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**MEMORANDUM**

**PDS-C 8-2020**

**Subject:** COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Planning and Development Services

**Date:** September 9, 2020

**To:** Planning and Economic Development Committee

**From:** Rino Mostacci, Commissioner, Planning and Development

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**Commissioner Comments, Planning and Development Services**

**Community and Long Range Planning**

**Current Status of Operations**

The Province announced draft *"Amendment 1"* to 2019 Growth Plan and draft revised *"Land Needs Assessment"*. During the Provincial consultation period Comments were submitted by Niagara Region planning staff on July 31, 2020 and included in the Friday correspondence of July 31, 2020 (CWCD 218-2020). The final Land Needs Assessment methodology has not yet been released by the Province. This methodology is required to calculate the lands needs as part of the Regional Official Plan.

Progress and online/virtual consultation for the Regional Official Plan will continue from September through to November (6 Zoom PIC Webinars on key topic areas). The consultation will seek feedback on outcomes and policy directions from the background reports related to Growth Management and Natural Heritage, Water and Agriculture Systems. As well, individual consultation is being conducted directly with members of Regional Council and Area Planners to solicit feedback on the program and process to date. Draft policies for the Archaeological Management Plan are almost complete. On today's agenda are reports and associated presentations regarding the status of the Regional Structure and Settlement Area Boundary Review.

Staff are continuing to support planning initiatives in local municipalities, specifically Welland and Smithville urban expansion, the Glendale District Plan among others. As well, staff are anticipating the processing of JART quarry applications, which are

expected later this fall. In addition, Planning staff are also managing the Airports Master Plan project.

The Province is very much interested in encouraging the development activity to support economy recovery and in particular housing supply. On that basis, it has been introducing regulations to facilitate the processing of applications and the decision making process for municipal Councils. In addition, the Province continues to develop guidance material to support the conformity deadline of Municipal Comprehensive Reviews (the New Regional Official Plan) of July 2022.

### **Development Planning & Approval Services**

Development Planning & Approval Services continues to adapt to ensure the delivery of core development review functions including: review and comment on all development applications from a Provincial and Regional perspective, coordinating and analyzing internal review/comments from Urban Design, Environmental Planning and Development Engineering for a “one-window” Regional response.

For the month of June the following development volumes were received by the department:

- Planning Applications (includes zoning, subdivision, site plan etc.) - **29**
- Engineering Applications (includes servicing reviews, site plan, etc.) - **16**
- Private Septic Applications - **35**
- Pre-consultations – **42**

Although application volumes are generally below pre-pandemic levels, we are seeing a resurgence of volumes approaching “normal” levels with a steady increase in volumes starting in April. This can be attributed in large part to the ability of local area municipalities and the Niagara Escarpment Commission to clear up application backlogs resulting from difficulties in the early stages of the pandemic in accepting and processing applications remotely. Also a factor, is the ability to hold virtual public meetings, which allows planning applications to continue advancing through the approval process. While development volumes for July have not been compiled at the time of the writing of this update it is anticipated that development levels will show a continuation in this resurgence.

This recovery has also supported meeting our forecasted fee levels, which at the end of July represents only a 9% reduction from the same time in 2019 despite the significant

development decline at the early stage of the pandemic. Additionally the Region is seeing a resurgence of building permit activity in the month of June. Below is the building permit information for April, May and June 2020 for Local Area Municipal building permits.

	# Permits	New Units	New Unit Value	Total Permit Value	New Unit Area (ft2)	Total Area (ft2) reported
Apr	257	297	90,921,376	136,186,389	251,599	460,245
May	479	392	67,810,388	120,454,474	455,820	712,874
Jun	635	417	113,771,121	148,924,514	598,555	1,215,899

## **Infrastructure Planning & Development Engineering**

### **Current Status of Operations**

#### **Development Engineering**

We are continuing to respond to development applications with engineering comments, legal agreements for road works, and processing ECA's under the Transfer of Review program for new sanitary and storm sewers. Additionally, we are continuing with Stormwater Management (SWM) review, Transportation review/meetings, and W&WW review/meetings as it relates to development applications and inquiries. We are working on the SWM Guidelines Project with WOOD Consulting Engineers and assessing schedule/deliverables to adapt to current situation.

#### **Infrastructure Planning**

We are continuing with the development of the RFP for the 2021 Water & Wastewater (W&WW) Master Servicing Plan (MSP) Update project in consultation with W&WW team. The target release for the RFP is in September to ensure work can be completed by end of 2021 as it is an important input for the Development Charges Background

Study and By-law update.

Collectively, there are ongoing corporate wide-efforts to coordinate long range planning/growth with infrastructure planning projects (2021 W&WW MSP update) and the upcoming Development Charges Background Study & By-law update.

### **Development Industry Liaison**

We are continuing with the review of the potential build out scenarios for the urban areas of Niagara in collaboration with planning group. This must be completed to be part of the 2021 W&WW MSP update to better understand the potential servicing implications and supporting infrastructure for build out. We are leading the development application process for the Linhaven and Gilmore LTC Redevelopment Projects and coordinating with St. Catharines, MTO, and other review parties to ensure that site plan application can be approved and the timelines associated with this project remain on track (Government funding is tied to this as well). Participating with Development Industry meetings (NHBA) to understand impacts and restrictions from COVID to residential development industry and housing stock.

### **Private Sewage/Septic Systems Program**

The Private Sewage System group (responsible for Part 8 of the Ontario Building Code) is continuing to receive and respond to septic permit applications, inspections, development applications, special requests and complaints.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

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Rino Mostacci, MCIP, RPP  
Commissioner, Planning and Development Services