City of Guelph

Operational Review Issues Scoping Report

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Submitted to:

Economic Development and Tourism Services
Planning and Building Services
Engineering Services
City of Guelph

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Preface

GLPi is pleased to provide this report summarizing findings from the Operational Review 'issues scoping' exercise. We are grateful to the dedicated personnel from the City and the various external participants in the exercise for their commitment and intellectual contributions to this project.

Study Purpose and Issues Explored
The City of Guelph initiated this first phase of an Operational Review focused on improving processes, approaches and systems dealing with development/business inquiries and development review. There are a number of areas within City Hall that service clients dealing with these areas. They include Economic Development and Tourism, Planning and Building Services, and Engineering Services. Ultimately, the Review is intended to help identify potential process and system improvements, and ensure greater alignment of City practices with stated objectives. The focus is on finding new and/or better ways of doing things and working effectively.

In this first phase of the process, the City was looking to identify Operational Review related key issues, challenges and opportunities (i.e. issues scoping) — including initial ideas for addressing them. The results will serve as the basis for further exploration and provide the framework for future study and ultimate recommendations.

To this end, this qualitative exercise was undertaken to help the City better understand how different stakeholder segments perceive the issues. The project was designed to surface underlying attitudes and yield the kind of context, nuance and subtlety that will allow for wise and enlightened decision-making that is both strategic and practical.

More specifically, this phase of work was designed to:

- Gauge perceptions of client-City staff interaction;
- Explore the degree to which the City is or is not considered 'business-friendly' (that is, the degree to which City policies/procedures and staff interaction are perceived as appropriate, fair, professional, effective, efficient, etc.) — and to better understand the reasons underlying these views;
- Explore issues relating to process, policies, rules, timelines, service and other client-related dimensions;
- Gauge perceptions of factors influencing client-City staff relationships, including levels of staff autonomy, attitudes toward a 'partnering' orientation, and so forth;
- Identify strengths/weaknesses, and priority issue areas requiring attention;
- Explore the degree of perceived alignment (or lack thereof) between key City departments; and
- Identify other municipalities or jurisdictions that Guelph might look to for insight on best practices or approaches — as points of competitive referencing and comparables analysis.

The full range of issues that were explored is covered in the discussion guides included in the appendix of this report. Please note that the interview approach began with an unaided discussion of typical client-City interactions, allowing participants to first surface those items of most concern to them. This was followed by a more aided discussion to ensure that key selected topics were addressed.

Methodology

Individual, in-depth interviews (primarily in-person, but supplemented by telephone) and focus groups were the methodologies used in this initiative. In total, 59 City staff and external stakeholders participated.

More specifically, initiatives with staff included:

- Eleven interviews with directors, general managers and managers from Economic Development and Tourism, Planning and Building Services, and Engineering Services;
- One focus group with staff from Economic Development and Tourism Services (n=8); and
- Two focus group with staff from Planning/Building/Engineering (n=26).

Please note that initiatives with managers and staff were conducted separately to encourage open dialogue and less inhibited discussion.

Initiatives with external stakeholders included in-person or telephone interviews with representatives from the following professions/sectors:

- Guelph business community — including individual businesses and sector representatives (n=2);
- Developers and equity investors (n=4);
- Planning and engineering consulting firms (n=4);
- Real estate brokers (n=2); and
- Public sector — including provincial ministries and school boards (n=2).

The focus groups and interviews described above were conducted between March-May, 2011 — to accommodate respondent availability and maximize response rates. Interviews ranged in length from about 20-30 minutes to over an hour. The focus groups were each approximately two hours in length. All interviews and focus groups were conducted in English. The City of Guelph provided the list of external stakeholders to interview for each of the disciplines/professional segments. The City also arranged for and recruited participants for the internal focus groups and interviews.

Findings are also informed by an initial meeting with the Steering Committee for the project (Jan. 6, 2011) and a meeting with the Economic Development Advisory Committee (Mar. 21, 2011).

All research participants are to be commended for their diligence and contributions. The depth of thought and commitment to the issue area was readily apparent. Many said they appreciated the opportunity to share their views and hoped that their input would make a meaningful and substantive difference. Moreover, some described the initiative as important outreach and a tangible sign that the City is interested in the views of its clients. Others noted that the interview discussions were focused on important and salient issues — that many relevant questions were being addressed.

Findings in Context
This report summarizes the findings from all of the participant interviews/focus groups. As with any qualitative study with some purposeful respondent selection and limited sample size, results must be regarded as indicative and directional, rather than statistically generalizable. The results do, however, provide a number of meaningful insights into how participants think about the range of issues that were explored. Key differences in participant perception/attitude by segment (or familiarity with/tenure working with the City) are noted where appropriate.

The Big Picture

Views on whether — and to what degree — the City of Guelph is 'business friendly' are wide-ranging, with a clear division among external and internal participants. A significant number of *external* stakeholders — in particular, developers and their planning/engineering consultants, real estate professionals, and businesses and their sector representatives — say that Guelph is among the more difficult places in Ontario in which to do business and that the City does not work collaboratively with business. Moreover, some believe that the City makes things unnecessarily complicated.

Some participants shared stories of developers and potential business investors who have said that they avoid working in Guelph given the perception that doing business in the City is too difficult. Others expressed their own frustrations based on past experience. Still others described having to routinely set aside additional time and money when working in the City — variously referred to as the 'The Guelph factor'; 'The Guelph twist'; 'The Guelph contingency' — to account for unexpected delays, process issues, public opposition, appeals to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), and so forth. This perceived 'Guelph dynamic' is not solely attributed to any single cause, but rather is typically ascribed to an amalgam of City policies and practices, public and stakeholder engagement, and general attitudes toward business.

While some external participants acknowledge that some of the unease and unhappiness with the City is outcomes-based — that is, associated with an unrealized hoped for result, many say that the challenges go well beyond this. More specifically, this scoping exercise has identified the following categories of issues and sub-topics (*please note that each of these is fully described and 'unpacked' in the following section of this report*):

- **<u>Issues Concerning Understanding, Clarity and Expectations</u>** — including topic area complexity, understanding of City processes and requirements, differing expectations, inconsistency, conflicting messages and insufficient clarity/precision;

- **<u>Issues Concerning Staff Attitudes, Practices and Behaviours</u>** — including philosophical and attitudinal orientation, overzealousness and questionable role definition, perceived favouritism/preferential treatment, and level of compliance enforcement;

- **<u>Issues Concerning Process and Client Service</u>** — including timeliness and perceived unnecessary delays, process requirements, rules and rigidity, staff empowerment and autonomy, and internal project ownership;

- **Issues Concerning Proponent Practices (and Those of Their Representatives)** — including the caliber of submissions and efficacy of developer-consultant communication;

- **Issues Concerning Work Volume, Coordination and City Staffing** — including the level of resources available to meet demand, staff morale, intra-departmental clarity, high-level direction and inter-departmental relationships; and

- **Issues Concerning the Broader Public Domain** — including the role of Council, perceived anti-business sentiment, and level of/attention paid to 'stakeholders'.

Though not exclusively so, many of the issues are planning and/or engineering-related (or involve the perceived lack of coordination between these functions and other departments, in particular, economic development). From an external participants' point-of-view, the greatest challenges typically are with residential and retail/commercial projects. There were relatively few identified issues specifically associated with the Building Services function. Again, all of this is more fully explored and documented in the following sections of this report.

Notwithstanding the above, many external participants say that most if not all of the challenges and issues associated with Guelph are *not* unique to the City — that many are encountered in other jurisdictions as well. Some added that there are virtually no municipalities in which it is easy or straightforward to do business.

Simply put, Guelph is not alone in wrestling with the range of issues identified in this scoping exercise. However, there is a general sense that the City is a place where the 'constellation' of issues is, in aggregate, disproportionately large.

It is important to note that external participants also identified positive experiences with the City — and some noted a sense of improvement and constructive momentum: that barriers have been reduced, some processes strengthened, and that the City can be responsive and client-focused. Also of importance, most external participants are generally complimentary about staff performance and appreciative of their professionalism and role. There is a sense that many staff are conscientious, dedicated and respectful.

Moreover, there is a stated recognition of the challenges inherent in the work done by City Staff, the conflicting pressures faced, and the volume of work to be completed. In fact, some external participants said explicitly that the Operations Review should not be used as a pretense for eliminating staff positions (and/or unfairly criticizing individuals).

While many staff say there is some truth in the characterizations of the City as too bureaucratic, inflexible, inconsistent, unresponsive and so forth, they are far less

likely than their external counterparts to describe the City as 'not business friendly.' In fact, some view this characterization as inaccurate, offensive and manifestly unfair. Many say that ensuring that proponents do what is required does not make Guelph a bad place in which to do business. Staff are typically more likely to attribute the 'not business friendly' sentiment to client unhappiness with a project outcome (i.e. a proponent not getting all that they wanted).

Perhaps not surprisingly, staff also have a much more positive view of their own performance. Many expressed a genuine desire to do a good job and felt that was reflected in their work. There is a shared staff sense that great service is the norm, not the exception.

Moreover, as described later in this report, some staff say that any difficulties working with the City lie more at the feet of external players — who have unrealistic expectations, lack process understanding, do not meet requirements, try to bend the rules, etc. — in particular external players with less experience working in Guelph and who, presumably, have less understanding of City processes and standards.

Unpacking the Issues

This section describes and 'unpacks' the full range of issues (and sub-topics) identified in this scoping exercise. They are listed in no particular order.

Issue Concerning Understanding, Clarity and Expectations

Topic Complexity

The planning and building discipline (and related engineering services functions) and economic development and tourism, are generally acknowledged to be complex areas. Moreover, planning is broadly considered an area in which there is little certainty. The ability to fully understand the range of provincial initiatives and policy (from the Growth Plan, to the Provincial Policy Statement, to the Greenbelt Plan and others) and the full suite of City policies and requirements is typically considered beyond the realm of any single individual. This topic complexity — which necessitates the need to hire and coordinate a range of specialists — was identified as a factor contributing to the perceived challenges of doing business in Guelph.

However, there are somewhat divergent views on this issue of acknowledged complexity. External participants typically say that the City makes things *unduly* complex and that it is next to impossible to keep pace with and understand City policies, directions and requirements. City staff are more likely to say that those who want to do business in Guelph need to take the time to review and better understand the range of relevant factors — from sewage treatment and groundwater capacity constraints, to required studies and reports, to process requirements and associated timelines.

Understanding and Expectations — and Inconsistency

All participants understand that the process for reviewing and approving significant planning and development applications rarely runs smoothly, without unanticipated issues and challenges. Many staff believe these are normal and to be expected — and that clients should not view them as extraordinary. External participants acknowledge that some unforeseen circumstances are to be expected, but believe that the challenges can be reduced.

Virtually everyone agrees that the lynchpin for success lies in a shared understanding of a clear and consistently applied process that is fair to all — and an appreciation of each party's circumstances. On this latter point, staff say that those with development and business initiatives do not fully appreciate the constraints and processes that are part of working within a municipal structure that must demonstrate public accountability. Generally speaking, developers, real estate and investment participants say that City staff do not fully appreciate the 'business perspective' (including such things as carrying costs and the economic burden caused by process delays).

There is a generally shared view that City guidelines and requirements are not always clearly articulated nor well enough understood. Many said that knowing the rules of the game going in and that they are consistently applied is very important. Moreover, the City was often described as having inconsistent and ever-changing requirements — or as breaking its own rules. The following were offered as examples by the City's range of external clients:

- *Requirements can differ based on which City staff person one speaks to* — that staff have varying levels of experience and knowledge; that the rules (or staff's interpretation of them) seem to change frequently; that there is no consistency or clarity.

- *Requirements are applied inconsistently* — that what is required for one project may not be for another virtually identical one; that staff provide inconsistent direction and requirements, allowing for greater flexibility on some projects more so than others.

- *Mixed messages are received from different departments* — for example, that one department requests the protection of trees, while another says they must be removed; that one department pursues a certain kind of business development, while another says it is undesirable.

- *Stated City priorities are not reflected in practices* — for example, that the City says it wants infill and higher density development, but seems to make it difficult to approve this kind of development.

- *Varying City rules for different kinds of projects* — that what the City might require for a greenfield versus an infill versus a brownfield development can be quite different and that a proponent can get lost in the maze of requirements.

- *The City sometimes breaks its own rules* — that the City says their rules and requirements must be adhered to, but certain City projects move forward without full permits and proper drawings.

- *Insufficient clarity and precision* — for example, that the City's urban design guidelines are open to interpretation and have no clear, objective criteria; that in cases where there are criteria, they are applied arbitrarily; that there is confusion about what are *guidelines* and what are *requirements*.

- *Inability of the City to sufficiently reconcile a predominant 'small town feel and outlook' with its designation as an urban growth centre* — that many members of the community in general and some City staff/elected officials have not accepted the level and type of growth proposed for Guelph.

Given the above, there were multiple calls — *from both internal and external participants* — for reinvigorated efforts to clarify and communicate City requirements, rules, regulations, processes and timelines. Some called for the creation and promotion of a 'comprehensive, consolidated checklist' documenting all City expectations. All believe a shared understanding of these is critical.

Issues Concerning Attitudes, Practices and Behaviours

Philosophical and Attitudinal Orientation

Many internal and external participants say that current client-City Hall relationships — particularly in the area of development-related applications — can be highly adversarial. Most external participants believe they are too much so, while some staff believe that 'healthy challenge' is both appropriate and desirable.

Results from the interviews and focus groups with staff suggest little cohesiveness in terms of one's fundamental disposition to client interaction/relationships, with views running along a continuum that includes:

- *Client 'partnering'* to find mutually agreeable solutions (see below for more on partnering);

- *Process guardians* — that is, ensuring scrupulous adherence to policies, requirements and guidelines, while placing the onus on the client to meet them;

- *Champions and visionaries* — that is, protectors of and forceful advocates for City identified priorities (some would argue personal aspirations as well); and

- *Adversarial challengers* — that is, those who actively seek to find flaws and weaknesses in any proposal with a view to stopping or significantly modifying it.

While recognizing that it is sometimes appropriate for the City to say 'no,' many external participants suggest that City staff typically act more as *adversarial challengers* than *client partners*. At the heart of this perception is an underlying sense that City Hall focuses more on being a regulator rather than identifying and facilitating solutions. A number of external participants believe that staff find it much easier to raise objections and say 'no,' than to work with a client to find a way to say 'yes.' There is a perception that staff are not active participants in the search for mutually agreeable options.

While many staff would take exception to the above characterizations, there are others who agree that this orientation not only exists, but that it is somewhat desirable. Staff members noted the importance of protecting the public interest, ensuring that project proponents meet all relevant rules and requirements, and striving to create the best end result. Some go further to say that staff's role is to identify the issues, flaws and weaknesses — and that it is the proponent's job to address them.

Given the above, it is not surprising to find a gap between external party enthusiasm for a more 'partnership-oriented' approach and some staff reluctance to embrace this concept. For most participants, a partnership approach would include:

- A less adversarial client-City Hall relationship, in which everyone jointly pursues mutually agreeable solutions;
- More respectful dialogue with a view to understanding each other's aspirations, constraints;
- Inviting external stakeholders to meaningfully participate in the creation/refinement of City policies and guidelines;
- Openness to embracing new ideas/approaches; and
- Some degree of flexibility, negotiation and willingness to compromise.

A number of participants talked about the importance of attitude — and that this is a key differentiator, particularly given that rules and regulations are quite similar across jurisdictions.

While some City staff share the desire for a partnering approach, for others it is code for City Hall capitulation on significant issues. There are concerns about: how staff will be perceived by various external parties (i.e. that they are working too closely with developers and other proponents to help them achieve their desired ends); the extra work/burden placed on them to solve problems not of their own making; and of growing pressure to compromise interests, ideals and City aspirations. In fact, some staff believe that City Hall needs to raise the bar and challenge proponents to step-up and make their initiatives even better.

Overzealousness and Questionable Role Definition
There is a perception among some external participants — particularly developers, their consultants, real estate officials and businesses generally — that certain City policies and staff are inappropriately directing items that should be more within the purview of the proponent. This includes such things as the type of housing or commercial product and architectural detail/design (from roof treatments, to window shape/size, to the size/shape/placement of signs, to materials used: brick, stucco, etc.). Moreover, there is a sense that City-mandated approaches run counter to market realities (what 'works and sells) and do not respect builder or developer expertise. Some believe that City Hall is engaged in unwarranted social engineering and unduly dictating housing or commercial product.

City positions were often described as arbitrary and lacking a solid underpinning. In some cases, City staff were said to 'dictate policy' without providing sufficient rationales. A number of external participants argued that personal taste is not a defensible position or justification for requiring changes. Moreover, some take offence that relatively 'inexperienced' staff are directing seasoned professionals in areas outside their realms of expertise. Still others question City Hall's right to dictate to developers on such issues as elevations, colour and so forth.

In counter to the above, some City staff say that they do provide sufficient rationale for direction provided, but that proponent's are either unable or unwilling to fully appreciate the nuance and subtlety of what is being put forward.

Differing Treatment
Though not necessarily perceived to be a widespread issue, both internal and external participants raised the issue of favouritism and preferential treatment being given to certain parties — in particular, significant Guelph-based businesses and larger developers operating in the City. A number of participants referenced the case of a prominent business, which apparently proceeded with an expansion without first obtaining the required building permits — in full knowledge of the City — and was allowed to do so given their size and relative importance to the local economy. Others feel that downtown businesses and the downtown area generally are given preferential treatment. Still others say that certain developers — who were identified by name, but on the condition that they not be used — are beneficiaries of favouritism

As a general point, there is a broadly held perception that the City is too quick to respond to the 'squeaky wheels' — whether they be proponents or stakeholders opposing them. There is a sense that those who 'scream the loudest' seem to get what they want and that this leads to inequitable treatment.

Level and Consistency of Compliance Enforcement
A number of participants say that the City is inconsistently and insufficiently ensuring compliance with agreed upon plans. Some staff noted the City's lack of vigilance in ensuring that all requirements — particularly site plan requirements — are met. Some developers and their consultants cited examples of long, drawn-out discussions to reach agreement about such things as the number and placement of trees on a site — and then not actually executing the agreed upon approach (and the City not checking to ensure compliance).

Economic Development's Role and 'Over Eagerness'
The City's economic development function is broadly considered to play a vital role in advancing business interests within the City. External participants generally believe that the Department is responsive to business enquiries and keen to help. The Department is generally viewed as the 'business champion' within the City.

While acknowledging the Department's good intentions, some question the lack of tangible outcomes. There is a sense that the Department is too *process* rather than *results* focused. There is also a sense that the Department could be more proactive and aggressive: getting out and meeting with more existing and potential Guelph-based businesses; more actively securing investment in the City; more enthusiastically pursuing prospect companies; better taking advantage of land prices and low development charges relative to other locations closer to the GTA. Moreover, some feel that the Department sometimes 'drops the ball' when handling leads provided by others or in moving things forward within the City.

Notwithstanding the above, there are those in other City departments who feel that Economic Development — understandably given their mandate — is too aggressive in pushing for business investment that is 'inappropriate' for Guelph. Examples relating to trying to secure water intensive food processing businesses for the City were cited as evidence of this. There is a concern that the Economic Development function is falsely raising hopes and expectations among businesses that may not be right for Guelph — and, in doing so, is placing other departments such as planning and engineering in the unenviable position of having to say 'no.' There is general agreement that the City generally — and those working in economic development in particular — need to better screen and filter for appropriate development and investment opportunities. Moreover, there were suggestions for ensuring that all departments have input into establishing the vision for new business investment in the City (taking into account various engineering, environmental and other constraints).

A number of participants — both external participants and economic development staff — noted that other City departments typically do not share Economic Development's passion for securing new investment for the City. Of notable concern is the number of external participants who report that it is not uncommon for personnel within Economic Development to 'forewarn' proponents about the challenges they are likely to encounter with other departments.

The tourism component of the economic development function is generally viewed as lagging and in need of greater emphasis. Tourism was referred to as the 'weak sister' in the economic development mix.

Aside from addressing the above, participants had the following suggestions for strengthening economic development within the City:
- Greater Mayor and elected official support;
- Demonstrated investment readiness — including available/serviced land;

- City clarity on the type of investment desired;
- Formation of 'rapid response teams' that would quickly mobilize to address investment opportunities — and to help move 'on strategy' initiatives to the next level;
- Involving economic development staff in site plan approval meetings;
- Better defining and articulating the City's value proposition; and
- Implementing the Business Assistance Team (BAT) concept — that is, a fixed team with inter-departmental representation that works together to find timely solutions to business and investment overtures.

Issues Concerning Process and Client Service

Timeliness and Unnecessary Delays

Many external participants — developers and their consultants, real estate professionals and business generally — identified issues relating to timeliness and what they perceive as unnecessary process delays. For some, there are concerns about the overall length of time required for the City to process a proposal. This group feels that City staff do not appreciate the 'need for speed' given changing market conditions, carrying costs and so forth. City staff, on the other hand, feel that proponents do not adequately appreciate the complexity inherent in the review process, the volume of submissions that need to be addressed, the delays caused by poor submissions (see later in this section), and general process requirements (including public engagement) and constraints at play within a public sector institution. Some participants suggested that the City consider a two-tier applications system — one in which a proponent could pay more for an expedited level of service.

For others, the key issue is around the speed of City response on a specific issue or question that is highly time sensitive (this was of particular, though not exclusive, concern of real estate officials). The City was described as lacking an appreciation of the urgency required when in the midst of brokering deals. Moreover, there were also concerns about how long it takes to coordinate various departments and establish a joint City response to an economic opportunity, particularly given the narrow windows of time that are available. Even some City staff acknowledge that the process for getting and coordinating departmental responses can be cumbersome and time consuming.

For others, the issue concerning timeliness revolves around uncertainty. A number of external participants say that it is very difficult to get staff to commit to firm dates. Some participants noted their willingness to accept delays if clear timelines are established and adhered to thereafter.

There were also general concerns about the amount of time that certain City processes/approaches require. Chief among them were issues involving site plan revisions. More specifically, this process was typically characterized as 'unnecessarily bureaucratic' and 'lacking in common sense.' Participants provided multiple examples of how minor site plan changes could delay a project by a month or more. There was strong support — including some from City staff — for allowing 'red-lining' of relatively minor revisions and conditional site plan approvals.

Other (though less pronounced) time-related 'sore points' include:

- The length of time required for the City to review and provide consolidated comments on technical reports (e.g. traffic studies, geotechnical analysis, water/wastewater, etc.);
- Receiving feedback on issues 'too late' in the process — that is, the City failing to raise a 'knowable' issue early on;
- Difficulty arranging timely meetings with City staff;
- Missed deadlines; and
- City staff not meeting scheduled commitments.

The last two points regarding missed deadlines/commitments were described as more the exception than the rule.

Process Requirements, Rules and Rigidity
Some external participants — again, developers and their consultants, real estate officials and business generally — believe that City requirements for development applications and business investment initiatives have become increasingly complex and, in some instances, too onerous. Participants cited the number and range of reports/studies and level of detail required. While some referenced general 'red tape' others noted requirements for such things as: traffic studies for minor infill applications, tree study/full landscape plans for minor additions to existing businesses, and full elevations for residential site approvals. Of concern is the perception that the list of City requirements only seems to grow — more is added to the list, while nothing is removed.

Another concern revolves around the requirement to re-submit — some say unnecessarily — plans and drawings multiple times. This requirement is sometimes attributed to a perceived failure on the City's part to provide comprehensive and detailed feedback upon first review.

Many participants also say that the City is too rigid in its enforcement of requirements. This concern was mostly directed toward the site plan approvals process and the City's perceived focus on 'standard approaches' rather than 'creative solutions' to resolving issues. There is a sense that the City wants to impose its will, and that it does not appreciate that issues are rarely black or white, or that an innovative, compromise might be possible/desirable.

Staff Empowerment and Autonomy

Many external participants believe that most staff do not enjoy significant empowerment or autonomy — and many staff also feel this way. External participants say they are routinely frustrated by the inability to get a clear and concise response from City Hall. Moreover, there is frustration with the sometimes non-committal reactions from staff and the lack of clear direction or timely decision-making. There is a generally held view that staff avoid plain-speaking and making commitments out of a fear of potential censure and repercussion.

A significant number of staff — particularly those at the mid to lower levels — agree that there is a great reluctance to share opinions or espouse views that have not been specifically endorsed by more senior staff. Of interest, many staff and external stakeholders say the overall City organizational culture does not foster/promote autonomy, risk-taking or innovation. Some referred to a prevailing 'culture of fear' (see 'staff morale' in the following section). A number of staff also said they fear potential career backlash if accused of making a mistake, saying something that could be misinterpreted or being undermined by senior officials (including elected officials). Simply put, anything that might be regarded as akin to 'going out on a limb' is perceived as high-risk and low-reward — with the display of initiative rarely recognized or appreciated.

Some staff — particularly those in engineering and building services — say that they are simply constrained by the precise rules of their disciplines and the very prescriptive technical requirements to which they must adhere. However, certain external participants view this as 'inflexibility,' an unwillingness to find solutions, and/or a lack of understanding of business realities. Moreover, a number of external participants lament staff's typical unwillingness to apply their knowledge, creativity and professional skills to finding mutually acceptable solutions.

Various participants spoke in support of:

- Empowering staff to do more and providing them with greater autonomy;
- Supporting innovation and a solutions orientation by being more accepting of mistakes that may occur;
- Better harnessing the skills and abilities of staff;
- Building improved relationships between senior and more junior personnel;
- Ensuring senior staff mentoring, direction-setting and support for more junior staff; and
- Better communication between the City's executive team and general managers — to ensure clarity and focus.

In addition, some would like the City to place renewed emphasis on front-line customer service.

Internal Project Ownership
Tied-in to all of the above is an external participant frustration with what was referred to as the lack of a 'single, reliable go to planning project source at the City.' Many complained of being 'bounced around' between departments when looking for information or answers about their initiative — or receiving conflicting information with no City staff person available to resolve the conflicts or clarify direction. Moreover, there is a sense of lack of inter-departmental coordination/collaboration.

Not surprisingly, given the above, there was strong support for assigning an individual 'point person' who could serve as the contact/liaison for a project and who would take ownership for shepherding it through the various stages of the system — from application, to site plan approval, to building inspection, to final approvals. Recognizing that no single individual possesses all of the requisite knowledge required to independently assess an application, the point person would coordinate the involvement of various functional team members.

Suggestions for determining the assignment of individuals to projects were quite wide-ranging:

- Randomly, based on the next person available;
- By type of project (i.e. certain staff would deal exclusively with Greenfield projects, infill applications, brownfield redevelopment, etc.); and
- By geographic area (i.e. certain staff would be responsible for projects within a prescribed district, potentially on a Ward or district model basis).

There were fewer concerns expressed about having a City 'point person' for business enquiries and economic development initiatives, given that the current General Manager for the Economic Development area is perceived to already be playing this role and acting as the internal 'business champion.'

Issues Concerning Proponent (and Their Representatives') Practices

Caliber of Proponent Submissions
A number of staff say that the caliber of proponent submissions (whether Official Plan amendments, zoning change requests, site plan drawings and so forth) is less than what it should be and has been declining — and that this, as much as anything, is the reason for multiple re-submissions. Staff said that submissions often do not meet standards/requirements or that they are substantially incomplete.

Some staff also said that the City has become too accepting of submissions that are lacking in depth, quality and completeness. A number would like the City to reject and return any applications that do not meet minimum criteria. In fact, some developers and consultants acknowledge that the first submission may be less than complete (not as a ruse to get free services from the City, but rather given the perception that the City will 'redline everything anyway,' so why put too much effort

into the first go). Still others say they use preliminary, incomplete applications as a means of soliciting initial feedback and identifying concerns/issues.

As proposed improvements to address the above, some external participants recommended new approaches that would facilitate enhanced pre-application consultation with the City — that is, an improved ability to get more specific staff feedback (from various departments) prior to formal submission. A number of participants feel this pre-consultation would help avoid problems down the road. Moreover, there were calls for the City to provide clearer direction regarding how best to meet City-specified requirements or requested changes.

Developer-Consultant Communication
A number of staff are convinced that there is less than full communication and disclosure in developer-consultant relationships. More specifically, there is a concern that City requirements and requests for changes (and the rationales for them) are not being fully conveyed through consultants to proponents. There is a fear that this may lead to misinformation about and misrepresentation of the City's position.

While some attribute this less than ideal situation to 'broken telephone' communication, to busy professionals with busy lives, or to other generally innocuous motivations, some fear that consultants may be misleading their clients to either protect themselves when they make errors or miss things, or to generate additional work and the related billings.

Issues Concerning Work Volume, Coordination and City Staffing

Volume of Work
Virtually all participants — internal and external — believe that City staff have a high and growing volume of development/business inquiries and applications to address, and that many of these are complex. There is a sense that the increase in work has not been accompanied by a commensurate increase in staff. In part, process and other delays were attributed to this perceived imbalance in volume of work and available resources to address it.

Notwithstanding the above, some external participants believe that the City could better use available resources or change processes to maximize timeliness and efficiency. In fact, some say that City Hall is still trying to operate too much as though Guelph is a 'small town' and not enough like it is a growing city that has been designated one of the province's urban growth centres. There is a sense among this group that the City's processes and approaches have not kept pace with the growing volume, scope and complexity of development/investment applications.

Staff Morale

Though not an initial focus of this project, the issue of staff morale emerged as an important one with broad implications. Some staff described morale as being among the lowest they have ever seen it — and that it is having an impact on the quantity and quality of work being done. More specifically, staff identified 'frustration and ill feeling' caused by the following key areas of concern:

- *Change fatigue* — including 'constant reorganizations' and internal studies (including this Operational Review), and a sense of constantly changing directions/priorities;

- *Uncertainty and fear* — attributed to 'surprise lay-offs and firings,' employees who are removed from their positions without sufficient explanation, other employee departures clouded in uncertainty, and the loss of good people who have chosen to leave of their own volition;

- *Lack of support/respect* — attributed to the predilection of some senior management and Council to reject/over-turn staff professional opinion and recommendations (and to 'belittle' staff in the process), and the failure to support staff on contentious issues; and

- *Sense of exclusion and separation* — attributed to less interaction between Executive Team/Senior Management and lower-level staff.

Moreover, some staff expressed concern about specific facets of working for the City — from a sense of lack of recognition for accomplishment, to the current HR job grading system (and lack of job grade increases), to limited input into decision-making, to lack of communication, to limited access to one's director, and so forth. All of these were identified as contributing to lower morale, apathy, and an unwillingness to seek creative solutions on a client's behalf.

External participants also hear about and observe the morale issue. Some report hearing directly from staff about internal frustrations while others say they see it betrayed in staff attitudes and actions. A few external participants noted their diminished confidence in City management as a whole (citing uncertainty related to the pending retirement of the current CAO, the recent 'forced' and voluntary departures of key personnel, and a general sense of unclear direction).

The morale issue is exacerbated by some employee disenchantment with the current hierarchy, including concerns about selected staff capabilities and departmental reporting relationships.

A number of participants noted that actions to address the morale issue are among the most important that the City should consider.

Some participants suggested that Phase Two of the Operational Review address the following:

- Greater specificity and clarity regarding one's role — and it's relationship to others within a department — including enhanced delineation of 'strategic' and 'tactical' functions;
- Breaking down 'silos' within departments and ensuring the common pursuit of a shared vision (and related directions/priorities);
- A more strategic allocation of resources in support of realizing aspirations;
- Better engagement of staff in departmental priority setting; and
- Improved methods for sharing and acting on issues, concerns and ideas — and the potential for increased productivity, improved customer satisfaction and a healthier organization that could accrue from this.

High-Level Direction and Inter-Departmental Relationships

Many internal and external participants believe that the City and its clients would benefit from a clearly defined development/economic development agenda (that harnesses inherent strengths in agriculture and other areas) and improved cooperation and collaboration between City Hall departments. While recognizing the appropriateness of healthy tension between economic development, planning, engineering and building services, there is also a perceived need for:

- Someone (or group) within the City to make the higher-level strategic 'trade-off' decisions (e.g. Is the City willing to allow the building of a new plant if it means some loss in the number of residential units that could be constructed?);

- A mechanism to facilitate quick and reliable resolution of issues with multi-departmental implications;

- A truly integrated, interdisciplinary team that can holistically address development and business inquiries/proposals; and

- A streamlined approach that allows for the above to happen within a reasonable timeframe.

There are concerns that certain City services — for example, Economic Development and Tourism — do not have an adequate voice at the City's executive team level.

Issues Concerning the Broader Public Domain

Role of Council
As duly elected officials with decision-making authority, City Councillors were frequently identified — by virtually all parties consulted — as contributors to making Guelph 'a challenging place with which to do business.' More specifically, the following issues were identified:

- *Inconsistent Direction* — There is a sense (particularly among the business community, developers and their consultants) that Council lacks a clear, coherent and cohesive vision for development in Guelph. The perceived 'in-fighting' among Councillors was described as disconcerting, confusing, and polarizing. The lack of clear direction was viewed by some as contributing to unnecessary business risk and uncertainty, which has an inhibiting impact on investment in the City. Though some acknowledge the Development Priorities Plan (DPP) as a useful tool, others say that it provides only limited direction and surety (or that it is used more to control development than to strategically manage it). Moreover, some real estate professionals, developers and their consultants feel the DPP unfairly excludes projects and creates further business challenge/difficulty.

- *Anti-Development Sentiment* — There is a segment of Council that is perceived as 'anti-development and anti-business' and too willing to embrace (and/or rally) like-minded individuals and groups within the City. Some in the business and development community view this as particularly problematic. Even some staff question the degree to which Council is open to development and business investment in the City. Moreover, there is a sense among some that Guelph prides itself on being perceived as the 'Granola capital of the world' and an 'unabashedly green community' — and, though not mutually exclusive, that this works against the impression of being business friendly

- *Level of Understanding and Involvement* — There is a sense that some Council members do not sufficiently understand development and business investment issues, including: market trends/realities, access to capital, business decision-making criteria, financial risk, the relationship between time and carrying costs, and so forth. Moreover, there is a sense that some Councillors have an inappropriate level of 'hands-on involvement' in development and business investment initiatives, to the detriment of the process — in particular, in cases where this activity is seen as undermining staff. Some view this as inconsistent with what should be a higher-level governance and decision-making role for Council.

  In addition, some external participants believe that elected officials are too reluctant to actively support potential business investment in the City. Those with experiences in other Ontario locations said that Guelph council

involvement is typically less than that which is forthcoming in many other jurisdictions.

- ***Response to Stakeholder Activism*** — There is a sense (particularly among business and development interests, and their respective consultants) that Council is typically 'over-responsive' to any and all community opposition to investment and development proposals. Some believe that this willingness to 'indulge' activism gives rise and implicit license to some of the more egregious protester actions including the destruction of equipment, defaced buildings and vandalized construction sites. Moreover, there is a sense among some that Council (and City Hall generally) needs to better delineate between 'expert input' and opinion that may be less well founded in facts and issue area knowledge (in other words, that not all voices or views should be given equal standing).

Level of and Attention Paid to 'Stakeholders"
Related to the point above about Council responsiveness to stakeholder activism is a concern about the degree to which public engagement can have an impact on an initiative. Various examples were offered — the process for Walmart coming to Guelph, the process for securing approval of the Hanlon Creek Business Park, the process for securing approval of the Home Depot — as proof that the City as a whole is generally too willing to allow vocal interests to delay projects that are eventually approved.

There is a belief — particularly among business and development interests, and their respective consultants, but including some staff — that the City gives disproportionate attention and credence to the perspectives of a few and/or special interests of various kinds. There is a concern that City Hall is unduly swayed by the activism of a few — and that this is particularly problematic in an area with a highly educated, sophisticated and affluent population that understands how best to influence process. Some also noted the importance of the media who can 'sensationalize' issues and contribute to contentious issue creation or exacerbation.

As a counter-balance to the above, there are some staff who believe that the development industry has a disproportionate amount of power and influence — that their perspective is given undue credence. Not surprisingly, developers and their consultants have a contrarian perspective — essentially believing that their voice often goes unheard or is unappreciated, and that the industry as a whole is not afforded an appropriate level of respect. The perceived lack of ability to influence City initiatives — from the Natural Heritage Strategy, to growth planning, to individual site application outcomes — were often cited as evidence for this view.

Looking to Other Jurisdictions

There is general consensus that no single municipality stands out as an unquestioned leader in terms of a model for processes, approaches and systems for dealing with development/business inquiries and development review. Participants noted that 'no one is perfect' and that every municipality has its issues.

Notwithstanding this, the municipalities/jurisdictions listed below were identified as those with practices and processes that standout in a positive way and to which Guelph could look for insight. Typically, each of them was described as displaying *one or more* of the following characteristics:

- Employing knowledgeable, caring staff who emphasize customer service;
- Demonstrating responsiveness/timeliness in addressing issues — including a willingness, in some cases, to provide conditional approvals;
- Commitment to client satisfaction and a more inviting disposition to clients;
- The ability to quickly pull together interdepartmental/interdisciplinary teams that can provide timely perspective on a range of issues;
- A willingness to clearly define and communicate guidelines — and ensure adherence to them;
- Use of clearly established 'point people' who can serve as one-stop sources of information, guidance and the shepherding of development/investment initiatives;
- A solutions orientation and commitment to problem-solving (including flexibility and a willingness to waive and/or lessen requirements as appropriate — and embrace creative solutions);
- Receptivity to development and business investment (that is, actively inviting it as opposed to 'tolerating' it);
- Streamlined processes with teams in place empowered to get things done;
- Active and supportive participation of respectful elected officials who are not 'anti-growth' or 'anti-business';
- Clear strategies and directions for development and business investment; and
- 'Balanced' approaches to listening/responding to vocal stakeholders.

The bolded municipalities at the top of the following list tended to be mentioned most often and/or were most emphatically described as 'leaders':

- **Hamilton**
- **Cambridge**
- **Kitchener**
- **Waterloo**
- **Milton**
- **Burlington**
- **Mississauga**
- Brantford
- Woodstock

- Peterborough
- Barrie
- Brampton
- Ajax (*Note: The newly implemented Ajax 'Priority Path' program designed to streamline the site plan approval process for businesses was specifically identified by a number of participants*)
- London
- Caledon
- Stratford
- Toronto
- Kingston

Of note, some of the above were also singled-out as being *less desirable* jurisdictions from which to investigate best practices — and as models to avoid. Reflecting the broadly held view that 'no one is perfect,' just about all of the above were identified by at least a single participant as being less than exemplary in its processes and practices.

The following were identified as municipalities believed to have relatively effective economic development functions and services (again, those mentioned most often are highlighted in bold):

- **Mississauga**
- **Oakville**
- **Milton**
- **Chatham-Kent**
- Welland
- Niagara Falls (and Niagara Region generally)
- Belleville
- Quinte
- Cambridge
- London

These municipalities were typically lauded for the 'ability to get things done,' their clarity of focus, the degree to which they aggressively pursue opportunities, their 'proactivity,' and ability to mobilize support (both elected and unelected officials) in support of opportunities.

Looking Ahead and a Key Questions Summary

The main focus of this first Phase of the study was to scope the issues at play (*please see below for a preliminary list of key questions to address in the next phase of the Operational Review*). Recommendations for addressing them will be part of the future work.

It is important to note that there is significant skepticism and cynicism about the potential for positive outcomes flowing from the Operational Review. Though participants were most appreciative of the opportunity to participate in this scoping phase and contribute to the identification of issues, they are unconvinced that the City will act meaningfully on the information.

Many said that their skepticism would only be allayed if they see the following:
- Continued momentum for the initiative;
- A genuine response (i.e. 'more than lip service') to the issues identified;
- The eventual identification and implementation of focused actions to address the issues — including firm commitments and timelines;
- Stated support and endorsement from elected officials and the City's senior management team;
- Frank internal discussions — a forum for senior people from all departments — to work through and resolve sensitive and contentious issues;
- A willingness to embrace bold and innovative ideas;
- Ongoing involvement/engagement of external stakeholders in solutions identification and implementation; and
- The development of outcome measures against which to gauge ongoing success — and tracking of progress.

Key Questions to Address in the Next Study Phase
Reflecting the range of issues uncovered as part of this scoping exercise, the following key questions have been identified for further exploration as part of Phase Two of the Operational Review. These core questions serve as a starting point and do not preclude exploration of additional issues or sub-topics.

Re: Vision, Direction and the Bigger Picture
- What does 'Guelph as business-friendly' mean to Council — what are the core principles and directives that should underlie this concept?
- How might City Hall best communicate what it means to be 'business-friendly' and to demonstrate sincerity in achieving this goal?
- What is the clearly agreed upon and articulated Council vision for future development and investment in Guelph?
- What system or approach should City Hall use to make higher-level strategic 'trade-off' decisions concerning development/investment proposals — and to reconcile sometimes competing perspectives among departments?

- What is the appropriate role for Council in helping to further desirable development and investment opportunities for Guelph?
- What can the City learn from other jurisdictions and which best practices might be successfully adapted to the Guelph context?

Re: Communication and Understanding
- How can City policies, processes and systems be made more accessible to and easily understood by clients?
- How might City staff and clients better appreciate each other's circumstances and constraints?
- How can City guidelines and requirements be made more tangible and readily understandable?
- How can City guidelines and feedback be made less subjective — and more rationale-based and defensible?
- How might the City better encourage complete and adequate proponent submissions — and handle those that are not?

Re: Requirements and Process
- How might existing City policies, processes and systems be updated or refined to reflect an appropriate balance between City requirements and client expectations?
- What, if any, City requirements could be relaxed or eliminated? Which need to be strengthened or added?
- Which items are clearly within the City's purview and which should be left to a proponent's discretion?
- How can the City ensure that compliance with approved/agreed upon plans is consistently and meaningfully enforced?
- How can the City ensure that all clients are treated fairly, equitably and without favouritism?
- What protocols or approaches would facilitate faster City response to potential investment opportunities?
- How can the City streamline and appropriately accelerate development/investment processes in ways that are fair to all parties — particularly with regard to expediting the site plan revisions process?
- How can the City improve timeliness of response and provide greater timeline certainty?
- How can the City ensure that feedback on development applications is comprehensive and timely?
- How, if at all, might the City structure a 'point person' approach that would facilitate an individual staff member serving as the single, reliable 'go to' source for planning project information/shepherding?
- How, if at all, should the process for City-client pre-application consultation be refined?
- How can public, stakeholder, industry and proponent input be more fairly and reasonably incorporated into the process for evaluating potential development and investment opportunities for Guelph?

Re: Attitudes, Practices and Behaviours
- How can the City ensure that its rules and requirements are applied consistently and fairly — and respected by all?
- What is a mutually agreeable definition of 'business-friendly' and what are the implications for staff-client working relationships?
- What are the relative merits of a 'partnering approach' and how might such a model be best applied in a Guelph context?
- How can the City ensure a common staff orientation to client service that is broadly shared and embraced?
- How can the City foster a culture that emphasizes and supports high quality customer service?

Re: Interdepartmental Functioning
- How can greater alignment — in terms of consistency of message and the joint pursuit of a shared vision — be achieved between City departments?
- What structure, system or approach would best facilitate collaborative and mutually reinforcing City approaches to development/investment in Guelph?
- What approach or mechanism — with input from multiple departments — can be used to screen for and identify Guelph-appropriate development and investment opportunities?

Re: Staff Capacity, Empowerment and Morale
- How might staff be best encouraged, empowered and equipped to act more autonomously and more fully apply their knowledge and professional/technical skills to creative solutions identification?
- What level of delegated authority and autonomy is appropriate for staff in different positions — and how might this be best applied and monitored?
- How might relationships between senior and junior staff be strengthened, and mentoring approaches fostered?
- How can internal staff communication and information exchange be strengthened?
- How can the growing volume and complexity of development/business inquiries and applications be addressed given resource challenges?
- What initiatives might best address issues concerning staff morale — including concerns about change fatigue, uncertainty, levels of support/respect, exclusion and inadequate recognition of accomplishment?

Appendix

- Discussion questions used in the external interviews

- Discussion questions used in the internal interviews/focus groups

City of Guelph Operational Review —
Discussion Questions for Use in the <u>External Interviews</u>

Preamble:

The City of Guelph is undertaking an Operational Review focused on improving processes, approaches and systems dealing with development/business inquiries and development review. There are a number of areas within City Hall that service clients dealing with these areas. They include Economic Development and Tourism, Planning, Engineering and Building Services. The review is intended to help identify potential process and system improvements, and ensure greater alignment of City practices with stated objectives. The focus is truly on the potential of finding new and/or better ways of doing things and working effectively.

At this early point in the process, the City is looking to identify Operational Review related key issues, challenges and opportunities – including initial ideas for addressing them. Your perspective is critical to this process. Once views have been collected from various stakeholders — staff and diverse City clients such as developers and the related consultant community (e.g. planners, engineers etc.), businesses currently located in Guelph and those considering moving here, agencies, elected officials and so forth — key themes will be identified. The results will serve as the basis for further exploration and provide the framework for future study and ultimate recommendations.

Discussion Questions

1. On what types of issues, activities or initiatives are you typically having interaction with the City of Guelph? (Probe: economic development; tourism-related; development applications or zoning/re-zoning approvals; site plan approvals; building permits or building inspections; business expansions/relocations). What's the frequency of that interaction? (Probe: What's the approximate number of initiatives that bring you in contact with the City in a typical year?)

2. How would you describe or characterize your typical interactions with the City?

3. In fact, some have said that Guelph is 'not business friendly' — in your view, to what degree is that statement accurate? More specifically, what do you think people really mean when they say that Guelph is 'not business friendly'? [AS APPROPRIATE ASK: What, if any, are some real examples — that you're personally familiar with or aware of — that show that Guelph is 'not business friendly'?]

4. Based on your experiences with the City of Guelph, what issues do you see or potential changes that might be required in the following areas [NOTE: *For each of the following, participants to be asked: What's the issue(s)? How prevalent is it/are they? What are some examples? What can be done to address it (them)?*]:
    a. City requirements:
        i. Process (including inconsistencies or lack of process certainty; unnecessarily complicated approaches; etc.)
           [AS APPROPRITATE, PROBE: Official Plan/Zoning amendments; site plan approval; plans of subdivision; engineering plan reviews; other]
        ii. Policies or rules — and/or the communication of them (including inconsistencies or uncertainties)
        iii. Timelines
        iv. Other
    b. City attitudes toward clients and/or their initiatives
    c. City staff's ability to effectively and efficiently serve clients
    d. Treatment of clients (including any perceived favouritism or inequitable treatment, perceptions of fairness in treatment, etc.)

5. [THIS QUESTION TO BE ASKED ONLY OF THOSE WHO HAVE HAD SOME INTERACTION WITH THE CITY'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FUNCTION]
   In terms of your interaction with the City's economic development function, are there any issues regarding: responsiveness to enquiries, the provision of requested information, the meeting of commitments, or overall handling of your initiative?

6. What underlies the kinds of challenges and issues we've been discussing — is it a lack of client awareness/understanding of City objectives/requirements…is it less than exemplary client service…is it less than ideal systems or approaches…something else?

7. Generally speaking, how would you describe the outcome of your typical interaction with the City — do you generally get most or all of what you want? [INTERVIEWER TO PROBE THE DEGREE TO WHICH EXPRESSED CONCERNS ARE ATTRIBUTABLE TO FRUSTRATION WITH THE PERCEIVED OUTCOME, THAN WITH PROCESS]

8. Some have said that the City needs to adopt more of a 'partnership orientation' when it comes to dealing with clients. What does 'partnership orientation' mean to you — and to what degree do you see this as being desirable?

9. In your view, how would you describe the level of City staff autonomy in terms of exercising judgment/decision-making and latitude within a set framework? Which work area (e.g. those involved in building permits, development application approvals, zoning/rezoning, business expansions and relocations etc), if any, does not have adequate autonomy?

10. What could the City do that would clearly demonstrate that it is open to new and more productive ways of 'doing business with business'? [PROBE: What could City Council do? What could staff do? What could the business community do? Others?]

11. How does your 'client experience' with Guelph compare to that with other municipalities with which you have had contact? Which municipality, if any, does things really well — what other municipalities or jurisdictions might Guelph look to for insight on best practices or approaches? What are these others doing that makes them standout in a positive way — how are their processes or practices different or better than what's done in Guelph?

12. Beyond those discussed today, what other key factors, trends or considerations need to be considered as part of this Operational Review? What makes you say that?

13. Anything else you'd like to add?

[Facilitator to thank participants for their contributions; Opportunities for additional input]

City of Guelph Operational Review —

Discussion questions for use with staff

Preamble:

The City of Guelph is undertaking an Operational Review focused on improving processes, approaches and systems dealing with development/business inquiries and development review. There are a number of areas within City Hall that service clients dealing with development. They include Economic Development and Tourism, Planning, Engineering and Building Services. The review is intended to help identify potential process and system improvements, and ensure greater alignment of City practices with stated objectives related to the entire process of development approval — from preliminary meeting consultation to final site plan and related building inspection. With regard to Building Services, this process involves how each area interacts with the others and does not negate the work that was undertaken during its own recent Operational Review or the work currently being conducted to implement its recommendations.

This study is **not** about assessing the competencies or abilities of individual staff members or cutting jobs or reallocating people. The focus is truly on the potential of finding new and/or better ways of doing things and working effectively with each other and clients to help them and the City make a difference. Given your role as a staff person with first-hand experience, your sense of the issues and opportunities is vital to the success of this process. That is why you were invited to attend this session.

At this early point in the process, the City is looking to identify Operational Review related key issues, challenges and opportunities – including initial ideas for addressing them. **Staff perspective is critical to this process.** Once views have been collected from staff and other groups related to the processes including City clients such as developers and the related consultant community (e.g. planners, engineers etc.), businesses currently located in Guelph and those considering moving here, agencies, elected officials and so forth – key themes will be identified. The results will serve as the basis for further exploration and provide the framework for future study and ultimate recommendations.

Discussion Questions

1. In just a sentence or two, how would you describe or characterize typical City of Guelph-client relationships — by clients, we mean everything from individuals or companies seeking building permits, to those seeking development application or zoning/rezoning approvals, to those interested in business expansions, to those looking to locate or relocate in Guelph, and so forth? What makes you say that?

2. How do think *clients* would typically describe or characterize their interactions with the City? [AS APPROPRIATE, ASK: Why the discrepancy between the two descriptions/characterizations?]

3. In fact, some have said that Guelph is 'not business friendly' — in your view, to what degree is that statement accurate? More specifically, what do you think people really mean when they say that Guelph is 'not business friendly'? [AS APPROPRIATE ASK: What, if any, are some real examples — that you're personally familiar with or aware of — that show that Guelph is 'not business friendly'?]

4. As you know, the City of Guelph has various 'clients or customers' with an interest in the areas of building, engineering, planning and economic development — again, from individuals or companies interested in building permits, development application approvals, zoning/rezoning, business expansions and relocations, and so forth. Thinking specifically about these kinds of services (and <u>not</u> others such as parks and recreation, social services, etc.), what issues do you see or potential changes that might be required in the following areas [NOTE: *For each of the following, participants to be asked: What's the issue(s)? What can be done to address it (them)?]*:
   a. City requirements:
      i. Process (including inconsistencies or lack of process certainty; unnecessarily complicated approaches; etc.)
         [PROBE: Official Plan/Zoning amendments; site plan approval; plans of subdivision; engineering plan reviews; other]
      ii. Policies or rules (including inconsistencies or uncertainties)
      iii. Timelines
      iv. Other
   b. City attitudes toward clients and/or their initiatives
   c. City staff's ability to effectively and efficiently serve clients
   d. Treatment of clients (including any perceived favouritism or inequitable treatment, perceptions of fairness in treatment, etc.)

5. What underlies the kinds of challenges and issues we've been discussing — is it a lack of client awareness/understanding of City objectives/requirements…is it less than exemplary client service…is it less than ideal systems or approaches…something else?

6. Some have said that the City needs to adopt more of a 'partnership orientation' when it comes to dealing with clients. What does 'partnership orientation' mean to you — and to what degree do you see this as being desirable?

7. What, if anything, could be done to lessen what some have characterized as the 'adversarial' nature of selected encounters with building department, planning, engineering or economic development staff?

8. In your view, how would you describe the level of City staff autonomy in terms of exercising judgment/decision-making and latitude within a set framework? Which, if any, work area (e.g. those involved in building permits, development application approvals, zoning/rezoning, business expansions and relocations etc) does not have adequate autonomy?

9. In your view, what are the factors/pressures that are *currently* driving City processes and staff performance? Which factors/pressures *should be* the drivers?

10. For City staff to make some of the changes we've been discussing today — with a view to improving City-client relationships — how might we need to better balance or align workloads with available resources?

11. What could the City do that would clearly demonstrate that it is open to new and more productive ways of 'doing business with business'? [PROBE: What could City Council do? What could staff do? What could the business community do? Others?]

12. What other municipalities or jurisdictions might Guelph look to for insight on best practices or approaches? What are these others doing that makes them standout in a positive way — how are their processes or practices different or better than what's done in Guelph?

13. Beyond those discussed today, what other key factors, trends or considerations need to be considered as part of this Operational Review? What makes you say that?

14. Anything else you'd like to add?

[Facilitator to thank participants for their contributions; Opportunities for additional input]