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Harmonizing Development Approval Forms and Practices District of Saanich and other Capital Region Local Governments, BC

Issue

In the Capital Regional District (CRD) of British Columbia, 13 municipalities exercise separate jurisdiction over bylaws, processes and forms used in reviewing land use applications. A CRD Housing Affordability Strategy flagged this multiplicity of procedures as a significant challenge to the building industry and an impediment to the creation of affordable housing.

With almost 53,000 new dwellings required to accommodate population growth in the region from 2003 to 2030, there was growing support for the 13 municipalities to harmonize their forms, processes and bylaws.

Plan

The District of Saanich, on behalf of the CRD municipalities, took a lead role in initiating a project to reduce the multiplicity of local government application forms and to harmonize development review procedures. With funding from ACT, Saanich hired a consultant to gather and compare data from all of the municipalities and then

produce a 'Best Practices' manual for use by the 13 municipalities to lower the complexity and costs of their development approval process.

Project team

Urban Development Institute
Canadian Home Builders' Association (Victoria)
District of Saanich
City of Victoria
City of Oak Bay
Town of View Royal
Township of Esquimalt
District of Langford
City of Colwood
District of Highlands
District of Metchosin
District of Central Saanich
District of North Saanich
Town of Sidney
District of Sooke
Kristina DeMedeiros and Associates – project consultant

Results

The consultant started by recording all processes, necessary documentation, fees and legal requirements in use by the 13



Cutting the Paperwork

13 municipalities now have a common one-page master form and two-page supplementary forms they can use in place of all this paper.

Source: District of Saanich

municipalities. This information was then categorized as follows: rezoning; official community plan amendments; development permits; development variance permits; board of variance; temporary use permits; and subdivision and building permits.

Questionnaires were sent to each municipality, and follow-up meetings were held with most of them. The consultant organized and facilitated workshops with

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planners and project partners, discussed unique components of a municipality's forms and kept in constant contact with the steering committee.

The data was used to create highly detailed spreadsheets that provided a clear indication of both the commonalities and the unique features specific to each location. From this, the consultant noted that all applications used by the municipalities were based on the principles of who, what, where and why. This observation encouraged their support for and acceptance of a common application form that would identify the location, owner, applicant, project details and variance explanations, if applicable.

The consultant also produced a Best Practice Manual for Harmonized Application Forms. The manual, which includes sample forms, is based on a two-part application system. Part One is used for all types of applications and can be considered the master form or title page for any application. A straightforward, one-page form, Part One indicates the type of application in a simple check-off format, followed by names, addresses and phone numbers of applicants and owners.

Part Two forms are used to document supplementary information. They specifically address the various application types identified earlier by the consultant, and they streamline the process into four alternatives:

- Rezoning/OCP/Development Permit
- Development Variance Permit
- Preliminary Layout Assessment
- Board of Variance.

In addition to standard content, the forms provide space for information that may be required by individual municipalities. None of the documents in Part Two are longer than two pages.

The consultant stressed that "the key is maintaining consistency with the current content as much as possible". However, provisions were also made to allow future changes and for each municipality to modify the documents. Forms were provided in the most widely used word processing format, so that each municipality could simply click and insert its logo, government crest or additional text as desired.

Uptake of the Harmonized Application Forms varies among the local governments in the CRD, with the general response being favorable.

"Currently we are undergoing a process review and expect to implement these forms at the same time we implement our new process," says Colleen Ferguson, Administrative Assistant Planning with the District of Saanich. "Hopefully [full integration will happen] within the next few months."

Related reports

Best Practice Manual for Harmonized Application Forms (Capital Region Local Governments, 2004)

This manual is available from the ACT website. See "ACT projects & solutions".

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