Ontario Building E-permitting – 2018 Update

© by Alek Antoniuk, OAA
   July 9, 2018

In 2017, Ontario municipalities received over 180,000 building permit applications. The vast majority of these applications were made in person, where the permit applicant traveled to the building department, waited in line to be served, waited for the counter clerk to review the application, paid the permit fee, and then traveled back to the office or home.

If it took an average of 2 hours for an applicant to travel to the building department and apply for a building permit, at a minimum wage salary of $15/hr., the lost productivity for Ontario is $5 million every single year. Many people have told me that $15/hr. is an unrealistically low salary for the design and construction industry: agreed! – let's double the salary! – then Ontario's lost productivity becomes over $10 million a year.

That $10 million a year will buy more than 20 brand new detached houses in Belleville this year, next year, and thereafter. What would you rather choose: drive to the building department and wait in line to apply for a permit; OR enable the Ontario economy to provide those 20 brand new detached houses in Belleville for young families next year and thereafter?

How do we make this happen?

In its report, titled "[Streamlining the Development and Building Approvals Process in Ontario](#)", released on July 4, 2018, the Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON) proposed a building e-permitting pilot project to transition the current antiquated Ontario system to a state-of-the-art system.

Some Ontario municipalities have attempted to build their own building e-permitting systems and the results have not been pretty:
- users have complained about a lack of technical support because municipalities have not budgeted for it
- technical support response times are measured in weeks
- each municipality has designed its own user interface and permit applicants have to learn a new interface for each municipality
- where a municipality offers user interface training, it takes applicants weeks to complete the training

From the user's point of view, it is preferable to have one, uniform user e-permitting interface for the entire province. After all, Ontario already has one, common permit application form, as well as one Building Code for the entire province.

Municipal building departments have invested millions of dollars in their individual data bases (such as Amanda) and processes. They would resist any changes that would render their current systems obsolete. Therefore, it would be prudent to design a building e-permitting system that has a common user interface but the system would have "back-end" connections to the existing "legacy" municipal systems.

An e-permitting interface for Ontario has to be capable of handling enormous data files, process financial payments, and maintain security for users and municipalities. The information technology component of the project would likely be outsourced.

Who would administer the Ontario Building E-permitting Interface?

In view of the new Ontario government's need to contain costs, this may be a good time to move the Building and Development Branch's code development, production, and regulatory functions into a designated administrative authority, in order to eliminate these costs from the government's financial books. The Building and Development Branch would become a 3 person policy shop funded by the taxpayer whereas the Building Code Designated Administrative Authority would manage the Ontario Building E-permitting Interface and the code development, production, and administrative functions.

Since annual building permit fees in Ontario are about $200 million, a 1% - 3% surcharge on building permit fees would support a streamlined designated administrative authority and free up some cash for the provincial government that is currently being spent to fund the Building and Development Branch. A 3% permit surcharge would enable the Building Code Designated Administrative Authority to produce and distribute the electronic version of the entire 2-volume Ontario Building Code for **FREE** to all college and university students, designers, builders, and anyone else who wants one.

Richard Lyall, RESCON President, provided some useful insights about the e-permitting recommendations as follows:

"This is low-hanging fruit for Premier Doug Ford and the new Ontario government. One of their platform planks was to cut red tape to help industry thrive – we recommend they start here."

This article appeared originally in the CodeNews Articles page of the CodeNews.ca website.
You may copy this entire article and share it.
Alek Antoniuk, OAA
CodeNews Consulting Corp., Consulting Architect
106 Montgomery Road, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M9A 3N5
e-mail: alek.antoniuk@codenews.ca
phone: +1-416-856-0241