

# **Municipal InNOVAward Application**

## **Executive Summary**

The Development Liaison Group (DLG) is a committee which has created an unprecedented partnership between the private and public sectors, including representatives from the following organizations:

- Nova Scotia Home Builder's Association
- Halifax Regional Municipality
- Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Labour
- Urban Development Institute
- Halifax Regional Water Commission
- Nova Scotia Power

The committee's focus is on improving service to their common clients, all citizens who own or occupy buildings.

## **Innovation Description**

### **Reason for the Innovation**

HRM development approvals staff were continually being criticised for failing to meet industry and public expectations relative to the review and approval of Permit Applications. This caused the relationship between industry and staff to be strained, creating an "adversarial" atmosphere rather than one of "common purpose".

The primary reason for the creation of the Development Liaison Group was to explore ways to close the gap between HRM's service delivery standards and the Development Industry's service expectations.

The DLG has evolved into a progressive, highly effective, and action oriented committee dedicated to improving efficiencies in both services and products delivered to the citizens of HRM.

### **Description of the Innovation and Challenges**

The committee was convened with an initial focus on reducing review and approval time frames. A great deal of time during the early meetings was spent "pointing fingers" and "laying blame" for the problems with the approval process. Overcoming this was the first, and arguably the greatest challenge which had to be faced. Eventually professional and respectful relationships were built. These relationships now serve as the foundation for the ongoing positive work of the DLG. The committee established formal Terms of Reference (attached) which ensure the focus remains on their "common clients", the owners and users of buildings in the HRM.

The first achievement of the DLG was the development of a “Complete Application Package” for Low Density Residential Permit Applications. This included the following significant changes:

- < Established what information MUST be included to constitute a “complete” application;
- < Agreement on MAXIMUM review times;
- < Establishment of formal communication methods;

These changes resulted in a reduction in approval times from 21 days or more, to under 5 days. This improvement in customer service was the direct result of an open and collaborative approach to problem solving. The committee identified “pressure points”, brain stormed on solutions, and then implemented the solutions within their respective representative groups.

Since this early success, the DLG has been instrumental in initiating, implementing and/or participating in the following initiatives:

- , Municipal Service Standard review processes;
- , Capitol Cost Charges implementation;
- , Smooth implementation of regulatory changes such as:
  - Civic Address Bylaw
  - Provincial Building Regulation Amendments
  - Certification process for private property civil works
- , Multi-Unit Residential, Industrial, Commercial, and Institutional permit process improvements (MICI Application Guide)
- , Planning Application guidelines
- , Blasting By-law review

#### Award Criteria

The creation of the Development Liaison Group has dramatically changed the traditional relationships between government regulators and the private sector. Taking an open and collaborative approach to problem solving, while maintaining focus on citizen needs has created a lasting and effective private/public partnership.

With it’s continual focus on the needs of the clients, the citizens have benefited from cost savings due to reduced time frames in obtaining development approvals (time is money). In addition, the focus on improving efficiencies has made the Public Sector partners more effective. These efficiencies have reduced the need for additional resources and provided for the assignment of resources to other public services.

The DLG continues to work towards improving services through the regular monthly meetings and sub-committee meetings which bring a greater focus to specific issues. Some of the current issues and initiatives of the DLG are:

- , Provincial Storm Water Approval Process
- , Performance Securities for Subdivision Developments
- , Subdivision By-law review
- , Residential Sprinkler Committee
- , Underground Services Review

# Terms of Reference

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## Development Liaison Group

- Mandate:** The Development Liaison Group develops and maintains business processes, business practices, and legislation which facilitate the design and construction of safe, affordable development throughout Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), and focuses on the impact to our “common clients”, the owners and users of buildings.
- Guiding Principles:**
- Client Focus:* All participants maintain a focus on the impact of processes, practices, and legislation, on our “common clients”, the owners and users of buildings.
  - Clarity:* ensure industry know the processes; and HRM staff and industry know their roles and responsibilities
  - Efficiency:* realize maximum benefit with minimal resources
  - Effectiveness:* provide timely responses and approvals with a high degree of customer service
  - Accountability:* identify what is expected from HRM staff and Industry
  - Consistency & Fairness:* in terms of approach, process and practice used throughout HRM
- Responsibilities:**
- The Development Liaison Group shall have the following responsibilities:
- provide leadership, promoting industry and public awareness; education
  - identify issues and actions on development related matters
  - provide advice to municipal staff regarding business practices, legislation and regulations of HRM, other agencies and other levels of government
  - liaise with and facilitate the transfer of information to and from the industry group at large
- Membership:**
- The group will consist of:
- Subdivision/Land Use Manager
  - Permits/Inspections Manager
  - Development Engineering Manager
  - Administrative Assistant
  - 1 representative from Halifax Regional Water Commission
  - 2 representative from NS Department of Environment & Labour
  - 4 representatives of the NS Home Builders Association (NSHBA) appointed on an annual basis by the executive. The 4 representatives will consist of a Board member of Central Nova and 3 others, 1 of which is a builder. The executive has the discretion to change the representatives at any time during the term.
  - 4 representatives of the Urban Development Institute (UDI) being a Board member and 3 others. The executive has the discretion to change the representatives at any time during the term.
  - 1 representative from Nova Scotia Power
- Chair**
- The Subdivision/Land Use Manager will be the chair.
- Administrative:**
- Meetings will be held the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of every month, from 2pm to 4pm at West End Mall, Halifax, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee. Any additional meetings required will be scheduled as needed. Notice of meetings, agenda's and related information will be circulated to the group by the Administrative Assistant one week in advance of the meeting. Minutes from the meetings will be circulated to group members only.