Committee of Council Presentation

Value-for-Money Audit of the Accela Workflow Tool

December 6, 2023

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Value-for-Money (VFM) Audit:

An assessment to determine if resources (such as time, money or effort) are effectively used to achieve goals, ensuring that benefits justify costs.

- **Focuses on service quality relative to resources**
- **Optimizes cost-performance balance**

The parameters set out in the 2023 Value-For-Money Accela Audit Plan are consistent with the Federal Auditor General's Value-for-Money Audit Manual (2000).

Purpose of the Audit

Motion: PDC014-2023 - Mandated a VFM review of Accela's performance (February, 2023)

"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 of the review."

Strategic Priorities:

- Assess Accela's efficiency in handling development approvals
- Position Brampton to manage evolving regulatory requirements and mounting pressures for expedited approvals

Legislative Context:

Bill 109:   Mandates processing fee refunds to proponents for delays in development approvals

Bill 23:   Targets constructing 113,000 units by 2031, accelerating prior forecasts by 20 years

Audit Framework and Methodology

Audit Methodology Overview:

1. **Objective Definition and Criteria Establishment**

2. **Data Collection:**
   - Semi-Structured Interviews
   - Diagnostic Testing

3. **Financial Evaluation:**
   - Net Present Value (NPV) Analysis

4. **Conclusions and Strategic Recommendations**

Audit Framework:

Audit Charter: Outlines the Audit's **intended outcome, scope, and responsibilities.**

Audit Plan: Specifies the **timeline, detailed objectives, criteria and approach** for the Audit. Details within the Audit Plan were reviewed and **confirmed with Management**.

Audit Report: Summarizes **observations, findings, and strategic recommendations.**

Key Areas of Focus (Audit Objectives/Criteria)

Objective 1	**Enhancing Service Delivery Model**	Can Accela provide prioritized triaging of files, tracking comments, timelines, and automated notifications?
Objective 2	**Regulatory Agility;** **End-to-End Workflows;** **Strategic Management Tools**	Can Accela meet changing regulatory timeframes? Can Accela handle complex phased subdivision approvals? Can Accela establish KPIs, automated progress reporting, and predictive time estimates for managerial goals?
Objective 3	**Comparative Analysis to Peers**	Is Accela being used to its full potential, comparing it with City of Barrie and City of Kingston configurations?
Objective 4	**Performance Improvement Opportunities**	What are some best performance practices being used in peer municipalities, and what are Brampton's challenges in their implementation?
Objective 5	**User Behaviour & Training Impact**	Are there any user behavioral obstacles and is there available training for better utilization?
Objective 6	**Tool Transition Consideration**	What are the potential functionality benefits in case of tool replacement?
Objective 7	**Financial Evaluation**	*What is the Net Present Value of two potential solutions?*

Key Findings (Audit Objectives 1 to 6)

Tool Assessment Highlights

- ★ Aligns with high-performance DAP requirements
- ★ Can achieve efficient tracking of project timelines
- ★ Does offer a comprehensive end-to-end DAP solution
- ★ Can provide seamless integration with various add-on applications

Key Challenges Uncovered

- ❏ Deficiency in document management investment
- ❏ Insufficient training and user knowledge of Accela
- ❏ Lack of ongoing configuration updates
- ❏ Room to improve end-user "behaviour"
- ❏ Inadequate integration of spatial data for GIS visualization

Resolvable Issues/Better Practices from Peer Municipalities

- ➜ Document management extension solution
- ➜ Bridging the gap between "Planning DAP" and "Engineering DAP"
- ➜ Improved training for accurate data input and general usage
- ➜ Enhanced coding for commenting and search functions
- ➜ Workflow re-configuration for file status updates
- ➜ Spatial data integration with built-in GIS tool

Objective 7: Net Present Value (NPV) Analysis

The Net Present Value (NPV) analysis enabled a comprehensive comparison of two different scenarios by considering the financial costs, benefits, and the timing of those transactions over an extended period.

- **Aids decision-makers in selecting the most financially advantageous option among various "investment" alternatives**
- **All factors are expressed as a dollar value – for ease of comparison**

Construction of the Net Present Value (NPV) Analysis

The NPV analysis informs the recommendation to retain Accela or switch to an alternative DAP workflow solution.

Output: NPV calculates the present value of cost savings or efficiencies over the analysis' 20 year lifecycle, allowing for comparison between scenarios, considering the phasing-in of changes/costs and potential gains in efficiency.

Core Elements: To quantify the financial implications of the NPV scenarios, the following core elements were examined

| Acquisition Costs | Ongoing Costs | Potential Efficiencies | Phasing | Cashflow |

Assumptions: Key control factors used to calculate NPV

| 20-year Lifecycle | Allowance for Inflation | Value of Staff Time as $'s | Development Application Volumes | One-time or Recurring Software Fees |

Scenario 1: Maintain and Improve Accela

- Keep using Accela
- Make necessary investments to fully optimize it

Scenario 2: Alternate DAP Solution

- Acquire, configure, test, and fully roll out a new platform
- Full re-train staff
- Exit Accela at the end of the transition

Results/NPV Conclusion

S1   **SCENARIO 1**

- Keep using Accela
- Make necessary investments to fully optimize it

...over 20 years, is estimated to be $4.3M less costly than....

S2   **SCENARIO 2**

- Acquire and configure a new platform so it's fully optimized
- Train staff
- Exit Accela at the end of the transition

The NPV analysis indicates that Scenario 1 (Maintain and Improve Accela) is better value for money.

Summary of Recommendations

Twenty-six detailed recommendations are outlined in the Audit Report across the following key themes:

Recommendations on Improved Utilization and Training

R3, R16, R17, R21: Focus on training staff for efficient use of the platform, updating file status promptly, and conducting spot-checks for training needs.

R15: Sustain a working group with peer municipalities for knowledge sharing.

Recommendations on Workflow and Document Management

R4, R5, R6, R10, R18, R20, R25, R26: Improve workflow integration and document management, prioritize Accela Cloud improvements, and implement a 'drawbridge' workflow configuration.

Recommendations on System Configuration and Functionality

R8, R11, R12, R13, R14, R19: Enhance deployment of spatial data, GIS interface, global search functionality, and resolve user interface/user experience issues in Accela.

Recommendations on Resource Allocation and Continuous Improvement

R23, R24: Develop a continuous improvement program and increase human resource support for the platform.

Recommendations for Investment Strategy and Cost-Benefit Analysis

R1, R2, R22, R26: Consider cost-benefit analysis in decisions, and prioritize investments in platform improvements.

Further Management Comments

The Audit Team has received further Management Comments since the issuance of the Audit Report, and documents the following:

Management remains concerned about the predictive analytics functionality of Accela.

Management remains concerned about the perceived user-friendliness of Accela.

Management remains concerned about the fragmentation of data among other systems.