

# AUDITOR GENERAL

Halifax Regional Municipality



## *Management of Development Approvals*

July 18, 2018

# Overview of Audit

- Management of development approvals requires significant improvement
- Inefficiencies
- Lacks a common approach across files and between staff members
- Policy manual should be developed to guide processes and promote consistency
- Significant data quality issues
- Strategic Plan (2015-19) behind schedule on key initiatives

# Detailed Results



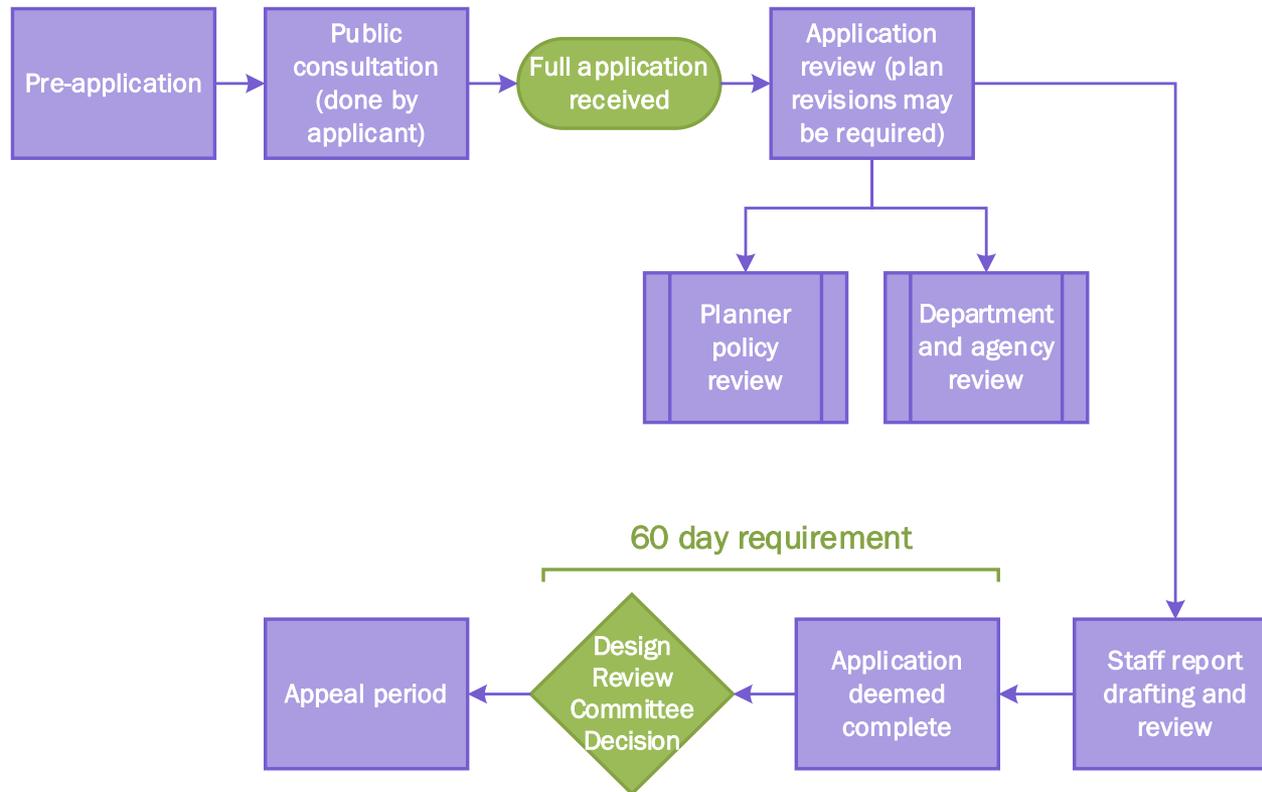
- No comprehensive policy manual to guide planning application review
- Some planning staff agreed lack of a policy manual contributes to variations
- Examples:
  - No common understanding of when application is complete
  - No policy which HRM divisions or external agencies should be involved
  - No standard timeframe for HRM division or external agency review

# Detailed Results

- Significant inefficiencies contributing to lengthy timelines before applications are approved
- Planning applications take too long to finalize
- Pre-application review phase for site plan approval does not add value or improve efficiency
- Charter requirements not met

# Detailed Results

## Site Plan Approval application process



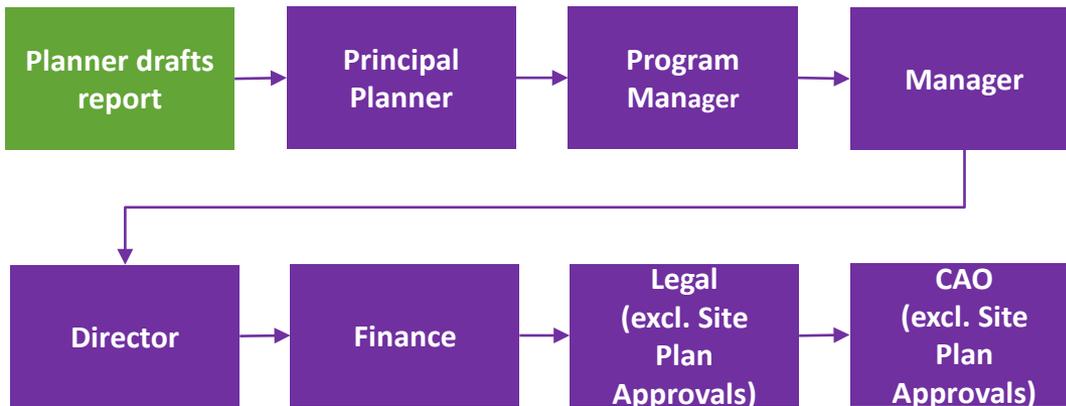
# Detailed Results

- No policy guiding:
  - External agencies and HRM business units and agencies to engage
  - Stakeholders to review final development agreements
- Application reviews may take a long time
  - No clear deadlines
- Poor communication with applicants
  - HRM staff do not provide updates
- Files were not complete
  - Rarely use checklists

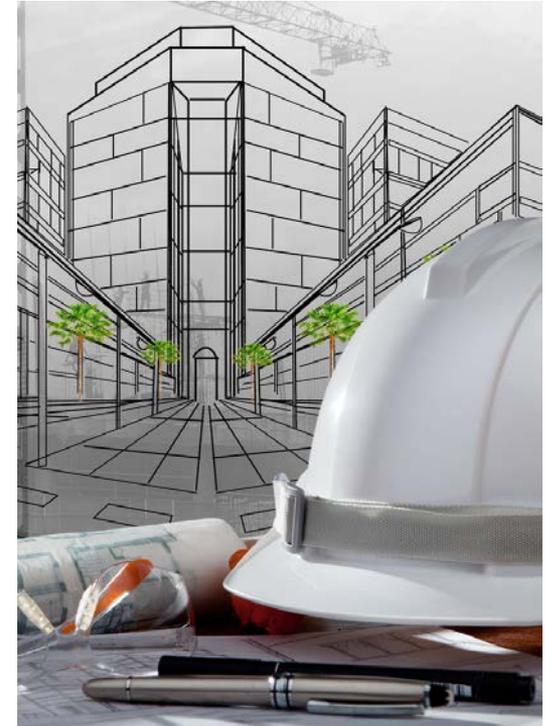


# Detailed Results

- Long timelines for staff report review



**Staff Report Review process as of January 2017**



# Detailed Results



- Inefficiencies and lengthy timelines with approval process for major subdivision applications
- Charter requirements not met
- Management say challenging to meet 90-day timeline
- No monitoring of timeliness of application processes
- Planning and Development has target timelines
  - Not implemented yet, no planned date
  - Targets for major subdivisions exceed maximum time per Charter

# Detailed Results

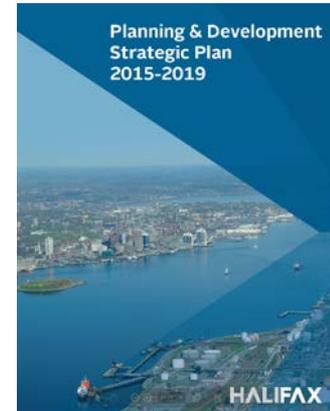
<b>Application type (non-appealed)</b>	<b>OAG samples total time from application date</b>	<b>Target timeframe</b>	<b>Time requirement per HRM Charter</b>
	<b>Days</b>		
Concept plan for subdivisions	306	120	90
Final design plan for subdivisions	201-671	180-365	90
Site Plan Approvals - pre-application <sup>(1)</sup>	39-249	0	60 – does not break approval into separate stages
Site Plan Approvals - full application <sup>(1)</sup>	62-190	60	
Site Plan Approvals - pre to full application <sup>(1)</sup>	109-347	0	
	<b>Months</b>		
Development Agreements	15-84	10	Not stated
Amendments to Development Agreements	9-29 <sup>(2)</sup>	Not stated	Not stated
Rezoning	2-19	Not stated	Not stated
Municipal Planning Strategies Amendments	14- 33	Not stated	Not stated
Land-use By-law Amendments	9-18	Not stated	Not stated

*(1) All site plan approvals tested are for Downtown or Centre Plan areas.*

*(2) Two ADA files in the sample remain open at 34 and 60 months, but have been inactive for greater than 18 months.*

# Detailed Results

- *Strategic Plan 2015-2019* behind schedule
- Lack of good information for management to make decisions
  - Are limitations with file management system
  - But...
    - Lack of documented processes
    - inefficiencies in application review and approval
  - Contribute to the lack of quality information



# Detailed Results



- Positive aspects
  - Sampled staff reports well-prepared
  - Reviewed by appropriate individuals
  - Tested appealed and denied applications
    - Files supported decisions made



# Wrap-up

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- 10 Recommendations
- 10 accepted by Management
- Changes are needed quickly
- Follow up in 18 months

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*Questions?*