

Municipal Licensing and Standards
Policy and Strategic Support

Referral of Item 2024.SE5.2

Service Excellence Committee

November 25, 2024

Issue:

- On September 6th, 2024 ([2024.SE5.2](#)), the Service Excellence Committee (SEC) directed Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS) to prepare a briefing note for members of Council reviewing MLS and 311 customer service delivery processes, including:
 - A. Discrepancies between Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA) provided by 311 and Municipal Licensing and Standards.
 - B. Lack of communication regarding case assignments and investigation outcomes from Municipal Licensing and Standards; and challenges in contacting Municipal Licensing and Standards to obtain case updates.
 - C. Instances of cases being closed without notifying the complainant.
- This briefing note summarizes the issues noted by SEC, provides background on each issue, actions taken to-date, and next steps.

Key Points:

- MLS responds to a wide range of service requests (SR) to resolve bylaw issues, improve community safety, and reduce public nuisances. Using a priority response model, MLS prioritizes more urgent SRs with health and safety concerns. This model sets service standards within which complainants should expect a first communication.
- MLS received 144,192 SRs in 2023 (accounting for approximately 27% of City-wide SRs).
- MLS and the Customer Experience Division (CXD), including the 311 team, have a shared commitment to continuous improvement, and regularly meet to identify enhancements to customer service delivery processes, including improving communication and processes around case updates, investigation outcomes, and notifying a complainant on cases being closed.

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Summary of Issues and Actions:

A. Discrepancies between ETAs provided by 311 and MLS

Issue:

- 311 provides both an “expected service delivery date/time” and an “estimated resolution timeframe” when an SR is registered. MLS has service standard thresholds (when first contact is made) that may differ from the timeline provided by 311.

Background:

- The “expected service delivery date/time” is a static title used by 311 for all divisions integrated with 311 that outlines a specific date and time for service delivery (based on the service standard for each SR), however it may not accurately reflect the actual delivery/completion date of a full investigation. MLS’ service standards identify when a complainant should expect a first communication from staff, which is a first step before opening an investigation.
- The “estimated resolution timeframe” uses the same calculation as the expected service delivery date/time to note the number of days it will take for staff to respond. Recently, changes have been made to 311’s messaging to clarify that MLS assesses and investigates service requests on a priority basis depending on the issue (for example, in 1, 5 or 10 days for noise complaints).

Actions Taken:

- Prior to [2024.SE5.2](#), MLS worked internally and with 311 to implement the following process changes for investigations related to property standards and other rental housing standards (which have been in effect since October 2024):
 - SRs that are received from 311 and created in MLS’ backend system will automatically have a priority value based on the priority response model determined by MLS and programmed by 311 for each work type or combination of work type and reflected in the “estimated resolution timeframe” field.
 - MLS staff can update the assigned priority number if required during review and any priority update will be communicated to the complainant.
 - In addition, if a complainant submits a SR with 311 and indicates that it is an emergency, the priority level will automatically be set to the highest priority. This is then confirmed by staff upon intake.
 - An automated message is provided to complainants after submitting an SR, so complainants have a clearer idea of when they can expect a first response and additional information on what happens after an SR is submitted.

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- Updated messaging clarifies that SRs are assessed and investigated on a priority basis and with a relevant service standard target.

Next Steps:

- MLS will work to expand the action noted above to other service lines within the Division, including for issues related to public spaces and business licensing enforcement.
- 311 will identify opportunities to define delivery and resolution timeframes more clearly in public communications to provide clarity to complainants.
- MLS will regularly review the information provided to 311 and will continue to respond to inconsistencies on response times between MLS and 311 as they arise.

B. Communication gaps on case assignments, status updates and outcomes

Issue:

- Complainants expect frequent updates on case assignments and investigation outcomes from MLS, and have expressed difficulties reaching the City for updates on the status of their case.

Background:

- When creating an SR, complainants can opt-in for email and/or SMS updates through 311. These are generic status messages referencing whether the SR has been initiated, in progress, cancelled, closed, or completed. Alternatively, complainants can call the 311 contact centre to receive a verbal update or use the online portal to check the status of an SR.
 - In most cases, 311 agents must transfer a call to MLS for accurate updates. This is for confidentiality reasons, as investigations consist of sensitive information that should only be viewed by the investigating officer, or those with the authorization.
- Timely communication is the responsibility of the assigned Bylaw Enforcement Officer (BEO), and MLS is committed to providing updates to complainants on the status of their investigation:
 - MLS provides complainants with the BEO's contact information upon initial contact. Communication with complainants is done manually by the assigned BEO when they receive the complaint and make first contact.
 - Complainants are to be updated by a BEO after a site visit, throughout the investigation process, and at the conclusion of an investigation via phone or email. These updates include a report of any findings, next steps, and when an investigation has concluded.
- When an SR requires a response from multiple city divisions, each division is responsible to update their own SR. The complainant and 311 do not have access to

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any new SRs that other divisions create and there is currently no way of linking SRs from different systems together. 311 relies on notes of the investigating division to advise that they have connected with other divisions.

- **Example:** for issues related to sign removal, 311 sends an SR to MLS to investigate if there is a violation. Transportation Services (TS) would remove the sign if over 6 feet and Solid Waste Management Services (SWMS) would remove it if it is under 6 feet. SWMS also removes hate signage daily in the downtown core.
 - There have been cases where the complainant has only been updated on the MLS action, and the removal of the sign is outstanding until TS or SWMS acts, which can be frustrating for complainants if they are not updated on the status of their SR.
- For some SRs, communication to the complainant may be delayed or not possible, such as in cases where investigations may not be conducted (for example, if there is insufficient information), or time is provided for compliance (for example, if a complaint is received for a business operating without a licence and their licence application has been submitted, but not yet approved), or where investigations are affected by other proceedings (for example, Officers are waiting for court proceedings to be completed to provide an update to the complainant).

Actions Taken:

- MLS has worked with 311 to include specific email contacts for enforcement teams and districts in 311 automated emails when new SRs are submitted.

Next Steps:

- MLS will review and update its standard operating procedures to ensure it is clear when BEOs are to contact complainants and provide updates on the status of their investigations.

C. Cases being closed without notification**Issue:**

- Cases are sometimes closed without notification to the complainant, which can cause confusion and uncertainty about how a complaint was resolved.

Background:

- MLS staff may close cases for a variety of reasons, including referral to another division or enforcement agency, resolution prior to an investigation, no bylaw violation was found, compliance was achieved, or the complaint was withdrawn by the complainant.
 - For example, in the case of duplicate SRs for the same issue, the practice is to add the new complainant's information to the existing investigation and cancel the new SR, however this can cause confusion if complainants are not

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provided clear information about what is happening, and why their SR may have been closed.

- If a complainant opts-in for email notifications when they create the SR with 311, they will be notified if an SR has been closed.

Actions Taken:

- Prior to [2024.SE5.2](#), MLS worked internally and with 311 to implement the following process changes for investigations related to property standards and other rental housing standards (which have been in effect since November 2024):
 - Changes to language in the automated 311 emails for SRs that proactively communicate to the complainant the process for duplicate SRs
 - Changes to its standard operating procedures for investigations related to property standards and other rental housing standards that staff should contact the complainant where there is a pre-existing SR for a property under investigation, and before closing the file, should advise them that there is a pre-existing file, that their file will be closed, but their contact information will be added to the pre-existing file

Next Steps:

- MLS will work to expand the actions noted above to other service lines within the Division.
- MLS will continue to assess alternative approaches to resolving duplicate SRs.
- MLS and 311 will continue to work together to identify enhancements to customer service delivery processes.

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