

COMMUNICATION 131130

Received From: Lennox Smith
Addressed To: Committee of the Whole
Date: November 10, 2020
Topic: Staffing Levels for Building Department

SUMMARY

This report outlines the current staffing levels in the Building Department, and the challenges facing the Department due to growth. Currently the staffing levels are providing satisfactory service levels while trying to accommodate the growth trends in our community. Increasing permit levels, requests for information, development consultation, and constant inquiries have put stresses on the successful operation of the Building Department, and staffing should be examined to ensure statutory service levels are being met or exceeded.

BACKGROUND

Over the last two years there has been an influx of new residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional growth throughout the Town. This growth has proven challenging for the Building Department to maintain an acceptable level of service that is expected by both Council and building permit applicants. As a growing community, the expectation of applicants is that the Building Department should staff accordingly to provide the proper service level that is required.

The growth currently underway includes larger scale residential, long term care, retirement developments, large subdivisions, industrial builds, and commercial interior fit ups. These developments have increased complexities for building permits, pre-consultation and building staff oversight which are primarily performed by the Chief Building Official as the senior and most qualified official. This trend has turned the Chief Building Official position into primarily a day-to-day worker role and has reduced the ability to properly manage the team.

Accompanying the increased scheduled pre-consultations is an increase in requests for Ontario Building Code interpretations by both inspectors and applicants such as designers, architects, project managers, and trades persons. The frequency and intricacy of these requests are escalating to the point where it has become the primary daily task performed by Building Department staff.

These requests are received mainly through email or phone calls with the Department seeing a significant decrease in in-person interactions (even before Covid-19). It is estimated that the CBO spends approximately 75% of his day answering phone and email inquiries while performing the balance of his duties within the remaining 25% of the day or outside business hours. Likewise, when the inspectors are not in the field performing inspections or inputting reports, they are responding to email and phone inquiries.

Current Staffing Contingent:

The Department is currently staffed with two (2) full time Building Inspectors, a Building Administrative Clerk, and the Chief Building Official. The CBO has over 14 years' experience with almost 10 years as a CBO. However, the inspector positions are

generally staffed as junior trainee positions. At present, our staff average four (4) years' prior experience in construction and design industries. With more junior staffing comes learning curves which include a significant reliance on the CBO for direction on both simple and complex issues. With the hands-on direction required from the CBO, the addition of an experienced Senior Plans Examiner would assist greatly with the workload.

In addition to workload, training is also required for all staff for three (3) main reasons:

1. To ensure they maintain their current qualifications to perform their required duties under the Ontario Building Code and the Building Code Act;
2. To attain further Ministry qualifications to expand on their inspection abilities in the field, and to maintain their ability to inspect legally, and,
3. To ensure that they are continually educated on the constantly changing Ontario Building Code changes to limit the Town's exposure to liability.

These training requirements dictate that extensive training will be required for a number of years for the Department's staff in order to address maintenance (for certification) and upgrades, and to remain efficient and competent in the field and the office. Additionally, the proposed new position, will permit the CBO to spend more time coaching and instructing to reduce the dependency of staff on the CBO and to increase their efficiency in the field and office.

Increased Permit Volumes:

Building Department permit volumes have been steadily increasing since 2017 as follows:

2017 – 131
2018 – 192
2019 – 362
2020 – 500+

The percentage of large projects and new housing has increased compared to smaller renovations or additions, which has resulted in the inspectors being primarily in the field with little to no time being available in the office to assist with plans examinations. This means that plans review is completed by the CBO or contracted out to a third-party reviewer at an increased cost.

Staff is recommending that a full-time Senior Plans Examiner position be created. This position is the next logical progression for the Department and was discussed during the discussion on a five (5) year staffing plan. With the rapid growth the Town is experiencing, this position needs to be considered at this time.

The ability to add this position and recruit a new experienced and qualified code professional would substantially increase the capabilities of the Department. This person would act as a second point of contact for technical direction for the Building Inspectors, a front-line point of contact for the everyday inquiries that are beyond the Building Administrative Clerk's capability, and an examiner that would share the review of incoming applications with the CBO to ensure statutory timeframes for review and response is satisfied.

This would free up the CBO to focus on the day-to-day operation of the Department like policies and procedures, coaching, training, large building plans review, development permit application reviews, and other higher-level duties. The duties of the Building Clerk and Building Inspectors positions would remain constant, except for reducing plans review which will allow the inspectors to complete more in-field work.

This new position would also provide a much-needed qualified person that could be appointed Deputy CBO when required. The staff member appointed in the interim to be Deputy would provide direction on Orders to Comply, policy and procedures and other items that are delegated to a Deputy CBO when the CBO is away on course, on vacation, sick or on potential leave. Most towns of this size that are exhibiting increased growth will look to have at least two fully qualified staff to ensure there are no issues with direction, guidance and capability when the CBO is out of the office. North Grenville would be a similar sized municipality experiencing rapid growth and for comparison purposes has staffing which includes: a CBO, Deputy CBO (who also performs plans examination), two (2) inspectors in the field, Building Clerk, and a are in the process of hiring a full time contract Plans Examiner for a total of six (6) staff. Carleton Place is currently issuing more permits than North Grenville (approximately 75 more permits to date for a total of 459 as of October 13, 2020).

The goal of the Department is to provide service which exceeds the minimum statutory requirements of the Ontario Building Code to the Town's current and future residents. This can be achieved by adding further expertise to the Department with the cost for the position being paid by building permit revenues and not taxation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

With the increasing permit numbers and permit fee generation, the position can be paid for from revenues generated by building permit fees. It is a requirement of Bill 124 that the Department be self-sufficient through its own permit fee revenue.

Over the last two (2) years, the Building Department has brought in a significant surplus due to the building increases in Town. It is expected that building permits will continue into the future with the number of draft approved subdivisions in Town. Without this position, the additional revenue earned in the Department would continue to be set aside in reserves.

This position will reduce, if not eliminate our third-party assistance costs for plans examinations and building inspections that are currently contracted out. The costs of those services in the past have been close to \$5,000.00 per year.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council authorize the hiring of a full-time permanent Senior Plans Examine position in 2021; and

THAT the cost be included in the draft 2021 Building Department budget.