



REPORT

Council

Meeting Date: June 17, 2024

FROM: Strategy, Policy and Communications Department
DATE: June 4, 2024
SUBJECT: **ServiceOakville – In Person and Service Channel Trends**
LOCATION:
WARD: Town-wide

Page 1

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report dated June 4, 2024, from the Strategy, Policy and Communications Department be received.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- From January 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024, ServiceOakville responded to the following volume of requests or inquiries across the following channels: 61% by phone, 30% by web/email, and 9% in-person at Town Hall.
- Of the 9% of in-person visits to Town Hall, approximately 90% were handled by ServiceOakville staff, with the majority being payments.
- All departments at Town Hall have staff working on-site to accommodate scheduled in-person appointments, and unscheduled visits when feasible, at the ServiceOakville counter.
- ServiceOakville acts as the single point of customer service access at Town Hall, which aligns with the “One Town, One Window” concept of service delivery first approved by Council in 2008. ServiceOakville handles a variety of requests across all channels on behalf of business areas, in particular those business areas that have consolidated their services with ServiceOakville.

BACKGROUND:

The Customer Service Delivery strategy was approved by Council in January 2008 as a framework for improving access to town services for the community. The strategy is conceptually based on the “One Town, One Window” model of service that focuses on

providing the community with a single point of contact regardless of intake channel to access town services.

ServiceOakville was implemented in 2009 and provided a variety of services to the community. At that time, multiple counters were open throughout Town Hall. In 2014, the large ServiceOakville front counter as we know it today at Town Hall was opened to the public. The size was intended to allow the ability for multiple departments to serve customers from this single location; however, multiple counters throughout Town Hall were still accessible to the public.

In 2019, in-person service at ServiceOakville was more popular than the online services provided at that time. In 2020, following the temporary closure of Town Hall to the public due to COVID-19 restrictions, multiple departments focused efforts on digital service delivery to maintain service. Following the impacts of COVID on in-person service delivery, as well as the launching additional options for online reporting of concerns, there was more uptake for online services from 2020 to 2023.

When COVID restrictions eased and in-person service was again allowed, the ServiceOakville front counter remained open as the single point of in-person contact at Town Hall while most other department counters, with the exception of Clerks and Recreation and Culture, remained closed. This eliminated the way-finding challenges experienced by the public by providing a fully accessible, easily found location to access staff.

According to the town's [2024 Community Satisfaction Survey](#), 79 per cent of residents feel satisfied with their local government, and 89 per cent are satisfied with the quality of services provided by the town. The survey results also highlighted the availability of online services as a primary area for improvement. Work is in progress to implement a broader online governance model and develop a long-term road map to support continuous improvement of online services for customers.

This staff report also references the Citizens First 2023 National Report. Since 1998, the Citizen's First National Report has assessed various aspects of civic life, public services, and government performance, providing an overview of society's current state from the citizen's perspective. Their report offers detailed analyses and statistics on topics such as infrastructure, service delivery, and public safety. The 2023 report is the 10th iteration of the research and highlights several key results related to service delivery across various channels in the municipal sector, including:

- Online services are now the number one choice and will likely remain so for the foreseeable future. Even the telephone channel may be showing signs of fading.
- Seeing online services as convenient and easy are huge drivers of use. Privacy concerns do need to be addressed, as do user experience issues that leave citizens feeling confused.

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- Investments in digital-first service provision will be needed to meet the appetite for online services and information.
 - Services can never be 100 per cent online. There will always be some who do not choose online options even when they are aware of them.
 - Chatbots have a bad reputation, based on people’s past experiences. While a truly interactive AI chatbot could be a game changer, expectations are low, and the difference between “new” chatbots and the old style will need to be made clear. Most people have interacted with chatbots but would not be willing to use them for accessing government services.

Requests Received by ServiceOakville by Channel Type

Figure 1 illustrates the number of requests received by ServiceOakville over the last 15 months across all intake channels. While the focus of this report is on the 15,790 “Walk-in” visits to Town Hall from January 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024, some high-level trends in service delivery across all channels will be highlighted.

Volume of ServiceOakville requests by channel January 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024

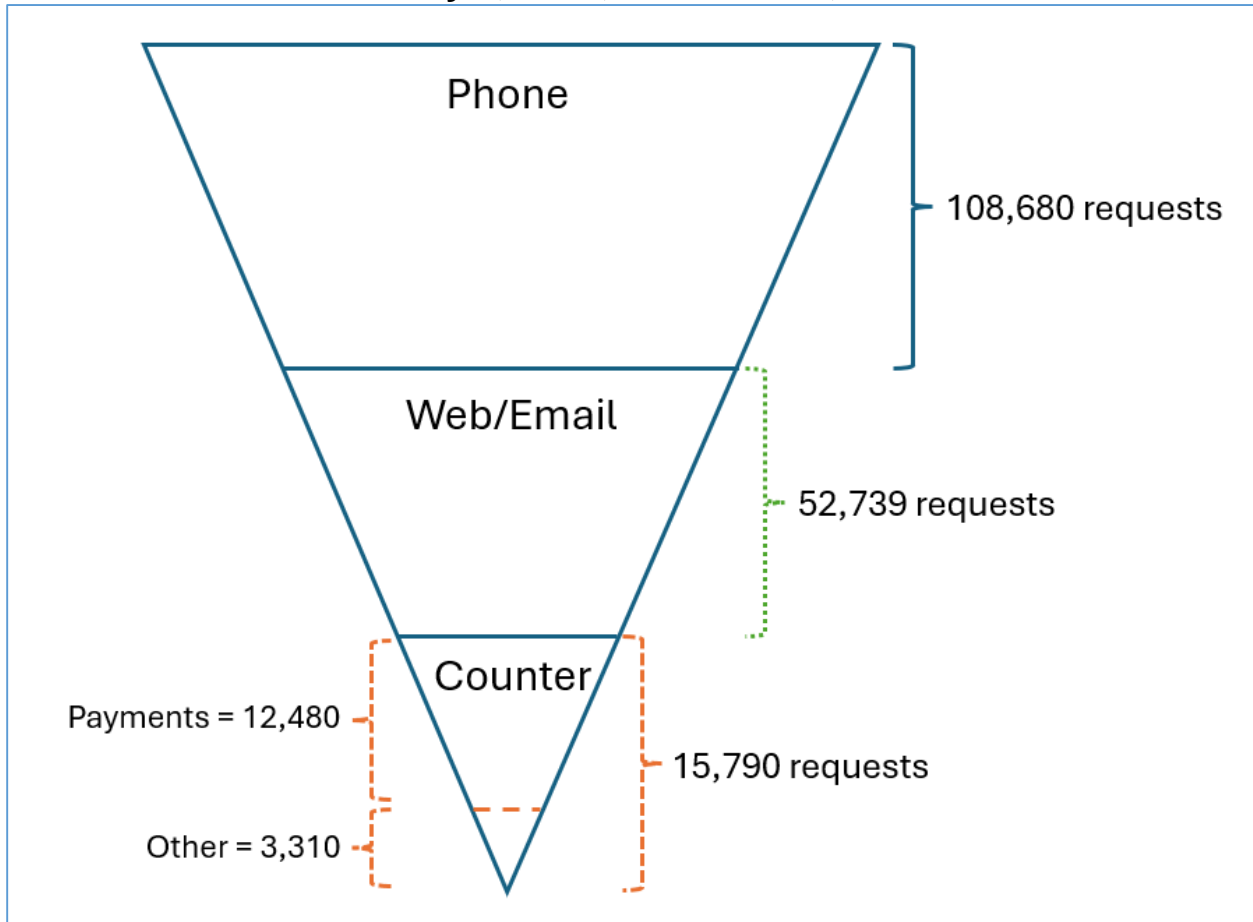


Figure 1: Total Number of Requests by Source, January 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024

Top requests by phone:

- The most frequent phone requests were about property taxes, general inquiries, recreation and culture online accounts, parking ticket review or hearing requests, and business license application issues.

Top requests by email:

- The most frequent email requests were related to property taxes, business license application issues, recreation and culture program information, general town information, and permit inquiries for development engineering and building.

Top requests on web:

- The top web requests were about parking violations, by-law inquiries on lot maintenance and noise, litter or debris issues, and tree pruning requests.

Top requests in person/at the ServiceOakville counter, not related to payments:

- The top walk-in requests were questions about property taxes, picking up or dropping off items, parking ticket reviews, picking up a Halton recycling or compost container, and business license application issues.

Most of the demand for in-person service is to make a payment (See Appendix A, Figure 1 for a detailed breakdown).

- Of the reasons for in-person service demand (See Appendix A, Figure 2 for top counter visit reasons), ServiceOakville staff handle most in their entirety; however, they are limited in responding to specific inquiries related to building or development engineering permits. In these instances, experts in the departments are contacted to attend the counter or, the customer is provided with a means to connect with the staff expert if the appropriate contact is not available to meet in person for an unscheduled visit in the moment.

Meeting with Staff in Person

For staff to provide the most effective service, customers are encouraged to schedule an in-person appointment in advance so that departments can ensure that the proper staff, who have the specific knowledge and expertise needed, are available to meet with them.

While counters in Town Hall other than ServiceOakville are not open for unscheduled visits by the public, the town has a process in place to make it easier for customers to get the service and information they need without having to navigate their way around the building or wait in line. If a customer comes to Town Hall without an appointment, staff at the ServiceOakville counter will do their best to assist by requesting that the appropriate expert staff come to the ServiceOakville counter to meet with the customer.

When this is not possible, for example, if expert staff are in a meeting or dealing with another customer, ServiceOakville will provide the customer with contact information for the department staff, as well as ask that staff to reach out to the customer to discuss their concern or request.

From January 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024, 63 people or 18% of the 345 customers who came into Town Hall for an unscheduled visit for Building, Development Engineering, or Municipal Enforcement Services specifically stated that they wanted to meet with a representative from that area.

In 2023, unscheduled visits were accommodated 11% of the time on average whereas in 2024 this number has increased to an average of 48% of the time. This improvement aligns with the direction that all departments are to have staff on site to accommodate unscheduled visits although specific staff may not be readily available in the moment.

Clerk's and Recreation and Culture Departments

Clerk's now provides service to the public in the G'an-hkwase Meeting Room on the main floor and in the Council Chamber. Clerk's process their own payments and schedule appointments with customers for marriages or signing of documents. If someone has an appointment with Clerk's, they are directed to the dedicated meeting room or to the Council Chamber for a marriage service.

Similarly, when customers are inquiring about services offered by Recreation and Culture, ServiceOakville staff direct them to the Recreation and Culture counter as they also process their own payments and assist with applications and agreements. The Recreation and Culture counter is staffed by customer service representatives Monday through Friday and is equipped with the technology required to meet customer needs.

Enhanced Security at Town Hall

The town recently reviewed and updated its facilities' security plans to maintain a safe work environment for staff and the public. In 2023, Emergency Procedures were updated and communicated to all staff. Continuing these efforts in 2024, staff have reviewed Town Hall's safety plan and implemented several new security measures, including training of the appropriate staff. This includes a visitor check-in process at ServiceOakville, improved wayfinding support and signage, elevator card access, and a new daytime security guard/concierge. These enhancements respond to past incidences, to ensure the safety of staff, Council, and members of the public.

The new daytime security guard/concierge is stationed from Monday to Friday 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. to the north side of the ServiceOakville front counter at Town Hall. The guard will remind visitors to check in with ServiceOakville with details about the purpose of their visit and who they are meeting. The guard has been trained to have friendly, accessible interaction with the public, and be assertive as required. The guard does not pose a barrier or unduly delay visitors who are at Town Hall for events like the Food for Life initiative, those visiting the Clerk's area on the ground level, or for other day-time events.

Staff have been reminded to enter Town Hall through staff entrances, always wear their ID badge, and ask visitors to check in at ServiceOakville, where they will be met by staff, and escorted into staff-only areas of the building. This approach is more effective for customers and ensures they do not attend a service desk that is no longer staffed.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:

Conclusion

The general trend is low demand for in-person service and an increase in demand for online services. The phone remains the most used channel for customers. As of April 30, 2024, in-person service accounted for approximately 3% of over-all customer demand. Email and web provide a combined total of 21% of demand. The phone channel accounts for the remaining 76% of demand.

While it is too early in the town’s digital journey to measure the impact of online services to service delivery, it is anticipated that as the online presence matures, it will become the preferred choice for customers to access town services.

This trend has been broadly observed nationally showing that in-person visits as the main channel for service has dropped from a high of 37% in 2014 to 25% in 2023. This is coupled with a general trend of an increased preference for online services rising from 25% to 31%. (Source: Citizens First 2023 National Report, 2023, p. 21-22). A similar trend has been observed at the town (See Figure 2).

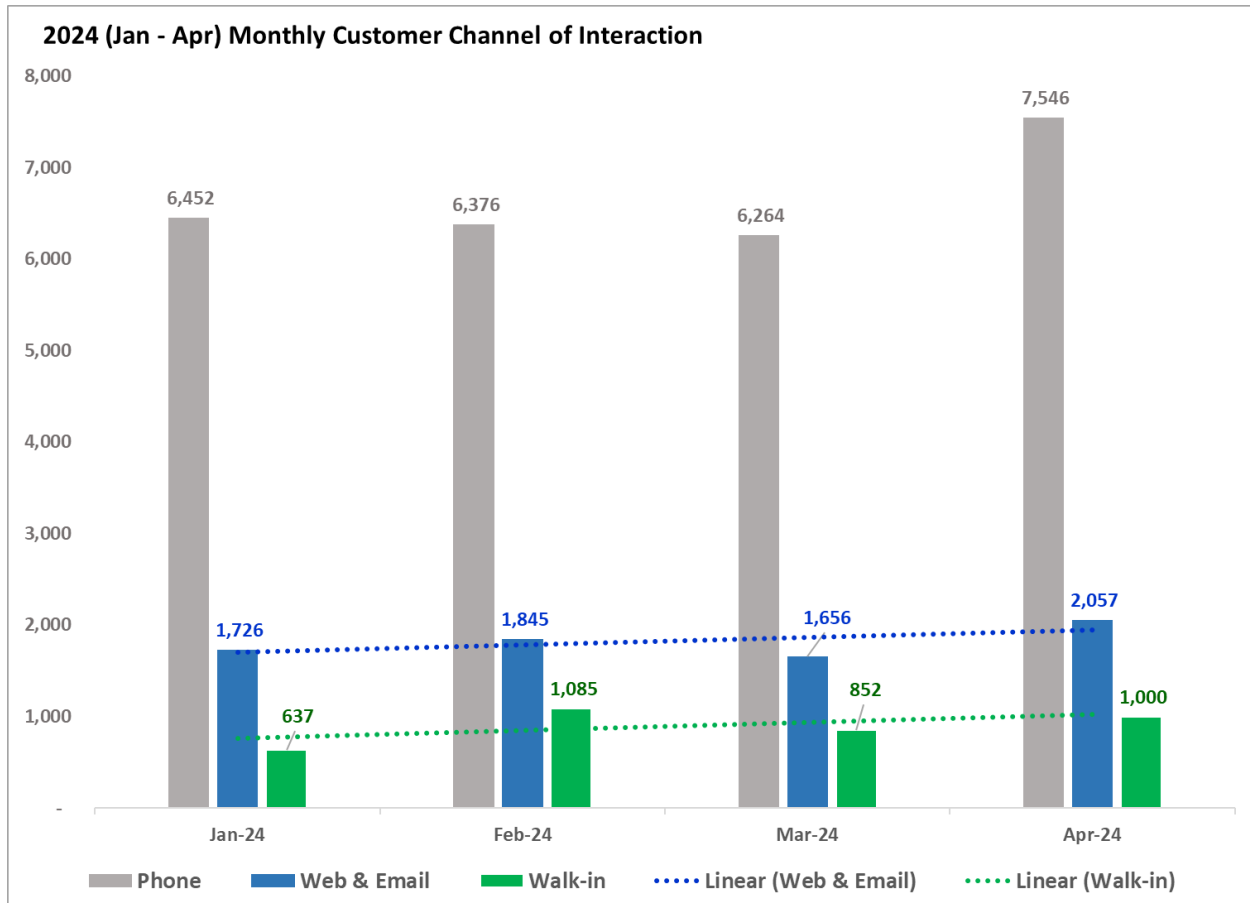


Figure 2: January to April 2024, Monthly Customer Channel of Interaction

Consolidating service delivery to a single point of contact for the community has been the focus of ServiceOakville since the Customer Service Delivery strategy was approved by Council in January 2008. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to digital-first service delivery and away from in-person service delivery. While most town business can be handled virtually or over the phone, staff recognize that there are still times where an in-person meeting with customers is necessary and preferred. As such, departments are responsible for ensuring that staff are available to meet with customers in-person when that is desired. To ensure a successful in-person visit, customers are encouraged to pre-schedule a meeting, when the purpose of their visit requires specialized expertise or relates to a line of business or service that has not been

consolidated with ServiceOakville, such as building and development engineering application reviews, status updates, etc.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

This report provides additional information for the public on in person service delivery at Town Hall.

(B) FINANCIAL

None.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

None.

(D) CORPORATE STRATEGIC GOALS

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal(s) to:

- Accountable Government: Service Excellence
- Community Belonging: Inclusion and Belonging

(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION

There are no climate considerations in this report.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – ServiceOakville Requests by Channel

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Recommended by:

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