

**Subject:** Development Applications Monitoring Report – 2024 Year End

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

**Report date:** Wednesday, April 9, 2025

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## Recommendations

1. That Report PDS 8-2025 **BE RECEIVED** for information; and
2. That a copy of Report PDS 8-2025 **BE CIRCULATED** to Local Area Municipalities, 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 the 2024 volume of development application activity in Niagara Region.
- In 2024, the number of development applications reviewed increased to 839, up from 794 in 2023.
- In 2024 there was a slight decrease in the number of pre-consultation meetings held (619) from the year prior. The number of pre-consultation meetings held each year is often a strong indicator of the development outlook.
- Despite growing complexity of development applications, staff met review timelines more than 90% of the time.

## Financial Considerations

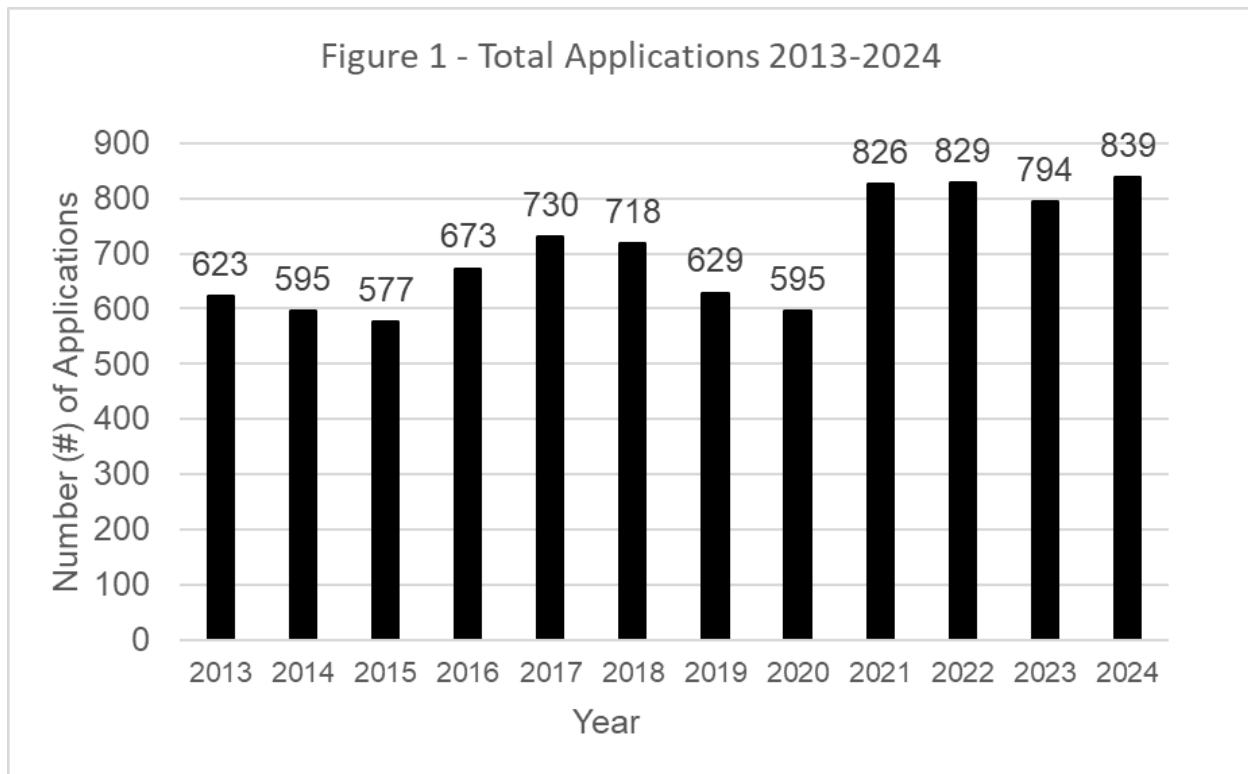
There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

## Analysis

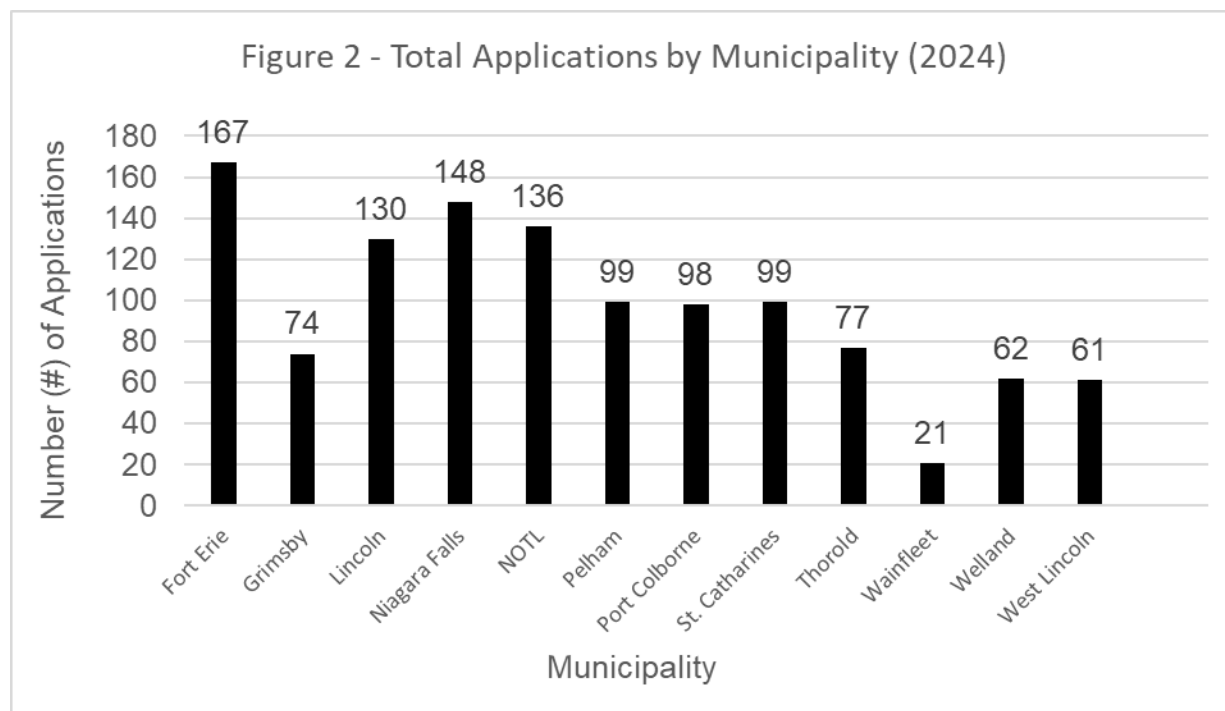
### Increase in Development Applications in 2024

Regional staff reviewed 839 development applications in 2024, marking an increase from the 794 applications reviewed in 2023. Figure 1 illustrates the number of applications considered by staff from 2013 to 2024. The highest application volumes were experienced in 2021, 2022 and 2024. Over time, staff have refined their approach

and practices to be more adaptable and collaborative in response to the growing volume of development applications.



The distribution of applications circulated to the Region, by municipality, during 2024 is shown on Figure 2. Municipalities with the highest volume of applications received by the Region were Fort Erie (167), Niagara Falls (148), Niagara-on-the-Lake (136), and Lincoln (130).



Development applications were circulated to the Region in accordance with Provincial legislation, the Niagara Escarpment Commission legislation, and the existing 2019 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Region and the Local Area Municipalities for planning in Niagara.

In Q2 of 2024, the Region replaced its existing development tracking management system and successfully introduced CityView, a new system for permitting, approvals, and application tracking. The implementation of this new system was completed on schedule, allowing us to secure \$500,000 from the Provincial Streamline Development Approval Fund. The new system has enhanced the development approval process by boosting efficiency, effectiveness, and predictability.

### **Complexity of Development Applications Increasing**

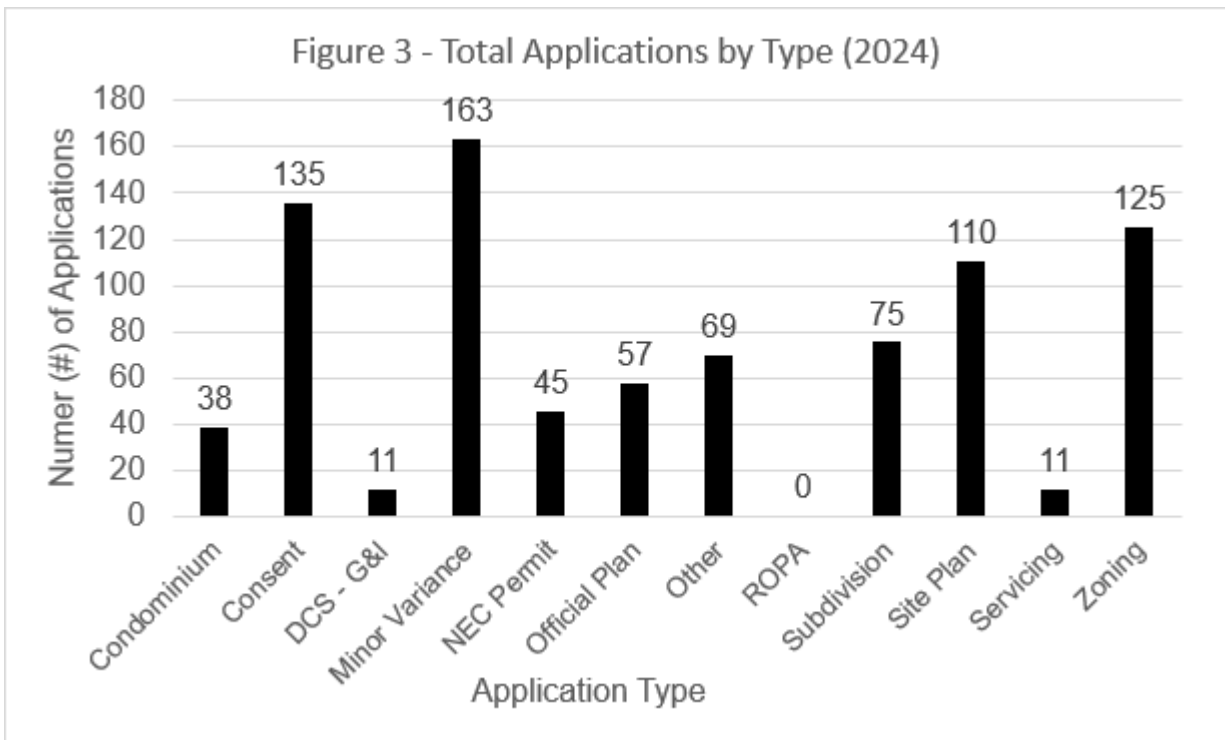
Figure 2 provides a breakdown of development applications by type reviewed by staff in 2024. Complex development proposals often trigger multiple planning approvals. For example, a subdivision or condominium application proposing a density or building height that exceeds the maximum limits set by the current Official Plan or Zoning By-law may also require concurrent Official Plan Amendment and/or Zoning By-law Amendment applications to proceed. The categories with the highest number of

applications reviewed by Staff in 2024 were Minor Variances (163) and Consents (135), followed closely by Zoning By-law Amendments (125) and Site Plans (110).

Regional staff were involved in reviewing several complex development applications in 2024, as highlighted in Appendix 1 of this report. This often requires a more extensive review process to adequately address environmental impacts, traffic impacts, urban design considerations, etc.

### **Despite Growing Complexity, Region Consistently Meets Review Timelines**

The MOU provides non-statutory development application review timelines for each application type. According to the data collected for 2024, Regional staff successfully met these review timelines more than 90% of the time.



### **Pre-consultation Meetings an Indicator of Future Development**

Staff attend regular pre-consultation meetings bi-weekly with each local municipality. These meetings are to determine complete application submission requirements and assist in the processing of applications.

Figure 4 illustrates the number of pre-consultation meetings attended by staff from 2013 to 2024. In 2024, Regional staff attended 619 pre-consultation meetings, which is a 5% decrease from the 2023 total (654). The number of pre-consultation meetings is generally an indicator of anticipated future development application volumes. Although pre-consultation meetings are no longer required due to changes in the Planning Act, most of the local area municipalities will continue with pre-consultation. They recognize the benefits it offers applicants by outlining application requirements and ensuring complete submissions.

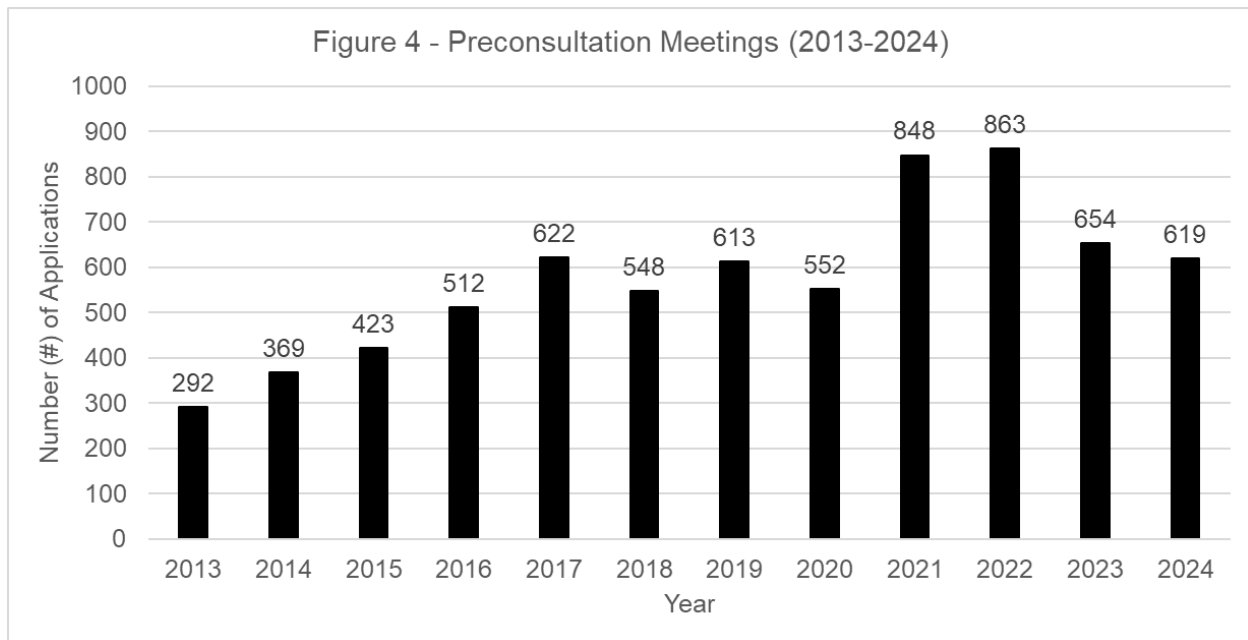
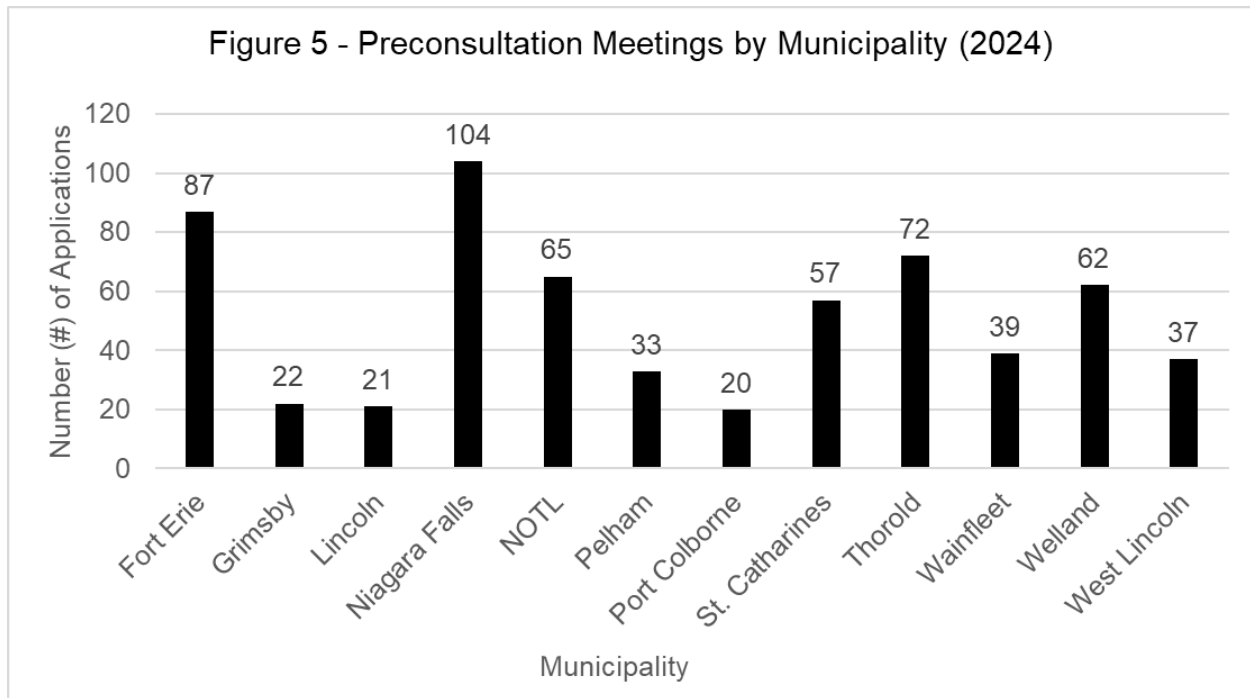
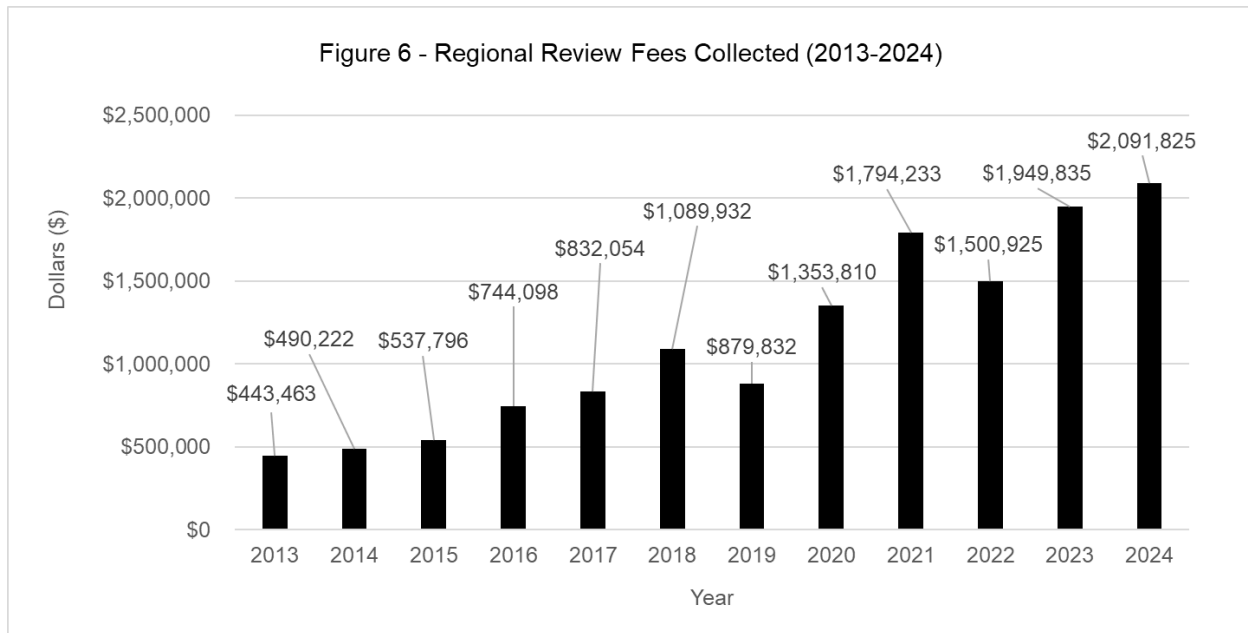


Figure 5 illustrates the number of pre-consultation meetings by municipality in 2024 that included Regional staff. The municipalities with the highest levels of pre-consultation activity were Niagara Falls (104), Fort Erie (87), Thorold (72), Niagara-on-the-Lake (65), and Welland (62).



**Regional Review Fees offset Regional Costs**

Regional review fees are collected to offset Regional costs for the development review service on a cost recovery basis. Figure 6 summarizes the fees collected between 2013 and 2024 for the Regional review of development applications. The 2024 total of \$2,091,825 represents a 7.28% increase from 2023.



While the development and pre-consultation volumes have decreased slightly from 2023, the increase in fees can be attributed to an increase in proposals that require multiple development applications with higher fees (Official Plan Amendments, Zoning By-law Amendments, Draft Plan of Condominiums and Subdivisions) received in 2024 compared to the previous year.

### 2025 Outlook – Region is Preparing for Proclamation

On October 20, 2024, the Province released the *Provincial Planning Statement (2024)* (“2024 PPS”), which replaced both the *Provincial Policy Statement (2020)* and *A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2020 Consolidation)*. The 2024 PPS is intended to streamline land use planning across the province to achieve mandatory minimum targets for intensification and redevelopment within built-up areas and balance housing development, economic growth, and environmental conservation.

As a result of Bill 23 *More Homes Built Faster Act*, the Region will be “an upper-tier municipality without planning responsibilities” on March 31, 2025. In preparation for proclamation of Bill 23, the Region facilitated discussions with local municipal CAOs and Planning Directors to determine a new model of planning service delivery that supports the changes to provincial legislation. The draft Planning Service Agreement, which was presented to and endorsed by this Committee and Regional Council (October 9, 2024 and October 16, 2024, respectively; report PDS 27-2024), was prepared through

consultation and collaboration and sets out the terms of planning service delivery between the Region and interested municipalities following March 31, 2025. Seven municipalities have agreed to enter into a Planning Service Agreement with the Region with each municipality signing on for various planning services tailored to meet their current needs. Two additional municipalities have recently expressed interest in also entering into an agreement with the Region. Staff are finalizing the individual Agreements for execution prior to the March 31, 2025 proclamation date.

Additionally, a 2024 MOU (Engineering Function and Services in Niagara) was prepared through consultation and collaboration with the Public Works Officials and Planning Directors to take effect upon proclamation. The 2024 MOU removes the planning review and updates the engineering review functions related to development applications.

After March 31, 2025, staff will continue to provide planning recommendations on development applications for the local area municipalities who have signed a Planning Services Agreement. By continuing to work collaboratively with the applicable local area municipalities, the Region is able to better facilitate the creation of well-rounded, complete communities to ensure that Niagara continues to be a desirable place to live and visit.

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

No alternatives have been reviewed as this report summarizes pre-consultation and development level activity for 2024 for information purposes.

### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

This report provides information on development application activity that contributes to strong economic prosperity through the communities within the region. This relates to Council's Strategic Priorities of Effective Region, Green and Resilient Region, and Equitable Region through ensuring high quality, efficient, and coordinated core services.

### **Other Pertinent Reports**

[PDS 24-2021: Development Applications Monitoring Report – 2020 Year End](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=16783)

(<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=16783>)

[PDS 4-2022: Development Applications Monitoring Report – 2021 Year End](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=22569)

(<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=22569>)



[PDS 9-2023: Development Applications Monitoring Report – 2022 Year End](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=30807)

(<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=30807>)

[PDS 6-2024: Development Applications Monitoring Report – 2023 Year End](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=36122)

(<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=36122>)

[PDS 27-2024: Planning Service Agreement and 2024 Memorandum of Understanding \(Engineering Function and Services in Niagara\)](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=39620)

(<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=39620>)

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Chief Administrative Officer

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**Appendices**

Appendix 1            Current Major Development Applications