PERSPECTIVES AND PHILOSOPHY

Adaptable Development Approvals Process Toolkit (ADAPT)

Table of Contents

Introduction

At the heart of an effective development approvals process lies a diverse array of participants, each bringing their unique knowledge, experiences, goals, and capabilities. In this section, we explore the fundamental principles that underpin an efficient, fair, and successful approvals process. These principles act as the guiding ethos, uniting the varied perspectives and expertise crucial to its success.

- Changing policies and plans is essential
- Demonstrating respect and mutual accountability
- Collaboration and clear and timely communication
- Generosity and fairness in the face of market realities
- Process clarity and certainty
- Good policy, plans and processes
- Community engagement and entitlement

This section covers the key obstacles that often impede the efficiency and effectiveness of the approvals process. These challenges pose a significant barrier to achieving timely and equitable outcomes. Through time and by implementing strategic solutions, these issues can be mitigated to ensure a smoother and streamlined approvals process.

Principles to Guide an Effective Process

The following section offers a summary of several core principles that can be seen as foundational to an effective development approvals process.

1. Changing policies and plans is essential

The development approvals process has two dimensions: approvals for high-level policies, plans and regulations (amendments to Regional Growth Strategies (RGS), Official Community Plan (OCP), Zoning, Variances, and others) and more detailed approvals (Subdivision, Development Permits (DP), and Building Permits (BP). Both exist for the sole purpose of coordinating the process of property owners to move forward on the development of their lands in the context of a range of public policies and regulations.

The purpose of the approvals process for high-level applications (RGS, OCP, Zoning, Variances) is to change existing policies and regulations for the land in question. As such, while current plans and policies exist, they should not be seen as paramount. The development approvals process exists to formalize the changes of existing plans and policies.

For detailed approvals (Subdivisions, DPs, BPs), the purpose of the approval is to implement policies on a specific project with some level of flexibility.

The foundation of a good development approvals process is an efficient and effective working process between the property owner/applicant and the local government to address changing existing plans and regulations to achieve an optimum of public and private interests in the necessary process of building and renewing a community.

2. Demonstrating respect and mutual accountability

Development applicants must acknowledge that:

- The plans, policies, processes and people involved in the approvals process are the core elements of democratic planning and decision-making and deserve respect.
- What they build in the short term will have impacts on the community for generations to come.

Local governments must acknowledge that:

- Property owners/applicants drive the development needed to fulfill community plans, especially since private sector projects are crucial for meeting housing and commercial needs. As such, applications are an essential part of a community's healthy future.
- Development projects carry considerable financial risk for property owners/applicants, who are exposed to fluctuating global prices for labour, materials, and financing. If a project fails, the property owner/applicant may lose everything they own (personal homes and assets are frequently required as collateral to any financing or construction loan).
- Local government actions can significantly impact development costs, which in turn affects housing availability and affordability. Excessive or unnecessary costs can lead to a reduced supply of housing and commercial/industrial capacity.

- Qualified professionals involved in a project bring valuable expertise and insights. Their recommendations should be respected and only contested with clear, evidence-based reasons, ideally through a peer review process.

3. Collaboration and clear and timely communication

Both parties in the approvals process need to seek to enhance a culture of collaboration, with the intent to achieve the highest possible performing project in both the public and private interest.

Both parties need to make efforts to be transparent, patient and educative in their work with each other to build trust and strong communication.

Both parties need to endeavour to communicate proactively and in a timely fashion, recognizing both are making judgements and decisions in response to what is or is not communicated.

4. Generosity and fairness in the face of market realities

The private sector needs to:

- Work to identify and pursue everything they can do to add value to the community through their project.
- Understand their project will have some level of negative impact on the community and be willing to contribute to help cover these costs (through Development Cost Charges (DCC), Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), etc.).

The public sector needs to:

- Acknowledge that market realities drive all property owner/applicant decisions and that projects are rarely more viable tomorrow than today unless the cost of housing rises faster than the cost of development.
- Provide flexibility and additional rights where possible to support the private sector in providing community benefits so as not to increase the price of housing.
- Ensure the scale of required studies is appropriate to the scale of the project.
- Ensure that any amenities demanded from applicants are clear and identified in advance, with costs and benefits equitably shared between new owners and existing taxpayers.

5. Process clarity and certainty

All efforts should be made to make approval processes as efficient and timely as possible, given that any delay adds costs and, therefore, increases the prices of the final products.

It is in every party's interest to have full clarity on all of the steps, requirements and probable timelines involved. Lack of clarity creates confusion and conflict and undermines trust and the ability to work harmoniously throughout the process.

Because the approvals process is complex and property owners/applicants have different levels of capacity, the local government should provide clear and comprehensive information, guides, checklists and other tools to establish mutual certainty on what is expected of applicants and how the process will go.

6. Good policy, plans and processes

The development approvals process needs to be structured to be the most efficient and involve the shortest time possible while meeting the necessities for review and commentary by the local government and citizens.

The public sector needs to put extra effort into due diligence in its policy and plan development process so that the plans and policies are realistic, respectable, and effective. If plans are not realistic but are implemented with little flexibility, the results waste time and resources and create cynicism and distrust.

Extensive consultation and advance notice to the development industry are needed to minimize the negative impacts of changes in plans, policies, and regulations that may impact property owners/applicants' projects.

7. Community engagement and entitlement

The community should be adequately informed of the facts of any project that may impact their neighbourhood.

The opinions of any neighbourhood should be weighed against the larger public interest in considering the merits of an application. No project is perfect, and all will have positive and negative impacts on someone. Those immediately adjacent and

most heavily impacted should not necessarily be the most influential voices for the local government decision-makers.