

STAFF REPORT

Department: Administration

Date: May 20, 2025

Item: Housing Action Plan Update

Recommendation: Be It Resolved That: Council acknowledges and endorses the continued work on the Housing Action Plan as part of the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) project; AND Be It Further Resolved That: Council approves the continued sole sourcing of GIS support from J.L. Richards & Associates Limited for the development and maintenance of the Town of Espanola's GIS system as outlined in this report for 2025; AND THAT: Council adopt the proposed cloud-based e-permitting system with PSD Citywide's solution for a one time set-up cost of \$57,900 (HAF funded).

Background: In August 2023, Council approved the Housing Action Plan in preparation for an application to CMHC's Housing Accelerator Fund. On its second attempt and with some updates to the plan to reflect evolving realities given that the first application and second application were one year apart, the Town was successful. This report serves to update Council on the work associated with the Housing Accelerator Fund and in relation, the Town's Housing Action Plan. This report also seeks certain approvals pursuant to the Procurement of Goods Policy.

Analysis: Since the implementation of the Town's Housing Action Plan in 2023, the Town has seen exponential growth in residential units. This growth is primarily due to a continued increase in interest for housing in our region both for folks working in or looking to join northeastern Ontario's labour market, starting young families, and also those looking for a nice place to settle for retirement given the full suite of services, programming and retail amenities Espanola has to offer. This growth is also in large part thanks to the considerable efforts of local developers who have made significant investments in their private properties in the Town as well as Real Estate Brokers who play a huge part in promoting our region as a wonderful place to live and do business. The Town Council and Staff are extremely grateful to all of these stakeholders for their part in the community's growth.

For the Town's part, it has attracted development through its Community Improvement Plan incentives, lack of development charges, strategic and thorough Building, Planning, Environmental Services, Economic Development and Public Works staff efforts – always looking for ways to better our standards of service while keeping the impact on the municipal levy in mind, and through the implementation of strategic



housing objectives that guide Council and Staff's approach to supporting development from concept to construction. For 2023 and 2024 combined, the Town permitted the development of 43 new residential units. The Town has established an eager objective of 100 new units over the next three-year period and is on pace to achieve this target with projects in the works for 2025, 2026 and 2027.

The Town's role in catalyzing development will be through the implementation of its Housing Action Plan and also through infrastructure investment both past and future to ensure the Town has the capacity to absorb these new households. Leading up to 2024, the Town invested in the replacement of its Trunk Watermain, investing \$4,210,226 as part of an approximately \$13.3 million dollar project with the remainder covered through grants. The Town invested an initial \$111,520 for a water and sewer capacity assessment to establish baselines and received a total contribution of \$20,000 from two private developers for that project who also required similar information to move forward with their projects. This means future developers will have only to pay a small amount to have waste volumes expected from their developments measured within our models to determine that the Town has the continued capacity. Capacity at this time is sufficient to achieve our housing goals. Finally, the Town has nearly finished the redevelopment of Centre Street for an expected total investment of approximately \$6.6 million as part of a combined project value of approximately \$23 million including all five phases to ensure the Town's main thoroughfare is in good condition to support increased traffic, water and sewer demands as well as to welcome tourists and commercial activity. The Town is very fortunate that sizeable portions of the above mentioned projects were funded by the Provincial and Federal Government. With these significant projects complete, the Town can focus its efforts on replenishing capital reserves to advance its Asset Management Plan which will require considerable work on existing roads, water and sewer while seeking grants for this work and balancing the need for expansion to support new growth. As mentioned, the Town has invested nearly \$84,000 since 2019 and is investing approximately \$529,000 over the next 5 years through its incremental tax relief grant under the Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to support residential development (this program has been paused given the sizeable investment already committed) and continues to provide funding through the CIP up to \$25,000 per year for various grants under the program for commercial and residential development.

Well supported by these foundational achievements and investments to date, the following summary of our work on the Housing Action Plan initiatives and planned work provides the roadmap to achieve our target of 100 new units by the end of 2028. The implementation of this plan is a collaborative effort led by a team of managers including the CAO/Clerk, Treasurer, Deputy Clerk, Chief Building Official, Manager of Environmental Services and Special Projects and the Manager of Economic Development and Regional Transit. All senior managers also play a role in supporting this broad strategy in many different ways, making this a very collaborative and corporate wide opportunity.

1. Increasing Housing Density

Led by the Deputy Clerk and the CAO/Clerk, this objective is being primarily accomplished through the Zoning Bylaw Housekeeping Amendment that is being considered in the same evening that this report is being presented as well as an upcoming Official Plan Amendment. Updating our Zoning Bylaw to align it with the new planning legislation and allowing for increased flexibility on the format of housing types in the R1 Zone will help to ensure that planned development and future development can proceed more quickly. The second part of this initiative involves the Town's Official Plan. A scoped review of the Official Plan to expand the urban service boundary of the Town to the south of the Queensway Corridor is currently underway and is expected to come to Council for approval in the summer. Consulting fees for external support from the Town's long standing Planning Consultant, J.L. Richards and Associates, associated with this work are being covered by the Housing Accelerator Fund. These amendments will not only assist in speeding up development in the south part of Town, but will also save developers significant dollars that would have been needed to undertake scoped reviews of the Town's Official Plan to accommodate their projects. As part of this review of the OP, another Zoning Bylaw Amendment will also be presented to reflect the redesignation of lands from Rural to Residential. Consent applications and/or Plans of Subdivision would still be required by property owners to move projects forward.

2. Supporting Housing with Digital Tools

As outlined in the Housing Action Plan, this initiative is primarily about continuing the development of the Town's GIS to support development, and modernizing Building Department processes to create efficiencies internally and for applicants. This initiative is being collaboratively led by the Treasurer, Chief Building Official and CAO/Clerk.

Geographical Information System (GIS)

A municipality's investment in Geographic Information System (GIS) technology significantly enhances data-driven governance, optimizes resources, and fosters sustainable community development. More specifically, GIS provides spatial analysis and visualization capabilities that aid decision makers in optimizing land use planning, infrastructure development, asset management and environmental management. GIS accurately maps and monitors municipal assets such as roads, water supplies, and public facilities, assisting in their maintenance and management. Providing public access to GIS maps and data, municipalities can enhance community engagement and transparency, allowing citizens to access land use plans, zoning information, and infrastructure details. In the future, GIS could also help emergency services to map critical points such as fire hydrants, shelters, and hazard areas, supporting effective response and disaster management strategies.



Many municipalities have had Geographic Information Systems (GIS) since the early 2000's. The Town of Espanola began developing its GIS system in 2022 and has since launched a public facing tool that has been well utilized to access property and land-use planning information via the Town's website. This tool was demonstrated to Council at that time and as part of the Council orientation program in 2023. Since that time, staff and J.L. Richards and Associates have been working on a plan to capture the Town's linear infrastructure in the GIS to provide tools to move away from reliance on paper maps that can often be inaccurate or lack information for decision making. Coincidentally, there have been needs or overlap in GIS technology over the years. Going back to 2017, the Public Works Department and Clerk's Office had identified that their cemetery software needed to be modernized. Due to the pandemic and other administrative challenges, no new solutions were undertaken until the Planning initiative of introducing ESRI (ARC GIS) services to the Town in 2022. Under the leadership of the Administrative Coordinator in Public Works, J.L. Richards and Associates has been working on developing a layer on the centralized GIS for Cemetery use. GIS provides precise spatial mapping of cemetery plots, allowing for effective inventory management and easy identification of available plots. It facilitates the digital recording of plot ownership and occupancy, streamlining plot sales and transfers. In parallel, the Town's asset management software does also have integration with GIS. This has been in place prior to 2016. Though this functionality has not been fully utilized, we have been incurring minor costs. Integrating data from various sources into a centralized GIS platform ensures all information is readily available to municipal staff and stakeholders and that there is less overlap in software solutions.

Financially, the continued work on the GIS is budgeted for from modernization funds in reserve received by the Province as well as the Housing Accelerator Fund as relates to the linear infrastructure. The recommendation from staff with this report is to support the continued sole-sourcing of J.L. Richards and Associates to continue this work given their long history of support for the Town in Planning and the initial development of the GIS. Investments in GIS planned for 2025 which were already approved as part of the annual budget include: \$24,500 for the Linear Infrastructure Project, \$15,000 for the continuation of the Cemetery Project, and up to \$10,000 as part of the regular annual maintenance of the system (keeping property and planning information and layers up to date given significant changes underway, adding any new information...etc.).

Building Department E-Permitting Software and Technology

Since 2015, the Building Department has been utilizing icity(Vadim) to process building permit applications. The Department has been considering new systems in the last 3-5 years due to the efficiencies associated with online services and customer portal capabilities. Initially hampered by budget constraints, the e-permitting initiative is now viable thanks to the Housing Accelerator Fund grant. This program will streamline permit processes, which aligns with the Town's Strategic Housing priority and was identified in the Housing Action Plan approved by Council in August of 2023. Three quotes were received and the Chief Building Official in



collaboration with the Treasurer have determined that PSD Citywide is the most suitable option and will have a lower long-term cost to the Town when compared to other quotes received. PSD Citywide is already utilized as the Town's asset management software which will also offer some familiarity and greater ability for integration. As the recommendation to Council states, there is a one time cost of \$57,900 for this software implementation. The annual cost of the software is estimated at \$12,500. The recommendation to Council this evening is pursuant to the Town's Procurement Policy for one-time purchases exceeding \$25,000.

Other quotes received included one similar cost over a three year period to PSD Citywide with a difference of only a few hundred dollars and the other a cost that was more than double.

In addition, the Building Department is in the process of sourcing additional technological equipment such as I-Pads, Displays and in-vehicle printing to allow staff to conduct more business remotely on building sites and streamline plans review. These purchases are budgeted for under the Housing Accelerator Fund.

Property and Building Document Digitization

In previous years, the Town has explored digitizing some of its existing stock of documents to assist in putting in place processes to move the Town toward operations that rely less on paper. The priority and pilot area was established to be the Property Files and Building Department files as this aligns well with our other digitization initiatives to support housing. Moving forward with this phased approach is now possible with the Housing Accelerator Fund. The Treasurer is currently seeking additional quotes for the digitization and engaged in discussions with the Deputy Clerk, Chief Building Official and CAO/Clerk to determine the best digital database to house these documents in moving forward. Many of these considerations are interrelated with the other software mentioned above to ensure we maximize use of existing or future software and avoid duplication. Under the Procurement of Goods Policy a staff report to Council will be forthcoming before proceeding as it is expected that the digitization of files will have a cost of more than \$25,000.

3. Implementing a Climate Adaptability Plan

Under the leadership of the Manager of Environmental Services and Special Projects, a request for proposals for a consultant to undertake the development of this plan has been posted. It is expected work associated with this initiative will be completed by the end of 2025.

4. Developing a Land Utilization Strategy

Being led by the CAO/Clerk, work on this initiative has been ongoing through the development of various grant funding applications to the Province to develop municipally owned land due to tight deadlines. We have not yet been successful, with namely two consecutive applications to the Housing Enabling Water Systems Fund.



Despite this, it is expected that a strategy document to be added as an appendix to the Land Acquisition and Disposition Policy will be brought to Council for approval in summer 2025 to fulfill this objective.

5. Developing Partnerships with Housing Providers

This objective has been largely underway in the ongoing discussions between the Town, public sector stakeholders and private developers to see what opportunities are feasible. Success under this objective is expected to be largely tied to upcoming decision making by Council in relation to infrastructure investments that will be prioritized with the majority of the Housing Accelerator Fund grant to meet our housing target. The Town expects to make decisions on these investments and announce them to the public some time in 2025.

Existing Policy: Procurement of Goods Policy, Policy # F17-01325; Housing Action Plan 2023-2027, Town of Espanola Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

Strategic Goal: Housing

Financial Commitment: 2025 GIS: \$49,500 (Modernization Reserve and HAF funded), PSD Citywide Building Module: \$57,900 one-time (HAF funded), annual cost of \$12,500 (HAF funded for 2025, 2026, 2027)

Budgeted: **Yes** ☒ **No** ☐

Implementation: Upon Council Recommendation

Prepared By: Joseph Burke, CAO/Clerk and Julie Bouthillette, Treasurer

Department Manager: N/A

CAO/Clerk: Joseph Burke

Approval of Recommendation: **Yes** ☒ **No** ☐

Comments: