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The Corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Information Report to Council

SUBJECT: E-Permitting Implementation Project Update
DATE: 2023-02-28
REPORT #: CAO-23-011
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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an update concerning the e-permitting project the Town is undertaking as part of its modernization efforts.

Background

On January 17, 2022, Cloudpermit was announced as the successful candidate in LAS' RFP process. Cloudpermit is an international e-permitting company that is becoming a common solution in Ontario municipalities. Their goal is to provide a web-based service to make the building permit process faster and easier while meeting the diverse needs of residents and the development industry.

Following the selection of Cloudpermit as the successful candidate in the AMO/LAS RFP process, AMO/LAS and MPAC sought applications from municipalities to participate in a pilot of the platform. The pilot project was intended to evaluate the broad benefits of e-permitting solutions for the municipal sector and share findings. The goal for participating municipalities was an integrated e-permitting system that provides a complete solution for building permits.

The Town was selected as a successful participant in the AMO/LAS-MPAC program. At the March 28, 2022, Council meeting, Town Council passed a resolution to authorize the Chief Building Official and Town Staff to proceed with implementing the e-permitting pilot project, including implementing the Cloudpermit E-permitting Software. Council also endorsed that \$35,000 of funding from the Municipal Modernization Project Intake 3 – Implementation Stream grant be committed to this project.

The Town proceeded to purchase and implement Cloudpermit, the e-permitting software, with the goal of modernizing application channels, facilitating a more efficient and effective building

permit process, and providing citizens with accurate and accessible information.

The Town launched the pilot project on November 9, 2022, and is currently in the soft launch phase.

The system includes a new online process for submitting and reviewing building permit applications, communication with applicants, inspection scheduling and documenting, payment processing, data storage, and coordination with Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) and other parties requiring reporting information.

Cloud Permit allows the Town to bring the following services online:

- Accepting and reviewing complete building permit applications
- Issuing building permits
- Scheduling inspections
- Utilizing mobile devices to assist with building inspections
- Using maps integrated with the Town's GIS system (ESRI)
- Gaining insight through reporting features
- Creating reports and certificates with templates
- Accepting payments
- Keeping all communication in one place

Summary of the Project Schedule:

The project work plan, established by Cloud Permit and approved by the Town's Project Team, officially began in August 2022. The pilot project is set to end in April 2023 and will roll into a 5-year agreement with Cloud Permit. The steps of the project schedule are as follows:

1. March 2022: Council endorsed e-permitting pilot and funding
2. August 2022: Project Manager hired
3. September 2022: Project kick-off
4. Sept. to Nov. 2022: Configuration of the System
5. Nov. 2022 to Mar. 2023: Training, testing, public engagement session, & soft launch
6. March/April 2023: Communications rollout & hard launch
(the online application process is open to the public)
7. April 2023: Pilot ends, and the 5-year Agreement term begins

Project Progress:

The implementation of Cloud Permit is progressing well. After several months of configuring the software, the project moved into the soft launch phase of the program. The soft launch allows Staff to upload new building applications to the new system to test all features in a live environment, work out bugs and identify any implementation errors. It is anticipated that the project will remain in the soft launch phase until the end of the first quarter of 2023, allowing Staff time to gain familiarity with the new software and ensure that it is tested thoroughly at every stage of the building permit application. The testing includes uploading and reviewing applications, processing online payments, issuing permits, completing inspections and utilizing the reporting feature.

To date, Staff has processed 12 building permits through the new system and has seen success

in the system’s ability to house information, process online payments, and communicate with customers.

Engagement & Communication:

Town Staff, in partnership with representatives from Cloud Permit, conducted a public engagement session for contractors to educate them on the upcoming changes to the Town’s current building permit application system. Staff also solicited a few volunteers from the building community to help test the new system and offer input on potential improvements.

Continued use of the system and enhanced training will support customer familiarity and ease of use. This confidence is founded on the feedback received from other Ontario municipalities currently utilizing Cloudpermit and discussions held within the Cloudpermit Peer Group.

To educate the public, builders/contractors, other clients and stakeholders about the Town’s new Cloud Permit program, Town Staff developed a communications plan which will be rolled out at the same time as the official launch. When the Cloud Permit program is fully launched, the Town will notify the general public with communication materials, including a media release, information on social media channels (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter), an updated building services webpage on the Town’s website and a digital advertisement in the front lobby of Town Hall to advertise to walk-ins.

Budget:

The Town is taking part in the pilot project with initial startup and six (6) months of service being funded by Cloudpermit, followed by six (6) months of service (and continued ongoing service) being funded by the Town. In 2022, the Town received \$122,366 for Municipal Modernization Program Intake 3, of which \$35,000 was allocated for the E-permitting Pilot Project.

Any pilot costs attributed to the Town are covered via the Municipal Modernization Program Intake 3 – Implementation Stream grant. Since the building department is self-funded through building permit fees, ongoing annual operating fees will be funded through this program.

The overall project expenditures and commitments are tracking within the approved project budget, and the project is currently under budget. The below chart summarizes the current expenditures.

	Budget	Invoiced	Variance
Pilot Program	\$35,000.00	\$22,100.00	\$12,900.00
Public Engagement Session	\$ 0.00	\$ 800.00	-\$ 800.00
Subtotal	\$35,000.00	\$22,900.00	\$12,100.00
HST (@1.76%)	\$ 616.00	\$ 403.04	\$ 212.96
Total	\$35,616.00	\$23,303.04	\$12,312.96

E-Permitting Details

The electronic permitting process is as follows:

Building Permit Application and Issuance

- Originating from a link on the Municipal website, the applicant creates a project, uploads the required application, forms and drawings, and makes the appropriate payment using a user-friendly process.

- Upon notification of a complete application, Municipal staff logs into the website to view and download the information.
- Staff will then conduct the plans examination electronically using document editing software. Once satisfied, the approved plans are uploaded to the applicant's project with a building permit.

Building Inspections:

- Permit holders can log onto the website and request an inspection for their project.
- Staff receive the notification and confirm.
- Inspectors will visit the project and confirm the status of the inspection to the permit holder through the software.

Benefits for the building industry include:

- Online submissions of all documents and payments.
- Submissions can be made from any place at any time.
- No printing costs; documents are uploaded electronically.
- No travel time to and from the municipal office.
- Ability to track several permits at one time.
- Inspection scheduling and results are received electronically and immediately.
- Availability of approved plans online at all times.
- Building projects in multiple municipalities can be viewed and maintained on one 'dashboard.'
- Integration with the Municipal building permit database

NEXT STEPS / CONCLUSION

The next step in the rollout of this new software is to move from the soft launch phase to the hard launch phase, accompanied by a comprehensive communication campaign.

The Project Team continues to work with the Peer support group to learn and customize the system to meet the Town's needs.

To support the evolution of municipal services, a robust online building permit portal is a critical step to better serve builders, developers and the community. Benefits to the development and building industry are numerous, including but not limited to enhanced service where submissions can be made from any place at any time, with reduced travel, and the ability to conveniently track permits and inspections scheduling and results. This initiative represents another step in the Town's continuous improvement and customer service excellence efforts, helping to make the permit process faster, easier, more accessible, efficient, and effective.

E-permitting has been identified as a priority area to help municipalities find efficiencies in building permit processes. This program provides the Town with an opportunity to unlock efficiencies and find cost savings in its administrative processes

PREVIOUS REPORTS

- [CS-22-055 AMO/LAS-MPAC E-Permitting Pilot Project with Cloudpermit](#)