



**City of Kingston
Report to Council
Report Number 26-069**

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Paige Agnew, Commissioner, Growth & Development Services;
Neil Carbone, Commissioner, Corporate & Emergency Services

Resource Staff: Lisa Capener-Hunt, Director of Building Services and CBO
Kyle Compeau, Director of Enforcement Services
Kevin Donaldson, Fire Chief

Date of Meeting: April 7, 2026

Subject: Streamlined Licensing & Approval Process

Council Strategic Plan Alignment:

Theme: Council requests

Goal: See above

Executive Summary:

On November 4, 2025, Council passed Resolution Number [2025-326](#) directing staff to report back on opportunities to streamline the city's licensing and approval process to improve coordination between City departments and better support Kingston's business community.

This report provides information in fulfillment of that Council direction. Through the review, staff confirmed that the core challenge is the absence of a coordinated end-to-end process that guides applicants through all required steps. With Licensing, Building Services, Fire Prevention, Planning Services, and Public Health each operating within their own legislated mandates, workflows, and software systems, applicant's may experience the process as fragmented, repetitive, or difficult to navigate.

While each division plays a critical regulatory role, the current structure makes it challenging for applicants to understand where their file stands, what steps are required, and how the various

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departmental reviews relate to one another. This can result in uncertainty, delays, and frustration, particularly for businesses operating in existing buildings where building code, fire code, zoning, and health requirements frequently intersect.

The review identified several significant opportunities to improve service delivery:

- Application delays due to a lack of applicant follow-up, resulting in files remaining inactive until applicants provide the necessary documentation.
- Uncertainty around required permits, inspections, and sequencing, including unexpected building permit requirements.
- Existing unpermitted construction or outstanding orders, which can trigger additional reviews late in the process.
- Fragmented processes across Departments, limiting visibility and requiring Licensing to rely on manual follow-up with other departments.

These findings highlight opportunities for the city to strengthen coordination, improve transparency, and more fully leverage existing software to reduce manual follow-up and improve visibility, providing a more predictable and supportive experience for businesses seeking to open, relocate or expand in Kingston.

This report outlines a new coordinated technical review model that provides a clear, sequenced path for business license applications, reduces redundancy, improves communication across departments, and ensures applicants receive one clear and comprehensive set of requirements.

The new structure enhances service delivery while maintaining full regulatory compliance, demonstrating staff's recognition and importance for supporting our business community

Recommendation:

This report is for information only.

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Authorizing Signatures:

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER

**Paige Agnew, Commissioner,
Growth & Development Services**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER

**Neil Carbone, Commissioner,
Corporate & Emergency
Services**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**Lanie Hurdle, Chief
Administrative Officer**

Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:

Jennifer Campbell, Commissioner, Community Services	Not required
David Fell, President & CEO, Utilities Kingston	Not required
Desirée Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer	Not required
Jenna Morley, City Solicitor	Not required

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Ian Semple, Commissioner, Transportation & Infrastructure Services

Not required

Options/Discussion:**Background**

The City of Kingston manages a high volume of business-related submissions each year, including business licensing, building permits and inspections, fire inspections, zoning reviews, and related regulatory approvals. Although these processes fall under different legislation, they frequently intersect when businesses intend to open or operate in existing buildings.

For most applicants, the first point of contact is the Licensing Division. At intake, Licensing Agents provide one-on-one support to applicants to understand the nature of the proposed business, location, and applicable approvals. This early engagement helps to ensure applicants know what is required before their file proceeds through the regulatory review process.

After intake, Licensing conducts a completeness review and determines which technical reviewers are required. Depending on the nature of the business, applications may be circulated to Planning Services, Building Services, Fire Prevention and Public Health.

While licensing remains the applicant's central point of contact, the technical reviews occur independently within each department's legislative authority, workflow, and priorities. This structure satisfies regulatory requirements but presents service delivery challenges. Once an application leaves intake, Licensing does not control the sequence, timing, or communication associated with the technical reviews. As a result, applicants often seek updates from Licensing on files actively under review in other departments, contributing to fragmented communication, and frustration.

Council has directed staff to improve coordination, communication, and process design to address these concerns.

Regulatory Roles

Understanding the distinct but overlapping roles of the circulated departments is essential to both the challenges and the solution.

- Building Services regulates construction and change of use under the Ontario Building Code. Ensuring buildings are designed and constructed safely, applicable law is met and required fire and life safety features are properly installed prior to granting occupancy.
- Fire Prevention regulates ongoing fire and life safety maintenance under the Ontario Fire Code. Once a building or space is occupied, Fire ensures fire protection systems, exits, and life safety features are maintained and functioning as intended.
- Planning Services confirms zoning compliance, including permitted uses and parking requirements under the zoning bylaw.
- Public Health regulates food premises or personal service settings to mitigate health risks.

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Identified Challenges

Licensing serves as the applicant's primary contact but has limited authority over other reviewing divisions, requiring continual status updates from other departments to complete the licensing process. Through feedback received, staff understood that some applicants have experienced the overall process as disconnected, repetitive, or contradictory, extending approval timelines. Key factors include:

1. Regulatory Overlap

- In existing, occupied buildings, areas under construction fall under Building Services authority while areas not under construction fall under Fire Prevention's authority. Both authorities may apply concurrently to different portions of the same building or tenant space.
- Even when applicants indicate that no construction is planned, Building Services may determine that a building permit is required due to past unpermitted work, change in the type of business use, or other circumstances that may reveal concerns through the course of an inspection often necessitating professional drawings and additional reviews.

2. Process and Sequencing Issues

- Reviews by Building Services, Fire Prevention, Planning Services and Public Health frequently occur simultaneously and independently rather than collaboratively.
- Fire Prevention inspections often occur after Building Services has approved occupancy, which can trigger additional building permits and construction under a fire order resulting in reviews after approvals have been granted.
- Planning may identify additional requirements, such as minor variances or further clarification to validate use impacting timelines.

3. Communication and Visibility Gaps

- Information, inspections, and documentation come from multiple divisions at different times. Applicants commonly respond to one division while missing requests from another.
- Applications remain inactive for weeks or months because the applicants believe the city is still reviewing the file, while the city is waiting on applicant information. There is currently no automated follow-up system or structured timeline prompting re-engagement or closure of files.
- Divisions operate on separate systems and under different legislation. The departments' lack visibility into each other's status and rely on emails, phone calls, and manual follow-up.

The core challenge is the absence of coordinated ownership of the overall process that guides applicants through all required steps. Without a single structured pathway, applicants are left to navigate technical requirements across multiple divisions. This can result in unclear timelines, inconsistent communication, and delays with real financial impacts for new businesses.

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Analysis

Staff mapped the end-to-end workflow from receipt of a business license application to lawful issuance. The review confirmed that, while licensing maintains responsibility for intake, coordination, and final approval, the critical dependencies for, life safety, building and fire code compliance, and zoning/permitted uses occur during interdepartmental and external technical reviews. These points are where most delays were experienced.

The review identified three core areas for improvement:

- 1. Applications Stalling Due to Applicant Inaction** - Incomplete applications persist due to missed responses to information requests, unclear or misunderstood requirements, lack of required inspections, outstanding deficiencies, or sequencing of approvals.
- 2. Unclear Requirements and Roles** - Applicants often do not understand the distinct but interrelated roles of Licensing, Building Services, Fire Prevention, Planning Services, and Public Health, when additional permits and approvals are required, as well as factors that influence approval timelines.
- 3. Fragmented Departmental Processes** - Independent departmental workflows and systems limit shared visibility, increase manual follow-up, and place the burden of coordination on applicants and Licensing staff.

The analysis also identified opportunities to more fully leverage the City's existing land management system (DASH). Many features such as automated tasking, integrated reviewer comments, inspection tracking, and permit closure notifications were previously underutilized.

The Coordinated Technical Review Model

To address these challenges, staff have implemented a coordinated, sequenced review model that clarifies departmental roles, eliminates redundant circulation, and directs applications to the appropriate technical stream immediately upon receipt. The model provides unified visibility into file status, timelines, and outstanding requirements.

Under the revised approach, a coordinated technical review begins as soon as Licensing receives an application. Instead of circulating files to multiple departments simultaneously, the workflow now directs applications to the established review stream. Licensing remains the primary applicant facing division, however, as Licensing agents do not administer technical legislation or issue building permits, technical coordination must be directed to the appropriate regulatory authority.

Construction in Ontario is regulated under the Ontario Building Code, with legislated review timelines, mandated service standards, and defined approval pathways for construction, change of use, and life-safety compliance. Centralizing coordination within Building Services is a logical starting point, as most business-related technical reviews lead back to the issuance or closure of a building permit.

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Because construction or life safety upgrades triggered by Fire Prevention or Public Health must proceed under a building permit, direct coordination to Building Services immediately after Licensing intake aligns technical oversight, review sequencing, and timelines. This creates a single coordinated path for all construction related requirements associated with business licensing and enables applicants to submit only one permit application while still meeting the requirements of all regulatory authorities.

To support this coordinated workflow, Licensing, Fire Prevention, Public Health and Planning Services are all tasked through the building permit review process in DASH. Because Licensing already has access to the system, integrating them into the reviewer chain ensures everyone receives real time status updates, inspection outcomes, and circulation notes. By enhancing the use of existing software and integrating all reviewers into a single, shared permit workflow creates unified requirements and streamlined reviews and inspections. This strengthens communication across departments, reduces manual follow ups, and provides a consistent and predictable approval process for applicants.

Step 1- Immediate Building Services Assessment

Upon receipt of a business license application, licensing immediately tasks Building Services who reviews all historical information on a property to determine the appropriate approval pathway.

Applicants who approach the City through Building Services with a permit application first, rather than Licensing, are proactively advised that a business license will also be required. Building Services has added check boxes and intake flags to the permit application workflow in the existing land management system (DASH) to identify projects requiring a business licence.

Outcome: The multiple early touchpoints mean applicants receive early, consistent guidance on requirements for permits regardless of which department they approach first with defined service timelines.

Step 2 – Integrated Circulation and Sequencing

If a building permit is required: Building Services leads the process and aligns with Planning at the permit review stage, this part of the process is unchanged. Fire Prevention is engaged where other parts of the building or tenant space fall outside the permit scope of work, and Public Health is included for food or personal service uses. Applicants receive one coordinated, comprehensive list of requirements under one building permit.

If no building permit is required initially: Fire Prevention reviews the business space. If deficiencies requiring construction are identified, the workflow returns to a building permit, ensuring all required work proceeds under a single, coordinated permit with one consolidated requirements list. If no construction is required, Licensing is notified of compliance.

Communication throughout the process keeps all parties informed of any changes and discussions with the applicant, and everyone is working from the same documentation.

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Outcome: Correct departments are engaged at the right time, reducing duplication and additional work through standardized, consolidated requirements. Notifications are sent to all parties to maintain file visibility.

Step 3 – Joint Inspections

Building Services, Fire Prevention and Public Health coordinate inspections to address construction and life safety requirements together prior to final sign-off of the business license. Joint inspections are logged in the land management system (DASH) for future tracking.

Outcome: Sequential handoffs are eliminated; issues are resolved collaboratively in fewer cycles and joint inspections reduce repeat site visits.

Step 4 – Joint Approvals to Licensing

When required permits are closed, approvals from Building Services, Fire Prevention, Planning Services and Public Health are automatically communicated to Licensing through permit closure workflows that have been enabled within the current system (DASH).

Outcome: Automated notification reduces repeated follow-ups by Licensing staff to confirm review status; communication is streamlined and timely.

Benefits of the New Approach

The coordinated model streamlines the business licensing requirements by identifying requirements early regardless of the entry point. It reduces duplicate reviews and inspections, ensures all divisions are working from the same documentation, and provides applicants with one clear and coordinated set of requirements. This approach maintains full regulatory compliance while measurably improving service delivery.

This model also leverages the City's existing land management system (DASH) more fully by integrating all reviewing divisions into a single coordinated workflow. This creates shared visibility, reduces manual follow-ups, and ensures applicants receive timely, accurate, and consistent information throughout the process.

By reducing duplicate circulation through the licensing process, the coordinated model eliminates unnecessary permit applications while still providing the licensing approvals required from each department.

Overall, the coordinated technical review model represents an improvement to the City's business licensing process. It establishes clear pathways, predictable timelines, and a unified approach to regulatory compliance. By aligning departmental workflows, consolidating requirements, and leveraging Building Services statutory framework, the city can provide a more efficient and transparent experience for applicants while maintaining full legislative oversight.

Ongoing performance measurement will support continuous improvements of the model and ensure accountability across divisions. Together, these changes strengthen customer service,

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support business growth, and reinforce the City’s commitment to responsive and modernized service delivery.

Previous Issues

Streamlined Process Solution

Applicants unsure who to contact	Licensing remains the central point of contact.
Applicants unaware of needed permits	Building Services engaged on day one; early pathway determined.
Duplication of Permits and Inspections	Sequenced, coordinated review reduces overlap, duplicate inspections, and re-review.
Parallel, uncoordinated departmental reviews	Technical sequencing delivers one clear, coordinated set of requirements.
Applicants completing renovations incorrectly	Early Building Services involvement clarifies permit and drawings needed.
Licensing repeatedly chasing approvals	Central, automatic approval flow upon permit closure.

Impact on Timelines and Applicant Experience

While the current licensing process includes a 20-day review target, only 126 of the 219 new business license applications received in 2025 were issued within this timeframe. Meeting this target can be challenging when multiple reviewing agencies are involved and permits progress at different stages. As part of the streamlined process, we are reviewing these timelines to determine whether any reductions are realistically achievable, taking into account key dependencies such as drawing submissions and regulatory specific requirements.

Building Services has assigned dedicated reviewers to permits related to business licences and has adjusted the complement of inspectors in areas with higher licensing activity to help support faster turnaround times. While staff continue to meet the mandated review timelines under the Building Code, as well as re-review timelines at half that period, customers may still experience delays when drawings prepared by qualified designers require additional time before they can be submitted for review.

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While regulatory requirements for each division remain unchanged, the coordinated model reduces uncertainty by clarifying requirements early, sequencing reviews appropriately, and issuing one consolidated requirements list. This reduces building permit resubmissions, minimises delays and provides applicants with predictable timelines, transparent status information, and fewer touchpoints. The result is a more consistent applicant experience, clearer accountability among divisions, and reduced administrative burden for Licensing staff.

Performance Measurement and Monitoring

To demonstrate service improvements and accountability, Licensing staff already monitor the average days from complete application to License issuance, the number of files inactive due to applicant inaction, the number of applications waiting on departmental reviewers, as well as the number of licenses rescinded by the applicant.

Additional metrics enabled through the coordinated workflow in DASH allow the City to track metrics more holistically by cross referencing coordinated permit processing times with licensing timelines to measure end to end improvements. The model also enables tracking of reductions in the number of related business licensing files requiring multiple permits, the number of inspections completed jointly, reductions in re-inspections or re-circulations, the percentage of applications receiving complete requirements, and the reduction in manual follow-ups required by Licensing to obtain departmental updates.

These measures will be used to demonstrate service improvements, enhance accountability, and inform continuous process refinements.

Training

Joint training sessions for all affected departments on the new workflow, triggers and respective responsibilities have been completed and will continue through quarterly collaborative sessions.

The coordinated model rebalances workload without requiring additional full-time staff. Workload impacts will continue to be monitored as part of the ongoing performance measurement to support continuous improvement.

Public Education and Engagement

This report focuses on internal process improvements related to interdepartmental coordination and workflow. Insights from customer experiences and customer identified service challenges informed the development of the coordinated technical review model.

Broader public engagement and information sessions to support the licensing modernization initiatives will involve key partners such as Kingston Economic Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, Real Estate agents and representatives from the local business community.

Initial discussions were had with representatives from KEDCO and the Downtown Kingston BIA, where the Stakeholders noted that while licensing requirements themselves are generally

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understood, that improving the navigation side of the various licensing steps would make the process easier and help reduce delays. They recommended that the City develop a simple directory of departmental contacts such as Licensing and Enforcement Services, Planning, Building, and Fire Prevention to help businesses quickly find the right support.

At a high level, stakeholders suggested the city consider:

- Creating a centralized staff contact or liaison to guide businesses through licensing and approvals.
- Offering clearer guidance materials or digital tools showing the steps involved.
- Developing a “one-window” or concierge-style approach for business licensing and permits.

The City will continue working collaboratively with stakeholders to obtain additional feedback, enhance educational and informational resources, including the promotion of website-based materials that clearly outline requirements, processes, and departmental roles. Staff will also explore opportunities to host collaborative workshops and engagement sessions with stakeholders moving forward, with the goal of improving awareness of licensing processes and supporting businesses in navigating municipal approvals.

A theme emerging from customer feedback is the importance of having full awareness of the end-to-end process including the need to know all requirements before an application is submitted with predictable timelines and the required approvals, permits and inspections. These insights will guide engagement efforts, which will be designed to gather ongoing feedback on applicant facing processes, identify service barriers, and help shape future improvements that reflect the needs and experiences of local businesses.

Indigenization, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility (IIDEA) Considerations

Clear and consistent requirements help reduce barriers for first time business owners, including those that may be unfamiliar with municipal regulatory processes. Streamlined communication and coordinated guidance support applicants in navigating complex requirements, while predictable timelines reduce financial and operational risks.

Existing Policy/By-Law

Business License By-Law Number 2025-34

Financial Considerations

The streamlined process is procedural and does not require funding.

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Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted

James Bar, Manager Development Approvals, Planning Services

Laird Leggo, Manager, Licensing, Parking Operations & Policy

Rita Coughlin, Supervisor, Policy & Licensing

Sarah Ryding, Manager, Public Health Programs and Services, Southeast Public Health

Exhibits Attached

None