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**Item No. 21.10**  
**Halifax Regional Council**  
**February 11, 2025**

**TO:** Mayor Fillmore and Members of Halifax Regional Council  
**SUBMITTED BY:** Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer  
**DATE:** January 22, 2025  
**SUBJECT:** **Planning & Development Key Performance Indicators**

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### **INFORMATION REPORT**

#### **ORIGIN**

On January 10, 2023, the following motion of Regional Council regarding Item No.16.1 was put and passed:

MOVED by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Cleary

*THAT Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to provide a staff report to:*

- 1. Outline current timeframes and recommendations for establishing KPIs and target timeframes for the various application and permitting processes within the Planning and Development business unit;*
- 2. Require staff to prepare a twice-yearly report on these KPIs;*
- 3. Prepare a list of potential Charter changes that would speed up the various permitting and approval processes for Council's consideration, and;*
- 4. Return with a report within 120 days and include options for service delivery improvements along with any additional resourcing and legislative supports.*

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report provides an update on timeframes relative to both permit and planning applications processed by the Planning and Development business unit in response to points one and two of the motion of January 2023, above. Included as well is an outline of ongoing initiatives aimed at enhancing customer service stemming from the October 2022 [HRM Housing Development Barrier Review- Executive Panel on Housing](#)<sup>1</sup> report completed by Deloitte, and details of a plan to formalize Planning and Development's customer service standards and protocols.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Both Council and the development industry have expressed interest in having access to transparent reporting on timelines and key performance indicators (KPIs) associated with development approvals and permit processes specifically. In response to the January 2023 motion of Council, an [initial report](#)<sup>2</sup> was delivered in May of 2023, that reported on processing times for all application approval streams and defined

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<sup>1</sup> <https://novascotia.ca/housing-panel/docs/housing-development-barrier-review.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/230523rci10.pdf>

associated targets, and which addressed the request for potential Charter changes and service delivery improvements, as outlined in points three and four of the above motion. Additionally, staff reported on Planning and Development's performance through the annual budget and business presentation to Council, and we share regular updates through various development industry engagements. This report provides the requested periodic reporting on KPIs.

## **DISCUSSION**

This update report includes information on processing times and associated targets for applications related to permitting, subdivision and planning approvals, and ongoing work related to customer service and processing, including information on new publicly available tools and initiatives underway in partnership with the Province's Executive Panel on Housing.

### **Transparent Reporting of KPIs**

Transparency and access to information is critical in allowing the public, development industry, community partners, and Regional Council to have an understanding of the details and status of proposed development within our communities.

Historically, our systems and processes had limited ability to fully export, analyze and produce meaningful and consumable permit and planning application data. While some permit information has been available through the [Halifax Data, Mapping & Analytics Hub](#) (formerly Open Data), Planning and Development staff have made meaningful progress in presenting the information in a more useful and convenient format. With the introduction of the Permitting, Planning, Licensing & Compliance system in December of 2020, data has become more accessible. Over the course of the last four years, staff have added to and improved the open data catalogue, ensuring that all permit information is available in multiple formats (e.g., tabular and geo-located), increased the information published in the open data sets to include not just issued permit information but lifecycle permit information from submission to completion, and launched multiple mapping tools for the public to access permit information. The new [Permit Status Map](#) provides users with the ability to see the details and status of permits with the added convenience of a spatial view and the ability to filter by districts and communities. The new [Property Information Finder](#) tool allows users/applicants to find key information regarding their properties that can be used to create complete permit applications.

The introduction of new internal, staff-facing dashboards was also completed over last two years. These dashboards have provided insight into review and inspection times that had previously been unavailable. Staff can use the information provided through the dashboards for workflow and performance management, productivity oversight, identification of areas for improvement, and as a source for evidence-based decision making.

In April of 2023, Planning and Development launched a public [Permit Volume & Processing Time webpage](#). The webpage initially provided rolling permit metrics only, but over the last year, staff have added residential unit volumes that are easily accessible for staff, the public and Council. Currently under development is a new public-facing dashboard that will include permit volumes and processing times that can be broken down in many ways, including by status and showcasing the time an application is under review by staff and the length of time it's with the applicant. The dashboard will also include detailed information on residential units and population trends. Having this information in an intelligent and dynamic dashboard will allow users to filter, view, and obtain information in a variety of formats. Over time, staff will continue to add to the dashboard to include planning application data and more. Planning and Development is targeting to launch the new public dashboard by the end of this fiscal year (March 31, 2025).

### **Current and Target Processing Times**

This report sets out current processing times associated with the end-to-end review of an application, from submission on the part of an applicant to issuance and/or decision. This includes:

- the time needed by the applicant to prepare and submit any missing documents or information such that an application can be deemed complete,
- review time by staff and other review agencies,
- additional time necessary for subsequent revisions and reviews, and

- issuance or final approval by authorized body.

The stated target processing times represent a reasonable expectation for largely complete, approvable applications of each type, and do not include any applicable appeal periods.

**Permits**

Planning and Development processes approximately seven thousand permits annually. Permits are separated into six main categories:

**Building Permits** - Permits for the construction of structures defined as buildings, which can generally be thought of as being able to be occupied (e.g., commercial, residential, institutional).

- Two types of building permits:
  - i. Mixed Use & Commercial Building Permit - high density, multi-unit residential, including mixed-use, but also includes any non-residential builds (e.g., institutional, industrial, commercial).
  - ii. Residential Building Permit – low density residential builds, including related accessory structures.
- Permits also fall under three types of work: new, renovation or addition.
- Permits are deemed complete upon issuance of a certificate of occupancy or a completion certificate.

**Construction Permits** – Permits for the construction of structures not defined as a building, that are not able to be occupied. There are eight types of construction permits, including but not limited to decks, swimming pools, fences, requests for occupancy not associated with renovation, demolition, and solar installations.

**Engineering Permits** – Permits for work involving the public street, for grading and alteration of the ground, or any other engineering needs related to development. Engineering permits include blasting, grade alteration, lot grading and impacts to the public street resulting from development.

**Land Use Approval Permit** – Permits establishing compliance with land use by-law requirements alone, often referred to as development permits. Land use approval permits verify that the proposed use is permitted by and complies with the zone that applies to the property, and that plans meet siting, form and design requirements.

**Construction of Infrastructure Permits** – Permits authorizing the construction of new public streets and parks associated with an approved subdivision design. This permit is also known as the Subdivision – Ready to Construct permit.

**Table 1 - All Permits - Volume & Processing Time with Targets for 2024**

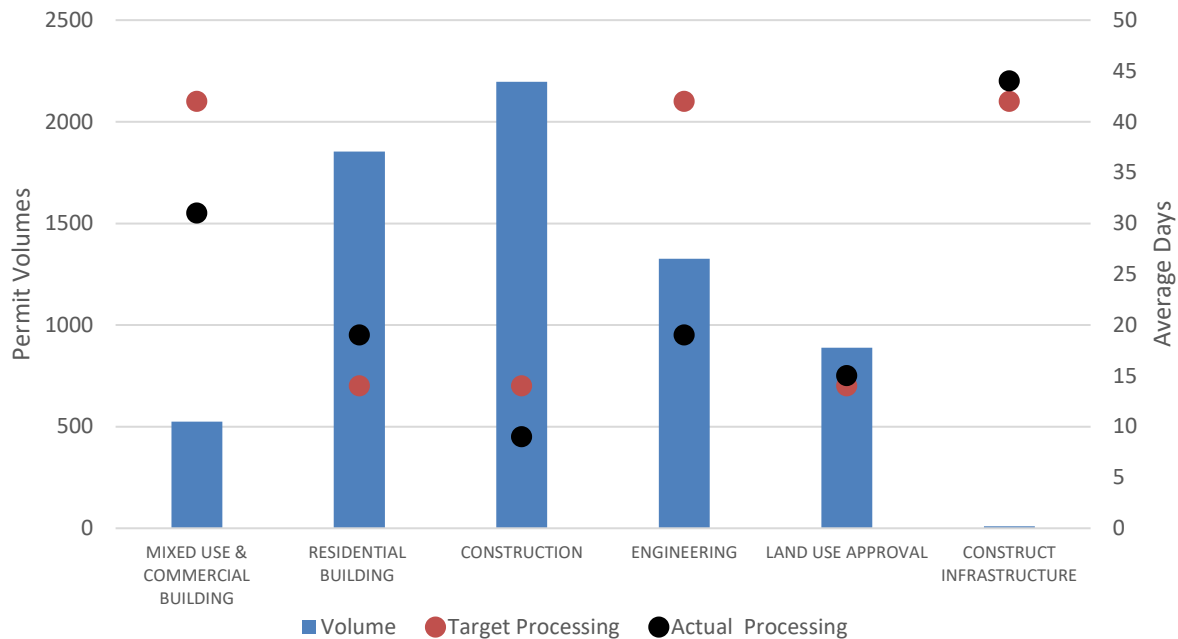
The below table shows processing times and volumes for all permits, measured in calendar days, combining both customer & staff time, and the associated target processing time for complete and largely approvable applications.

<b>2024 PERMITS (up to Oct 28, 024)</b>	<b>Permit Volume</b>	<b>Target Processing</b>	<b>Actual Processing</b>
<b>MIXED USE &amp; COMMERCIAL BUILDING</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>31</b>
NEW	119	42	64
RENOVATION	384	42	24
ADDITION	21	42	80
<b>RESIDENTIAL BUILDING</b>	<b>1853</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>19</b>
NEW	1224	14	16
RENOVATION	407	14	21
ADDITION	222	14	36
<b>CONSTRUCTION</b>	<b>2197</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>ENGINEERING</b>	<b>1326</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>19</b>

<b>LAND USE APPROVAL</b>	<b>888</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>CONSTRUCTION of INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>TOTAL VOLUME</b>	<b>6798</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>

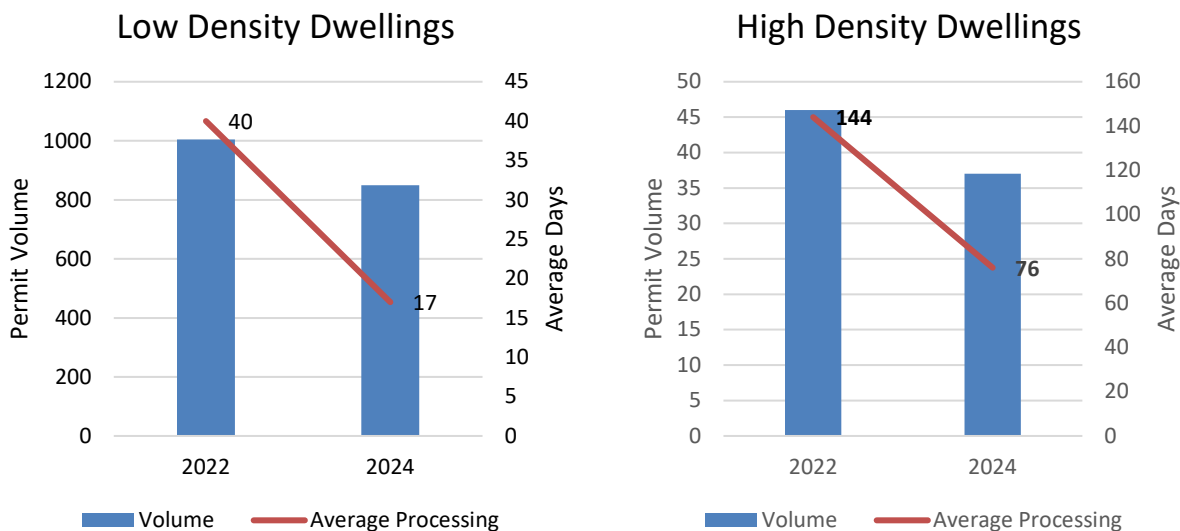
**Graph 1 - All Permit Volume & Processing Time with Targets for 2024**

Below is a graph of including the same information shown in table form, above



**Graph 1A & 1B - 2022 vs 2024 - Permit Volume and Processing Time - Dwellings**

Below is graphical comparison of permit volumes and processing times for low-density (Graph 1A) and high-density (Graph 1B) for 2022 and 2024.



<p><b>Graph 1A:</b> Includes dwellings categorized as low density or missing middle: single unit, two-, three- and four-plexes, townhouses and seasonal dwellings.</p>	<p><b>Graph 1B:</b> Includes dwellings categorized as high density: mixed use multi-unit buildings with residential, and fully residential multi-units.</p>
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Comparing the year-over-year trends of volume and processing times for permits reveals that volumes are increasing while there is continued improvement in processing times for all permit types. The performance for applications for construction of new high density, multi-unit, and mixed-use buildings has been reduced by nearly half as compared to 2022, but continues to lag above the target. Despite the lower number of new high density, multi-unit and mixed-use permit applications as compared to low density residential building applications, the complexity and volume of units is higher which is a key driver for the longer turnaround time. Overall, processing times for permits demonstrate continued improvement and most are at or near the target while the number of permit applications and associated inspections has increased.

There has also been a significant increase in land use approval permits due to the Provincial short term rental registry's requirement for confirmation of compliance with municipal land use requirements. The Engineering and Building Standards team continues to improve year-over-year on review and resolution times, notwithstanding increasing volumes in all areas of work including permits, inquiries, and inspections.

There continues to be focus on process points and process such as initial submission, support offerings to ensure that applicable regulations and necessary documents in order to deem an application complete are clear and accessible, turn-around of revision requests and resubmission, the complexity of regulations, and resilience and appropriateness of resources, in order to further improve the permit process.

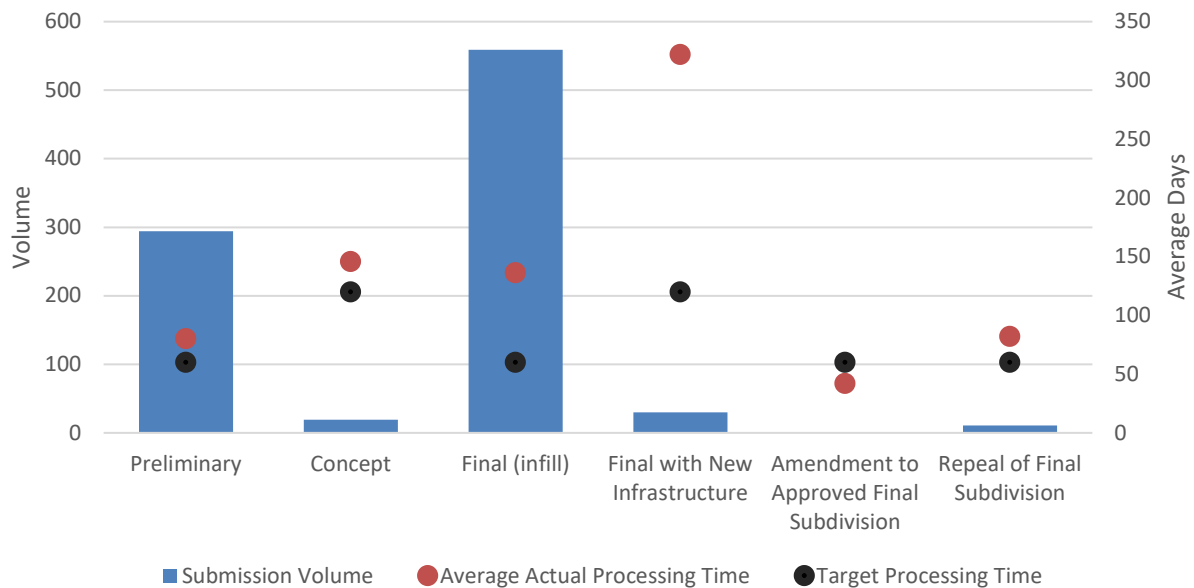
**Subdivision**

Subdivision is the division of land into two or more parcels or the consolidation of two or more parcels into one and includes proposals for 'infill' subdivision where the parcels rely on existing public street frontage, and those that propose new public streets and parks. There are several stages of subdivision including preliminary, concept, tentative and final applications. Preliminary subdivision is an optional, informal process allowing review and feedback before a surveyor is engaged, concept review is required for review of applications proposing new public streets to ensure acceptability of park dedication and appropriate connectivity of communities. Final subdivision is the last stage, where the plan is ultimately approved by the Development Officer and filed at the Land Registry Office.

**Table & Graph 2 - Subdivision Application Volume & Processing Time with Targets -  
January 1, 2023 to October 28, 2024**

The below table & graph show processing times and volumes for all subdivision applications, measured in calendar days and including both customer and staff time, along with the associated target processing time for complete and largely approvable applications.

<b>SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS</b>	<b>SUBMISSION VOLUME</b>	<b>AVERAGE PROCESSING TIME TO DECISION</b>	<b>TARGET PROCESSING TIME</b>
<b>PRELIMINARY</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>CONCEPT</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>FINAL (INFILL)</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>FINAL WITH NEW INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>AMENDMENT TO APPROVED FINAL SUBDIVISION</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>REPEAL OF FINAL SUBDIVISION</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>TOTAL VOLUME</b>	<b>914</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>



Processing times for final subdivision applications with new infrastructure trend well above the target. We now have a volume of data on these types of applications and will complete file audits to understand the common causes for delay. Anecdotally, we understand that these files tend to be subject to issues in connecting new infrastructure with existing sub-standard infrastructure and are commonly incomplete including drawings that miss components or information to confirm that regulations are met. Staff continue to engage with service providers, review agencies and industry partners to refine and define minimum applications standards. An internal working group has been created to complete file audits, outline common delays and prepare a plan to address each, and to further review and implement the recommendations of the Deloitte report that relate to the subdivision process.

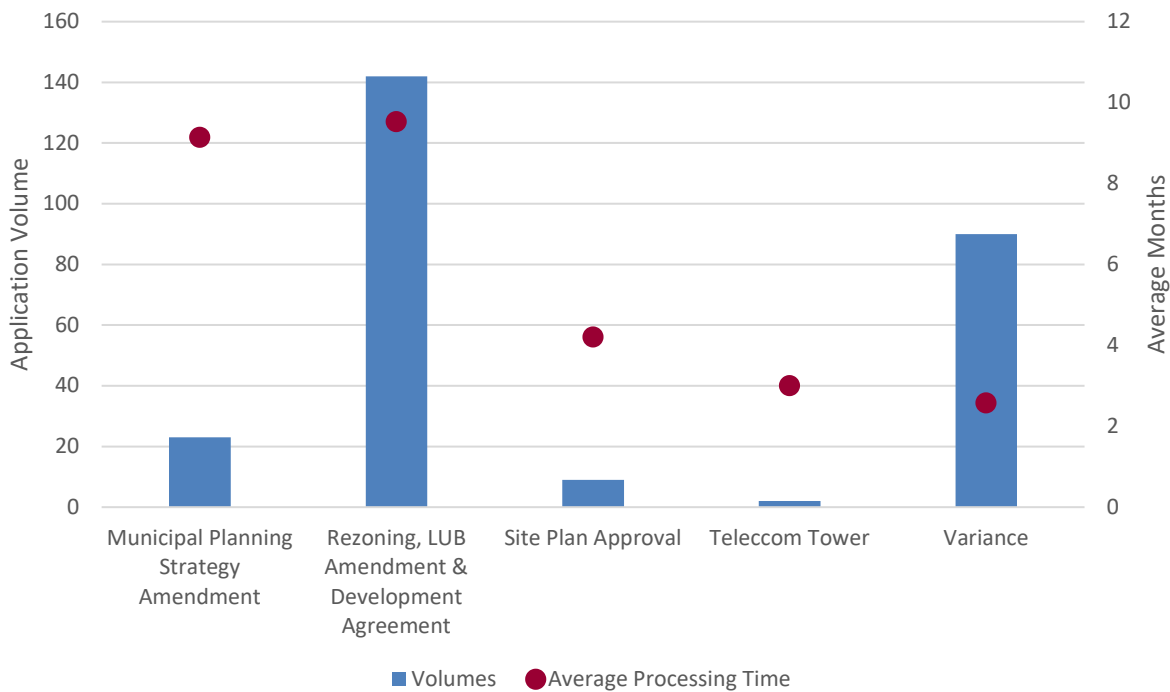
**Planning Applications**

Policies set out within the municipal planning strategies allow for Council’s discretionary consideration of development proposals through the applicable planning process. These planning applications include development agreements, rezonings, land use by-law amendments. Planning applications can be proposed separately or in combination, depending on the applicable policies as they relate to the proposal. It is also possible to request an amendment to plan policy to enable Council’s consideration of a proposal. Included within the planning application reporting are site plan approvals and variances.

Current processing times for planning applications in Graphs 3, 4, 5, below, are within a reporting period of January 2023 up to and including October of 2024, and are shown as a median range. It is important to note that there is a wide range of scale and complexity within planning applications, making a defined target impractical. The noted target processing targets apply to applications that are more typical in nature and do not require extensive engagement, review, and revision.

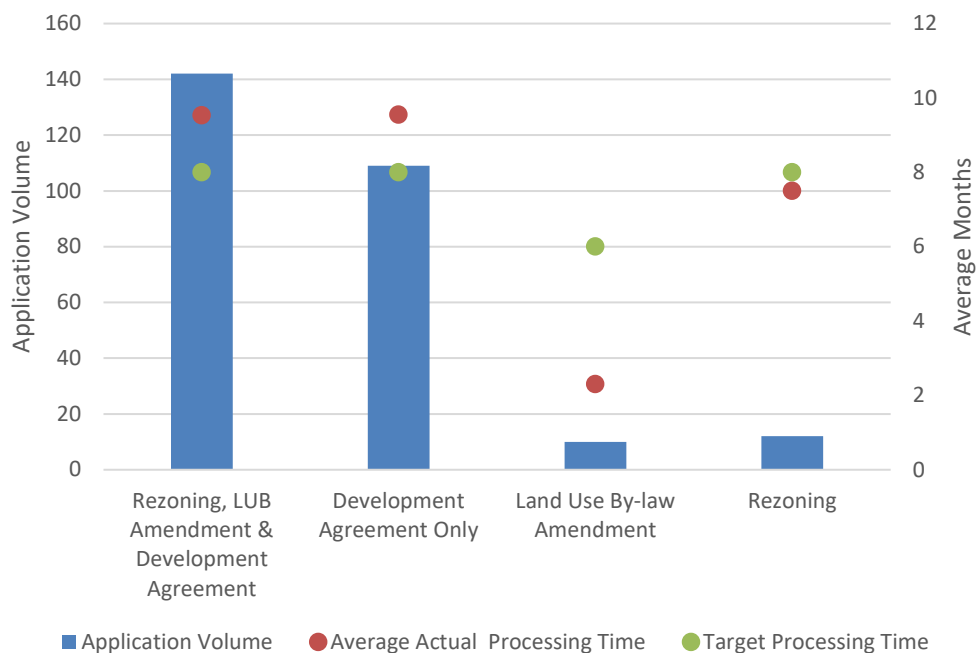
**Graph 3 - Planning Application Volume & Processing Time - January 1, 2023 to October 28, 2024**

The below graph shows a general overview of processing times and volumes for requests to amend municipal plan policies, land use by-law amendments, development agreements, site plan approvals, telecommunication tower installations and requests for relaxations of land use by-law requirements (variances). The reported timelines are measured in months, including both customer & staff time.



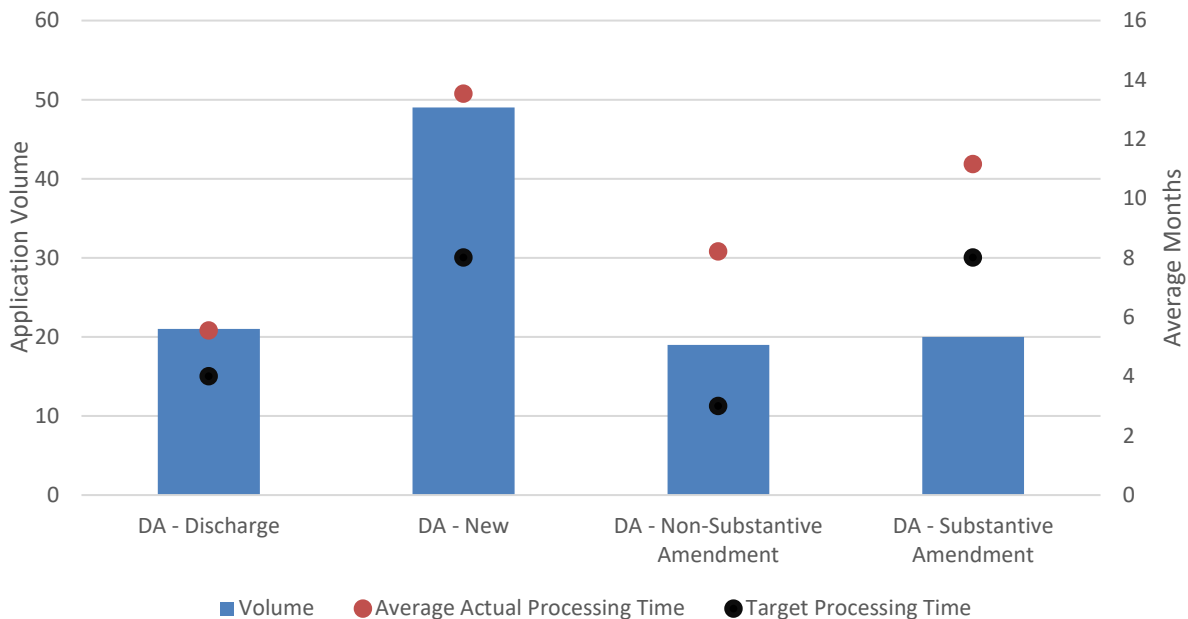
**Graph 4 - Rezoning, LUB Amendment & Development Agreement Application Volume & Processing Time with Targets – January 1, 2023 to October 28, 2024**

The below graph highlights more detailed information shown within the central column of Graph 3, above, demonstrating processing times and volumes for specific types of planning applications relative to rezonings, land use by-law amendments, development agreements, and combinations of the same. Reported processing timelines are measured in calendar days, including both customer and staff time, along with the associated target processing time for complete and largely approvable applications.



**Graph 5 - Development Agreements - Application Volume & Processing Time with Targets - January 1, 2023 to October 28, 2024**

The below graph details processing times specific to Development Agreements. Reported processing timelines are measured in calendar days, including both customer and staff time, along with the associated target processing time for complete and largely approvable applications.



The above is the first volume of reliable data on our performance on larger, more complex files and we have just begun analyzing the metrics relative to planning applications. Overall, we are experiencing a decline in planning applications showcasing that changes in planning policy are directing proposals to the as-of-right permit process. When looking at rezoning, LUB amendments and development agreements, we can confirm we are trending in the right direction reducing processing and approval time, however still have room for improvement. There are four factors that most commonly inform performance on processing times relative to the target for planning applications are scale and complexity of the proposal, how well the proposal relates to the applicable plan policy, quality and completeness of submission, and internal resourcing. There are several initiatives underway to address these issues. Planning and Development are improving our response documents that inform the applicant of required revisions so that it is succinct and plain-speaking. We are planning on forwarding a request for additional resources through the coming Budget and Business plan process, which will be dedicated to the more straightforward applications, specifically, discharge of development agreements and requests for modification and discharge of restrictive covenants. The dedication of resources to the discharge and covenant applications will provide capacity and focus to the more complex files. In the longer term, the ongoing plan and by-law simplification aims to make policy and regulation more easily anticipated, accessible and straightforward. Staff are continually monitoring and developing resource and process improvement plans to improve turnaround times for planning applications.

### Private Covenants

Changes made to the *HRM Charter* in November of 2023 have allowed the Chief Administrative Officer to modify or discharge a private covenant where it is determined to be more restrictive than the applicable zoning in terms of height or density. Covenants are contractual in nature, having been applied to title by the original developer/landowner. Covenants ‘run with the land’, in that they apply to any heirs and assigns (subsequent landowners). Where the covenants are determined through review to be more restrictive than the zoning in terms of height or density, the CAO may decide to modify or discharge the covenant agreement. It’s important to note that the review of permits by the Development Officer is limited solely to the land use by-law requirements, meaning that permits could be issued irrespective of any covenant agreement. Applications for modification or discharge of covenant agreements have been received starting in early 2024 and are in various stages of the review process. While this new approval process will remove



barriers for housing development, it may lengthen processing times for other more complex planning applications, notable development agreements. This is intended to be mitigated through adjustments to and additional request for resources, as discussed above.

### **Current and Target Processing Times Summary**

Improvements to business processes, technical solutions, and staff functions have driven a consistent trend of faster processing times for permit applications and has created efficiencies in planning application workflows. Streamlined processes have eliminated redundant steps and bottlenecks, ensuring that applications move more efficiently through the approval workflow. Meanwhile, the implementation of modern tools, such as the Permitting, Planning, Licensing and Compliance system, has reduced manual interventions, minimized errors, and accelerated communication with applicants, creating a better overall customer experience.

These changes have created sustained improvement by embedding consistency and scalability into business process. Automation and well-defined workflows ensure that efficiencies are applied uniformly, while data-driven feedback helps to quickly identify areas for improvement. As a result, processing times have decreased significantly, for example, new home building approval has decreased by 50% in the last two years, and we draw closer to our planning approval targets each year. These advancements not only enhance internal efficiency but also improve the experience for applicants, reflecting the long-term impact of these initiatives. These productivity improvements are just the beginning; Planning and Development is committed to continually refining our processes, enhancing the technology, engaging with industry partners and incorporating feedback to ensure even greater efficiency and service excellence in the future.

Now that permit processing times have seen considerable improvement, and now that we have a volume of reliable data on our performance on larger, more complex files, we will be shifting our focus towards improvement on those files. Council can expect a concentration on performance relative to subdivision and planning applications, with expected process refinement, engagement with industry on minimum application requirements, review of standards for completeness of application, and review of the appropriateness of process targets, with outcomes detailed within subsequent KPI reports.

### **Service Excellence Initiatives**

Over the past decade, Planning and Development has continued its long-standing commitment to service excellence through transformative initiatives. As noted previously, a multi-million-dollar technology upgrade transitioned the department from fully paper-based processes to a digital platform, offering seamless digital access for customers and streamlining internal workflows. Services were also centralized under one roof in 2022 to enhance accessibility and improve the customer experience, while functional team and resource realignments optimized collaboration on applications. A prioritization method for less complex permit applications was introduced to reduce processing times, and a collaborative process for planning applications strengthened partnerships with service providers and stakeholders, allowing for collective feedback for customers. The department has also actively participated in external and internal service reviews to ensure processes are continually refined, customer needs are met and relationships with our customers are strengthened.

While significant progress has been made, we recognize that the pursuit of excellence is never-ending. We remain focused on building upon this strong foundation, striving for ongoing improvements that enhance efficiency, responsiveness, and the quality of service we provide, while fostering trust and stronger connections with the communities we serve.

### **HRM Housing Development Application & Building Review Project by Davis Pier**

In 2021, the Executive Panel on Housing in the HRM was established as a joint effort between HRM and the province to explore ways to accelerate residential development across the municipality. At the direction of the Panel, Davis Pier Consulting was engaged to consult with development industry members and HRM planning staff, to identify challenges and barriers to development of housing.

Davis Pier has undertaken a review of planning applications, the decision for which has been pending for

more than six months, approved permits where construction has not started within 90 days of permit issuance, and discretionary planning applications that have been approved but for which a permit application has not been received. The final report, its results, and corresponding recommendations of staff will be delivered to Council once the final report is delivered and its outcomes have been reviewed.

### **Trusted Partner Program**

As recommended within the October 2022 [HRM Housing Development Barrier Review report](#)<sup>3</sup> by Deloitte, and directed through *HRM Charter* amendments, Planning and Development is in the process of creating a program where approvals are shortened for pre-qualified applicants with a proven track record, with review through on-site audits taking place to ensure that applicable regulations are followed. A pilot of the program is currently underway, which is primarily focussed on building and development permits, with analysis and industry engagement targeted for early in 2025, and delivery of a by-law for Council's consideration expected in fall of 2025. Later phases of the pilot program will also include subdivisions and planning applications to identify delays and work towards shortening approval times.

### **Service Excellence Framework**

Planning and Development is a customer-facing, service-based unit, with high value placed on the customer experience, seeing it as essential to the mission and reputation. Every interaction is an opportunity to show our commitment to respectful, attentive, and solution-focused service. By fostering a welcoming, transparent, and supportive environment, we aim to exceed expectations, build trust, and create lasting positive relationships with our community. We listen to our customers' needs and aim to constantly improve our commitment to service.

We are creating a comprehensive service excellence framework designed to set clear expectations and practices for all interactions. This program will establish a culture that places customers at the heart of everything we do, ensuring that each experience is consistent, well-informed, and a true reflection of our core values. Anchored in guiding principles, the program will promote a help-centered, people-centric approach, empowering every team member to deliver attentive, reliable, and respectful service. Through this initiative, we aim to foster a positive, solution-oriented environment that strengthens relationships with those we serve.

### **Conclusion**

Planning and Development continues to prioritize service improvements. Leadership continues to monitor and adjust resources, business processes and tools, to ensure teams are working efficiently towards reducing processing times, with the goal of achieving target times for applications. The addition of transparent and accountable mapping tools, open data sets and improved websites has provided greater understanding and service for customers, citizens, and elected officials. With the implementation of the new public facing dashboard, Council will have additional enhanced ability to review Planning and Development's service delivery metrics.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

While there are no immediate financial implications at this time, Planning and Development are reviewing resourcing and intend to bring forward further resource considerations as part of the business plan and budget process, as detailed in the Discussion section of this report.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

No community engagement was required.

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<sup>3</sup> Report available online at [housing-development-barrier-review.pdf \(novascotia.ca\)](#)

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*- Part I (The Municipality), as follows:

- 7A The purposes of the Municipality are to
- (a) provide good government;
  - (b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality;

Parts VIII (Planning and Development) and IX (Subdivision)

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