P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 14.1
Halifax Regional Council
May 23, 2023
July 11, 2023

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: May 15, 2023

SUBJECT: **Planning & Development Permitting and Development Approval KPIs**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

On January 10, 2023 the following motion of Regional Council regarding Item No.16.1 was put and passed:

MOVED by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Cleary

THAT Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to provide a staff report to:

1. *Outline current timeframes and recommendations for establishing KPIs and target timeframes for the various application and permitting processes within the Planning and Development business unit;*
2. *Require staff to prepare a twice-yearly report on these KPIs;*
3. *Prepare a list of potential Charter changes that would speed up the various permitting and approval processes for Council's consideration, and;*
4. *Return with a report within 120 days and include options for service delivery improvements along with any additional resourcing and legislative supports.*

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter- Parts VIII (Planning and Development) and IX (Subdivision), and clauses 7A (a) and (b), as follows:

7A The purposes of the Municipality are to

(a) provide good government;

(b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality;

BACKGROUND

Both Council and the development industry have expressed interest in having access to transparent reporting on timelines and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) associated with development approvals and permit processes specifically. There have also been several ongoing discussions with the Province of Nova Scotia and the development industry centered around concerns with delays and backlogs within approval processes that hinder access to an increased supply of housing. This report sets out the current processing timelines for all application approval streams, defines associated targets, discusses recent improvements in approvals timelines and related initiatives, and identifies barriers, needed resources and legislative changes required to meet targets more routinely.

DISCUSSION

This report includes information on processing times and associated targets for applications related to development and construction, subdivision applications, planning applications inclusive of rezonings, land use by-law amendments and development agreements. Minor-scaled municipal planning strategy amendments that are associated with and enable a development agreement are also included. Information on timelines for comprehensive policy work directed by Council such as the Regional Plan Review and policy initiatives for planned growth areas are not included within this report.

In March of this year, the Budget Committee was presented with information that responds in part to the January 10th motion. While the Budget and Business Plan report[1] was focused on the recommendation relative to P&D's 2023/2024 budget, information was included on service delivery performance measures, comparing KPIs for the permit process between 2021 and 2022. This comparison revealed significant improvement in processing times between the two years, with shortened process times for all permit application types. There are several reasons for the improvement. Many challenges presented themselves during 2021 that affected the processing times, including:

- staff turnover;
- increased application volumes;
- newly adopted and more complex regulations for the Regional Centre;
- the desire to preserve existing development rights before Centre Plan Package B took effect;
- increased volumes of customer service inquiries; and
- the challenges of remote work practices.

The most significant contributor to the processing delays of 2021 was staffing challenges. In anticipation of the need for additional staff resources to help reduce wait times, Council's approval of the 2021/22 budget included eleven additional staff positions focussed on permitting. Currently, apart from the added staff capacity, Planning and Development continues to actively respond to changing permit volumes by:

- monitoring and adjusting staff resources;
- refining business processes;
- making software adjustments as necessary; and
- reinforcing customer service protocols.

This report sets out current processing times associated with the end-to-end review of an application, from submission on the part of an applicant to issuance/decision or delivery of the recommendation report to Council. This includes:

- the time needed by the applicant to prepare and submit any missing documents or information such that an application can be deemed complete,
- initial review time by staff, and
- additional time necessary for subsequent revisions and reviews.

Timeframes do not include any applicable appeal periods

[1] See page 14 of this report: https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/230217bc062.pdf

The stated target processing times represent a reasonable expectation for largely complete, approvable applications of each type. It is important to note the permit data shown throughout this report is based on more current data than was presented during the P&D Budget and Business Plan.

Current and Target Processing Times

Permit Application KPIs – Table 1

PERMITS (measured in calendar days)			
Application Type	**Current Processing Time*** (Jan 1 – Mar 31/23)	**Yearly Processing Time*** (previous 12 months)	**Target Processing Time**
Residential Building Permits	17 Days	33 Days	14 Days
MixedUse and Commercial Building Permits (MICI)	21 Days	45 Days	45 Days
Construction Permits	7 Days	12 Days	14 Days
Engineering Permits	13 Days	25 Days	45 Days
Land Use Approval Only Permits (Development Only)	13 Days	23 Days	14 Days - Minor Residential 45 Days - MICI

*Also includes additional time spent by applicant to prepare and submit missing information to deem application complete

Attachment A includes additional detail on permit volumes and processing times for 2021 and 2022, as of March 15, 2023. It is an example of the information Planning & Development shares with industry partners – Urban Development Institute, Canadian Home Builders' Association NS, Construction Assn. of Nova Scotia, NS Road Builders' Assn. - via regular touchpoints, as well as through the HRM Development Liaison Group.

Subdivision Application KPIs – Table 2

SUBDIVISION		
Application Type	**Current Processing Time*** (2022 applications as of Dec 31/23)	**Target Processing Time**
Preliminary	2.5 months	2 months
Concept	7.5 months	4 months
Final (Infill)	3 months	2 months
Final (With New Infrastructure)	6 months	4 months

*Also includes additional time spent by applicant to prepare and submit missing information to deem application complete

Current processing times for subdivision applications in Table 2 above are within a reporting period of January to December of 2022. Subdivision applications have been accepted into the Permitting, Planning, Licensing & Compliance (PPL&C) system since December of 2022. Allowing time for data collection to occur via the new system, additional information on subdivision application volumes and processing times will be included in a new webpage, as detailed later in this report, in early 2024.

Planning Application KPIs – Table 3

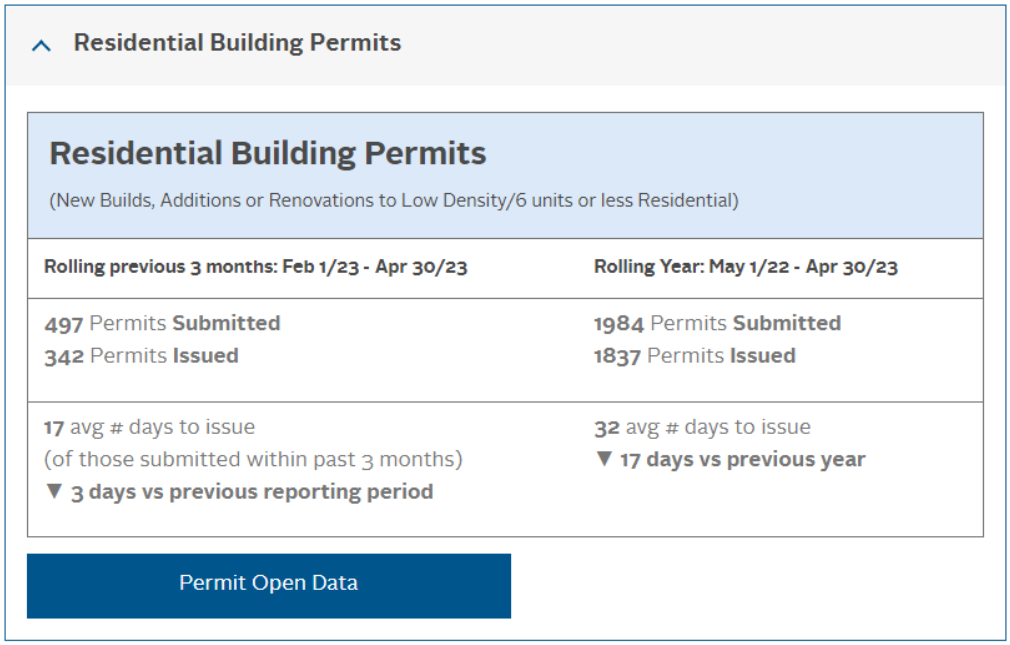
Application Type	Current Processing Time* (2020 to March 2023)	Target Processing Time
Development Agreement	8 months - 2.5 years	8 months
Discharge of Development Agreement	4 - 8 months	4 months
Substantive Amendment to Development Agreement	10 months – 2 years	8 months
Non-Substantive Amendment to Development Agreement	2 – 6 months	3 months
Rezoning	8 to 16 months	8 months
DA or LUB Amendment with Municipal Planning Strategy Amendment	10 months to 2.5 years	18 months

*Also includes additional time spent by applicant to prepare and submit missing information to deem application complete

Current processing times for planning applications in Table 3 above are within a reporting period of 2020 to March of 2023 and are expressed as a median range. It's important to note that there is a wide range of scale and complexity within most planning applications, making a defined target somewhat impractical. The noted target timeframes would apply to applications that are more typical in nature and do not require extensive engagement and review and re-work processes.

Bi-Annual KPI Report

In April of this year, Planning & Development launched a new Permit Volume & Processing Time webpage[2]. To help provide transparent service levels for permit application turnaround times, the new webpage provides rolling permit metrics that are easily accessible for staff, citizens, and elected officials. The ability to regularly produce this type of information promises to be just the beginning of data transformation within Planning & Development. The following is an image of a portion of the page.



[2] https://www.halifax.ca/home-property/building-development-permits/permit-volume-processing-times

Historically, systems and processes have limited the ability to fully export, analyze and produce meaningful and consumable permit and planning application data. While permit information has always been available via the Halifax Data, Mapping & Analytics Hub[3] (formerly Open Data), Planning & Development staff have been working towards presenting the information in a more useful and convenient format. With the introduction of the new PPL&C system, data has become more accessible and over the course of the last two years, staff have improved the open data catalogue with all permit types, and increased the information published in the open data sets to include not just issued permit information but lifecycle permit information from submission to completion. Staff are working on a public facing permit volume and processing dashboard to go live this coming fall with the addition of planning application data and other metrics in 2024.

As we transition to the new webpage and dashboard, the requirement for a twice yearly KPI report should lessen. During this transition period, Planning & Development will provide a KPI information report in January 2024, with a second report in June 2024.

Legislative Changes

In April of 2022, the Province made several changes to the *HRM Charter*, intended to make processes relating to development approvals more efficient. The changes included:

- Conversion of notices from newspaper advertisements to website postings;
- Shortening of the review time for planning documents by the Provincial Director of Planning;
- The ability to provisionally approve a development agreement associated with supporting plan and by-amendments;
- The ability for a development agreement to contain terms and requirements for supporting off-site upgrades;
- Suspension of the referral of planning decision to community councils ir any advisory committee (including a planning advisory committees) for three years;
- Decision-making on discharge of existing development agreements by the CAO; and
- Decision-making on non-substantive amendments to development agreements by the Development Officer.

Planning applications have recently benefited from these amendments. The changes have made a measurable impact on timelines associated with planning applications (rezonings, LUB amendments, development agreements). No additional Charter changes are required or recommended at this time that would immediately result in a substantial improvement to processing times.

While legislation can always be improved and streamlined, a focus on complete, approvable applications would have the most impact in terms of shortened approval timeframes. Staff will continue to work with industry partners to ensure that minimum application requirements are well understood, and regulations are transparent and easily accessible.

Service Delivery Improvements

Several initiatives are planned or underway that will support improvements in service delivery.

Trusted Partner Program

As recommended within the October 2022 HRM Housing Development Barrier Review report[4] by Deloitte, Planning & Development is in the process of developing a program where approvals are shortened for pre-qualified applicants, with review and on-site audits taking place to ensure that applicable regulations are followed on site. Analysis and industry engagement is targeted for later this year (2023), with a potential launch of a program in 2024.

[3] https://data-hrm.hub.arcgis.com/ages/open-data-catalogue

[4] Report available online at housing-development-barrier-review.pdf (novascotia.ca)

Single Point of Contact
From the point of submission to completion of the development on site, staff are available and engaged with applicants and developers with contact information of the staff person assigned included in all communications. A complete staff directory is also posted online, organized by the various P&D areas of responsibility, to help applicants identify appropriate contacts as well as supervisory and managerial staff.

System Improvements
Staff continue to adjust to the new PPL&C system and offer training and education for staff users and customers. A focus over the upcoming year will be to work with industry on submitting more complete and approvable applications, which will further support the development of a trusted partner program.

By-law Simplification
There are other longer-term initiatives that are subject to municipal authority that will help to reduce application processing times. The modernization and consolidation of HRM's various planning documents and land use by-laws within the rural and suburban areas of the municipality will enable more efficient processing of permit and subdivision applications in future. Work on these projects is continuing as part of the Regional Plan and withfunding that Council endorsed to advance background work on both the Suburban and Rural Plans.

Additional Resourcing

Planning & Development have had considerable increases to the overall staff complement over the past few years, however as is the case in all sectors, filling vacancies has been challenging. Improvements have been made in technology and process, but to truly understand the need for additional staff resourcing, the business unit needs to achieve a more steady state in its staff complement. Reducing the current vacancy rate as much as possible and building and retaining staff capability will continue to be a business unit and corporate focus.

Conclusion
While permit and development application processing timeframes and services were greatly impacted in 2021 due to a number of factors, considerable improvements have occurred since that time to achieve more acceptable wait times. Staff will continue to monitor and adjust staffing, processes and tools as necessary to reduce wait times as much as possible and achieve target timeframes for the majority of applications. Providing approval wait times via the website and the upcoming online dashboard will provide greater transparency for service delivery expecattions to citizens and elected officials. The bi-annual KPI report as well as the annual budget and business plan will afford Council with a regular opportunity to review P&D's service delivery metrics and provide direction and support as it deems appropriate.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications at this time.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – P&D Touchpoint

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Erin MacIntyre, Director- Development Services 902.293.7721

P&D Touchpoint

PERMIT VOLUMES & PROCESSING UPDATE

2023-03-15

Mixed-Use & Commercial Building Permits

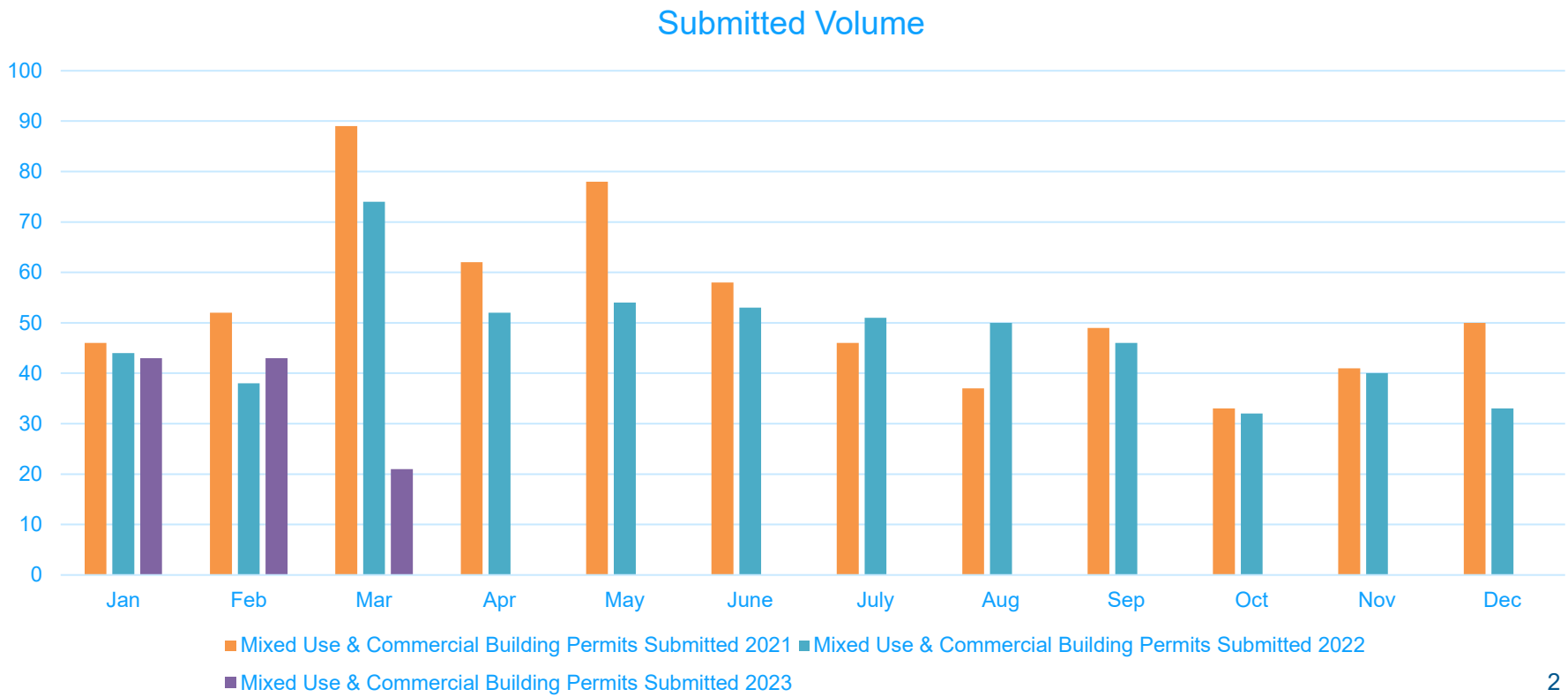
aka MICIs (includes high density residential)

New, Adds & Renos

Target Processing Time: 42 Calendar Days (30 BDs)

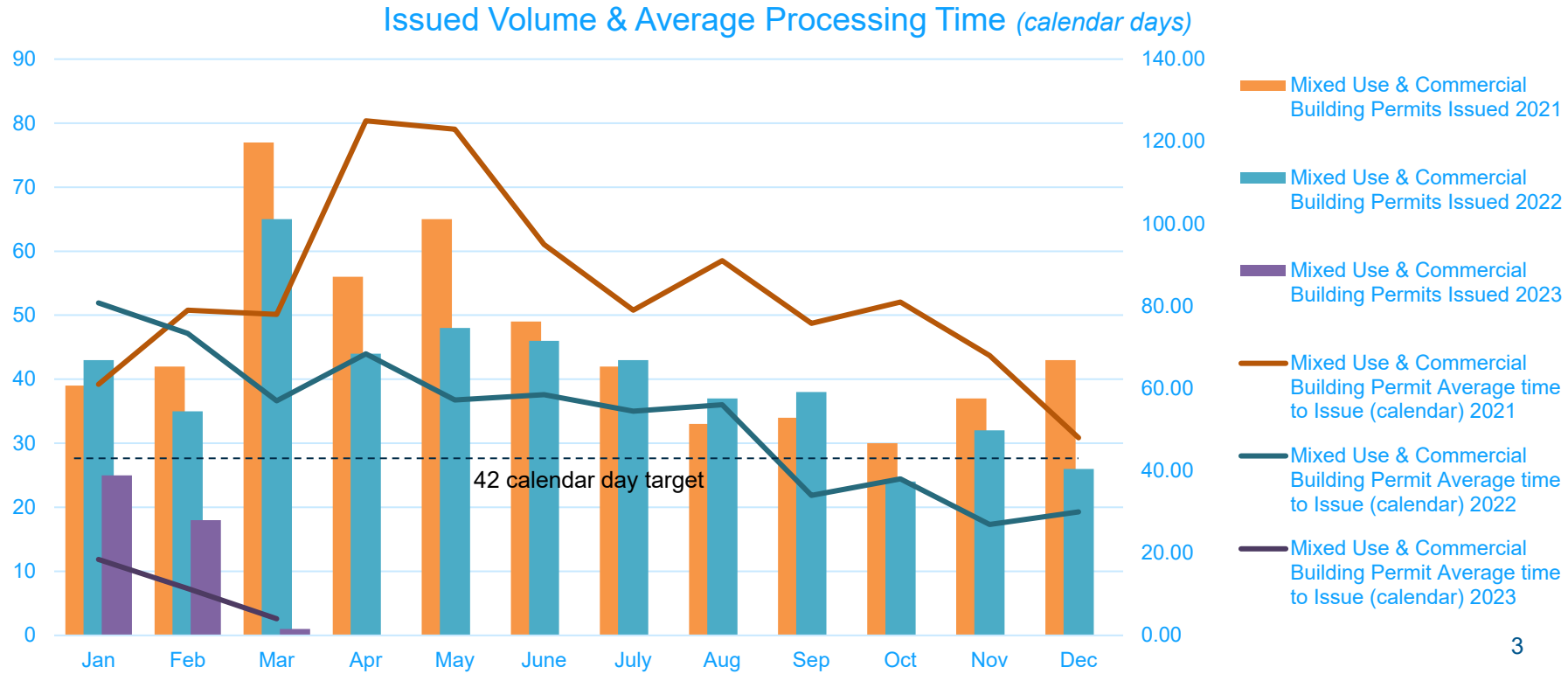
HALIFAX

Mixed Use & Commercial Building Permits (New, Adds & Renos)



HALIFAX

Mixed Use & Commercial Building Permits
(New, Adds & Renos)



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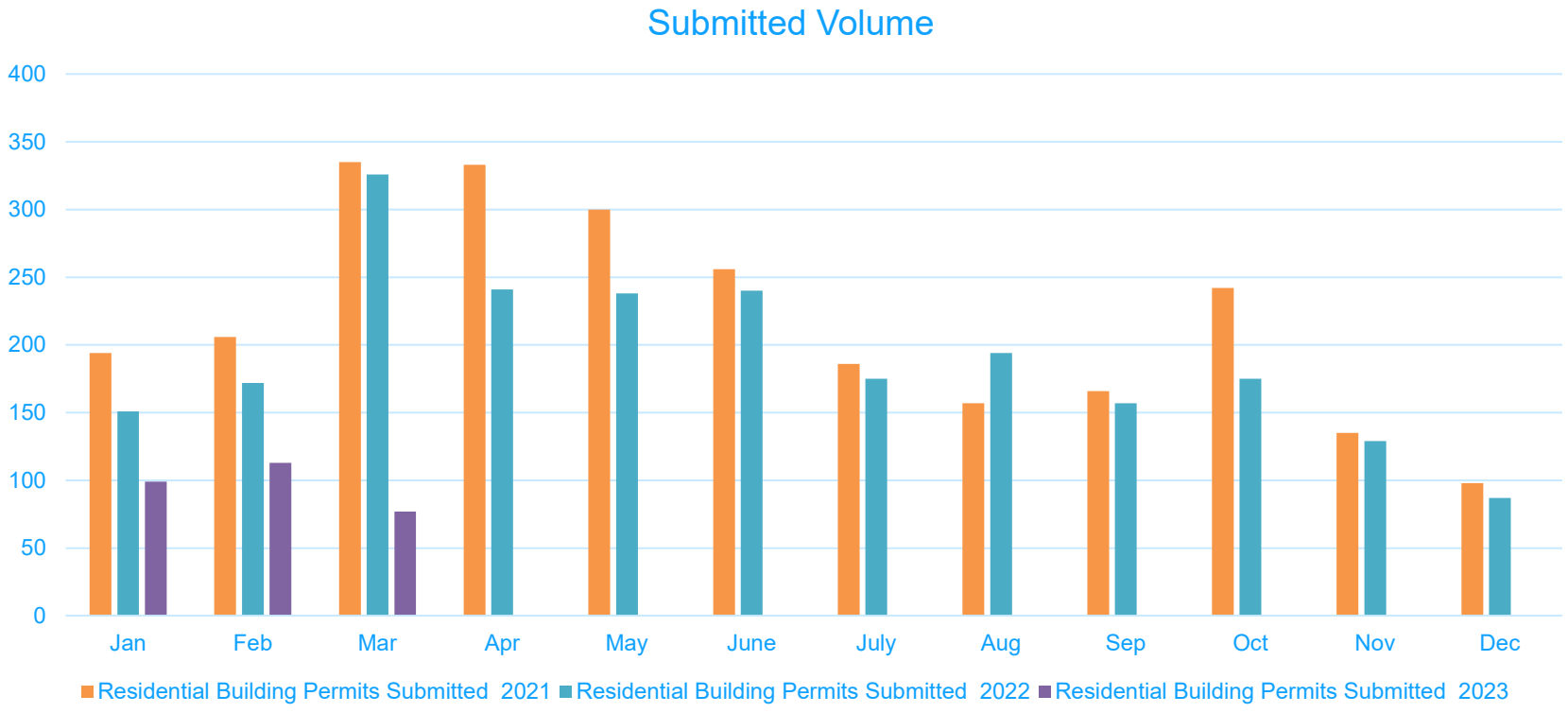
Residential Building Permits

Low Density (6 unit or less)
New, Adds & Renos

Target Processing Time: 14 Calendar Days (10 BDs)

Residential Building Permits (New, Adds & Renos)



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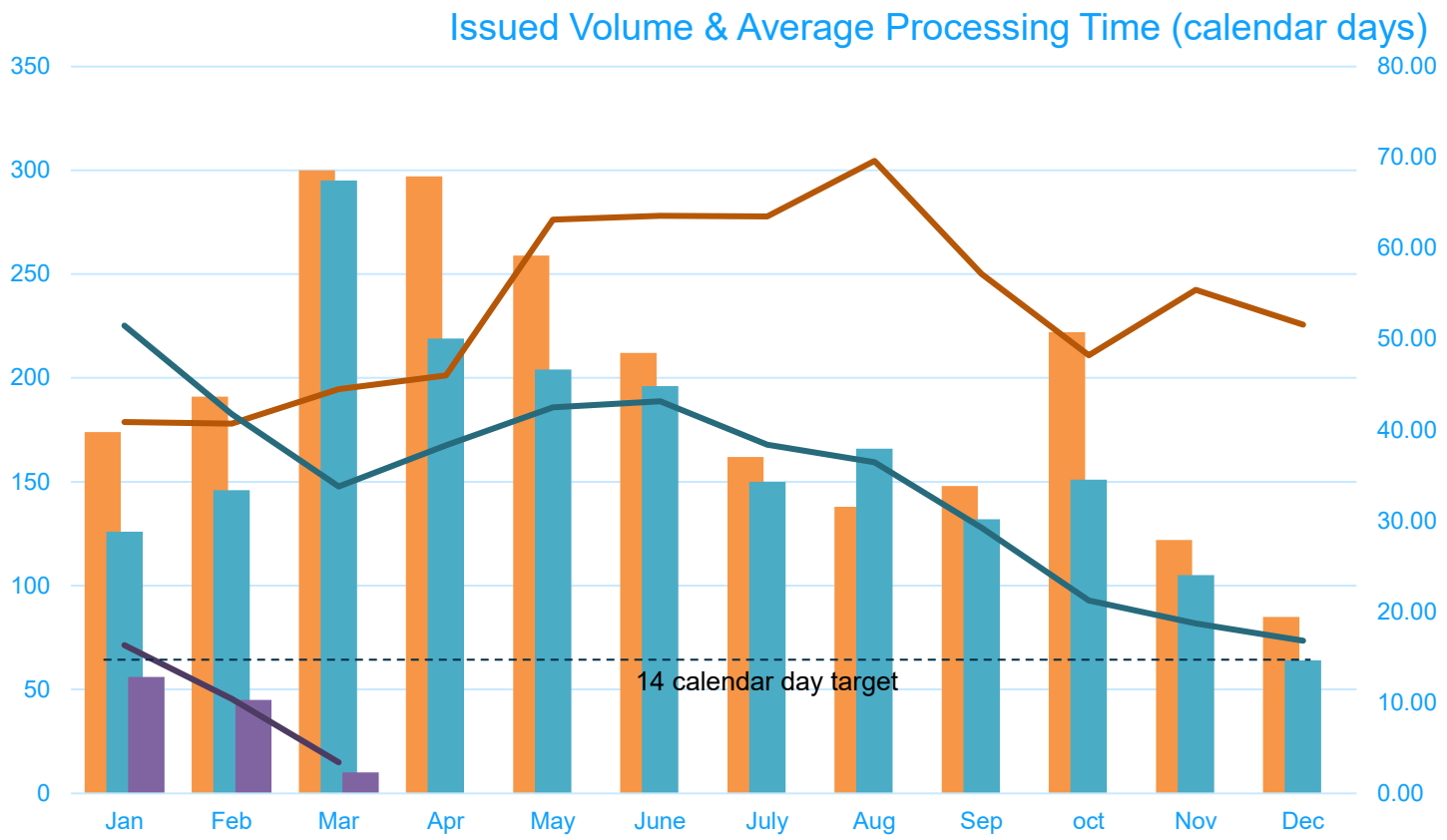
Residential Building Permits (New, Adds & Renos)



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All P&D Permits

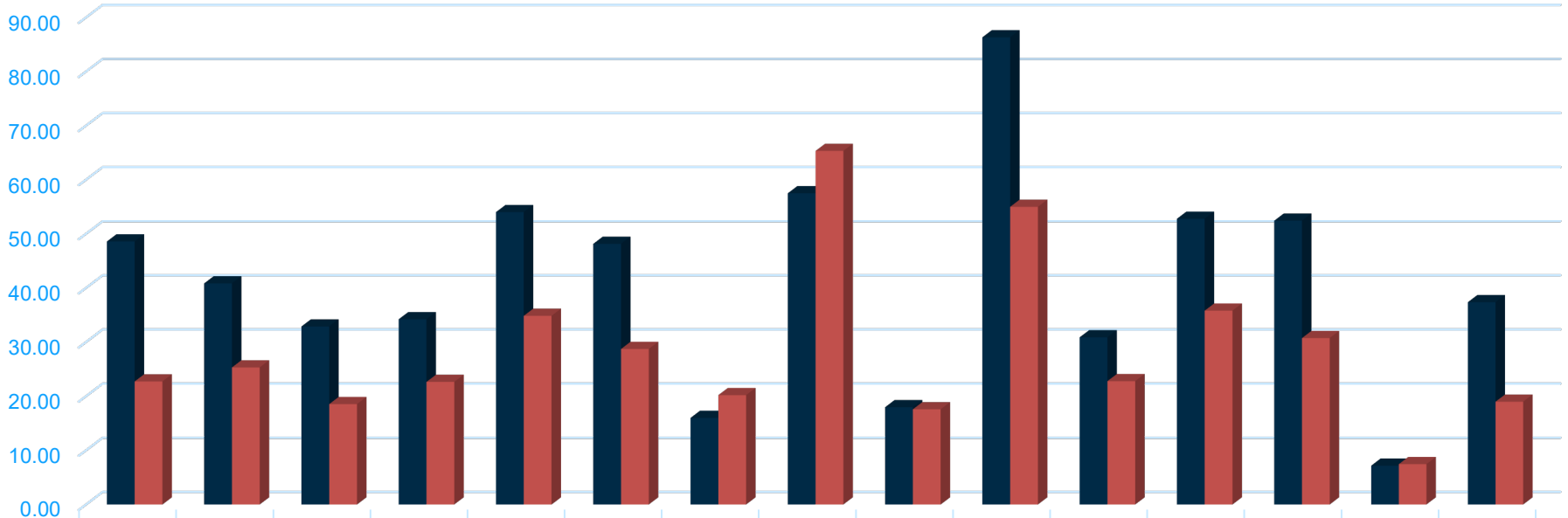
Average Processing Times
2021 vs 2022

Target Processing Times

Low Complexity: 14 Calendar Days (10 BDs)

Med-High Complexity: 42 Calendar Days (30 BDs)

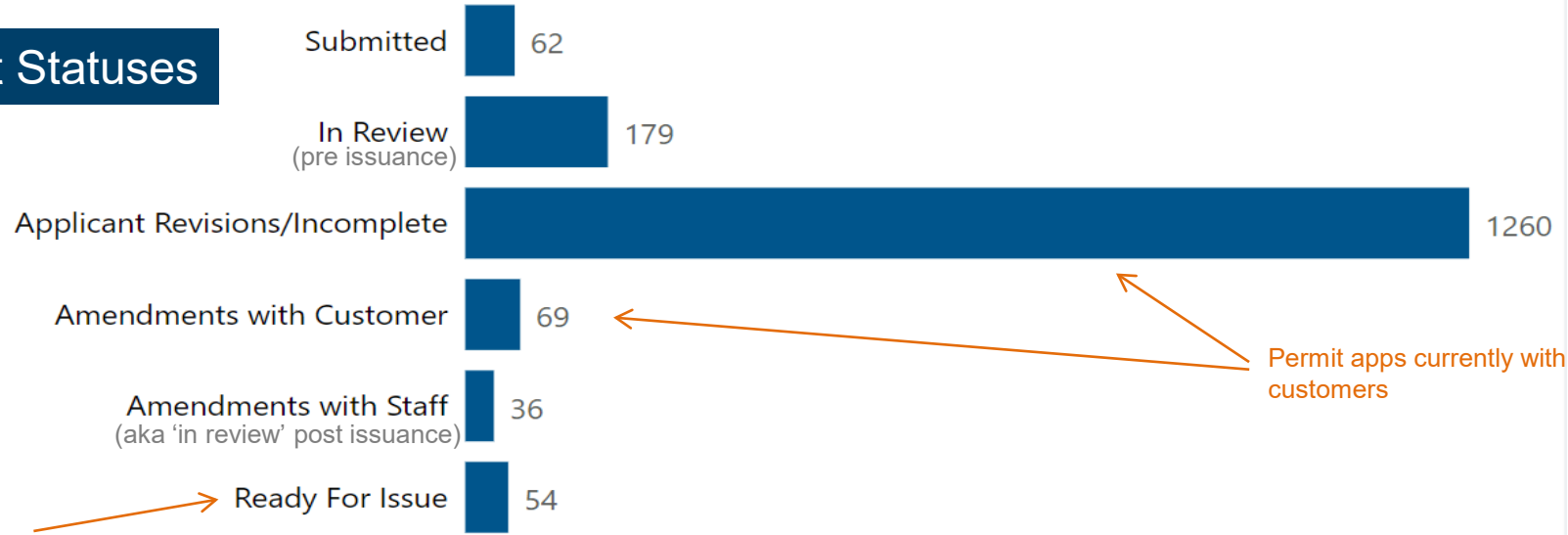
Average Time from Submission to Issue (Calendar Days)
YR over YR Comparison



	Application to Occupy	Blasting Permit	Deck Permit	Demolition Permit	Development - Right of Way Permit	Development Only Permit	Fence Construction	Grade Alteration Permit	Lot Grading Permit	Mixed Use & Commercial Building Permit	Mobile Home Permit	Residential Building Permit	Sign Permit	Solar Permit	Swimming Pool Permit
2021	48.58	40.84	32.88	34.21	54.01	48.14	16.00	57.50	17.97	86.32	30.88	52.77	52.42	7.17	37.37
2022	22.72	25.31	18.54	22.64	34.84	28.72	20.20	65.33	17.58	54.99	22.78	35.81	30.73	7.45	18.98

At a glance:
March 15, 2023, 7am

Permit Statuses



Some permits 'almost' ready for issue.
A final check being done &/or held due to conditions not being met, outstanding action required by customer, or staff prior to issuance

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