

Planning Services



The Planning Services Department provides planning advisory services to County Council on matters related to County-wide land use planning, economic development and strategic planning matters. The Manager of Planning is responsible for preparing responses to provincial policy and program initiatives as well as acting as the approval authority in accordance with legislation for various planning applications.

By ensuring the County's planning perspective is collaborative and regional, Planning Services works to support the planning development of the entire County including those of the local municipalities.

Level of Service Statement

The Planning Services Department coordinates the review and approval of subdivisions, condominiums, Official Plan and Amendments on behalf of the Province. This service delivery involves collaboration with seven (7) local municipalities, County departments and external agencies. The department provides timely and effective communication with the development

community such that processes and requirements are clearly defined early-on and throughout the approval process.

The Planning Services Department strives to be a resource for planning policy direction and coordination ensuring Provincial policy is shared and regional studies are undertaken.

2021 Achievements and Challenges

This past year represented a year of noteworthy development activity and regional strategic planning achievement. Through the dedication of stakeholder partnerships, the County along with ERCA and several others partners brought forward the final Essex County Regional Energy Plan (REP) for approval in May of this year. The Planning Services Department is well positioned to move forward with implementation of strategic, sustainability actions in 2022 which aim to support County Council's declaration of a climate change emergency and approval in principle of the REP. The continuation of these strong partnerships will ensure the success in implementation activities.

In 2019 and 2020, our region was under flood watches and warnings for hundreds of days in a row. The Manager of Planning Services worked closely with administration from ERCA to participate in the development of a Floodplain Prioritization and Relative Risk Assessment. During 2021 the Floodplain Prioritization will be finalized and used to guide future investments and grant requests for updates to the floodline mapping. This natural hazard mapping is used in updates to municipal Official Plans and Zoning By-laws as well as by ERCA in administering their regulatory process. This is especially needed as administration relies on outdated hazard mapping while the Region continues to experience this extended period of elevated lake levels, more frequent intense storms, and continued high growth and demand for new development.

Requests for pre-consultations and the on-going increase in processing of subdivisions and condominiums at the County has continued with interest equally spread over all seven local municipalities.

The Planning Services Department continues to work closely with local municipalities on expediting development approvals through challenges associated with COVID-19 again this year. Planning Services, in collaboration with the local municipalities have worked together to find alternate methods to meet with the developers, agencies and the public to expedite approval processes as appropriate. Planning Services is presently advising developers

and municipalities on process and requirements for over one hundred subdivision and condominium applications progressing through for draft plan approval.

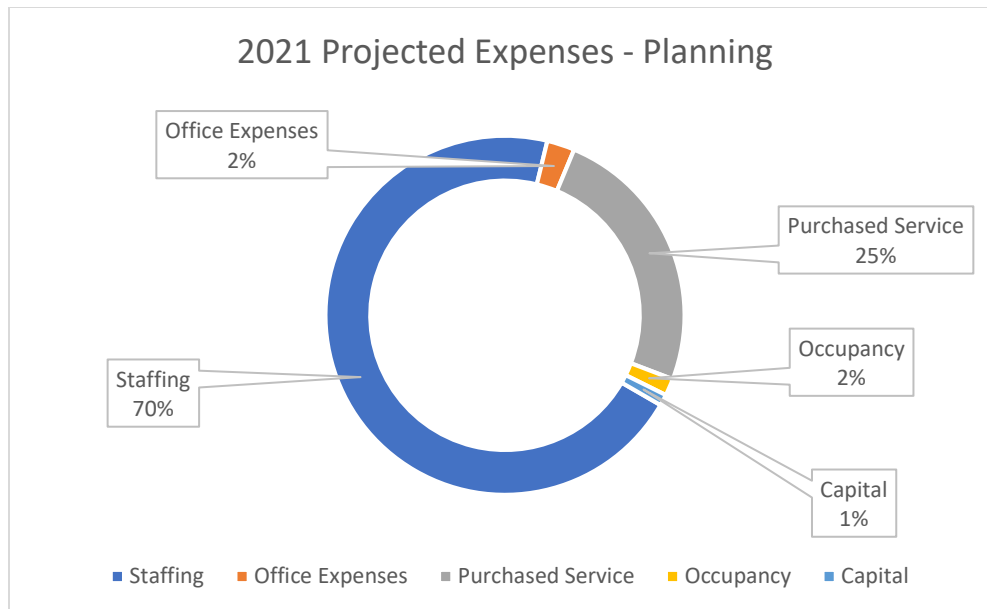
The 2021 departmental operations have resulted in significant favourable revenue with higher than average revenues anticipated again in 2022. Important to note, that this development boom in Essex County is leading to the construction of much needed housing units across Essex County including residential intensification, affordable housing projects and targeting developments for the aged. Planning Services continues to focus strategic planning efforts on seeking policies and methods for providing affordable and equitable housing supply in the County.

During this year, the contract for a consultant to undertake the regional population, household and employment forecasting associated with the upcoming County Official Plan review was approved. The regional growth projection project is underway and the Phase 1 work program of the Official Plan will conclude in the Spring of 2022. A Project Steering Committee (comprised of Senior Planning Staff from each of the local municipalities) will play an important role throughout this review process, and input received from local planning staff will help to shape the policy direction that will be incorporated as part of the new County Official Plan.

The Phase 1 Official Plan review will involve a robust Council, stakeholder and community consultation seeking to obtain input regarding opportunities, challenges and issues facing this region and what priorities the new County Official Plan review will need to address. The Planning Services Department webpage will be regularly updated with project details and workshops and community surveys are planned.

The Manager of Planning Services is also presently a member of the project working team for several shoreline management and Secondary Plans. Five out of the seven local municipalities have been in various stages of their Official Plan reviews during 2021 with the Tecumseh Official Plan obtaining final approval this year. Several of the other municipal Official Plans are expecting to imminently move to final approval at the County.

The graph below illustrates the key areas of spending in Planning Services for this past year (projected to December 31, 2021).



Challenges Facing Planning Services in 2022

Due to the significant number of developments on the horizon in 2022, along with an enhanced participation by the Manager of Planning Services in supporting both regional and local policy initiatives, it was necessary to add a Senior Planner position a year ago. Even with the addition of this position in the fall of 2020, the workload in the Planning Services Department continues to be at capacity.

Planning Services will be leading the Official Plan review process through-out 2022 which will require substantial time commitments. A Special Planning Advisor was retained in 2021 to assist County staff undertake and complete this important project. During 2022, Planning Services will again utilize the consulting services of this Special Planning Advisor to assist with the overall project facilitation. In the Spring of 2022 a Discussion Paper will be finalized by Planning Services with the assistance of the Special Planning Advisor. The Discussion Paper will be used to inform members of Council, stakeholders and the public pertaining to major drivers and trends and future directions and additional recommended work to be completed in the Phase 2 work program.

Based on the scope of additional work identified in the Phase 1 Discussion Paper, additional studies and technical reports will be undertaken during Phase 2.

The Planning Services Department will be heavily involved with implementing projects and initiatives associated with the recommendations contained in the Essex County Regional Energy Plan. Planning Services will continue to provide the oversight of the strategic priorities to ensure that annual progress is made in meeting Provincial and Federal objectives to reduce emissions and energy costs toward 2041. On-going implementation under the direction of the project co-chairs will require cross-sector collaboration, drawing strength from the expertise and leadership of the community taskforce.

With the recent change to the Conservation Authorities Act, the Essex Region Conservation Authority will be reviewing and modifying their programs and service delivery. As such, the Climate Change Specialist position at ERCA is no longer supportable and it is proposed that County Planning provide regional climate and sustainability oversight. A full-time, temporary Climate Change Coordinator position has been included in the Planning Services Departmental Budget. As the County is the delegated Provincial planning authority, this initiative falls directly within the planning context implementing policy objectives of the Provincial Policy Statement.

Proposed 2022 Budget Plan

The Planning Services Department Budget anticipates an increase in revenues associated with subdivision/condominium application fees due to the number of developments in the pre-consultation phase. The increase in revenue will offset operational costs and continue to fund the Official Plan Review Reserve.

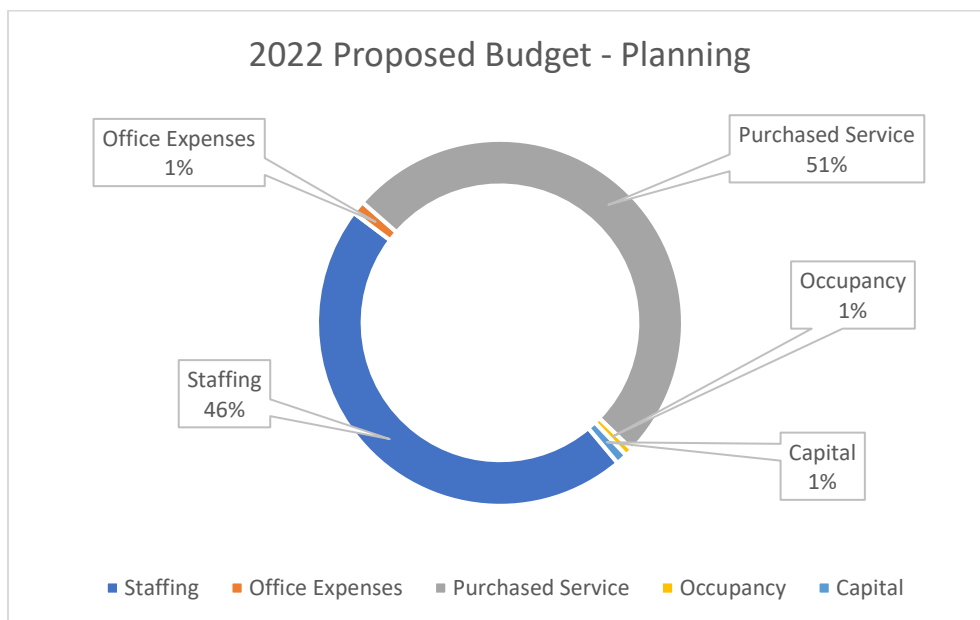
The 2022 Budget proposes the continuation of the County Official Plan review work with the completion of the population, household and employment forecasting in the Spring at an estimated cost of \$45,000 funded from the Official Plan reserve. At the same time, Planning Services will be releasing Discussion Paper No. 1 which will lead to the selection of the consultant to undertake the Land Need Analysis Report. The Planning Budget provides an estimated cost of \$50,000 to conduct this study. Planning Services proposes the initiation of a Regional Economic Development and Employment Land Strategy as another additional background study to be completed in 2022 as part of the Official Plan review work program.

The remainder of the studies and Official Plan development will be identified in the 2023 Planning Services Budget. The Budget includes \$50,000 to fund implementation projects associated with the Regional Energy Plan which

may be used to leverage funding support from upper levels of government and confirm stakeholder project partnerships. Further, \$200,000 has been allocated as a carry over from last year to support the regional updates to Flood Hazard Mapping which is incorporated into the County and municipal Official Plans. The County and local municipalities, with the leadership of ERCA, intend to approach upper levels of government to seek significant financial support to complete this mapping over the next several years.

The Budget maintains the provision for legal expenses in the event of appeals to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT) of decisions as the approval authority, or to protect the County's interest in appeals of decisions at the local level. The Budget also includes \$50,000 in consulting planned to work with the Special Planning Advisor due to the amount of Official Plan review background work that will be undertaken in-house.

The graph below illustrates the key areas of proposed 2022 Budget spending in Planning Services.



Overall, the 2022 Budget for Planning Services, net of recoveries, totals \$307,100 (1.0% increase over the 2021 Budget of \$304,170).