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INFORMATION REQUEST (IR) - St. Albert Planning Resources

Requested by: Councillor Brodhead

Date of Request: December 3, 2024

Date Response Due: January 10, 2025

Confidential Response: No

QUESTION

Given the limited in-house St. Albert planning resources and their focused priority to the development of the Lakeview Business District and the St. Albert West ASP, what contracted resources are available to provide planning/engineering expertise to the City to allow the concurrent development of northeast St. Albert.

Secondly, should such planning expertise be available, would the costs of their engagement be capitalized within the overall program cost of the servicing plan for northeast St. Albert?

RESPONSE

The City's Planning and Development Department is staffed primarily to support ongoing developer and resident applications and permits, rather than strategic initiatives or process improvements, such as red tape reduction. This staffing model aligns with the department's budget, where application revenue minimally covers 75% of staffing costs. Within the three branches-Planning (12 FTEs), Development (6 FTEs), and Building Inspection Services (10 FTEs), plus the administration support staff (5 FTEs)-only two full-time positions are dedicated to corporate priority projects such as St. Albert West, the Municipal Development Plan, Infill Strategy, and Red Tape Reduction.

Over the past two years, one position has been dedicated to the project management of the St. Albert West Area Structure Plan (ASP) and the supporting Neighborhood Plans for Lakeview and Badger Lands. Another position has been focused on managing the Land Use Bylaw (LUB) project. When the department is asked to take on additional projects, such as supporting other corporate initiatives like the Edmonton/St. Albert Joint Planning Study or Lakeview Servicing, staffing resources must be reassigned from existing projects. This often impacts the processing of current planning and development permit applications unless additional funds are allocated for temporary staffing, as seen with the Municipal Development Plan and Annexation projects.

For large-scale projects, Administration frequently hires external consultants to assist in plan or policy development. However, this still impacts FTE staffing, as managing these large contracts and serving as the internal project expert requires a full-time position. This was evident with the St. Albert West

ASP and the Land Use Bylaw contracts. Additionally, the Branch Managers' time is impacted, and internal expertise is needed to review input from the consultant's team. While consultants provide best practice recommendations, the nuanced perspectives of St. Albert's residents, Council, and internal teams must be considered, which often requires significant P&D staffing time and effort, sometimes exceeding the time spent by the external consultants. This is when the pressure on P&D staffing is most acute.

Introducing new development areas, such as the Northeast Area Structure Plan (NE ASP), will also affect P&D staffing. However, the degree of impact depends on the volume of applications and permits received. As the development/growth rate is not expected to increase significantly with the addition of the NE ASP lands, the number of permits is anticipated to remain within the standard growth level. Should this change, P&D can increase permit fees to offset the additional staffing costs - so that this is not the burden of the taxpayer (the development pay for development principle). However, if additional FTEs are not added, permit processing timelines would be impacted.

It is important to note that the inclusion of a new development area, such as the NE ASP lands, will have staffing implications for other departments, including Engineering/Utilities and operational areas (e.g., Public Operations, Recreation and Parks, and Emergency Services). At a high level, the costs associated with bringing on the necessary infrastructure servicing, as well as additional staffing and consultant fees, are included in the \$70+ million project. This amount covers the design, project management, and construction of these utility projects. However, the costs related to design, project management, construction, operation, and maintenance of new community services and amenities (e.g., road clearing, fire hall, and parks) are not included in this total. These are long-term costs, and Council will need to be prepared to support the development through permanent staffing rather than contracted personnel.

A full Financial Impact Assessment, currently being conducted by Applications Management, will provide detailed information on the anticipated costs and revenue associated with the NE ASP lands over the next 25 years. The findings are expected to be available in late January.

Report Date: January 8, 2025
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