



Report to County Council

From: Mat Vaughan, Director of Planning and Development

Date: March 11, 2025

Subject: Update on County Planning Service

Recommendation(s):

THAT the report titled “Update on County Planning Service” from the Director of Planning and Development, dated March 11, 2025 be received and filed.

AND THAT County Council direct planning staff to continue working with the County’s Local Municipal Partners through a by-the-hour fee structure to help implement the County’s planning service.

Introduction:

On September 10, 2024 County staff presented a report to Elgin County Council to discuss the formation of a centralized county planning service. In that report, staff requested direction to proceed with a phased centralized planning services plan where staffing is increased as additional LMP’s planning responsibilities are added and to adopt the tax levy form of compensation to administer the centralized planning services team. Council directed staff to further engage with the County’s local municipalities to gauge interest in how the centralized planning service could be implemented.

Since that time, planning staff have been actively discussing the implementation of a county planning service with several of the County’s local municipalities.

Background and Discussion:

Through discussions with local municipal senior staff, it was understood that administrating a centralized planning service through the tax levy would not be a fair approach unless the majority of local municipal partners were engaged with the county’s planning service. An alternative approach using a flat-fee system was developed, where the estimated annual fee was derived by reviewing the municipalities 2023 development activity, and forecasting a similar workload for 2025. This approach included a review of each type of planning application, the amount of time spent processing each

application, and utilized specific planning technical experience for each type of planning application. For example, a minor variance would be largely reviewed by a junior planner, whereas a draft plan of subdivision, or official plan amendment would be reviewed by a senior planner. Likewise, policy planning was included for specific projects required by each LMP.

While the flat-fee approach was based on sound background estimations, it led to a request by some LMPs for the County to consider an alternative fee structure. Of primary concern was the thought that the flat fee was overestimating the amount of planning applications that would be reviewed in 2025, leading to a higher than estimated annual fee.

As a result, planning staff are requesting direction from Council to proceed with implementing a county planning service using a by-the-hour planning fee structure. Such a fee structure would in practical terms be no more challenging to implement as both a flat-fee and by-the-hour fee structure require detailed application, resource and time tracking. Billing such a service would also be similar, as a flat-fee service and by-the-hour service can be invoiced in many possible formats (ie. Monthly, quarterly, annually, etc.). The primary negative aspect of using a by-the-hour fee structure is that it makes predicting county staffing resources more challenging. To help alleviate this challenge, the county’s planning department may need to utilize planning consulting services more than expected. Consulting planning services has been considered as part of the 2025 planning and development department budget.

Financial Implications:

The by-the-hour fee structure should not have any significant impact on the planning and development budget projections for 2025.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Serving Elgin	Growing Elgin	Investing in Elgin
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensuring alignment of current programs and services with community need. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exploring different ways of addressing community need. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engaging with our community and other stakeholders.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Planning for and facilitating commercial, industrial, residential, and agricultural growth. <input type="checkbox"/> Fostering a healthy environment. <input type="checkbox"/> Enhancing quality of place.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensuring we have the necessary tools, resources, and infrastructure to deliver programs and services now and in the future. <input type="checkbox"/> Delivering mandated programs and services efficiently and effectively.

Local Municipal Partner Impact:

A county planning service by-the-hour fee structure will help our local municipal partners ensure that fees will only be charged for work rendered, which may help bring down the overall cost of implementing the county planning service if the number of planning applications is lower than predicted.

Communication Requirements:

The direction of County Council regarding the planning fee structure will be communicated to the local municipalities who are engaged in negotiations with the county's planning and development department.

Conclusion:

In an effort to help possibly reduce the county planning service fees for our local municipal partners, planning staff are seeking direction from County Council to utilize a by-the-hour planning service fee. As previously stated in earlier reports, the planning and development department will track and measure several metrics related to the county's planning services to ensure county resources are being adequately compensated and that planning fees are being fairly apportioned to the participating LMPs.

All of which is Respectfully Submitted

Approved for Submission

Mat Vaughan
Director of Planning and Development

Blaine Parkin
Chief Administrative Officer/Clerk