentals are operated. However, there are further uses that would benefit from additional criteria to guide customers on what their proposal will be assessed against. Having more clarity in the Bylaw's general regulations will likely remove the need to have similar uses separately identified and defined in such great detail, and instead it will promote the consolidation of these uses into groups of uses that have consistent criteria applied to limit their scale and intensity.

This will move the County away from a current heavy emphasis on controlling the specific uses allowed in an area, to increasingly focusing on how each use is designed and operated to limit impacts on the surrounding area. It will provide greater flexibility in the approvals process and a greater connection with the guiding policy documents such as area structure plans or master site development plans.

- **Phase 3 – Distinct Areas and Base Districts (terms of reference by end of Q2 2026)**

Following on from adoption of the County's Municipal Development Plan which aims to acknowledge the County's diverse communities by emphasizing distinct areas, Phase 3 of the Land Use Bylaw amendments would comprise a comprehensive restructuring of the document to create land use districts that are tied to a community or area, and the guiding policy document. Base districts would initially be created for the following types of distinct area:

- Hamlets
- Business Areas
- Country Residential Areas
- Agricultural Areas



Landowners in each identified distinct area in the County would then be consulted to establish any additional criteria, uses, or design considerations that they would like to apply to their area, thereby modifying the base districts to fit with local context. This would have a significant benefit in allowing a local approach to applying the Land Use Bylaw rules in line with area structure plans and community wishes. It would also allow future Land Use Bylaw updates to be limited in scope to a specific distinct area and would limit the need for further direct control bylaws.

By following this approach, it is envisaged that Land Use Bylaw updates for a distinct area would be adopted at the same time as Council approves any new or revised area structure plan. This would promote a better understanding of how long-range planning documents will be realized at the future land use rezoning and development permit stages.



C. DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

The new Development Support Services department was created in June, 2025, merging the front-line application intake and customer services teams of Planning and Building Services. This department will act as the central team to work through customer inquiries and increase collaboration between internal departments.

THIS DEPARTMENT WILL ACT AS THE CENTRAL TEAM TO WORK THROUGH CUSTOMER INQUIRIES AND INCREASE COLLABORATION BETWEEN INTERNAL DEPARTMENTS.

Although existing staff will take time to cross-train and take on a broader range of responsibilities, a new Development Technician role has been created combining the responsibilities of Planning Assistants and Safety Code Technicians. Existing staff will gradually transition to these responsibilities while new staff will assume the broader responsibilities immediately.

The overall aim is to provide the customer with an integrated service that focuses on delivering a single point of contact, emphasis on the success of the project itself rather than the separate approvals required, and a consistent approach to service delivery.

In the coming months, there will be a specific focus on the following initiatives in the new department:

1. Remove duplication of both Planning and Building Services separately undertaking Land Use Bylaw reviews for the same property in dealing with inquiries and permit submissions.

Outcome: More effective use of staff resources on other customer services and consistent application of County requirements for customers.

2. Implement a unified approach to application intake and technology (e.g. CityView, application submission portal, and use of artificial intelligence).

Outcome: Customers will experience familiar process in moving from Planning to Building Services and staff will be more efficient in using the same software.

3. Publicly launch the new department with new contact details and website information.

Outcome: Customers will start to see the development approvals process as being provided by a single entity with staff that can answer both their development permit and building permit questions.

4. Transfer responsibility for exempt and minor development permit approvals and 'quick' building permits from Planning and Building Services staff onto the Development Support Services department.

Outcome: Land Use Bylaw amendments and Building Services process changes would significantly reduce approval timelines for simple permit applications, while removing these tasks from more senior technical staff, allowing them to focus on more complex files.



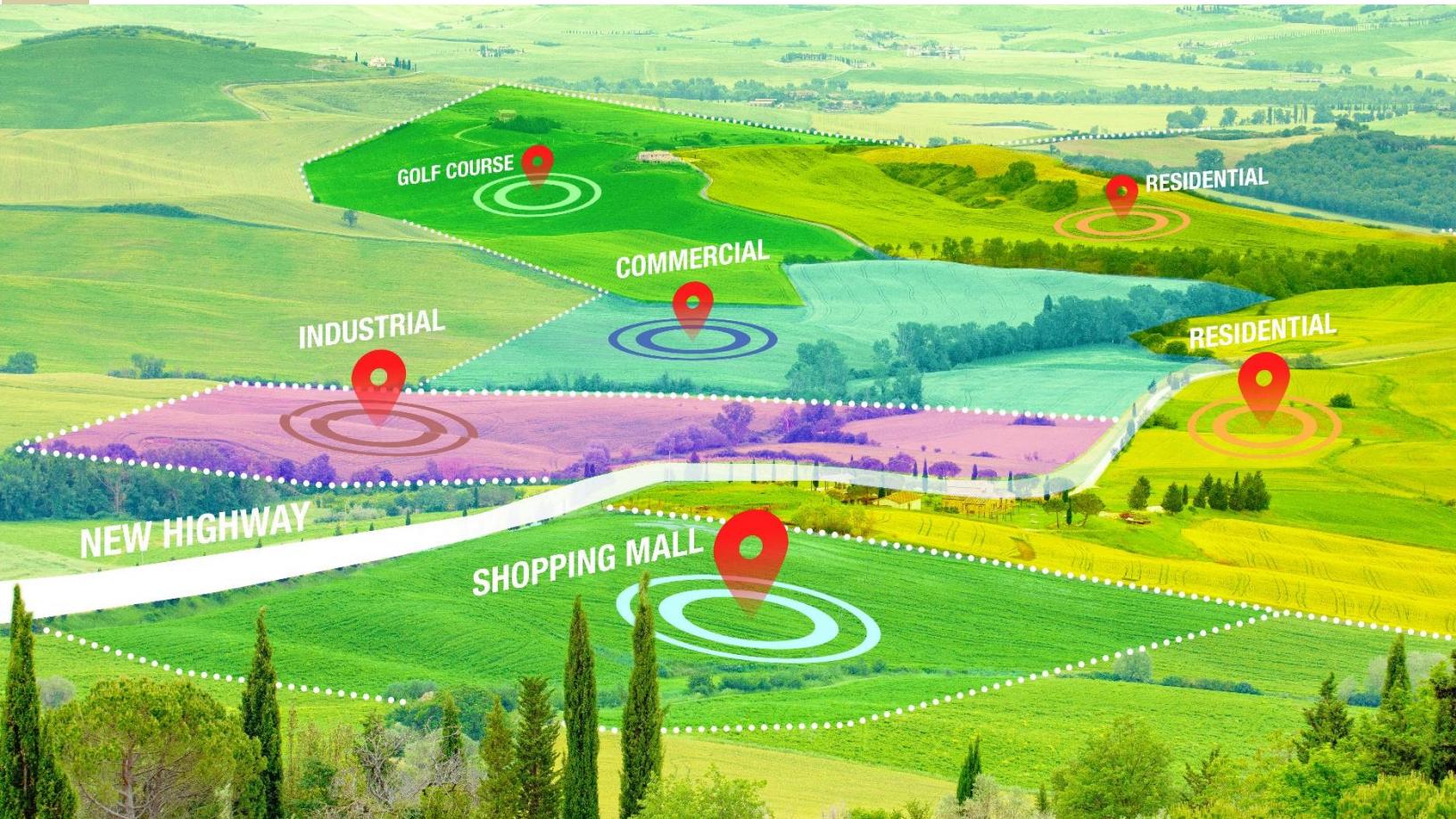
5. Implement the use of AI software to support applicants in application submission.

Outcome: Providing a self-serve option for applicants to check compliance with County requirements prior to submission would improve accessibility by offering an all-hours digital service and would reduce application intake timelines by improving initial application quality.

6. Establish monitoring and coordination of customer communications to identify opportunities for improving County responses and quick escalation of inquiries to management as necessary.

Outcome: This case management approach would ensure that any delays in service are reduced and issues on applications are identified and solved early for the customer.

Once the department is operating at full capacity with the above initiatives complete, Administration will develop plans for Council's consideration to offer new services within the department. This could include the potential for the County to offer an in-house applications consulting and submissions team that would provide chargeable services to customers to draft and submit simple planning applications. This team could also develop improved application templates, including conceptual scheme and master site development plan templates. This would dramatically improve application quality and reduce overall approval timelines for customers, especially for those that are unfamiliar in navigating planning and building approvals processes.





D. APPLICATION COORDINATION & NAVIGATION

In alignment with the Program's goal to improve customer navigation through the development approvals process, several initiatives have been identified to encourage proactive communication with applicants and the prompt resolution of any issues that arise for applicants in obtaining approvals. The aim is to limit the perception from customers that County requirements are changing throughout the process by providing a strong case management approach and emphasizing high quality advice early on in the application process.

1. One Team Initiative (Complete September 2025):

The One Team initiative seeks to increase collaboration on larger investment projects by having the Economic Development department project manage the approvals process and bring department staff together to quickly resolve issues on applications.

Senior staff and file managers will be brought together in regular meetings to track the progress of development approvals, identify opportunities for efficiencies, problem solve, and ensure coordinated communication between departments and the development proponent.

Most of the document templates, processes and selection criteria have now been completed and it is expected that the first project will be selected by the end of September.

Outcome: Relationships between project proponents and County staff will be strengthened and the proponent will have greater access to senior staff to resolve concerns and receive clear advice.

2. Applications Coordination Team (Complete October 2025):

Similar to the One Team initiative, the Applications Coordination Team will promote greater oversight and management of applications but will be focused on all applications rather than the larger development projects.

Software was utilized in August 2025 to flag where an application has gone beyond standard timelines for each part of the application process. The software automatically creates a list of delayed files for review by the Coordination team.

The Coordination Team will mainly comprise management staff from Planning and Engineering. The Team will establish the reason for the delay, provide appropriate solutions, and then direct the file manager accordingly, including communication back to the applicant.

Outcome: Improved project management of applications will reduce the potential for unnecessary delays and rework required by the applicant and County staff.

3. Initial Application Meeting (Complete October 2025)

Many applications incur delays due to the applicant not being fully aware of the application process or what is required of them. Some applicants have also raised concerns that they receive either limited communication from their file manager or that the information provided is overly technical in nature.

It is also often assumed by applicants that when their application is received by County staff and sent to a file manager that it is complete and will start processing. Therefore, when a file manager reviews the application and requests further information by letter or email, this can be frustrating for the applicant. The application intake process for planning files will be amended to require that the assigned file manager is the main contact for the customer, replacing the current approach of various staff working with the applicant to complete the application.



Where held, pre-application meetings can also be conceptual in nature and may not reflect the application that is finally submitted to the County. Therefore, it is proposed that staff will hold an initial meeting with the applicant, once their application has been reviewed by the file manager. Here staff can outline expectations for processing of the file and any initial risks to approval.

Outcome: Emphasizing early meetings between the file manager and applicant will build relationships and encourage a better understanding from both sides on the purpose of the application and the County's requirements and processes.

4. Online Information and Process Guides (initial updates by end of Q1 2026):

The provision of clear, consistent, and accurate information on the County's development approval processes is crucial in guiding the applicant through the various application steps to a successful outcome. Previous customer feedback has suggested that website content and written communication from the County is overly technical, incomplete, or difficult to find.

The Building and Planning departments already have several process maps and guides available internally and on the County's website. Use of these materials to create infographics, basic process maps, and audio-visual content for distribution to applicants and the public will help to simplify often complex approval processes.

Outcome: Providing high quality online information will allow customers to self-serve and better understand the application process. This is likely to reduce the number of inquiries submitted to the County and improve the efficiency of applicant discussions throughout the approvals process.

5. Enforcement Coordination (Launch Q4 2025)

The investigation and coordination of Land Use Bylaw and Building Code compliance issues can be challenging currently due to the shared ownership and overlapping roles between Enforcement Services, Planning, and Building Services. This has previously resulted in delays to investigations and inconsistencies in interpretation between departments. A temporary Development Compliance Liaison position is being trialed to provide enhanced coordination between Bylaw Officers and approvals staff.

The Liaison position will act as a central point for customers and internal departments in managing development compliance issues, and will promote a consistent approach on development-related complaints. By transferring a significant amount of post-approval inspections from technical staff onto the Liaison position, this will also increase the efficiency of staff in processing applications.

Outcome: Improved coordination of development-related complaints and investigations will result in more definitive and consistent outcomes for complainants and landowners when bringing sites into compliance.



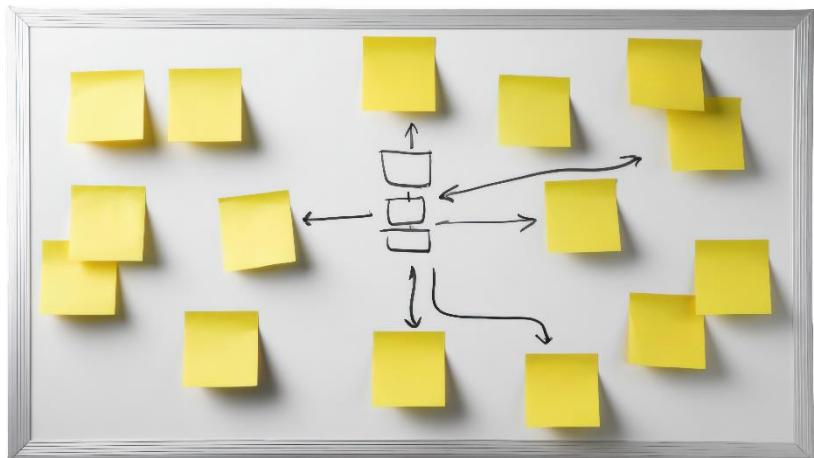
E. PROCESS REDESIGN & POLICY UPDATES

Separate to other projects identified in the Program, and directly resulting from research and engagement on best practice and customer feedback identified in Project A above, there is significant opportunity to amend department workflows and policies to achieve 'quick wins' delivering lasting transformation in the approvals process.

The main intent of the process redesign will be to develop a tiering of work and applications, so that staff can deliver maximum value to customers in accordance with their skills and knowledge. This means transferring a significant volume of simple administrative tasks, inquiries, or permits from senior technical staff onto technological solutions or customer-support staff.

The Building Services and Engineering teams will be a particular focus for process efficiencies, examining opportunities to shift staff responsibilities, automate tasks, and to tier applications according to risk and complexity. This will reduce bottlenecks in the overall approvals process for applicants in addition to the improvements being made to the Planning department's processes.

Process redesign will be an ongoing initiative, as regular updates are made to processes in accordance with the priority areas identified from customer feedback and best practice research currently being undertaken.





F. TECHNOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENTS

The Transformation Program is primarily focused on delivering outcomes for the customer, without an overreliance on technological solutions which can delay progress. While work has commenced to move the County towards comprehensive software solutions, particularly through the Enterprise Resource Planning project, three near-term projects are considered to offer significant value to improving the development approvals process by increasing accessibility, automation, and transparency.

1. Archistar Pilot (Complete October 2025)

Administration has signed a contract with Archistar Property Technology Ltd. to deliver a pilot which aims to test an automated compliance checking service for customers applying for development and building permits. The pilot is running from June until October and is expected to demonstrate how the use of the AI system will improve quality and efficiency in determining permit applications. If successful, Administration will bring forward proposals for full adoption of the software and roll out of the service to customers.

The scope of the pilot is focusing on automating reviews against the direct control bylaw for the Hamlet of Harmony and then all other standard land use districts around the County. The use of these checks for Real Property Report Certificate of Compliance submissions will also be investigated.

2. CityView Planning Portal (Complete end of Q1 2026)

Administration is working with CityView to establish an online application portal for Planning application submissions, similar to the existing MyBuild system utilized for Building and Safety Codes Permit applications. The implementation of the online portal will integrate with wider CityView updates the Planning department is implementing to streamline application processes and tracking. The online portal will allow applicants to submit and pay for applications, upload additional documents, and receive updates throughout the process, thereby improving applicant navigation through the process and increasing transparency for all stakeholders.

3. Customized Digital Landowner Circulation (Complete by Q4 2026)

In accordance with Council Policy C-327 (Circulation and Notification Standards), Administration notifies landowners near to planning and development permit applications by letter. Due to the standardized nature of the application circulation areas in Policy C-327 this can result in residents being under- or over-circulated. It also results in significant cost to the County in printing, packaging and posting circulation letters.

Following release of the County's Online Planning and Development Map to the public in October 2024, residents and other stakeholders can now more easily access information on current applications submitted to the County. There is now the opportunity to leverage the online map to support electronic circulation of planning applications to stakeholders, thereby increasing transparency in the application process and further opportunities for engagement.

Electronic circulation of applications will be designed to give landowners and other stakeholders more choice and control in how they receive information. Stakeholders will be able to tailor their notification area based on their level of interest in planning decisions and will have the ability to easily update their own contact information. This approach improves transparency and engagement while reducing administrative effort and costs for the County.