

**INFRASTRUCTURE & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIVISION
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

CORE SERVICES REVIEW

BENCH MARKING

- No comparators available.
- MPMP (Municipal Performance Measurement Program) – no information/comparators available.
- OMBI (Ontario Municipal CAO's Benchmarking Initiative) – no information/comparators available yet.

BEST PRACTICES

- No best practices available.
- The Ontario Centre for Municipal Best Practices has currently only produced Best Practice Reports in the areas of Roads, Transit, Waste Management, Water and Sewer.
- The Ontario Planning Act includes provisions relating to time frames within which planning applications must be processed and decisions made. Failure to meet those time frames results in the possibility of appeals to the Ontario Municipal Board. We have had no such appeals.

PROVINCIAL FUNDING COMMITMENTS

- No provincial funding is available for the administration and enforcement of the Planning Act, County or Local Official Plans and Zoning By-laws.

ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF DELIVERY

- Option 1 - Status Quo – County planning staff provide planning advisory services to County Council and to all local municipalities (currently with the exception of the City of Sarnia).
- Option 2 - Planning advisory services contracted to private sector consultants.
- Option 3 - Planning advisory services transferred from County to each local municipality.
- Option 4 – Consolidation of City of Sarnia & County departments pursuant to County Council motion.

Option 1 – Status Quo

Overview

This is the current model for the delivery of county and municipal planning advisory services in Lambton. The County Planning and Development Services Department maintains a staff of professional planners and support staff to provide this function to all local municipalities with the exception of the City of Sarnia. County planning functions are also maintained by this department, including the monitoring and updating of the County of Lambton Official Plan, Official Plan and Official Plan Amendment approvals for all local

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municipalities and subdivision and condominium approvals for all local municipalities with the exception of Sarnia and Lambton Shores.

Funding for the Planning and Development Services Department is provided by the municipalities through the county's general levy and through user fees for various planning applications.

Advantages

- Well established system (30 + years).
- No disruption to staff or current operations; no transition period required for implementation of changes; no job losses.
- Builds and maintains relationships between planning and local staff and councils.
- Builds and maintains local knowledge of communities, issues, approaches.
- Local accountability.
- Access to planning staff by municipalities due to proximity.
- Municipal clients are free to contact us at any time and not worry about charges and fees.
- Costs are reasonable and fixed each year for the year, resulting in easy budgeting and administration with no unexpected expenses.
- Cost of service is shared amongst all municipalities.
- Cost of major projects such as Official Plans and Zoning By-laws and other special studies are included in regular levy.
- Tax dollars stay in Lambton – not paid to a company in London or Toronto.

- Lambton clients are our only clients – no issues of competing for our time.
- Pool of resources and knowledge among planning staff available to all municipalities.
- Back-up staff coverage always available for vacations, illness etc from people who are reasonably familiar with issues and communities.
- “One stop” services - direct link between planning, building, septic etc.
- Direct link between local advisory and county approval authority functions.

Disadvantages

- Perceived lack of “control” – municipalities are not dealing directly with their own municipal employees.
- Perception that the County Planning Department can or does impose planning policies or approaches on local municipalities.

Option 2 – Contract Services to Private Sector Consultants

Overview

Under this alternative, the county and local municipalities would request and receive planning advisory services from private sector planning consultants. To our knowledge there are no such consultants or firms operating in Lambton County, with the closest being in London or in Chatham-Kent. Municipalities would contact their consultants when they required planning advice, and that advice would be provided for a fee. Special projects such as

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Official Plan or Zoning By-law updates would require the payment of substantial additional fees. Municipalities are generally billed on a monthly basis for services and advice provided.

Advantages

- County workforce would be significantly reduced except for the possibility of maintaining a small staff presence for approval authority functions that legislatively reside at the county level at this time.
- County levy would be significantly reduced through the elimination of positions, though it would obviously be redirected to paying consulting fees.

Disadvantages

- Lack of access due to distances.
- Successful consultants have many clients so attention is divided.
- Municipal staff must always be concerned about \$ as each phone call, letter, report etc. is billed.
- Fees paid for planning services would leave the county as there are no consultants operating in Lambton County.
- Major projects such as OP's and zoning by-laws are significant extra expenses.
- Less local knowledge.
- Private sector is obviously trying to make a profit so costs are likely to be higher.
- Travel time and expenses added to fees.
- Lack of fixed costs, harder to budget.

- Little or no vacation/sick time back-up.
- Changeover would result in disruption and anxiety, loss of jobs for existing staff.
- More local administrative time and cost for reviewing and paying invoices etc. vs. one yearly levy payment.
- Transition time required so services would be disrupted.

Option 3 – Transfer Services to Local Municipalities

Overview

In this alternative, each municipality would become fully responsible for and provide its own planning advisory services and administration. Planning staff would be on the municipal payroll rather than being county employees or private sector employees.

Advantages

- Possibly more direct contact with planning staff, though we have moved to providing more local office hours in our current service.
- County workforce would be reduced, except for the possibility of providing a small staff presence for approval authority functions which legislatively reside at the county level at this time.
- County levy would be significantly reduced through the elimination of positions, though it would obviously be redirected to paying local staff.

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Disadvantages

- Most municipalities in County do not have the workload to support their own planning staff.
- Loss of direct connection between local advisory and approval authority functions.
- Pool of shared resources and expertise would be lost.
- No back-up for vacations/absences and illness.
- Would need support staff as well as planner.
- Disruption and anxiety, possible loss of jobs for existing staff.
- Transition time required so services disrupted.

**Option 4 – Consolidation of City of Sarnia & County Departments
Pursuant to County Council Motion**

Overview

Option 4 flows from motion #11 of the March 15, 2006 meeting of the Infrastructure and Development/Social and Health Services Committee. The motion states:

The County and the City work together in 2006 and explore the potential for rationalization of services, including the potential for a consolidation of both departments.”

A report is to be developed for the Committee and Council’s consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the current service delivery model of the county providing county and local planning advisory services be maintained, as it provides the best combination of access, service and efficiency.
2. That the Planning and Development Services Department continue to explore with its municipal partners the possibility of providing new or increased office hours for planners in the local municipal offices, and any other means of further increasing local access to our services.
3. That, pursuant to motion #11 at the March 15 meeting of the Infrastructure and Development/Social and Health Services Committee, “the County and the City work together in 2006 and explore the potential for rationalization of services, including the potential for a consolidation of both departments.”
4. That the longstanding direct linkages between the Planning and Building Services Departments be maintained in order to continue offering comprehensive, “one-window” development services to the residents of Lambton County.