

Report to City Council
Economic Development Advisory Committee
Recommendations- Red Tape Reduction

Introduction

The Spruce Grove Economic Advisory Committee (EDAC) is pleased to present the following report to City Council. The purpose of this report is to provide City Council advice from the perspective of the EDAC Red Tape Reduction Sub-Committee.

Background

Economic Development Advisory Committee

EDAC is a Committee of Council which has an advisory role by making recommendations and providing strategic advice to Council on economic and business development matters in Spruce Grove. As per the EDAC bylaw, the committee is required to develop an annual work plan and may provide reports to Council which include recommendations on matters related to the mandate and annual work plan.

Red Tape Reduction

Bill 48: Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, aims to remove needless red tape by one-third to reduce costs, speed up approvals, and save time, money, and resources. These efforts will help to streamline processes and make life easier for workers and businesses in Alberta.

Municipalities are required to make measurable progress in at least one of the areas:

1. Make it easier to start-up an new business
2. Streamline processes and shorten timelines for development and permit approvals
3. Make your municipality a more attractive destination for new investment and/or tourism

In order to receive funding under the Municipal Stimulus Program (MSP), municipalities were required to make measurable progress in at least one of the areas, develop a red tape reduction plan, and report it to Municipal Affairs by February 1st, 2021.

Furthermore, in May of 2021, City Council was presented with a Recovery Framework to Address Impacts of Covid-19. A key theme in this document is to find ways to reduce red tape and increase administrative efficiency to streamline services for a faster and more efficient return to operating status for business.

EDAC struck a sub-committee to work on this initiative. The committee created and circulated a Spruce Grove specific Red Tape Reduction Survey to gauge the varying perspectives of those who invest and are looking to invest in our community. The survey was circulated to various business owners and developers in Spruce Grove.

What We Heard Report – Red Tape Reduction

The comments on the feedback form from the survey are summarized into the following five broad categories. Quotes have been pulled from the survey to represent the perspectives shared.

1. Helping understand the approval requirements, timelines, and processes:

- “The applicant needs to be educated as to why the permitting process exists”
- “It seems that not everyone realizes that the City’s website is so helpful and complete”
- “We found that they just looked at one part of the application at a time. When they found a problem they stopped at that point”. We had to submit 3 or 4 times”
- “By-laws are overly complex and nearly impossible for a lay person to understand”

2. Move from a regulatory to facilitative approach in serving clients:

- “Adding the personal touch of someone who appears to be on your side would be a definite asset”
- “The City asked for a parking study. We had to pay thousands of dollars for an engineer whose report essentially concluded that “their software can manage parking”.

3. Building and fire code requirements- discretion of the inspector:

- “Forced to buy firelock from one company with no choice”
- “Miscommunication and no flexibility between the City and the electrical inspector”

4. Streamline approval and inspection processes:

- “Sometimes developments and approvals are delayed because we are told that City staff only conduct inspections on certain days of the week and some weeks are completely booked”

- “Have a dedicated representative assigned to assist anyone doing an application and work with them on completing all the paperwork they need and understanding the By-laws.
- “Currently have residential homes in permit review for two months. These homes are in new subdivisions with no abnormalities”

5. Review Standards set out in the Land Use Bylaw:

- “The biggest challenge that we encountered was parking requirements”
- “Signage for the City Centre must be updated to allow for perpendicular signage and allow for encroachments”
- “Minimum parking standards for commercial development are heavy handed and seemed like far too much for what the building would require”.
- “Many standards need to be updated to enable Spruce Grove to compete with other municipalities

Recommendations:

Based on Bill 48, the City of Spruce Grove Recovery Framework, and the information gathered and collected by the What We Heard Report, the Red Tape Reduction Sub-Committee recommends the following:

1. The report and recommendations be referred to Administration for review and that Administration report back to Council on proposed actions.
2. The City consider adopting more of a facilitative approach and environment in dealing with development proposals. This ‘facilitative approach’ would help to guide clients through the approval process rather than the current situation where respondents often perceive the City as ‘as gatekeepers.’

This ‘facilitative approach’ would start with a formalized pre-development meeting of all relevant departments and then a person assigned as the project manager or liaison in working through the approval and permitting processes.

3. The City needs to look at updating development standards as part of the next Land Use Bylaw review. In particular, the efficacy of the existing parking standards for commercial development needs to be considered as this will assist in making measurable progress in attracting new investment into Spruce Grove.
4. As part of the move toward development paying more of the approval and administrative costs related to new development, there needs to be more visible accountability by the City on process timeframes and outcomes making start-ups for new business much more attainable.