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**Subject:** Development Applications Monitoring Report - 2018 Year End

**Report to:** Planning and Economic Development Committee

**Report date:** Wednesday, February 20, 2019

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## Recommendations

1. That Report PDS 3-2019 **BE RECEIVED** for information; and,
2. That a copy of Report PDS 3-2019 **BE CIRCULATED** to Local Area Municipalities, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, Niagara Home Builders Association, Niagara Industrial Association, local Chambers of Commerce and School Boards.

## Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to inform Regional Council of 2018 development application activity in Niagara Region.
- Regional Development Planning and Engineering staff reviewed 718 development applications in 2018.
- Regional Development Planning and Engineering staff attended 548 Pre-Consultation Meetings in 2018.
- The Region received \$1,089,932 in review fees for development applications in 2018 (31% increase over 2017 fees).

## Financial Considerations

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

## Analysis

### Development Applications

Regional Development Services staff reviewed 718 development applications in 2018 representing a minimal 1.6% decrease over the 2017 application total (730). Figure 1 illustrates the number of applications considered by Development Planning and Engineering staff from 2013 to 2018 indicating high development activity levels and a general upward trend plateauing over the past few years. These development applications are circulated to the Region based on Provincial legislation requirements and the existing Memorandum of Understanding between the Region and local area municipalities for planning in Niagara.

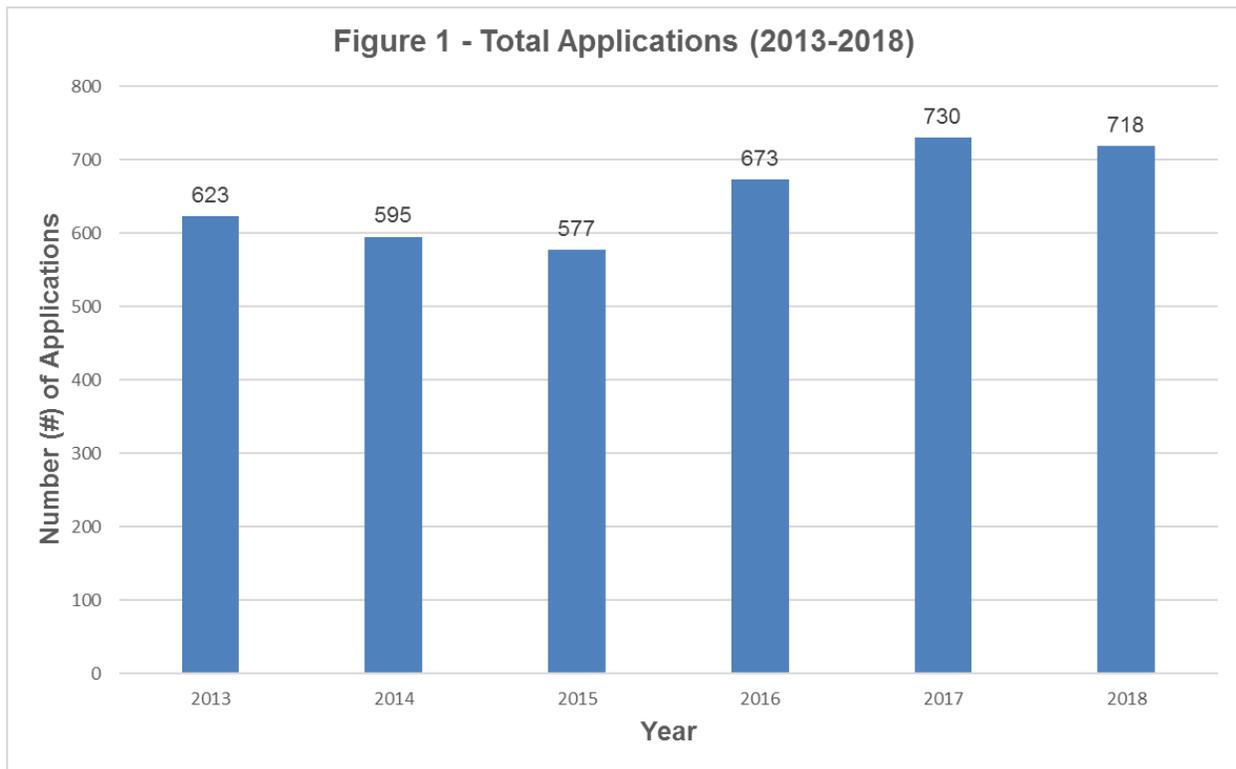
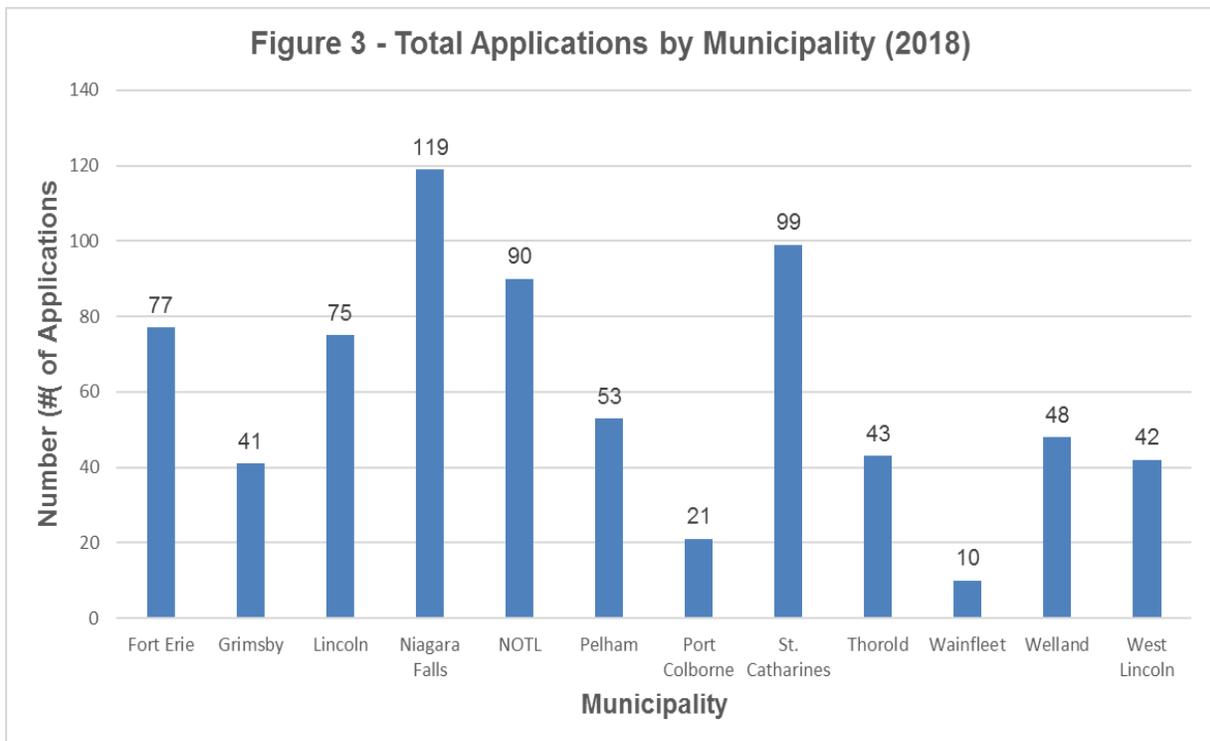
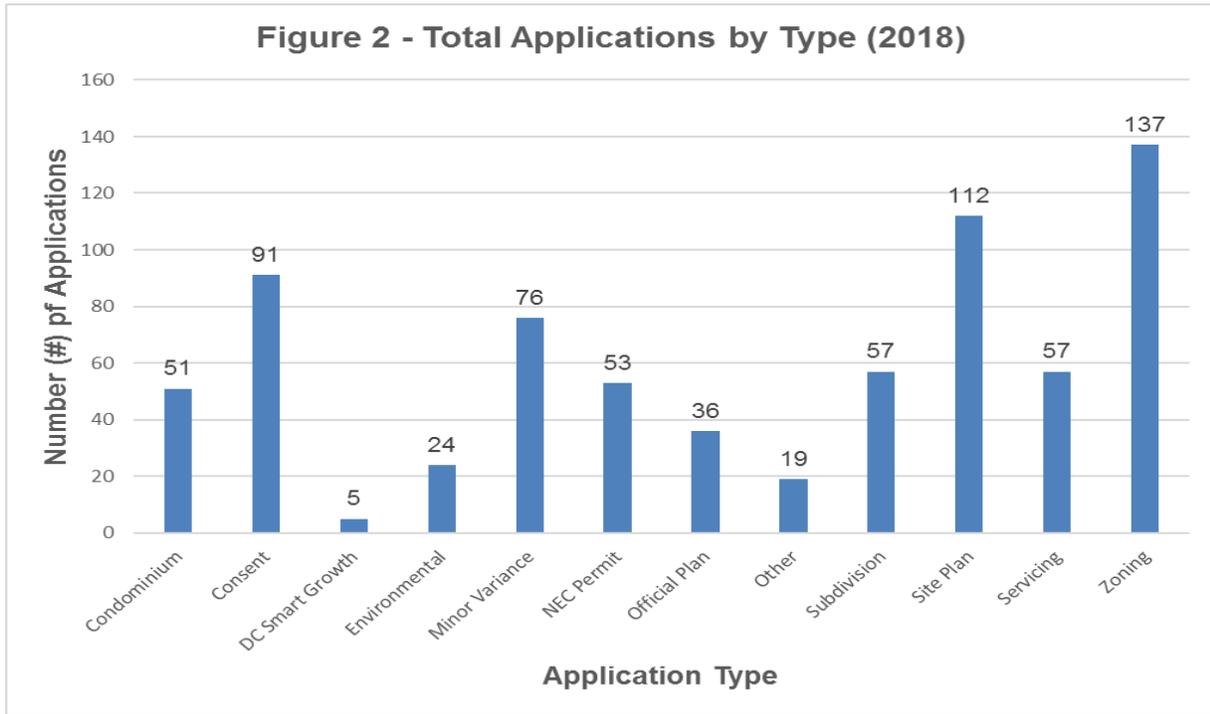


Figure 2 provides the breakdown of the development application types reviewed by Regional staff in 2018. The more complex development proposals often require multiple planning approvals. As an example, subdivision and condominium applications may also need amendments to the municipal Official Plan and Zoning By-law to facilitate the development. The categories with the most applications considered by Regional staff were Zoning By-law amendments (137), followed by Site Plan (112), Consent/ Severance (91), and Minor Variance (76).

The distribution of applications circulated to the Region by local area municipalities during 2018 is shown on Figure 3. This information indicates relatively high levels of development activity in several communities. The municipalities with the most applications in the year were Niagara Falls (119), St. Catharines (99), Niagara-on-the-Lake (90), Fort Erie (77), and Lincoln (75).



## Preconsultation Meetings

Development Services staff are scheduled to attend regular preconsultation meeting sessions two days each month in each local municipal office. These meetings with developers, property owners, local staff and agencies determine complete application submission requirements and assist in the processing of applications. In 2018, Regional staff attended 548 preconsultation meetings which is a 12% decrease compared to the 2017 total (see Figure 4). It is not uncommon for municipalities to experience these reduced numbers (in applications and preconsultation meetings) during a municipal election year. As the number of preconsultation meetings is an indicator of future development applications, Regional staff are expecting that development applications and preconsultation meeting numbers will resume an upward trend for 2019.

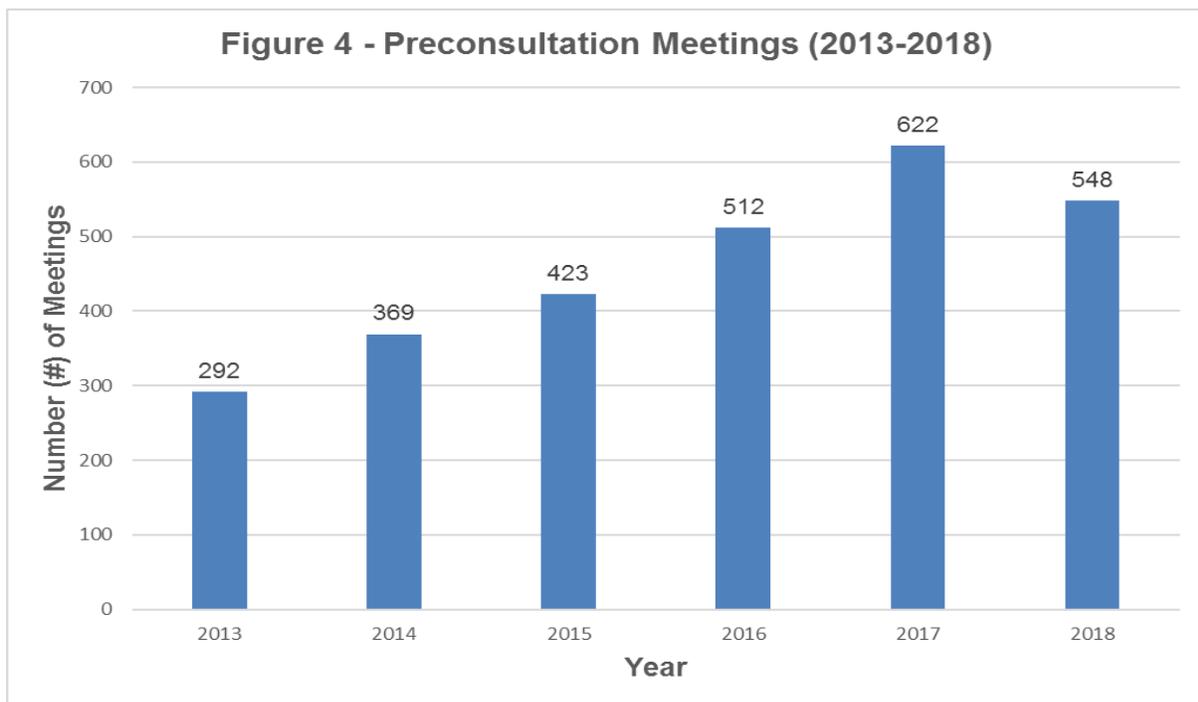
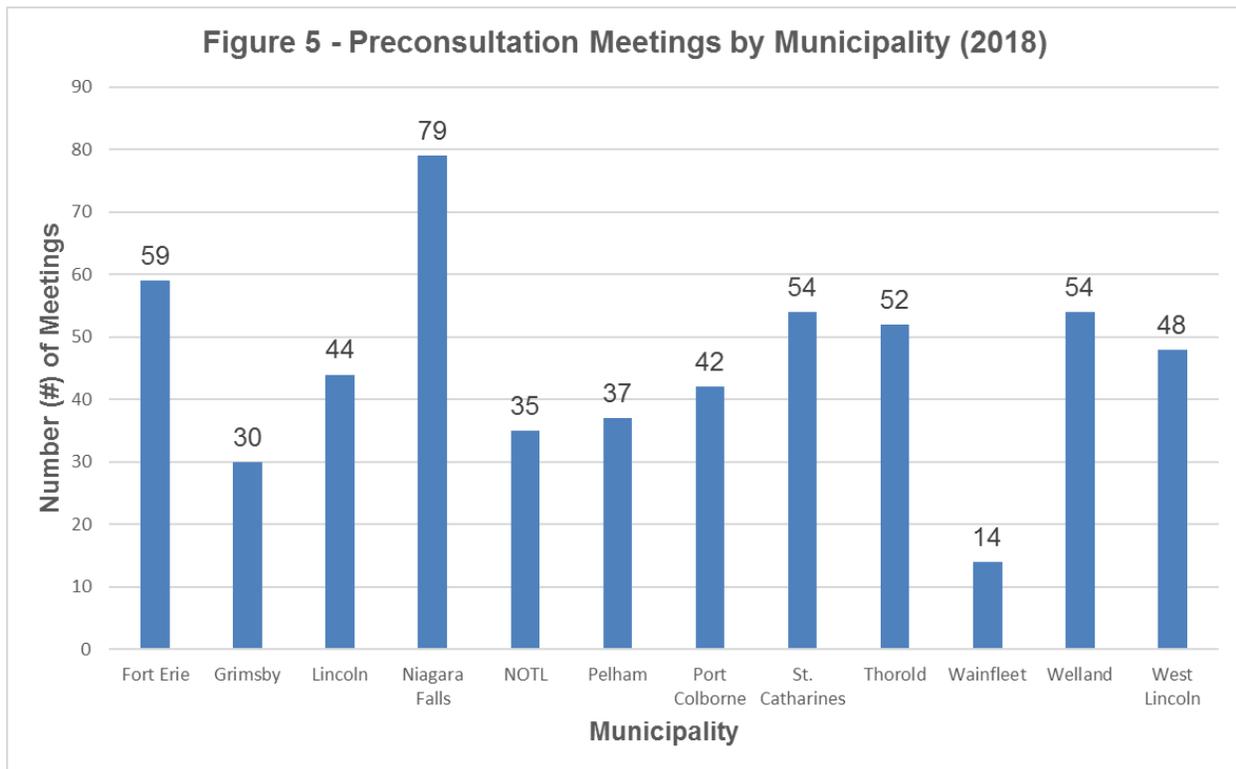
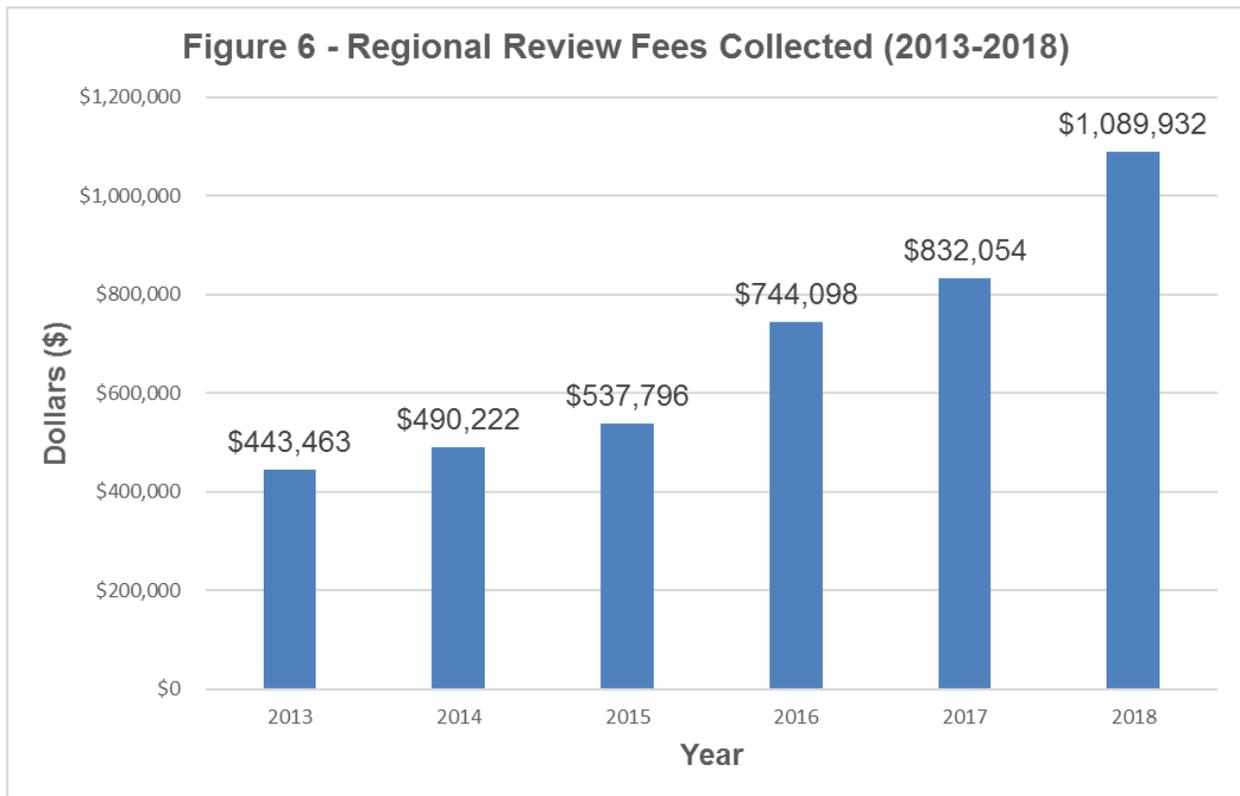


Figure 5 illustrates the number of Preconsultation Meetings by municipality in 2018 that involved Regional staff. The municipalities with the highest levels of preconsultation activity were Niagara Falls (79), followed by Fort Erie (59), St. Catharines and Welland (54 each) and Thorold (52).



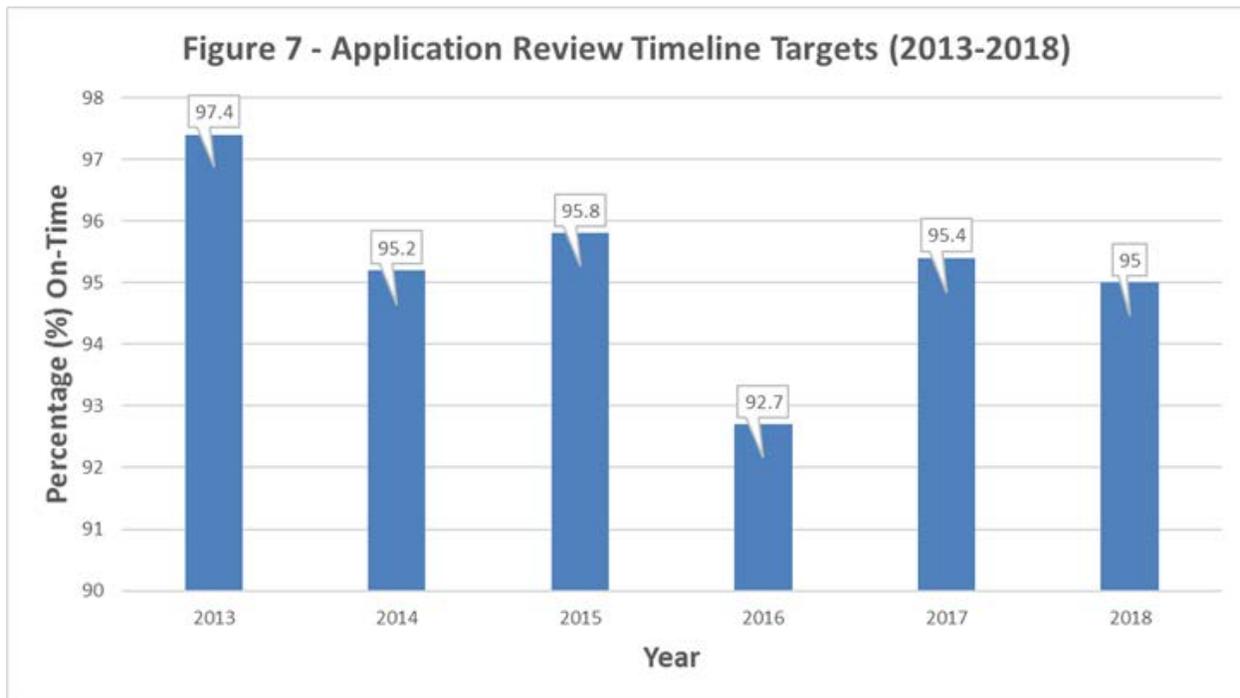
### Regional Review Fees

Regional review fees are intended to offset Regional costs for the development review service. Figure 6 summarizes the fees collected between 2013 and 2018 for the Regional review of development applications. The 2018 total of \$1,089,932 represents an increase of 31% over 2017. The 31% increase is due to a number of large development applications (i.e. Prudhommes Landing Subdivision); the increase in our review fee schedule; and the addition of Urban Design and Stormwater Management Reviews.



### Application Review Timelines

Timeline response targets for municipal and agency files vary according to application type (complexity) and are established by Planning Act regulations and the current Memorandum of Understanding between the Region and the local area municipalities. The Region consults with municipal staff to establish local priorities and in several cases, extensions were granted to initial comment periods. This arrangement allowed for the resolution of issues, submission of additional information where required and addressed workload demands. Based on this consultation and cooperation with local municipal staff, Regional staff provided review comments satisfying timeline targets for 95% of all Development Planning and Engineering applications with due dates in 2018 as outlined in Figure 7.



#### Commissioner Comments

In 2018, Regional Development Services assumed the responsibility for review of the Natural Heritage policies in the Region's Official Plan in accordance with the revised Environmental Protocol with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

In order to review service delivery and ensure Regional Planning continues to add value to the application review and approval process for local municipalities and developers/investors, an update to the Memorandum of Understanding is nearing completion.

The increased level of development in recent years represents a "new normal" for the Region. Regional Development Planning has adjusted its approach and practices to be solution oriented and proactive. By providing ongoing support to our local Municipalities, the Region strives to realize complete community planning outcomes that encourage the best possible development throughout the Region.

It is important to keep in mind that the development approval process is not intended to be a substitute for community planning. While some municipalities have relied on the development approval process in past to achieve their land use objectives, this is not a best practice and cannot be sustained on a go forward basis – municipalities will have to invest and increase their capacity for proactive planning such as Secondary Plans and Neighbourhood Plans in order to achieve desirable result and meet expectations.

## **Alternatives Reviewed**

None.

## **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

This report provides information on development application activity that contributes to strong economic prosperity throughout the communities within the Niagara Region.

## **Other Pertinent Reports**

- PDS 25-2018: Niagara Region Mid-Year 2018 Growth Monitoring Report
- PDS 23-2018: 2017 Year End Development Planning Applications Monitoring Report

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### **Recommended by:**

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### **Submitted by:**

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Acting Chief Administrative Officer

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