



## STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

### **Guidelines for the Placement of Utility Infrastructure in Association with New Developments to Limit its Visual Impacts**

<b>Date:</b>	August 14, 2007
<b>To:</b>	Planning & Growth Management Committee
<b>From:</b>	Richard Butts, Deputy City Manager
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	PGM07016

#### **SUMMARY**

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In order to provide for a consistent, city-wide approach to ensure that the placement of utilities installed in conjunction with new developments minimizes their visual impacts, it is recommended that an inter-divisional team, chaired by City Planning and Technical Services Divisions, be created. The team, consisting of key staff from several divisions who are involved in the review of development and utility permit applications, will explore and evaluate options for installing utility plants that would minimize their visual impacts and consult with the utility companies to review legislative and safety considerations governing the installation of utility plants; and then report back to City Council with a set of Utility Placement Guidelines and an implementation strategy for use across the City.

Until such time as the guidelines and an implementation strategy have been developed and approved by Council, it is recommended that the landscape plans submitted with site plan applications include both the existing and proposed public utilities plans for review by staff.

With respect to utilities installed to service new subdivisions, the City's standard subdivision agreement requires developers to submit, for staff review and approval, composite utility plans showing the location of all proposed utility systems. This provides staff with the means to control or limit the visual impacts that utilities may have when installed to service subdivision developments. This level of subdivision control will be

enhanced by the development of the Utility Placement Guidelines recommended in this report which aim to extend the City's influence to the broader public realm by taking into consideration the visual impacts of utilities on the quality of our streets, parks and open spaces.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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### **The Deputy City Manager recommends that:**

1. An inter-divisional team, chaired by City Planning and Technical Services Divisions and consisting of key staff involved with the review of development applications and boulevard utility permit applications, be created to:
  - a. identify and evaluate options for the installation of development-related utility plants that would minimize their visual impacts from streets, parks and open spaces;
  - b. consult with utility companies on the preferred location for development-related utility plants that balance their legislative and safety considerations with City policy;
  - c. report back to City Council with a set of Utility Placement Guidelines for use across the City, and
  - d. recommend an implementation procedure that will ensure the guidelines are implemented efficiently, consistently and effectively.
2. That the Technical Services Division review current practices and find ways to implement the Utility Placement Guidelines for changes to utility plants that occur in the absence of new development.
3. Until such time as the Utility Placement Guidelines have been developed and approved by Council, it is recommended that landscape plans submitted as part of site plan applications be required to include the existing and proposed utilities plans to facilitate the review of utility placement by staff.

### **Financial Impact**

There are no financial impacts resulting from the adoption of this report. The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agree with the financial impact information.

## DECISION HISTORY

This report responds to Councillor Milczyn's request at the Planning and Growth Committee meeting of January 18, 2007 to the Acting Deputy City Manager to report on:

- a) the development of guidelines for the location of utility infrastructure on public and private property in new developments to limit its visual impacts on private and public property; and,
- b) The success of requiring utility corridor plans in subdivision agreements and other appropriate applications.

## COMMENTS

### Utility Placement Guidelines

Toronto's Official Plan speaks clearly to the relationship that utilities within the public boulevard are to have in regard to the quality of the pedestrian and street tree environment: Section 3.3.1 - 6 "*Sidewalks and boulevards will be designed to provide safe, attractive, interesting and comfortable spaces for pedestrians by..... locating and designing utilities within streets, within buildings or underground, in a manner that will minimize negative impacts on the natural pedestrian and visual environment and enable the planting and growth of trees to maturity.*"

The Official Plan goes further to discuss utilities on development sites: 3.1.2 2 "*New development will locate and organize utilities to minimize their impact on the property, and on surrounding properties to improve the safety and attractiveness of adjacent streets, parks and open spaces.*"

Current standards for utility plant and utility placement vary from district to district in the City as well as from utility to utility. In general the standard practices for utility plant locations do not conform to the policies of the Official Plan. A walk through any recent development in any part of the City will show the public boulevard and landscaped setbacks along the streets occupied by gas meters, large green hydro transformers, phone and cable pedestals and a host of other utility plants. Frequently, areas planned and secured in site plans for street trees have been lost or given over during the implementation process to provide space for the placement of utilities.

These unfortunate visual impacts and loss of planting areas are the result of many factors, including the lack of agreed-upon, city-wide guidelines for the placement of utility plants that can be formally incorporated into the development approval process and consistently applied by staff across the City with Council's full support. Reaching agreement on such guidelines will not be an easy task as there are competing interests at stake as well as physical, cost and safety limitations on where utilities can be placed. However, it is

important to identify the common ground on which the guidelines can be developed if the City's agenda for the public realm is to be advanced.

The need to ensure the safe operation of each utility is not at question. Utilities are a fundamental part of the working of the city and have the legislative right to be within the right of way.

In order to provide for a consistent, city-wide approach to the location of utility plants that are installed as part of a new development, it is recommended that an inter-divisional team, chaired by City Planning and Technical Services Divisions be created to explore and evaluate options for the placement of utility plants that would minimize their visual impacts. The team would consist of key staff involved in the review of development and boulevard utility permit applications. They would consult with the utility companies to review legislative, cost and safety considerations governing the installation of utility plants and negotiate appropriate locations and forms for utility plants in the various development situations that meet both utility concerns and City built-form policies.

### Implementation

Along with the proposed guidelines, a review of the implementation process will be undertaken to ensure that implementation of the guidelines will be efficient and effective. Section 114 of the new City of Toronto Act allows the City of Toronto to secure streetscape improvements in the boulevard adjacent to development. This gives legal force to a process which the City has practiced for many years. Staff will review how these Section 114 powers may affect the way boulevard improvements are reviewed as a part of development proposals.

### Interim Condition

*Building Toronto Together – A Development Guide, Appendix 4 (Development Guide)* provides a list of drawings and plans that need to be submitted with a site plan control application. Included in that list of required drawings is a public utilities plan which is to show all existing and proposed utilities on the site and the adjacent road right-of-way.

Currently, many site plan applications do not provide this information on the site plan. Tree locations, final utility locations and other details of the public boulevard are drawn on the plan and then, at times changed during the boulevard permit stage. In the interim, until proper guidelines and an appropriate implementation process is approved by Council, site plan applications for all in-fill developments should include plans showing existing and future locations of utility plants within the adjacent public right-of-way.

### Utility Corridors

With respect to Councillor's Milczyn's request relating to requiring composite utility corridor plans in subdivision agreements, the City's standard subdivision agreement contains a clause that requires developers to submit composite utility plans showing all

proposed utility systems to service a new subdivision for review and approval by City staff. This requirement provides staff with the opportunity to limit the visual impacts that utilities may have when installed to service subdivision developments. This level of subdivision control will be enhanced by the development and implementation of the Utility Placement Guidelines recommended in this report taking into consideration the visual impacts of utility plants on the quality of our streets, parks and open spaces.

This report has been prepared with input from staff in Legal Services, City Planning's Urban Design section and Technical Services' Development Engineering and Design & Construction sections.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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