
MEETING TYPE: Regular Council Meeting
MEETING DATE: Tuesday, July 19, 2022
AUTHOR: Tamera Cameron, Manager of Planning
DEPARTMENT: Planning and Development
ITEM TITLE: Planning Department Workload Update
DESCRIPTION: To discuss the current workload in Planning and to seek Council direction on next steps.

OPTIONS

- A. No action required
- B. THAT staff is directed to report back to Council outlining options and recommendations to prioritize active development applications.
- C. THAT staff is directed to report back to Council outlining options and recommendations for improving development application timelines.
- D. THAT staff be directed to report back to Council outlining:
 - 1. options and recommendations to prioritize active development applications; and
 - 2. options and recommendations for improving development application timelines.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The District of Lake Country is experiencing a significant backlog of planning applications, which has been increasing each year since at least 2016. While some actions have already been taken to address the backlog, further action is necessary to create long-term solutions. Should Council choose, staff will return to Council with options and recommendations:

- 1. to prioritize active development applications; and
- 2. for improving development application timelines.

KEY INFORMATION

- The Planning division has 149 active applications as of July 1, 2022.
- According to the 2021 Census, Lake Country grew by 22.4% from 2016 to 2021.
- The file backlog has also been growing since at least 2016.
- During the last 5 years, the number of staff and number of applications received per year has remained relatively consistent. However, recent disruptions such as the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing staff changes have reduced staff capacity to process applications.
- Application scale and complexity has generally increased over this period and the quality of application reviews and processing by staff has also improved.
- If nothing changes, the application backlog will continue to grow each year.

STRATEGIC RELEVANCE AND COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

It is Council's strategic priorities to:

- Identify and Support Improvements to the Development Process,
- Support Opportunities to Diversify Lake Country's Tax Base,
- Encourage Growth of the Downtown Core and
- Create and Support Opportunities for a Healthy, Active and Inclusive Community.

Extended application timelines are having an impact on the ability of the District to support opportunities to diversify its tax base, grow its Town Centre and approve projects that will add housing (market, affordable, and senior's facilities) within our community.

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

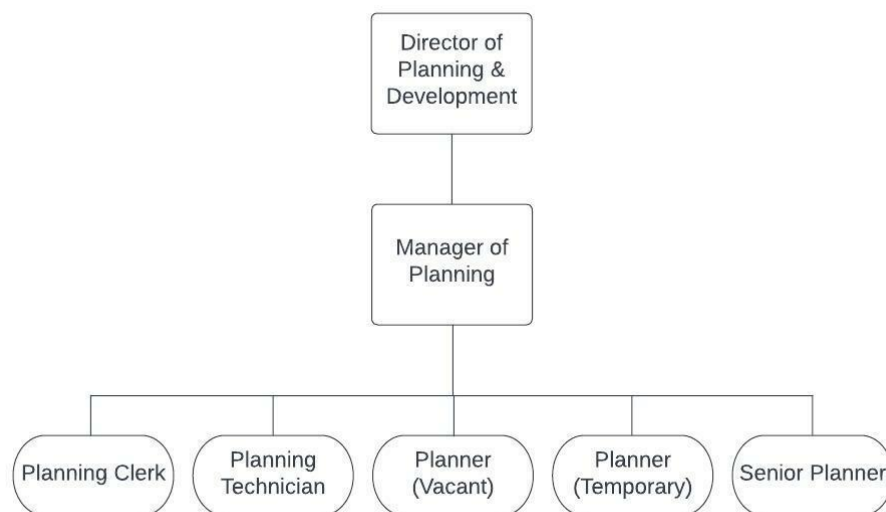
Responsibilities of the Planning Division

The Planning division is responsible for current planning (development and land use applications) and long-range planning (plan and policy development and implementation). The current planning function takes up most of the division's resources and includes the processing of a range of application types including:

- Official Community Plan Amendments
- Zoning Amendments
- Development Variance Permits
- Temporary Use Permits
- Development Permits (Council & Technical)
- Board of Variance
- Subdivisions
- Agricultural Land Commission Referrals
- Liquor Licence Referrals
- Covenant amendments
- Development Permit Exemption applications
- Sign Permits
- Business Licences
- Referrals from the Province and other municipalities.

Number of Planning Staff

At present, the Planning division consists of a Manager of Planning and the following four permanent unionized positions: senior planner, planner, planning technician, and planning clerk. The planner position is currently vacant and will be filled shortly. Additionally, there is a temporary planner position in the Department that has been filled for up to a 2-year term. See the organizational chart for the Planning division below.



Since 2016, the number of staff in the Planning division has remained relatively consistent. From 2016 to 2021 the team consisted of five unionized staff including a senior planner, planner, planning technician, planning clerk, and technical planning clerk. Until 2020, the team was directly managed by a Director of Planning & Development who was also the Approving Officer. In 2020, a Manager of Planning position was added, which took on the Approving Officer role. In 2021, the technical planning clerk position evolved into two roles—a development clerk and a

development technician—within the Engineering & Environmental Services Department. This change transitioned some of the technical tasks of the Planning division related to civic addressing, legal document preparation, and subdivision processing to that department. A new Manager of Development position has also been created in the Engineering & Environmental Services Department, which will take on the Approving Officer role once the position is filled.

Recent Disruptions to the Planning Division

The Covid-19 pandemic temporarily disrupted the functioning of the Planning division in 2020 (to current) as staff adapted to a work-from-home model. The Planning division also experienced significant staff changes in 2021-2022, which resulted in a staff shortage for nearly 11 months as positions were filled. As the team is entirely new, time is required for staff to learn their new roles, which temporarily translates into slower processing times.

Applications Received Versus Applications Resolved Per Year

Chart 1 below compares the number of applications received versus applications resolved (approved/withdrawn/rejected) each year from the beginning of 2016 to the end of 2021. Since 2016, the Planning division has received an average of 131 major development applications per year. The number of files resolved has remained steady at 102 to 109 over this period (apart from a peak in resolved applications in 2018 and a low in 2020). During this time, the scale and complexity of applications generally increased, while the quality of application evaluation and processing by staff also improved.

Every year, except for 2018, there have been more applications received than applications resolved. As a result, the backlog of applications has continued to grow each year.

Chart 1

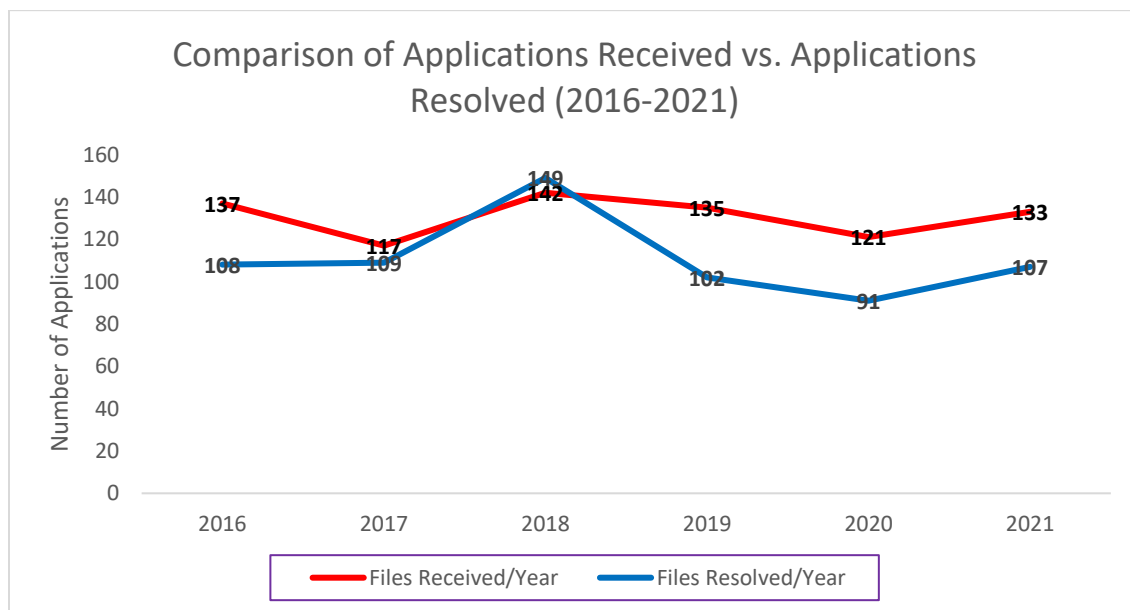
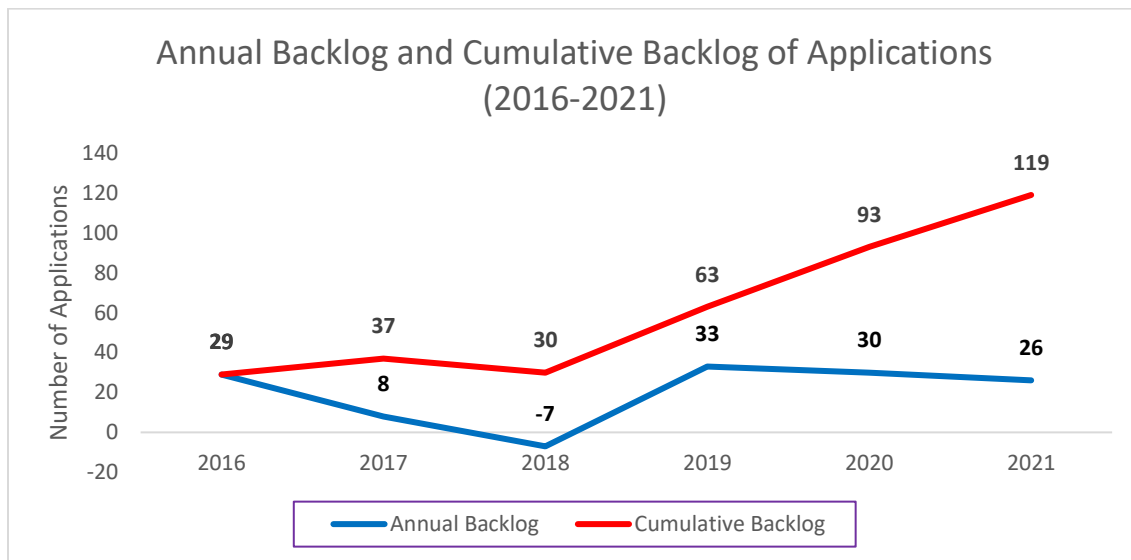


Chart 2 shows the number of files that are carried over each year (Annual Backlog) and how the application backlog has grown over the years (Cumulative Backlog). To illustrate the impact of this backlog, at the beginning of 2022, the Planning division was already responsible for 119 major files that were carried over from previous years.

Chart 2



Average Application Processing Timelines and Number of Active Files

The Planning division had the following average timelines in 2021 and 2022 (as of July 1):

Application Type	Average File Processing Timelines in 2021	Average File Processing Timelines in 2022
Zoning Amendment	14 months	18 months
Development Variance Permit	6 months	12 months
Temporary Use Permit	7 months	9 months
Development Permit – Council	14 months	14 months
Development Permit – Technical (staff)	7 months	6 months
Agricultural Land Commission Referral	13 months	N/A
Subdivision (Preliminary Layout Reviews)	7 months	10 months

Additionally, as of July 1, 2022, the Planning division has 149 active files (see the breakdown by application type in the table below). This does not include smaller files such as DP exemption applications, referrals, sign permits, or business licences.

Application Type	Number of Active Applications	Percentage of Total Applications
Development Permit – Council	39	26%
Subdivision (staff)	32	22%
Development Permit – Technical (staff)	24	16%
Development Variance Permit	17	11%
Zoning Amendment	16	11%
Agricultural Land Reserve	10	7%
Temporary Use Permit	6	4%
OCP Amendment	2	1.5%
Covenant Amendment	2	1.5%
TOTAL	149	100%

Actions Already Taken

To fill the staffing gap while we undertook various longer term hiring processes:

- a consultant was hired as the Interim Approving Officer to work 3 days per week on subdivision applications;
- consultants have been used to advance complex development applications such as Lakestone and O'Rourke's Vineyards;
- a casual clerk was recently hired to help with inquiries, business licensing, and other administrative tasks;
- a temporary planner position was created to fill in for a planner on leave. As this planner has resigned, the planner position will be filled shortly, and the temporary planner position will remain in place. This will provide an additional planner (for a total of 1 senior planner, 1 planner, and 1 temporary planner) to help process applications for at least an additional 18 months; and,
- a new Manager of Development position was created in the Engineering & Environmental Services Department. This new position will take on the Approving Officer role. Once this position is filled, most subdivision processing tasks will be transferred to the Engineering & Environmental Services Department.

While these interventions have all been helpful, most are temporary solutions. More solutions that are less temporary in nature are needed to address the scale of the application backlog.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

File Management Staffing Scenarios

With 149 active applications, the timelines to receive application approval are extended and are continuing to grow. Chart 3 below shows how the number of active applications will grow over the next 2.5 years based on two staffing scenarios should the District continue to receive an average of 130 files per year. Scenario 1 is based on the number of staff we currently have when all positions are filled (1 Manager of Planning, 1 Senior Planner, 1 Planner, 1 Planning Technician, 1 Development Technician, and 1 Approving Officer) and the number of files they are reasonably able to resolve per year when fully trained. Scenario 2 adds one planner position, for a total of 3 planners. In Scenario 1, the file backlog will continue to grow each year by 27 files, which is consistent with how the file backlog has historically grown (see Chart 2). Scenario 2 shows that adding an additional planner will begin to reduce the backlog but by only 3 files per year.

Chart 3

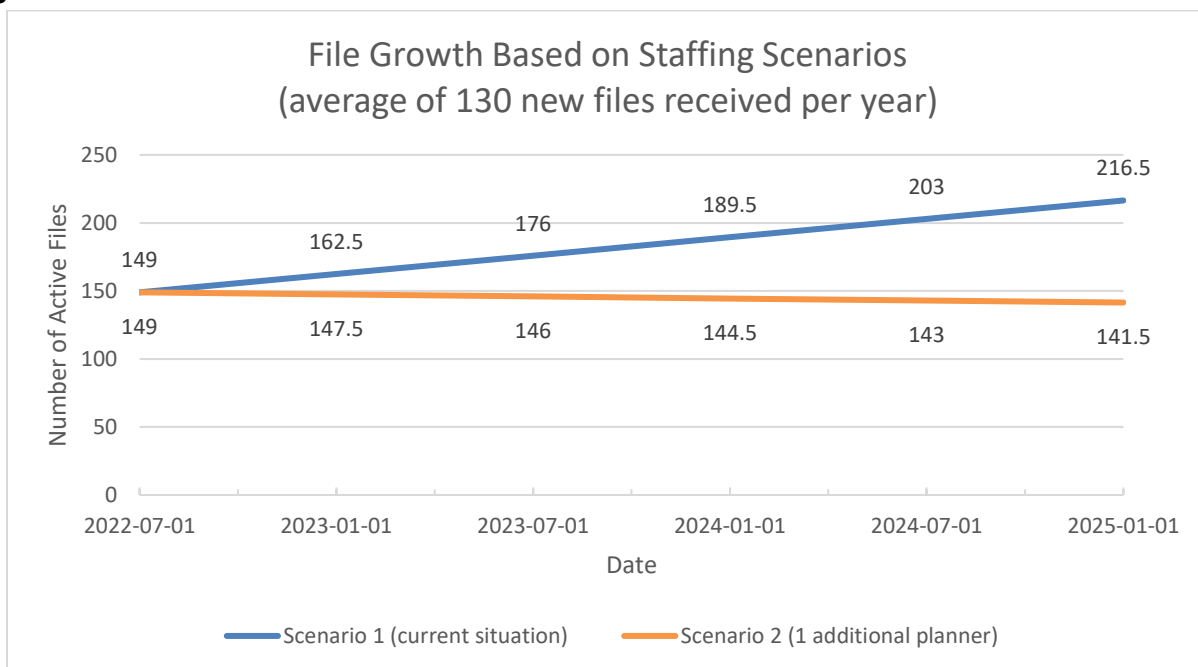
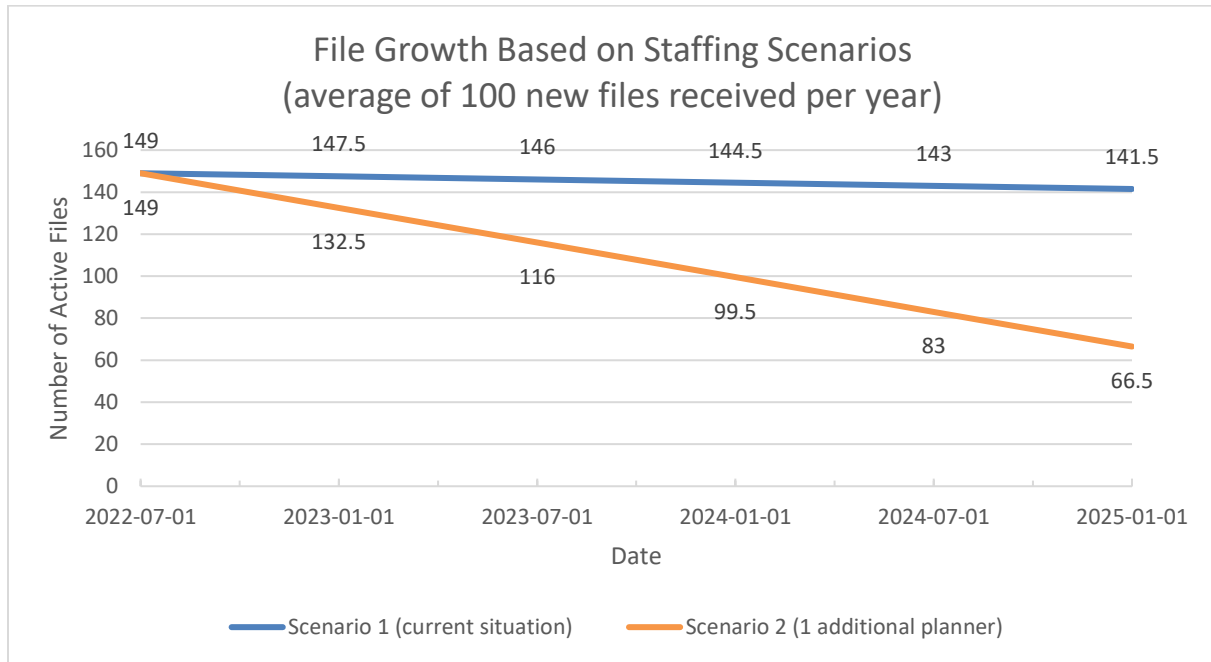


Chart 4 uses the same two staffing scenarios but considers what might happen if an economic downturn reduces the number of applications received each year (100 per year). In Scenario 1, the backlog will decrease by 3 applications per year. If another planner is added, Scenario 2 shows that the backlog will decrease by 33 files per year.

Chart 4



However, even if Scenario 2 were to occur, it would still take 4.5 years to get through the entire backlog of applications. Additionally, these scenarios rely on the assumption that applications received remain steady at 100 per year and no other disruptions occur such as staff vacancies. It also does not factor in staff capacity in other departments such as Engineering or Building to process additional applications. For example, it is possible that an increase in files resolved in Planning could contribute to backlogs at the Building Permit stage.

Prioritization of Active Applications

As a more immediate intervention, staff are seeking direction from Council regarding the prioritization of active applications. The typical procedure is to process applications chronologically based on the application received date. However, Section 7.1.7. (b) in the Official Community Plan states that the policies of Council are as follows: “Expedite permitting procedures for development proposals providing attainable ownership units, rental units, special needs housing, seniors housing, or congregate care facilities.”

Staff is seeking clarification from Council regarding the intent of this policy. Given the current number of active applications, expediting certain types of applications will likely extend timelines for all other types of applications. For example, a Development Permit for a single-family dwelling or an accessory building in the Hillside Development Permit Area received in 2021 may take longer to process if other applications are prioritized before it.

Potential Next Steps for Improving Application Timelines

Unless economic conditions change, application timelines are likely to increase as the backlog of applications grows each year. Should Council direct staff to improve the application timelines, there are three areas that can be explored further for possible solutions:

- *Staff Numbers*

Adding staff will help to process applications faster, thus reducing application timelines. However, an increase in planning staff will also have budget implications as well as an impact on other departments in

terms of their capacity to review and/or process the additional applications. Staff can review the benefits of adding new positions (permanent or temporary) and the implications for other departments.

- *Policy*
Staff can review existing policies to identify changes that could be implemented to either reduce the number of applications received or streamline processes. Staff would explore possible opportunities for policy change within the Official Community Plan as well as existing bylaws such as the Subdivision & Development Servicing Bylaw and Zoning Bylaw that could reduce the number of required applications, reduce application timelines, and/or clarify information to reduce the number of inquiries.
- *Procedures*
Some procedures are legislated (such as the requirement to notify for Development Variance Permits), but others could be reviewed such as administrative procedures and procedures in the Development Approvals Procedures Bylaw. This will ensure that applications are being processed as effectively and efficiently as possible without sacrificing quality.

Specific details regarding possible solutions can be presented to Council at a future meeting for further discussion.

IMPACT ON INFRASTRUCTURE OR MUNICIPAL SERVICES

The current backlog of applications is having an impact on construction timelines in the District for projects ranging from swimming pools to large-scale multi-family developments, commercial and industrial developments. This affects Council's strategic priorities to support opportunities to diversify its tax base, grow the Town Centre, and add more housing stock (market and affordable) to contribute to its goal of creating and supporting an inclusive community. Additionally, the application backlog also translates into uncertainty in the development industry, which may cause investment to leave our community.

IMPACT ON STAFF CAPACITY AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

As the majority of staff time currently is dedicated to processing applications and responding to planning inquiries, there is little remaining capacity for long-range planning projects such as plan or policy development. While some long-range projects can be completed by consultants, these projects still require staff time dedicated to project management.

Additionally, delays in the Planning division are also contributing to delays in other divisions such as Building. On the other hand, should Planning begin to process applications faster, this is likely to cause backlogs in other departments.

COMMENTS FROM EXTERNAL AGENCIES, COMMITTEES AND STAKEHOLDERS

Staff have not sought comments from external agencies, committees, or stakeholders at this time.

CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

No public consultation has occurred at this time. Communication to applicants and the public regarding the staff workload has been limited to an explanation that application timelines are currently extended due to the volume of applications and our current staff capacity. It was previously customary for staff to advise applicants as to application timelines (in 2021, applicants were advised that the timeline is approximately 18 months). However, due to current uncertainty about staffing and the volume of applications, staff are no longer able to provide specific timelines to applicants.

ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Option A: Should Council choose Option A, staff will not follow up with any further information to Council.

Option B: Should Council choose Option B, staff will review possible options and provide recommendations for application prioritization for Council's consideration at a future Council meeting.

Option C: Should Council choose Option C, staff will review possible solutions to improve application timelines and will return to Council at a Regular Council meeting with a report providing further information and outlining options and recommendations for Council's consideration.

Option D: Should Council choose Option D, staff will return to Council at a future meeting with a report outlining options and recommendations for application prioritization and to improve application timelines for Council's consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,
Tamera Cameron, Manager of Planning

This report has been prepared in consultation with the following:

Tanya Garost, Chief Administrative Officer	TG
Jared Kassel, Director of Planning and Development	JK