

PEARSON ECO-BUSINESS ZONE POLICY TOOLKIT

PRIMERS

FAST TRACKING ECO-BUSINESS ZONE (EBZ) APPLICATION: HOW TO GET STARTED



FAST TRACKING ECO-BUSINESS ZONE APPLICATIONS: HOW TO GET STARTED

Description

Expediting applications for green development, rezonings, subdivisions or building permits can provide an incentive for developers to meet desired sustainability criteria, as time saved in the approvals process can reduce overall project costs. This tool can also help municipalities establish clear expectations to provide guidance to developers and also offer a tangible incentive for helping municipalities achieve their own sustainability objectives.

The Partners in Project Green Experience

Variations on expediting the approvals process for certain types of development are already being practiced by some Partners in Project Green municipalities, as noted below in Table 1. Although these programs are not all necessarily focused on green development, they provide each municipality with an in-house precedent for expediting certain types of development. Existing programs include:

- Concierge program and business approvals fast track program (Brampton)
- Proposed expedited permitting for Old Port Credit Village Heritage Conservation District (Mississauga)
- Affordable Housing Streamlined Process and recommended Official Plan policy (Peel)
- Streamlining the Application Review (STAR) program (Toronto)

Partners in Project Green municipalities can build on the above-noted experiences and expand the scope of their efforts to create a fast track program for employment lands.

Toronto offers two different approaches to reduce time businesses need to spend in the development process. In the Gold Star program, the city assigns a dedicated review team and contact person for some new industrial, commercial, office and institutional projects. This allows new business prospects to better navigate the city's processes and approvals and to identify and address challenges early on. The city has also adopted a second type of expediting program, the STAR program, which takes advantage of the authority derived from the complete application process.

Toronto's experience suggests that one of the most effective means of expediting approvals is through ongoing staff training. This ensures that all staff involved in the approvals process have the same knowledge of sustainability principles and how these impact the design

and development processes. There may be a good case for coordinating efforts among change to Partners in Project Green partner municipalities around training for all staff involved in the development approvals process, and potentially aligning these efforts within the scope of other sustainability training.

Toronto's Gold Star program facilitates navigation of all the approvals processes for new businesses.

Learning From Others

It is possible that this type of incentive might be developed and administered without the need for significant additional resources. For example, the City of Port Coquitlam (BC) created their fast tracking incentive as part of a larger effort to develop a comprehensive Sustainability Initiative, and it was not developed as a stand-alone project. And the District of Saanich (BC) was able to implement an expedited approvals process for building permits within existing budgets and without the need for additional staff training. However, this contrasts with Toronto's experience in terms of the need to ensure training throughout the entire department and highlights an important consideration: many municipalities have chosen to implement a green development fast tracking program in conjunction with other complementary tools, such as a sustainability checklist, financial incentives for green development (e.g. reduced development charges), density bonusing, etc. The effectiveness of the fast tracking tool is often strongest when it is adopted as part of such an overarching sustainability incentive framework. A further consideration is that municipalities may want to undertake a balanced assessment of which types of development should be prioritized. For instance, green employment land development and affordable housing are two unrelated types of development applications, each with their own merits.

EXAMPLES OF CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES USING AN EXPEDITED PERMITTING PROCESS IN CONJUNCTION WITH A SUSTAINABILITY CHECKLIST

City of Port Coquitlam (BC):

http://www.portcoquitlam.ca/City_Hall/City_Departments/Development_Services/Sustainability_Initiative.htm

City of Kamloops, North Shore Neighbourhood Plan (BC):

<http://www.kamloops.ca/communityplanning/northshore.shtml>

The Developer's Perspective

Developers have certain expectations of municipalities when it comes to development projects: all applications are given equal treatment, the process is clear and transparent, and developers are kept informed about what actions they need to take. An expedited approvals process when combined with another tool like a sustainability checklist can help municipalities address these concerns by: i) establishing a process for how different applications are to be treated; ii) clearly indicating the municipality's interest and procedures on websites, application forms and in policy documents; and iii) having policy relating to incentives to encourage green employment land development in Official Plans and other plans and policy documents.

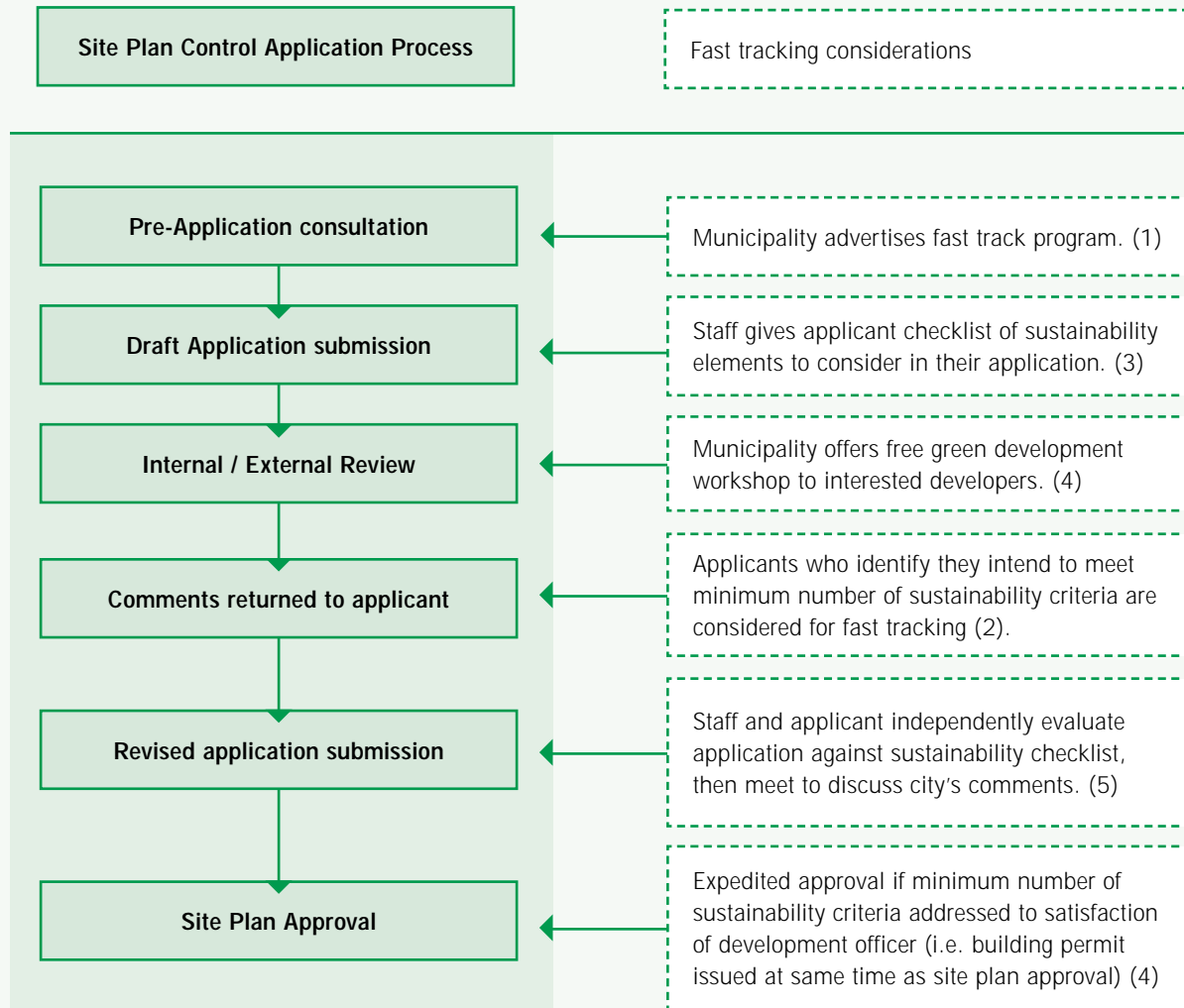
The Fast Tracking Process

The process of fast tracking might generally address the following issues:

- Streamline development application procedure so it takes less time to process.
 - » E.g. Aligning upper and lower tier municipal processing procedures; or providing education resources so staff are familiar with sustainability concepts and design criteria, and can process green approvals in less time.
- Remove barriers to green development.
 - » E.g. Providing assurance to developers that green design will not result in increased approval times; and providing an indirect financial incentive that would not be available for traditional development projects.
- Prioritize green development.
 - » E.g. Allowing green applications to skip to the front of the application queue sends a message that the city welcomes green development, and also encourages business-as-usual applicants to consider green development.
- Reinforce business attraction and retention efforts.
 - » E.g. Reducing development processing times can be helpful in attracting key business sectors.

General Site Plan Control Process & Potential Fast Track Considerations

This section outlines a generic Site Plan Control application process outlining steps in common with all three lower-tier PPG municipal partners (green highlight). Lessons and procedures from other municipalities with fast tracking programs are indicated at the relevant step of a site plan control application process to illustrate how a fast tracking program might impact the typical development application process. The numbers following the procedures correlate with the examples listed below.



1. City of Santa Monica (CA) – advertises fast track program as part of their green development incentives. http://www.smgov.net/Departments/OSE/Categories/Green_Building/Incentives.aspx

2. City of Santa Monica (CA) – applicants that indicate they are pursuing LEED certification are flagged to alert the development officer the application should receive expedited review. Once applicant provides documentation to this effect, the application is given priority (fast track) status. <http://www01.smgov.net/planning/buildingsafety/guides.htm>

3. City of Vernon (BC) – staff give applicants ‘smart growth checklist’ of principles to consider in the planning / design process. This process is currently being revised so the checklist will be replaced with a sustainability scorecard that will be used as a basis for issuing fast track priority to qualifying applications. http://www.vernon.ca/services/pde/application_forms_procedures.html

4. City of Issaquah (WA) – applications meeting a minimum number of specified green building performance requirements will be placed at the front of the queue ahead of other development applications. City also provides free green development workshops for applicants. <http://www.ci.issaquah.wa.us/Files/Issaquah%20Incentives%20Commercial%2012%2008.pdf>
5. City of Port Coquitlam (BC) – developers use the city’s sustainability checklist to independently score their application prior to submitting the first draft to the city. During the application review stage, the city also evaluates the application using the same sustainability checklist. The applicant and development officer meet and compare both scores on the checklist – this provides a common language for both developer and city staff for recommending changes to the draft application. High-scoring applications are fast tracked through the development permitting process, and the checklist is further augmented with other, non-fast track related incentives (e.g. reduced development charges). http://www.portcoquitlam.ca/City_Hall/City_Departments/Development_Services/Sustainability_Initiative.htm

Potential Next Steps

When developing a fast track process, municipalities can consider some of the following practices to make the best use of this tool:

1. Create educational materials highlighting the benefits of reduced processing time on a typical development application and provide these to developers.
 - » E.g. Use this tool to update existing developer education and information resources, such as Mississauga’s “Typical Development Approval Cost Guideline Booklet”.
2. Create economic development / marketing materials to highlight the fast track program in business attraction and retention efforts.
 - » E.g. City of Issaquah, WA published a brochure on sustainable building incentives for commercial buildings.
3. Revise existing development application materials (e.g. application forms, online application status tracking, etc) to indicate the time savings available to development applications that qualify for the fast track process.
 - » City of Port Coquitlam indicates green development will be fast tracked in their Guide to Development Permits.

4. Integrate fast-tracking with other tools and incentives (e.g. a sustainability checklist).
 - » City of Port Coquitlam uses a sustainability checklist. Applications for development permits that achieve high scores on the checklist are fast tracked through the rezoning and development permitting process.
 - » PPG partners can consider linking specific elements that might otherwise prove difficult to obtain through other policy and regulations (e.g. Official Plans, zoning by-laws) to fast tracking. For instance, applications that demonstrate the use of an Integrated Design Process might qualify for fast tracking, as this approach is more likely to result in a final design that meets EBZ principles.
5. Publish the general timelines for business-as-usual vs. green applications that are fast tracked.
 - » E.g. Green development permit processing time is estimated alongside existing New Industrial/ Commercial application times in Mississauga’s Building Permit Application website.

INCOMPLETE BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATIONS PROCESSING TIMES TO STATUS REPORT LETTERS

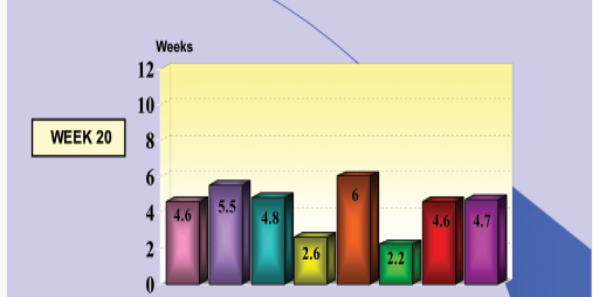


Figure 1 – Estimated wait times for different types of development (City of Mississauga website).

CASE STUDIES REFERENCE

- **Menomonee Valley** – has a program that matches new businesses with a local development officer to help them through the development process
- **Deven Enterprise Commission** – has an expedited permitting program

To view the case studies, please visit www.partnersinprojectgreen.com/policytoolkit

Table 1 – Existing expediting-related initiatives in PPG municipalities

Municipality	Initiative	Scope	Summary	Eco-Business Zone Considerations
Brampton	Concierge Permit Process	Building Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows approvals in 3 days instead of 10 for selected building projects Only applies to residential Staff have reviewed Toronto fast track experience 	Expand scope to include Eco-Business Zone green development process
	Mayor's speaking notes (2009 address to Board of Trade)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for fast tracking business applications in general City has program to fast track business approvals process 	
Mississauga	Infrastructure Stimulus Funding	Capital projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fast tracking of consultation & approvals processes proposed as one of several strategies to accommodate potential new infrastructure projects 	Not as relevant to planning approvals
	Mississauga Plan Review – Office Strategy Study (2008)	In reference to potential high order Hurontario St. transit study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fast track program proposed for environmental assessment 	Consider reviewing for general lessons of fast tracking one program component over others (e.g. How to evaluate trade offs, where more funds/HR resources might be needed, etc.)
	Old Port Credit Village Heritage Conservation District Plan (2004)	Targets heritage and conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expedited heritage permit approval process proposed as part of implementation strategy 	
	Other		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fast track programs have also been proposed for non-planning and development projects, such as Arts & Culture Master Plan, Sign permits, etc 	Not as relevant to planning approvals

Peel	Affordable Housing Streamlined Approval Process (2009)	Focus on increasing affordability of housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study to evaluate tools for streamlining regional housing approvals process • Recommendation – region and area municipalities could investigate fast track priority projects and opportunities for cooperating to reduce time 	Findings may be adaptable to ICI lands
	Peel Region Official Plan Review – 2009 consultation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations include focus on exploring fast tracking development approvals that meet specific criteria as a non-financial incentive to manage growth 	Findings may be adaptable to ICI lands
	Official Plan		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy 5.8.3.2.2 – explore fast tracking affordable housing planning approvals 	Expand scope to include Eco-Business Zone green development process
Toronto	STAR program	Streamlining the development process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives certainty on timing of approvals • Requires ‘complete application’ as part of fast track qualification process • Complete application give staff and public better idea of proposed development, thereby reducing time in future corrections or public consultation events • Part of Development Apporval Review project (coordinated, 1 window approvals process) 	There is potential opportunity for other municipalities to adopt Toronto’s green staff training program
	Other		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best approach to streamlining = ongoing staff training to understand implications of sustainable design review 	