



Staff Report

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Report To: General Government Committee **Report Number:** CAO-004-22

Date of Meeting: June 6, 2022 **By-law Number:**

Reviewed By: Mary-Anne Dempster, CAO **Resolution#:**

File Number:

Report Subject: Citizen Centric Ground Floor – Municipal Administrative Centre

Recommendations:

1. That Report CAO-004-22 be received for information; and
2. That Council authorize the allocation of the remaining capital budget from account #110-36-370-83601-7401 to facilitate the renovations.

Report Overview

As part of [Report CAO-009-21](#) Council provided staff direction to review recommendations that were set out by the consultants (Customer Service Professional Network) to move Clarington towards establishing a centralized customer service model. The premise of this centralized model was based on work done by Grant Thornton during the organizational review, who opined that this would be the best method of delivering the service, based on the circumstances at that time.

As directed, staff have been actively working through the recommendations in Report [CAO-009-21](#) to prepare an implementation report for Council. This report builds on the concept of centralized customer service for both our residents and business partners but deviates in the approach of how to offer the actual services. The new method proposed would see front-line services and the staff associated, physically moved to the ground floor of the Municipal Administrative Centre (MAC). The rationale for this adjustment builds around efforts to mitigate two key risks with the model proposed by the consultants – resources (increased costs) and accountability. Having staff stay accountable to their home department will allow for the appropriate manager to maintain control over the information being given to the public – ensuring it is both timely and accurate.

Some renovations will be required to make these adjustments, with the goal to create an enhanced customer service experience for all those visiting the MAC. This will include new public facing counters, accessibility/technology upgrades, and several other customer centric enhancements.

1. Background

Audit and Accountability Fund – Grant Thornton LLP and Customer Service Professional Network

- 1.1 In the first intake of the Province of Ontario's Audit and Accountability Fund ("AAF"), the Municipality applied for and was successful in obtaining funds to undertake an organizational structure review. As part of that review, Grant Thornton LLP ("GT"), the consultant, recommended that a centralized customer service function be created (see Recommendation #10 in [GTs Recommendation and Implementation report](#)).
- 1.2 In Report [CAO-006-20](#), staff identified a path towards centralization and the need to review all the services that we currently provide to our customers. This would have been a massive undertaking for existing staff, making the second round of the AAF a great opportunity to bring in a third-party customer service expert to undertake this

work. Customer Service Professional Network (“CSPN”) was retained for that engagement.

- 1.3 The final report from CSPN ([Report CAO-009-21](#)) set-out a path towards centralization which included several recommendations, but upon further review there is likely a simpler and more cost-effective way that Clarington can accomplish enhanced customer service and realize cost savings.

2. Centralized Customer Service – Implementation Risks

- 2.1 Upon further review of the CSPN recommendations, there are concerns that our ability to stay lean in terms of human resources may be compromised once this model is fully implemented. The concerns with implementation include:
- 2.2 **Resources** – Simply moving FTEs to a centralized department is going to require staff who are already fully utilized to be deployed to a dedicated customer service function. In theory, it sounds more effective. However, staff in the home departments do not just provide customer service. The additional assigned duties will remain, causing capacity issues for the home department to provide services in a timely manner. For example, it was proposed that a Clerk II from Planning and Development could be moved to the centralized department. The job posting for this position (which was recently filled), includes the following tasks that would still need to be fulfilled:
- Providing clerical support for the preparation of notices of public meetings, notice signs, newsletters and website application summaries, application status letters, and reports to the Planning and Development Committee.
 - Assisting with the processing of Zoning Clearance Letters, Accessory Dwelling Unit registrations, Sign Permits, and Land Division comments.
 - Liaising with the Building Permit Clerks on cross divisional inquiries and providing clerical support to the Development Application Coordinators as needed.

Applying the same analysis against the Revenue Clerk position, the following specialized duties would need to be backfilled:

- Maintenance of Mortgage Company files.
- Perform collection processes in order to collect outstanding balances.
- Processing tax roll adjustments such as refunds, payment switches, returned payments, and liens.
- Assist in preparing and processing tax appeal adjustments such as Municipal Act decisions and post roll amendments.
- Assist in assessment-based management processes.

Ultimately, the proposed model would require additional staff, carrying a cost impact which was not the intent of the exercise. It is anticipated according to the review, that eight full time positions are required to provide the enhanced service at a cost for wages and benefits of \$551,281- this does not include the cost of technology and office expenses. It is fair to note that the proposed service contemplated included expanding additional hours of service, however, the need for this was not fully analyzed.

There is also the additional consideration related to productivity. If staff are too conservative in responding to questions, it could lead to additional questions simply being escalated to home departments unnecessarily. This would affect productivity and require additional resources within said department to respond.

- 2.3 **Accountability** – By moving customer service staff to a centralized manager, it raises concerns regarding chain of control and responsibility for service delivery. For example, if the subject matter expert (“SME”) in Tax is responsible to a customer service manager, how can the home department ensure quality of service? The answer to that is that memorandums of understanding are often drafted between the home department and the manager responsible for the centralized service. This clearly adds a layer of bureaucracy. Furthermore, the centralized model also proposes that departmental subject matter experts assigned to customer service are cross-trained, this increases the chances that incorrect information will be given to residents and business partners. There is some information that is technical and nuanced and it would be very hard to appropriately train people in multiple disciplines. Of course, the centralized function could increase its staff count to add more SMEs, but at a cost. The lines of business provided by a municipality are complex and require a level of training. Under the centralized model, the Director ultimately accountable for the service may be forced to deal with the issue they are not responsible for creating. The public does not distinguish between departments, we are perceived as one business, which when everything is working seamlessly is fine.

To illustrate the issue, below are two examples of high-traffic customer facing services from Planning and Development Services and Financial Services, and how enhanced customer service can help residents to avoid error:

Comments from Chief Building Official regarding the Ontario Building Code:

Not all construction materials that are available to homeowners are code compliant or acceptable on all projects. For example, there are many different types of guards and handrails, some come with engineered designs and are acceptable while others are not engineered and do not meet the OBC design requirements to withstand the loads applied to them and/or are climbable. Helical piles are another example, Home Depot sells a product that can not be used for anything requiring a building permit but they do not inquire about what a purchaser is going to use them for when they sell them. When a

Plans Examiner is talking to people who are thinking of using or may consider helical piles or any other product which could be mistakenly used, they explain what can and can't be used and what to look for when sourcing the product.

Most homeowners and even some contractors contact us to discuss their project because they don't know how to do what they want and are looking to draw on our experience. If a person inquiring about what may be required is not warned or receives the wrong information they may proceed with the wrong materials or methods and jeopardize the safety of the structure and people using it and/or incur increased costs to replace materials and/or rebuild as well as the potential liability on the Municipality.

As the scope of projects increases so does the complexity of the OBC requirements, the range of materials available for use, the methods of construction and the risk.

Comment from the Director of Planning regarding zoning:

Providing the wrong information or a misinterpretation of the information provided can result in the deck being constructed in the wrong location, e.g. too close to the property line or a pool.

Comments from the Deputy CAO/Treasurer regarding tax inquiries that could create issues:

- *Not understanding that there is a difference between assessed value and market value and the implications if a purchaser/taxpayer is trying to calculate the tax impact of a purchase*
- *Applying tax payments incorrectly to an account could result in added stress and fees, or implications with mortgage covenants.*

The report set out that staff within the centralized function would be cross-trained, with the assumption that the customer service manager would be responsible for hiring (as vacancies occurred). This would mean that the manager would be set to determine the skills and experience required, which could quickly create gaps for certain departments, depending on what was required to deliver services for their area.

3. Current Context and Opportunities

- 3.1 As part of our post-pandemic planning, the administrative team is in the process of building a hybrid work model that will see a modernized approach to space use in the MAC. This new model will strategically address the need for any net-new space at the MAC for several years and is both agile and flexible in nature.

- 3.2 It was through this space-focused initiative, our adjusted staffing model, and the need to manage against risks proposed by the recommended centralized customer service model, that this report recommends a deviation from the plan as set out in [Report CAO-009-21](#). What is recommended below builds on the principles of providing high-quality customer service to residents and business partners, while taking a prudent approach to cost management.

4. “Customer Centric” Model – Financial and Human Resource Considerations

- 4.1 To achieve a first floor that has the appropriate facilities to implement this model there will be the need to undertake capital improvements. Proposed below is an updated approach to how we can achieve an enhanced customer service delivery model on the main floor of the MAC. It draws on bringing services to where the residents are, utilizing current staffing complements and departmental structures, and creating a welcoming environment.
- 4.2 The Director of Community Services and his staff have been working to determine how to optimize space allocations on the first floor for divisions that deliver front-facing customer service. It is proposed that the current finance area will house Tax and Clerk's, a component of Planning and Development, and Engineering while the former Purchasing area will house the Building Division. This means that new and redeveloped customer service counters and pathways of travel will be designed to make things easier for everyone. Attachment A showcases the anticipated layout of the ground floor.
- 4.3 Staff in the Human Resources, Finance and Purchasing divisions who do not provide a customer facing service will be moved to space on the third floor vacated from Planning and Development Services staff. Space needs will be reduced as the hybrid work model will be layered in, with certain staff sharing a workspace, depending on their time spent in office. It is important to note that the Office of the CAO will be drafting a policy that will specifically address return-to-work and space allocation. To help develop the policy, there will be several engagement sessions with staff as well as a workplace satisfaction survey to help ensure we get it right.
- 4.4 The phone system capabilities will be used to direct callers to the correct business support, if this is not known, there will be a generic option to receive support. At this time, it is not recommended to establish a Clarington call centre as the Region is enhancing their service and potentially offering, on a shared cost basis, the opportunity for municipalities to partner thus significantly decreasing the cost for the Municipality of Clarington to offer this service. This opportunity will be fully explored prior to making any further recommendations with respect to a Clarington Call Centre.

- 4.5 In 2017, Council approved \$1,296,809 for upgrades at the MAC to address accessibility, security, lighting, audio/visual, etc. Of the amount approved, only \$1,290,000 was debentured and received. Due to the nature of the projects undertaken and unused contingency, there was \$286,000 that went unspent and is available for use to fund the proposed work. Staff advise that the \$286,000 be utilized and spent against a list to include:
- Removal of the customer service counter
 - Renovation work to better utilize existing workspace (wall removal, barrier installation, workspace design with plug-in options, etc.)
 - Technology and wayfinding to improve accessibility for residents which includes LED display screens and signage
 - Tech-enabled meeting room spaces to serve customers (e.g. larger display screens, MS Teams capabilities, upgraded furniture, etc.)
- 4.7 If costs exceed available funds, Staff will return to Council for approval, but it is anticipated that this phase of implementation will come in under the amount available.

5. Implementation Plan

- 5.1 Pending Council approval, it is expected that this work could begin quickly, with an anticipated completion date of October 1, 2022.
- 5.2 The following customer facing services would be available to residents on the main floor of the MAC:
- Provide Information and Support to General Inquiries / Issues from Public
 - Complaint management resolution tracking
 - Process and Manage Approval of Departmental Permits / Licenses
 - *Marriage License, Business Licensing*
 - Process and Manage Payments for Various Departmental Services
 - *Licenses, Parking Tickets, Parking Permits, and Animal Licenses*
 - *FOI/MFIPPA Request*
 - Complete and Manage Customer Payments of Property Taxes
 - Manage Review & Sign-Off for Zoning / Land-Use Aspect of Permit Approval
 - Process and Manage Approval of Construction Related Permits
 - *Deck, Fence, Pool Enclosure, Shed, Sign*

6. Concurrence

- 6.1 This report has been reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team, who concur with the recommendations.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 A “Citizen-Centric” ground floor at the Municipal Administrative Centre represents the most cost-effective approach and one that aligns staff to deliver on the needs of the public efficiently and effectively. Therefore, it is respectfully recommended that Council approve the allocation of capital budget from account #110-36-370-83601-7401 to facilitate the renovations.

Staff Contact: Justin MacLean, Manager, Strategy, Intergovernmental Affairs and Transformation, jmaclean@clarington.net.

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Rendering of Ground Floor “Citizen-Centric” Wickets

Attachment 2 – Rendering of Ground Floor “Citizen-Centric” Service Counter

Interested Parties:

There are no interested parties to be notified of Council's decision.