

NO: R056

COUNCIL DATE: April 8, 2024

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## REGULAR COUNCIL

**TO: Mayor & Council** **DATE: April 4, 2024**

**FROM: General Manager, Planning & Development** **FILE: 1855-03**  
**General Manager, Corporate Services** **(Housing Accelerator Fund)**

**SUBJECT: Establishment of the Development Inquiry Assistant**

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## RECOMMENDATION

The Planning & Development Department and Corporate Services Department recommend that Council receive this report for information.

## INTENT

The intent of this report is to inform Council of the April 9, 2024 launch of the Development Inquiry Assistant, an Artificial Intelligence-powered chatbot aimed at empowering citizens with instant and accurate answers to their questions about permitting requirements and development opportunities.

## BACKGROUND

In December 2023, the City received a grant from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (“CMHC”) under the Housing Accelerator Fund (“HAF”) program. The City’s HAF Action Plan includes researching and implementing Artificial Intelligence (“AI”) technology to enhance service and accelerate the permitting process.

Leveraging the power of AI is a strategic growth area in the City’s aim to improve quality of life for citizens, enhance delivery of services, and create a smarter, more sustainable and connected City, while upholding high ethical standards in the development and deployment of AI, ensuring fairness, transparency, and accountability.

## DISCUSSION

As highlighted at the Mayor’s State of the City Address, the City has developed and is now ready to establish an online Development Inquiry Assistant (“DIA”). The initial launch of DIA on April 9, 2024 is aimed at answering frequent citizen development inquiries, focusing on single-family building permits and tenant improvement building permits. This web-based system simplifies the understanding of permitting requirements accessible on the City’s website. DIA is designed to be user-friendly, interactive, and to complement the role of Building Front Counter staff.

DIA provides a conversational experience, allowing the user to explore development questions such as:

- What are the setbacks for a single-family dwelling in the RF zone?
- How do I apply for a building permit for a basement suite?
- What are the zoning and permitting requirements at [an address]?

DIA is expected to provide the following benefits for the City and its citizens:

- Enhance customer service and information accessibility by providing instant and accurate answers to development inquiries 24/7;
- Increase the awareness and understanding of the City's permitting requirements and development potentials;
- Reduce the workload and response time for staff who handle development inquiries; and
- Improve the quality and completeness of building permit applications, increasing the speed of the permit approval process.

The development of DIA upholds the City's information security and privacy standards.

### **Next Steps**

The launch of DIA will be accompanied by significant communication efforts, including social media engagement, to foster the adoption of this service by the Surrey community.

Staff will actively monitor the reliability and quality of answers of DIA based on user feedback built-into the service and performing updates and improvements, as required.

The initial launch of DIA is the first phase of a multi-phase project that will continue to improve and expand DIA's capabilities, reliability, and coverage. The future phases of the project will focus on augmenting DIA's core capabilities, with increased focus on rezoning, development permit, subdivision, and the transition of the upcoming zoning requirements relating to provincial legislation.

The Planning & Development Department and the Corporate Services Department will work collaboratively with other departments, stakeholders, and partners to ensure the successful implementation and improvement of DIA.

### **CONCLUSION**

DIA is a web-based AI chatbot that empowers citizens with instant and accurate answers to their questions about permitting requirements and development potentials. DIA is part of the City's HAF Action Plan and aims to improve customer service and information accessibility for common development inquiries. The initial launch of DIA is the first phase of a multi-phase project that will continue to improve and expand DIA's capabilities and coverage.

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