

Building Department – Customer Service Procedure

Approved By: Jointly – Chief Building Official and CAO
Approval Date: TBD
Effective Date: TBD

Procedure Statement

To establish customer service standards for the Building Department to ensure a consistent standard practice that reflects the Building Department's commitment to customer service excellence and accessibility, while acknowledging the unique responsibilities of the department.

Purpose:

This procedure will outline the requirements and expectations of Building Department staff to respond to inquiries associated with the Department. This procedure recognizes the need for Building Department staff to frequently complete in-depth research and review of various materials.

Application: This policy applies to all Building Department staff, or any other individual undertaking any portion of those duties.

Exclusions: None

References & Related Policies:

Building Code Act, 1992 & O/Reg. 332/12, as amended
Building Customer Service Policy P9
Code of Conduct — Chief Building Official P4
Code of Conduct Policy A14
Complaint Handling Policy A23

Review Cycle: This procedure shall be reviewed on an as needed basis.

Preamble

Building Department staff are frequently required to be out of the office. This has a direct impact on reasonable response times. The majority of the Department's workload is bound by various pieces of legislation such as the Building Code Act, the Planning Act, and many other applicable laws. Completing these tasks by their respective legal deadline must be prioritized over duties that are not governed by law. The Building Department recognizes that work volume can also influence customer service levels by virtue of reduced response capacity and longer response times.

Procedure

The following customer service procedures shall be followed by Building Department staff and, where applicable, shall be applied in accordance with the Township's accessibility and other related policies and procedures:

- 1) It is recognized that there are various methods of communication available to the public to correspond with staff, and that not all communication warrants a response. This procedure is only meant to address non-anonymous correspondence that is delivered by means of in-person, telephone, or written (letter, email, fax) communication and where a response is required.
- 2) Township staff, not operating in a capacity for the Building Department, should endeavour to direct the customer to the Building Department Administrator or the requested staff member.
- 3) If available, the Building Department Administrator (or alternate Department staff) will attend to walk-in customers immediately. If the attending staff member is unable to address the customers needs, or reach the customers desired staff; the following course of action should be taken:
 - a) Record name (confirm spelling if needed), phone number, email address (if desired), address of property, and the general nature of visit.
 - b) If the contact information is going to be transferred to another staff member, the customer shall be made aware and informed that someone will reach out within two (2) business days.

- c) The procedures for staff assigned to complete the inquiry are covered later in this document.
- 4) Building Department staff will answer calls within three (3) rings, when feasible. Staff will attempt to address customer's needs if possible. If not, the same course of action should be taken as if the customer was attending in-person. The following additional consideration should be adhered to:
 - a) If the message is transferred to a specific staff member on the day it was delivered (delivered being the day that the customer communicates it), no further action is required by the initial staff member. If the message is not re-assigned on the day of delivery, the initial staff member is to communicate with the customer what action has been taken.
- 5) Written communication (letter, email, fax) shall be acknowledged within two (2) business days after delivery. Communication that is being transferred to another staff shall follow the same additional considerations as telephone messages.
- 6) When an initial correspondence has been transferred from one staff member to another, the receiving staff member shall acknowledge receipt of the transfer.
- 7) Communications received after the end of the business day, over the weekend, or over holidays will be considered to be delivered on the next business day.
- 8) Inquiries received by the Building Department will fall under one of three categories; Non-technical, Technical, or Highly Technical. In determining the appropriate category, consideration shall be given to either:
 - i) The amount of effort required to formulate a reasonable response, or;
 - ii) How in-depth and technical the response will need to be.
- a) A non-technical inquiry can usually be answered using the staff members general knowledge but may require the need to confirm their interpretation with additional staff. The response is likely general in nature or composed with limited references.
- b) A technical inquiry may require the staff member to review a technical document and it may be necessary to perform a small amount of research. The response could be technical in nature with specific references to applicable documents.

- c) A highly technical inquiry will typically require the staff member to complete a degree of research to formulate a response. The response may be technical in nature with specific reference documents being addressed.
- 9) Staff members who are responsible for the research, review, or response to a given inquiry, shall adhere to one of the following response protocols listed below. The acceptable proposed timelines are covered further on in this document.
- a) A non-technical inquiry during sustainable departmental workload or during a time of high-volume departmental workload shall be responded to within two (2) business days.
 - b) A technical, or highly technical, inquiry during sustainable departmental workload, or during a time of high-volume departmental workload, shall be acknowledged within two (2) business days and accompanied by proposed timeline for a full response.
- 10) Proposed timelines are intended to inform customers and help manage expectations when submitting an inquiry to the Building Department. They also provide staff with a clear due date in order to help manage their own work flow. The timeline proposed should be the maximum amount of time that will be required to complete the given research, review, and/or response. Clauses a) – c) will outline some of the criteria that will be considered when selecting an appropriate timeline. Notwithstanding the items listed below, other mitigating factors may be considered when determining an appropriate timeline.
- a) The priority in which inquiries are completed will be based on the following criteria:
 - i) Items governed by legislated timelines.
 - ii) Items that require a response in order to not unduly stall a project where a building permit has been issued.
 - iii) Items that require a response in order to not unduly stall a project that has an application being assessed.
 - iv) Items not listed in i – iii.
 - b) The following is a break down of acceptable response times based on technicality of the inquiry or required response:
 - i) Non-technical – 2-3 business days

- ii) Technical – 5-10 business days
 - iii) Highly technical – 10-15 business days
 - c) When experiencing a period of high-volume departmental workload staff may choose not to establish a specific timeline. The absence of a completion date only means that a specific timeline, in number of days, cannot reasonably be established. Communication between staff and the customer is still to occur during the processing of the inquiry, and the two (2) day acknowledgment is still to be given.
- 11) If a customer is unaccepting, or unhappy, with the proposed timeline, staff can offer solutions to help the customer play a more significant role in obtaining the information they are seeking.
- a) Help them compile a list of what documents may help in achieving a self-directed solution and where to locate them.
 - b) Inform them that there may be a qualified professional, within the private sector, that could aid in their inquiry. Staff will not refer to a specific entity.
 - c) If applicable, staff could suggest that the customer provide a report, from themselves or a qualified professional, that identifies a proposed interpretation and supporting rationale.
- 12) In all circumstances, target timelines are intended to be minimum standards. Special and extenuating circumstance may apply. Staff should always endeavor to provide responses in a timelier manner.
- 13) If the initial proposed timeline cannot be adhered to, additional correspondence is to take place with the customer and another estimate is to be provided. The proposed timeline shall only be extended one time. If an extenuating circumstance requires another extension, the staff's direct manager is to be consulted for approval.
- 14) Staff will include, in their signature line, their normal working hours when responding to a customer.
- 15) Staff shall include an alternate contact when out of the office for an extended period of time.
- 16) To enhance transparency, a key component in customer service, the CBO will:
- a) Inform the CAO, if the Building Department declares a high-volume departmental workload situation for over 15 consecutive days.

- b) Bring a report to Council, if the Building Department declares a high-volume departmental workload situation for over 30 consecutive days.