



## **Administrative Report**

**To:** Warden MacDonald and Members of Essex County Council

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

**Date:** Wednesday, July 16, 2025

**Subject:** Planning Services Division Annual Report 2024

**Report #:** 2025-0716-IPS-R15-RB

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### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to provide County Council with an update on departmental activities and performance for approximately a one year period ending June 1, 2025. County Planning facilitates approvals of *Planning Act* applications on behalf of the Province as delegated by County Council. The details provided in this report provide an update on development approvals over this past year in comparison with the prior five years. The report will also address the progress toward achieving the County's strategic goals including those listed in the County's strategic plan and new adopted County Official Plan 2024.

### **Background**

The Planning Services Division provides planning advisory services to County Council on matters related to County-wide land use planning, economic development, and strategic planning matters. In collaboration with local administrations, Planning Services works with landowners, developers and agencies to support orderly and successful growth and development across the County. The division is continuing to take measures to protect the public interest and put the residents and service users at the centre of the planning process in everything it does. This means:

- Delivering a clear and effective policy framework to guide development in the County to increase certainty in how development is approved and implemented.
- Providing timely and efficient service in responding to customer inquiries and processing *Planning Act* applications.

- Improving communication and engagement opportunities with residents, developers, local municipalities and agencies.

The Planning Services Division provides four broad service areas as indicated in **Appendix A**. These include long range planning, processing planning applications, special projects and responding to inquiries.

This division also prepares responses to provincial policy and legislative changes and works with local municipal planners to resolve development issues and move new development forward. The Manager of Planning Services acts as the provincially delegated approval authority for plans of subdivision, plans of condominium, part lot control by-laws, and local Official Plan Amendments.

The Planning Services Division has a staffing complement consisting of the manager, two senior planners, one of which has a focus on environmental initiatives and presently a summer, co-op student.

County Planning hosts meetings for the Essex County planners to provide provincial legislative updates with MMAH, and provide a county-wide planning information exchange and learning opportunities.

## Discussion

During 2024 and 2025 to date, a significant number of *Planning Act* applications are at various stages of finalization requiring regular and on-going pre-consultation and project update meetings with proponents and municipal planning/engineering administration. The review and approval of *Planning Act* applications has statutory timelines and as such this is the primary focus and the main function of the division. As of June 1<sup>st</sup>, as presented in **Appendix A**, the number of *Planning Act* applications under review by County Planning Services is over 150 active applications. Planning Services anticipates that the submission of subdivision and condominium applications would continue well above the previous five-year average. The number of applications under process has grown exponentially from the previous 5-10 years. In a department update provided to County Council in 2019, the number of applications identified in the report under process was approximately 30.

The effort of Planning Services in reviewing planning applications involves numerous hours in reviewing all support studies which range from planning justification (PJR), stormwater management, traffic impact, functional servicing (FSR), and environmental impact (EIA). Planning Services requires

the input from the local municipalities and agencies and then evaluates the responses to determine when applications can be deemed complete to then outline the requirements for the remaining approval process.

The request for subdivision/condominium approval is broadly spread throughout all of the municipalities, as noted in **Appendix A, Figure 1**. Several of the municipalities have recently adopted Secondary Plans for significant greenfield areas along with associated servicing strategies which will lead to strong growth in these municipalities for years to come. There has been a noted increase in requests for subdivision application approvals from lower density forms of housing to medium and high-density development and this shift continues to grow as directed by the PPS and County OP 2024. This residential intensification provides the benefit of compact urban form creating walkable communities and affordability. Further, this form of housing provides an alternative choice of housing for the aging population to remain within their community.

Planning Services continues to provide advice to developers and expedite new development to the greatest extent possible while meeting provincial and county policy requirements.

**Appendix A** provides details regarding the long-range planning initiatives under progress by County Planning. Long range planning focuses on setting a vision for how the overall County and individual communities will grow and develop based on the implementation of Provincial Policy. To achieve this, the division prepares and maintains the County's Official Plan including growth projections and lands needs analysis and manages other land-use related strategic and master plans. The adoption of the new County Official Plan in 2024 was a significant undertaking by the division spanning two years

Planning Services is also responsible for project management of special studies as identified in the County's Strategic Plan, Official Plan and as directed by County Council. The current studies under preparation or implementation are specifically listed in **Appendix A**. These studies cover all facets of sustainable growth including economic, environmental and social issues.

In 2024 and to date in 2025, County Planning Services received 5 appeals of *Planning Act* applications. Through the cooperation of the appellants and local municipalities, in the last five years all appeals to the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) have been successfully mediated avoiding costs by all parties in providing evidence at the OLT.

Planning Services continues to focus efforts to streamline the development approvals process and improve service delivery. The County entered into a contract with Cloudpermit and the planning module is under development which will provide the web-based platform for processing subdivision and condominium applications County-wide. This web-based platform will allow developers, agencies, local municipalities and the County to share application updates all under one platform to ensure that all users have the same information. The implementation of Cloudpermit serves to implement strategic directions listed in the County Strategic Plan encouraging regional collaboration. The implementation of this software achieves direction 9, from the County Strategic Plan which states "*work with Local Municipal Partners to harmonize planning and development policies, procedures and fees*".

The division also continues to enhance data collection so that trends can be observed in file and inquiry volumes and processing timelines. Further efforts toward innovations are on the horizon for future years to track land supply across the County versus timing for development approvals and building permit issuance. These further innovations will support the development of all forms of master plans including economic and infrastructure.

The County's Strategic Plan, states "*the County will empower staff and be an essential team player in driving shared priorities with Local Municipal Partners.*" The strategic directions identify scaling sustainable services through innovation as a priority. Many of the initiatives underway by County Planning provide progress and leadership on shared regional priorities relating to economic development, sustainability, housing affordability and supply, and red tape reduction. The Strategic Plan also encourages staff to participate in associations, boards and committees. The Manager of Planning Services is a member of the Western Ontario Wardens Caucus (WOWC) Planning sub-committee, the County Planning Directors Group and the Senior Environmental Planner is part of the County Environmental Planners Group.

As noted in both the Strategic Plan and the new County Official Plan, massive growth and development are anticipated during the next few decades. Innovative efforts along with striving for constant improvements in the division will strengthen sustainable growth will help the County maintain and grow municipal revenues and improve service delivery.

## **Financial Implications**

With a high number of planning applications already in pre-consultation and more expected throughout the year, the department is on track to exceed revenue projections. Development activity, both residential and commercial, remains strong across the County, showing continued confidence in the local market and steady demand for new lots.

As new developments are completed and assessed through MPAC, they will contribute to the long-term growth of the County's tax base. Property taxes are collected on local municipal tax bills, which include a local portion for municipal services and a County portion for upper-tier services.

The shift toward higher-density development, supported by the new County Official Plan, will help build more walkable communities while also making better use of infrastructure and supporting long-term financial sustainability.

Ongoing efforts to modernize the development review process, including the rollout of Cloudpermit, are expected to improve coordination between the County and local municipalities and create efficiencies that benefit both developers and the public.

## **Consultations**

There were no consultations required in preparing this report.

## Strategic Plan Alignment

Working as Team Essex County	Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence	Building a Regional Powerhouse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☒ Scaling Sustainable Services through Innovation</li><li>☒ Focusing “Team Essex County” for Results</li><li>☒ Advocating for Essex County’s Fair Share</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☐ Being an Employer with Impact</li><li>☒ A Government Working for the People</li><li>☒ Promoting Transparency and Awareness</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☐ Providing Reliable Infrastructure for Partners</li><li>☒ Supporting Dynamic and Thriving Communities Across the County</li><li>☒ Harmonizing Action for Growth</li><li>☐ Advancing Truth and Reconciliation</li></ul>

## Recommendation

That Essex County Council receive report number 2025-0716-IPS-R15-RB, Planning Services Division Annual Report 2024 for information.

## Approvals

Respectfully Submitted,

*Rebecca Belanger*

Rebecca Belanger, MCIP, RPP, Manager, Planning Services

Concurred With,

*Allan Botham*

Allan Botham, P.Eng., Director, Infrastructure and Planning Services

Concurred With,

*Sandra Zwiers*

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Appendix	Title
A	County Planning Service Division Update 2024/2025