

Date: 2023-11-16

Subject: **Information Report – Value for Money Audit of the current Development Approvals Process (DAP) digital workflow tool - Accela**

Contact: Carolyn Crozier, Manager, Development Services & Design
Planning, Building and Growth Management Department

Report Number: Planning, Bld & Growth Mgt-2023-1023

Recommendations:

1. That the report from Carolyn Crozier, Manager, Development Services and Design to the Council Meeting of December 6, 2023 re: **Information Report – Value for Money Audit of Accela**, be received.

Overview:

- In February 2023, Council passed a motion for staff to conduct a value-for-money (VFM) audit of Planning staff's current Development Approvals Process (DAP) digital workflow tool, Accela.
- Staff engaged Dillon Consulting Ltd. to conduct an independent, third party VFM audit, for which funding was provided through the Province's Streamline Development Approval Fund.
- The VFM audit identifies a suite of recommendations that the City could utilize to improve the existing workflow tool to better leverage existing investments.
- The audit also provides a detailed analysis of the Net Present Value between the option to Maintain/Improve the existing digital workflow tool and the option to transition to a new digital workflow tool.
- The audit found some drawbacks with the Accela digital workflow tool and the net present value analysis demonstrated that switching to another platform does not provide greater value to Brampton.

Background:

In February 2023, in response to findings identified through Development Services and Design's end to end reviews of Development Applications, Urban Design, and Committee

of Adjustment Processes (Planning, Bld & Growth Mgt-2023-036), Brampton City Council passed motion PDC014-2023 which reads:

“Whereas leveraging technology – in particular Accela was a key theme for opportunities to improve identified in all three studies – end-to-end review, urban design review and Committee of Adjustment; and

Whereas with the significant growth planned for Brampton, combined with our need to ensure we are using the best technology that meets customer service and financially prudent outcomes for the City;

Therefore, be it resolved that staff be directed to undertake a value-for-money review of Accela and report back to Council on the outcome on the review.”

Utilizing funding provided by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing’s Streamline Development Approval Fund, staff engaged Dillon Consulting Limited (with Performance Concepts Consulting Limited) (Audit Team) to conduct an independent, third-party value-for-money audit of Accela (VFM audit).

The purpose of this report is to summarize the findings of this audit and the outcome of the Net Present Value calculation associated with maintaining/investing in the existing workflow platform or transitioning to a net new workflow solution.

Current Situation

Audit Approach

The VFM audit of the Accela workflow tool completed by the Audit Team is consistent with the Federal Auditor General’s Value-For-Money Audit Manual (January, 2000). This methodology has been proved to lead to objective and well-founded conclusions.

The Audit Team employed a mix of semi-structured interviews, diagnostic Accela tests, peer comparisons and cost-benefit calculations to obtain a clear understanding of Accela’s functionality, improvement opportunities, and staff practices as it relates to utilizing the tool.

Audit Findings

Net Present Value Analysis

A NPV analysis is one way of helping decision-makers to choose between different options for financial investments. It allows for a comparison of multiple scenarios according to the financial value they stand to offer after accounting for financial costs, benefits, and when those transaction will occur over an extended period of time, expressed as a dollar value.

The Net Present Value (NPV) analysis was used to answer one of the main questions in the Audit:

- Should Brampton retain the Accela platform and migrate to Accela Cloud when support for on-premise Accela ends, or should Brampton migrate to an alternative workflow solution:

Two scenarios were examined:

- Scenario 1 – maintaining and making necessary investments to fully optimize improving the Accela platform, and;
- Scenario 2 – transitioning from Accela to a different software platform.

Using reasonable assumptions about the financial costs and benefits that would be involved in each scenario over a 20-year horizon.

The graphic below illustrates the results from the NPV analysis. Scenario 2 represents substantially less financial value than Scenario 1. In this respect, Scenario 1 is more financially viable.



Key Findings

The following is a summary of findings by each Audit Objective:

- Audit Objective #1 – Selection Criteria

The RFP through which Accela was purchased did include criteria that meet the Auditor's expectations for a high-performance DAP system.

- Audit Objective #2 – Goal Setting

Accela (current "on-premises" version) requires complex analytics reporting to be generated using other companion software; however, with the implementation of Accela's Cloud version, this type of reporting will be natively available (via Accela

Insight) which very adeptly reports on file analytics and timing details (tracking late, on time, or coming due).

- **Audit Objective #3 – Comparison to Peers**

Brampton is underinvested in Accela for the Committee of Adjustment function, time-tracking of development files (“clock on/clock off”), document management, the engineering workflows of final (phased) Plan of Subdivision applications, and upkeep of the platform based on end-user feedback.

- **Audit Objective #4 – Performance Improvements**

Brampton’s usage of Accela has revealed several challenges that hinder efficiency and productivity – very little of which is inherently due to failings of the software platform itself.

- **Audit Objective #5, Underutilization Risk:** There is some inconsistent use of Accela. The Audit Team recognizes that the ethos at Brampton is to work with the applicant – so if workflow gaps are updated (or a subworkflow designed) then that would achieve continuity of file tracking.
- **Audit Objective, #6, Functionality of Alternatives:** The configuration benefits of the commercially available DAP software platforms typically used in Ontario are so common that the Audit Team finds that there is no compelling functionality that would justify replacing Accela with two other possible platforms we considered.
- **Audit Objective #7, Net Present Value:** The Audit Team finds that, based on the assumptions noted previously, the results of the financial analysis indicate that Scenario 2 (Alternate DAP Solution) represents substantially less value-for-money than Scenario 1 (Maintain and Improve Accela) on the basis of their net present values, in the order of approximately \$4.3 million dollars. Given that this is specifically a Value-for-Money Audit, the results of the analysis do not justify a switch decision to an alternative platform and that Scenario 1 (Maintain and Improve Accela) is better value for money.

Corporate Implications:

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

Strategic Focus Area:

Government & Leadership

This report is consistent with the Strategic Focus Area – Government & Leadership. The audit findings support the Corporation in the provision of service excellence with equity, innovation, efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency.

Conclusion:

The findings of the Dillon Consulting Ltd.'s investigations into the Accela workflow tool has led them to conclude that Brampton has a workflow software platform that meets the functional needs to deliver a high performance development approvals regime. The net present value calculation demonstrated that switching to another software platform does not provide greater value to Brampton; therefore the value for money audit recommends that Brampton maintain and improve Accela.

Authored by:

Reviewed by:

Carolyn Crozier, MsC.PI., MCIP,RPP
Manager, Development Services &
Design
Planning, Building & Growth
Management

Allan Parsons, MCIP, RPP
Director, Development Services & Design
Planning, Building & Growth Management

Submitted by:

Approved by:

Steve Ganesh, MCIP, RPP
Commissioner,
Planning, Building & Growth
Management

Marlon Kallideen
Chief Administrative Officer
City of Brampton

Attachments:

- Attachment 1 – Value for Money Audit of Accela
- Attachment 2 – Value for Money Audit Presentation