



Administrative Report

Office of the Manager, Planning Services

To: Robert Maisonville, Chief Administrative Officer

**From: Rebecca Belanger
Manager, Planning Services**

Date: Friday, November 29, 2019

Subject: Planner Position- Permanent full-time

Report #: N/A

Purpose

To recommend the addition of a full-time Planner position to the Planning Services Department.

Background

The staff complement in the County Planning Services Department has fluctuated over the past thirty years from four people to one individual in the past number of years. The nature of the service delivery has also changed in the last ten years with regard to Approval Authority responsibilities.

The Planning Services Department serves as a resource to local municipalities, agencies and the general public. Following the approval of the County of Essex Official Plan in 2005, the County became the Approval Authority for plans of subdivision/condominium, local Official Plans and Amendments and Part Lot Control. In accordance with Sections 17.1(1) and 51.2(1) of the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.P.13, County Council delegated the Approval Authority for local Official Plan Amendments, plans of subdivision and condominium, and Part Lot Control By-laws, to the Manager of Planning Services. The approval of local Official Plans cannot be delegated from Council.

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With the delegation of Approval Authority from the Province came with it, the expectation that there would be sufficient planning administration capacity to oversee the Provincial interests related to the processing of these Planning Act application types. Along with this delegation of authority is the associated responsibility to ensure that all Planning Act applications adhere to applicable Federal and Provincial legislation including the Planning Act, Endangered Species Act, Ontario Water Resources Act, Environmental Protection Act, Ontario Heritage Act, as some examples. Applications and new Official Plans and Secondary Plans must also be in conformity with the County Official Plan and by-laws/policies. The Manager, Planning Services has the authority on behalf of the Province to deny, approve or approve with conditions development and policy applications.

The County Planning Services Department acts as the One-Window directly determining when to consult with various Ministries during the development of local Official Plans and on specific planning matters. With this on-going increase in the level of authority and reduced participation on behalf of Provincial Ministries for their legislative oversight, the Manager, Planning Services must spend significant amounts of time comprehensively reviewing new local Official Plans and Secondary Plans. Further, it is the responsibility of the Manager, Planning Services to directly consult with Ministries and Agencies to determine the appropriate draft conditions of approval for subdivisions/condominiums.

Over the past decade the land use planning system and the complexity in the planning process continues to significantly evolve. Along with the substantial and on-going legislative changes, the Province has also implemented several pieces of landmark legislation, plans and/or policies. The cumulative impact of these changes is noteworthy in the complex development process.

The County will be initiating the Official Plan review during 2020 beginning with the population, housing and employment land forecasting and the development of a regional economic development and employment land strategy. It is important that County Planning undertake strategic long-range planning. The strategic planning leadership should include wise growth management practices that will assist municipalities balance growth in a sustainable and coordinated manner. The County Official Plan, which is the growth management plan for Essex County links the region's strategies for conservation, natural and cultural resources, and economic development. The County has the responsibility as the upper-tier to undertake regional population projections/forecasting and land budget methodologies for residential, housing and employment lands.

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It is the role of the County Planning Services Department to demonstrate strong leadership to ensure effective implementation of provincial policy. The County must lead the conversation and collaborate with municipalities and the public with respect to how Provincial planning policies and objectives will impact existing communities.

Discussion

The Manager, Planning Services has been delegated as the approval authority by County Council as noted above. It is a consideration that there would be a benefit in the appointment of an additional planner in County Planning with approval authority delegations should there be a limited absence of the Manager, to ensure that municipalities and the public/developers have no delay in response times.

Further, due to the on-going strength in the local economy, development proposals continue at an increasing rate, three times of that of a few years ago. There are presently more than 40 subdivisions/condominiums receiving on-going pre-consultation advice from County Planning Services.

It is important to note that there is a demonstrated interest by the local municipal planners in having County Planning provide a greater level of regional policy leadership particularly in the areas of emerging trends and threats. These policy areas where County Planning has been requested to provide additional strategic planning support include growth management, regional transportation, economic development, environmental issues (climate change, natural heritage systems planning) natural hazards (safe ingress/egress, shoreline and floodplain mapping) and other water resource issues.

During 2019 the County secured a grant contribution from the Ministry of Energy to assist in the development of a Regional Community Energy Plan. The project will be managed by the Climate Change Specialist from the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA). The County Planning Services Department will provide significant participation into the development of the plan which will strive to develop a more integrated approach to energy management incorporated into everyday decision making.

The Department is also currently reviewing five local Official Plans. These plans are at various stages within the approval process. The County is responsible for coordinating the receipt of comments from various Ministries and other agencies such as the Essex Region Conservation Authority, the four school boards, utilities and railways.

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Due to the on-going increasing workload in the Planning Services Department on both regional strategic planning and Planning Act approval responsibilities it is recommended that additional professional planning administration capacity be added to the department. The recently retired Manager, Planning Services provided some limited planning assistance during 2019 for on-going planning files.

Due to a departmental assessment which occurred during 2019, a review of subdivision approval procedures was undertaken. The purpose of the review was to determine opportunities for greater efficiencies and streamlining of approval processes. The Planning Services Department has now implemented a pre-consultation meeting at the outset of each subdivision/condominium proposal. The municipalities, consultants and developers have expressed gratitude for this additional planning support which serves to clarify terms of reference for studies and possible development hurdles early on. The County Planning Division is also providing a greater level of project coordination to ensure that municipalities, agencies and departments are all receiving the same information and communications. Due to this additional level of support from the department there is a greater amount of time spent on project coordination from previous years.

Financial Implications

The 2020 Planning Services Department Budget has included the addition of a permanent position in the Planning Department. The Job Description for the Planner Position has been reviewed and updated and will be subject to the current Job Evaluation Scoring process.

Recommendation

That the CAO present the request for a Planner position to County Council and that the position be funded through the Planning Services Department Budget.

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Respectfully Submitted

Rebecca Belanger

Originally Signed by

Rebecca Belanger, Manager, Planning Services

Appendix No.	Title of Appendix
Appendix II-A	Job Description – Planner