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District of Lake Country
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Attention: Jamie McEwan

Subject: Improving Processes Related to Building Permits & PLRs

We appreciated the opportunity to meet with you on August 11th, 2021 to discuss areas of improvement related to the District of Lake Country's Building Permit (BP) and Preliminary Layout Review (PLR) processes. As a follow-up to our meeting, we would like to highlight some of the areas of improvement that were discussed along with some of our recommended solutions.

Building Permits

The most common issues that we are hearing from our members surrounding Building Permits relate to communication, approval timelines and servicing levels.

We have heard of applicants having difficulty contacting District staff to discuss potential BP submissions or challenges with current BP submissions. Each project is different yet the checklists for permit submissions are the same regardless of the project size and complexity. This can make it difficult for an applicant to navigate through the process and the issue is further compounded when building permit staff do not seem available to assist applicants through this.

We have also heard about a lack of approachability of Building Inspectors in that they often resist speaking with applicants on site as well as refusing to conduct site visits to review complicated or challenging scenarios or to confirm what they are looking for. This refusal extends to completing pre-occupancy walkthroughs on challenging projects to prevent last-minute hang ups. This can lead to uncertainty and frustration on the part of applicants.

Another challenge discussed is the rare issuance and then subsequent revocation of a Building Permit. This can undermine the confidence in the whole process if it occurs too often.

Recommendations:

- 1) Good communication between District staff and the builder or developer can go a long way in helping to alleviate some of these issues. UDI Okanagan recommends that the District take steps to improve the level of communication between District staff and the building and development community. This can involve but is not limited to:
 - a. Foster a highly communicative culture and encourage staff to be responsive to phone and email inquiries surrounding BP submissions and BP challenges.
 - b. Consider implementing pre-inspection walk throughs.
 - c. Ensure that staff thoroughly comprehend the drawing submissions that they are reviewing and either reject or approve them upfront. This could involve direct communication with the applicant to ensure staff are well aware of what the drawings mean.

- 2) Increase staffing levels as needed to ensure the level and quality of servicing that the District desires to handle the current level of demand.

Preliminary Layout Reviews

One issue with PLRs is the time it takes to receive the PLR in the first place. In many instances, it can take up to two years. After that, the PLR is only good for one year. If the year expires and the applicant has not yet had the chance to move forward on all of the items in the PLR, the application gets thrown out and the applicant needs to apply all over again starting from scratch. After that they need to wait up to two years to receive their new PLR. This process is frustrating and cumbersome for applicants.

PLRs are able to be extended but only for a period of six months. This extension period is often not long enough to allow the applicant to complete all of the items in the PLR before it expires.

One of the items that compounds the problem discussed above is that staff capacity and communication to provide review and feedback on items such as engineering is often lacking.

Recommendations:

- 1) UDI Okanagan recommends that the District of Lake Country examine the feasibility of reviewing PLRs that have passed their expiration date and determine whether or not it would be suitable to simply update the existing PLR rather than discarding it and necessitating that the applicant start from scratch after their PLR expires.

- 2) We recommend that the District of Lake Country consider extending the PLRs for longer than the current six-month period since this is something that is not a statutory requirement and is instead set at the discretion of the District.

- 3) Increase staffing levels as needed to ensure the level and quality of servicing that the District desires to handle the current level of demand.