

MOTION

8. Daylighting Building Permit Wait Times (Member's Motion B.4)

At the Council meeting on February 9, 2021, Council referred the following motion to the Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities meeting on February 10, 2021, in order to hear from speakers.

Submitted by: Councillor Kirby-Yung

WHEREAS

1. The City of Vancouver continually works to make Vancouver's homes and buildings safer, healthier, greener, and more accessible, including reviewing permit applications and enforcing regulations in a fair and consistent manner, and working to decrease the length and complexity of the permit process by introducing – among other measures – online services and more efficient procedures and processes;
2. Construction projects and any change of land use or occupancy on private property require a building permit. All projects must comply with the Vancouver Building By-law to meet life safety, livability, accessibility, and sustainability requirements. Building permits are the tool the City uses to achieve these requirements;
3. The City has a Small Business Commercial Renovation Centre (CRC) for small business owners planning a renovation or looking to move or start a business in Vancouver. The CRC offers assistance to help customers make an informed decision about the suitability of a business property or the viability of a proposed renovation;
4. Despite various strategies and measures implemented by the City of Vancouver over time to improve permit wait times such as the Commercial Renovation Centre launched in February 2017 (as a 'one stop shop' for small businesses to get dedicated support), investments in technology to improve transparency, workflow, and overall customer experience, increased staff to address backlogs and specific areas of need, as well as conducting stakeholder engagements, policy inventories, high-level process and decision-making reviews, and data and metrics reviews, the duration and clarity surrounding permit wait times continue to be an impediment to those wishing to invest in existing and/or open new businesses in Vancouver;
5. At a public hearing on June 25, 2020, Council approved amendments to clean-up, clarify, and consolidate our land use regulations and related land use documents to make them more user-friendly. These amendments represent incremental changes toward a set of simplified zoning regulations and are intended to help simplify and streamline permit reviews in combination with permit processing improvements;
6. Likewise, on July 24, 2020, Council enacted the amendments to the zoning regulations noted above, and on September 15, 2020, Council gave final

approval to the various consequential amendments related to the City's land use documents. The updated and simplified land use regulations and policies are intended to result in review processes that are more streamlined;

7. With reference to the City's "Regulation Redesign" initiative – a comprehensive ongoing review of the City's land use regulations and related policy documents – staff are scheduled to report back to Council in the Winter of 2021 with regulatory updates related to the drafting and refining of new zoning by-laws, the development of an implementation plan for introducing new by-laws, and the communication protocols and procedures for developing regulations and policies, along with related public engagement opportunities. The timeline for implementation of the above-noted report items is scheduled for 2022;
8. Despite the foregoing, and despite the various strategies and measures implemented by the City to improve permit wait times, a lack of clear information and general uncertainty regarding permit wait times continues to be an issue, especially in terms of transparently communicating wait times to the general public and small businesses wishing to expand or open. For example, the CRC webpage on the City's website shows "permit processing times as of January 1, 2021" but only for one permit category – namely, for "Minor commercial renovation" work;
9. Likewise, the CRC webpage notes a target to issue 95% of "minor commercial renovation" permits within seven weeks, yet only 44% of these applications have been accomplished within the seven-week target in the last three months; further there is no clear information given regarding the average wait time;
10. The impact of delays and/or permit processing times that are longer than expected causes a range of financial hardships for small businesses, not the least of which are having to carry extra months of lease costs without any revenue, delaying the projected timeline for opening to the paying public, and generally impacting the financial well-being and sustainability of a business (especially considering the added layers of uncertainty due to COVID-19);
11. Making clear, transparent information available to small businesses would help them to plan more effectively, for example in negotiating leases by knowing the length of time they will have to plan for carrying costs along with other matters relevant to opening or expanding a small business (while recognizing that wait times could be subject to change for a number of reasons such as the completeness of a permit application, questions that arise, and the volume of instream applications to be processed).

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Vancouver City Council direct staff to post easy-to-access information on the City's website that would show current projected wait times for various building permit types in as close to real-time as possible, so that businesses planning to make improvements and/or changes to their premises (where a permit is required), or people planning to open a new business that would require permits, can have greater clarity and ability to plan appropriately and achieve success.

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