

# Grand River Conservation Authority

**Report number:** GM-11-21-79

**Date:** November 26, 2021

**To:** Members of the Grand River Conservation Authority

**Subject:** Permit, Planning and Inquiry Fee Schedule for 2022

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## **Recommendation:**

THAT the proposed 2022 Permit, Planning and Inquiry Fee Schedule be approved and become effective as of January 1, 2022.

## **Summary:**

It is recommended that the fees for permits, planning comments and inquiries be increased by 3.0%.

## **Report:**

The proposed Grand River Conservation Authority fee increase for permits, plan review applications and inquiries to be effective January 1, 2022 is 3.0% (rounded to the nearest \$5.00). The recommended fee increase is intended to cover increased costs associated with providing these services.

The *Conservation Authorities Act* allows fees to be charged for permits, inquiries and plan review services. The Ministry of Natural Resources (*and Forestry*) established guidelines for collection of fees under Section 21 of the *Conservation Authorities Act*. The proposed fees and the process used to review the fees conform to these guidelines and the Conservation Ontario guidelines.

In 2020 approximately 67% of permit applications were received digitally using the online application process implemented in 2014 as a streamlining measure. With the move to staff working remotely, planning applications are almost exclusively digital submissions. This has resulted in increased efficiency in receiving and filing materials and holding virtual meetings. However, there are also inefficiencies with limited access to historical paper files, additional work to consolidate and review materials and collaboration, as well as some additional coordination and sharing of information from site visits. During the past year, staff have maintained service delivery standards for permit and planning applications although due to staff vacancies and training and increased volume of inquiries, there was a temporary disruption to responding to some general inquiries from August to October. Individuals requesting information were provided with a link to access the GRCA [Map Your Property](#) application to review Regulated areas mapping and they were provided with a direct link to the GRCA Permit [policies](#).

New planning applications through 2021 remains consistent with prior years however staff have been responding to a higher volume of requests for pre-consultation meetings and general inquiries for future planning and permit applications. There has been a marked increase again this year in the number of permit applications being processed with most being minor applications attributable to an increase in homeowners doing property improvements. At the end of 2020, GRCA had received 1003 permits, compared to 829 permit applications in 2019 and as of November 12, 2021 we received 1,020 applications compared to 917 applications November 12, 2020. It is unknown if this will be a continued trend or if it will return to a more normal level next

year. The province of Ontario has indicated they will be consulting on a new Regulation for all Conservation Authorities. No timeline has been established for this review at this time.

Municipalities have adapted to changes in the way they handle Planning Act applications due to office closures during the pandemic. Conservation authority staff have changed our processes to provide a comparable service through the use of various electronic communication means to meet the timelines of the municipal processes.

Conservation authority staff attend joint pre-submission or pre-consultation meetings with municipal staff in many municipalities. As noted above, efficiencies are being implemented or explored with various municipal partners to ensure comments are provided that meet the needs and timelines of municipalities.

The more complex and major planning application workload is phased over multiple years as pre-consultation often occurs 1-2 years prior to the formal application to establish pre-development monitoring requirements, followed by the application and review of technical studies and plans and subsequent review of various stages of subdivision or applicable site plans. It is difficult to accurately project future applications or revenue over a given period because the types and timing of when planning and permit applications are received is unpredictable and are be driven by factors outside of the GRCA control e.g. economic conditions.

The GRCA has been active in updating some Memoranda of Understanding for Plan Review services with various municipalities in the past few years. These are posted on the GRCA website. In some areas of the watershed MOUs are not currently in place however the same level of services is provided to the applicable municipal approval authority. The review of planning MOUs with participating and other municipalities will be part of the Transition Plan and will occur over the next two years.

### **Provincial Regulations**

There is some uncertainty of the changes to GRCA planning and permit programs from the implementation of the province's changes to the Conservation Authorities Act and development of the associated regulations. Phase 2 of the Regulations include provincial guidance regarding fees. It is anticipated that modifications to these programs will include an increased effort for documentation, demonstration of compliance with Regulations and policies, while continuing to meet increasing expectations for customer service. Working with applicants to achieve high quality pre-consultation meetings and to submit a complete application will be a focus to ensure decisions on applications will be within the proposed mandatory decision timelines for permits.

It is anticipated that a comprehensive fee review will be undertaken in 2022-2023 due to pending changes to the Regulation under the Conservation Authorities Act. The proposed fee recommendation for 2022 will maintain the current program delivery.

### **Consultation**

The proposed fee changes have been shared with the Home Builders/GRCA Liaison Committee and adjacent conservation authorities. Members of the Home Builders Liaison Committee have no objections to the proposed fee schedule. Staff have considered program delivery costs, adjacent Conservation Authorities and local municipality fee schedules when considering revisions to the fee schedules.

Attachment 1 includes the current and proposed fees for permit, planning and inquiry fees.

### **Permit Fees**

Permit processing procedures related to the GRCA regulation has remained consistent over the past year.

A 3.0% increase (rounded to the nearest \$5.00) in the permit fees is proposed, with the exception of the per cubic metre fee for large fill permit applications which staff recommend remain unchanged at \$0.50. The notes have been updated to identify site visits are included in the higher fee categories.

### **Title Clearance and Inquiry Fee**

A 3.0% increase (rounded to the nearest \$5.00) is proposed in the fee for written responses to legal, real estate and property report requests and general inquiries. The notes have been updated to clarify the focus of this service is related to the Conservation Authority Regulation 150/06 and compliance matters.

### **Plan Review**

A 3.0% increase (rounded to the nearest \$5.00) in the Plan Review fees is proposed.

### **Financial Implications:**

The recommended fee schedule has considered the costs of delivering the services described in the schedule of fees for service. These fees will maintain current service levels and do not consider potential changes to review processes or changes to provincial Regulations. A full time Water Resource Engineering position and a temporary Regulations Officer have been included in the 2022 budget for this program.

The general levy enables the GRCA to continue to provide input to initiatives of municipalities in the watershed. These include municipal plans and policies such as Official Plan and Comprehensive Zoning By-law documents, Environmental Assessments, Secondary and Community Plans and review of planning amendments initiated by municipalities, as well as policy and technical support at appeal hearings without additional cost to the municipality. In addition, the levy supports other activities such as the review of provincial policy and technical initiatives such as natural hazard and natural heritage guidelines, enforcement as well as responding to most general inquiries from watershed residents related to permit regulations and planning processes and approval requirements.

### **Other Department Considerations:**

The fees collected for these services contribute to staffing in Resource Planning, Engineering, Natural Heritage, and Information Systems.

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