

Subject: Niagara Region Growth and Forecasting Report: 2024 Year-End Summary

Report to: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Report date: Wednesday, July 9, 2025

Recommendations

1. That Report PDS 12-2025 **BE RECEIVED** for information; and
2. That Report PDS 12-2025 **BE CIRCULATED** to the Local Area Municipalities, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, Niagara Home Builders Association, Niagara Industrial Association, local Chambers of Commerce and School Boards.

Key Facts

- This report provides an overview of Regional growth metrics and future forecasting.
- Population and employment forecasts provide the foundation for infrastructure and service planning, regional financial planning, and development charges.
- Regional growth forecasting supports data-driven decision-making, aligns with strategic priorities, and guides infrastructure delivery to enable orderly, efficient, and fiscally responsible development.
- Effective growth forecasting requires coordination and collaboration between local area municipalities and the Region.
- Key insights include:
 - General population growth averages 9,400 people per year.
 - Niagara continues to experience a shift toward a greater share of medium- and high-density residential developments, moving away from the historically dominant low-density housing.
 - Housing starts and completions trend down for the third year in a row, reflecting a broader provincial pattern.

Financial Considerations

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

Analysis

Regional Growth Forecasting and Monitoring

Regional growth forecasting plays a critical role in supporting capital infrastructure planning and aligning local, regional, and provincial policies. Current growth metrics, combined with projections of future population and employment, form the foundation for infrastructure and service planning, financial planning and the calculation of development charges in Niagara Region.

Historically, the Niagara Official Plan established population and employment forecasts for area municipalities, with Regional staff monitoring progress through an annual growth monitoring report. Although the Province of Ontario has recently removed Niagara Region's planning authority, the Region continues to be responsible for monitoring growth and producing forecasts to inform infrastructure, service, and financial planning.

Key growth indicators, such as population, employment, building permits and the 'housing pipeline' informed by development application activity, provide insight into how and where the Region is growing. Monitoring this data at a Regional level is essential to ensure growth is supported by infrastructure such as water, wastewater and transportation networks. Additional employment-related insights were presented in ED 4-2025 (Niagara Economic Update) and PDS 2-2025 (2024 Niagara Employment Inventory Results).

Regional growth forecasting data supports strategic decision-making across Public Works. In collaboration with Water and Wastewater and Transportation divisions, it informs analyses such as wastewater treatment plant capacity tracking, capital project scheduling, and transportation planning. Long-term growth forecasts also underpin corporate master plans and capital budgeting, helping the Region advocate for initiatives like GO Transit expansion or funding for major infrastructure projects.

Throughout the year, Regional staff also respond to requests for growth data from various agencies, boards, and organizations—including Niagara Region Transit, Niagara Regional Police, school boards, and the Niagara Children's Centre. Providing these insights from a region-wide perspective is essential for the coordinated planning and delivery of services across the Region.

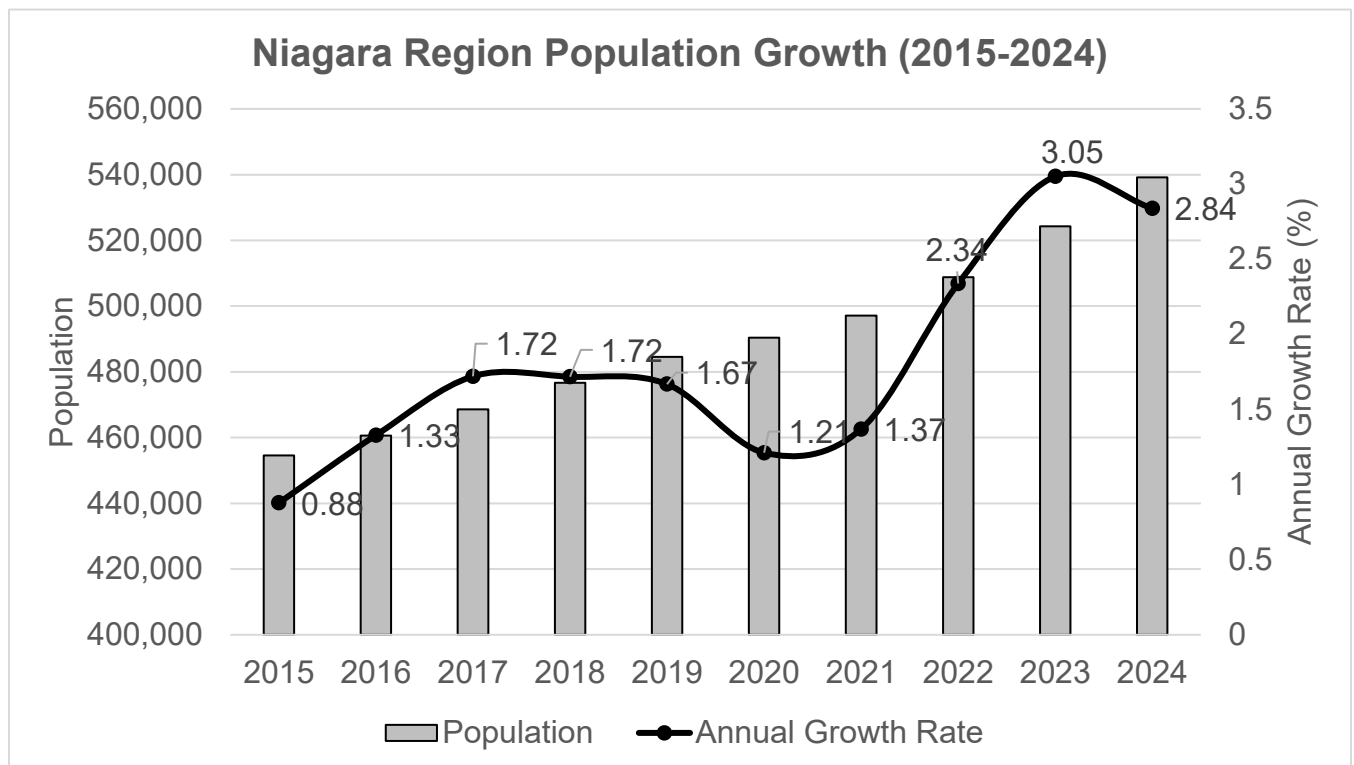
Year End 2024 - Growth Metrics

Tracking growth metrics and development statistics gives a holistic picture of what is happening across the entire Niagara Region. When analyzed from a region-wide perspective, this data supports more effective planning and monitoring of regional infrastructure and services. The following metrics represent key sources of information used in growth management and offer a snapshot of growth-related information as of the end of 2024.

General Population Growth

Population growth in Niagara has continuously increased over the last 10 years. On average, the Region's population has increased by nearly 9,400 people per year since 2015, for a total of approximately 84,500 new residents. The current estimated population of Niagara is approximately 539,000.

Figure 1: Niagara Region Annual Population Estimates

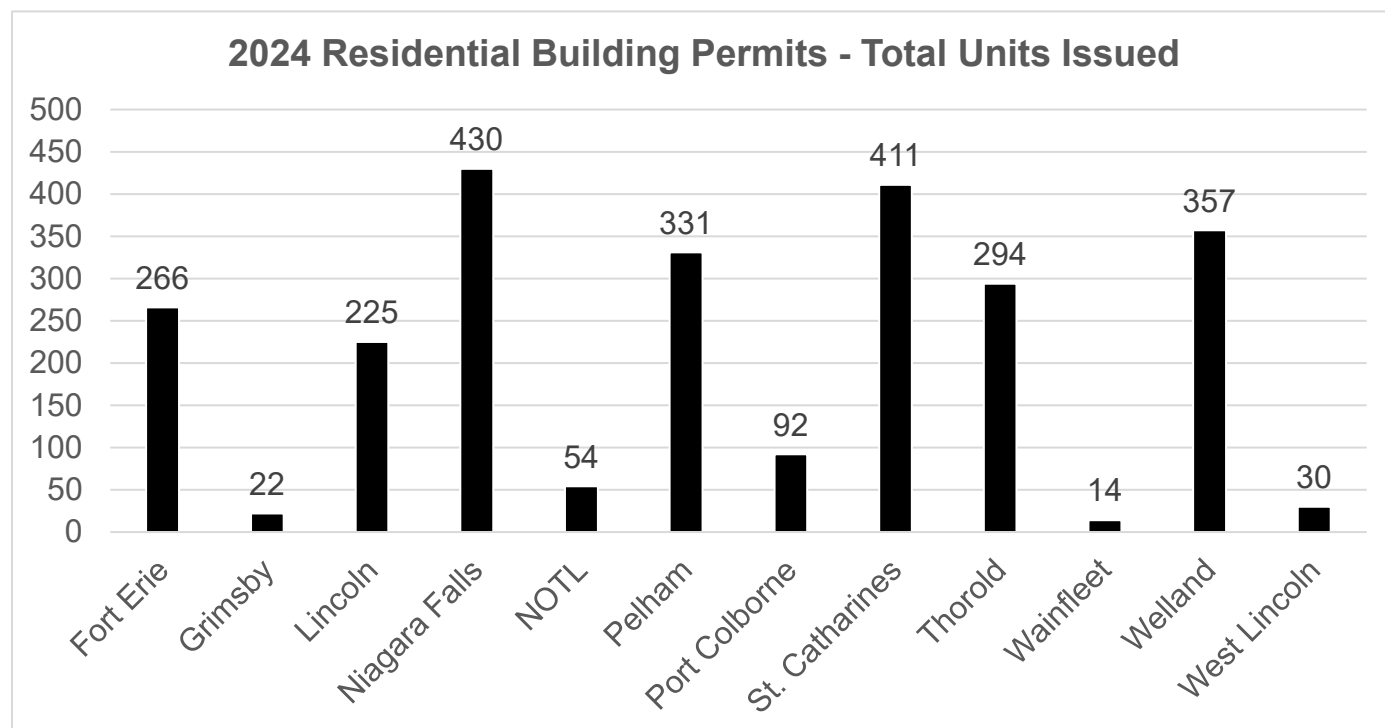


Source: Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0152-01 Population estimates, July 1, by census division, 2021 boundaries

Building Permits

Building permit activity is one predictor of anticipated population and employment growth in the Region. New residential units, from issued building permits, totalled 2,527 in 2024.

Figure 2: Total residential building permits issued by each of the 12 municipalities.

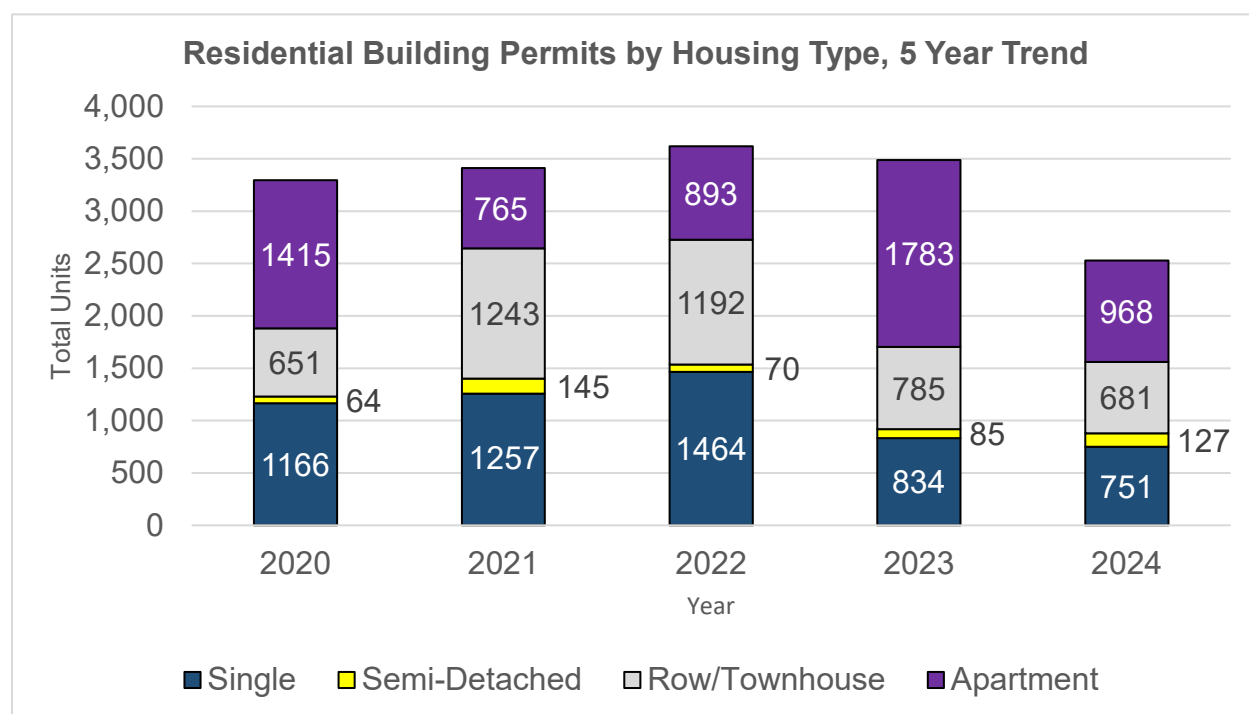


Residential building permit totals have trended downwards over the last 3 years with approximately 900 less residential units issued permits in 2024 than 2023. Available 2025 data suggests this trend is continuing so far in 2025.

Medium and higher density forms of housing, which includes townhouse/row and apartment developments, are continuing to become more prevalent in the region compared to low density, which includes semi-detached and single detached housing. During the 5-year span from 2015 to 2019, high and medium density residential permits accounted for 46% of total residential permits issued. In the subsequent 5 years (2020-2024) the percentage share of these type of permits rose to 64%. From a growth management perspective, higher density developments create higher land productivity, resulting in a more efficient use of servicing infrastructure.

Building permits for additional dwelling units (ADU) have become more consistently categorized in building permit data in response to growing popularity, updated bylaws, and incentive programs in some municipalities. Through the *Bill 185, Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024* the Province made changes to the *Planning Act* to allow for up to three ADU's per lot in an urban settlement area. ADU's are self-contained residential units on the same lot as a principal dwelling and can be detached or within the principle dwelling. ADU's account for approximately 13% of all new residential units tracked through building permits in 2024. The increase in this type of unit is expected to continue and staff consider the impacts of ADU's to residential neighbourhoods when working through growth management exercises. Figure 3 provides an overview of building permits (residential) over the last 5 years by dwelling type. Due to the similar expected occupancy, ADU's are categorized under the apartment category in this figure.

Figure 3: Residential Building Permits by Unit Type



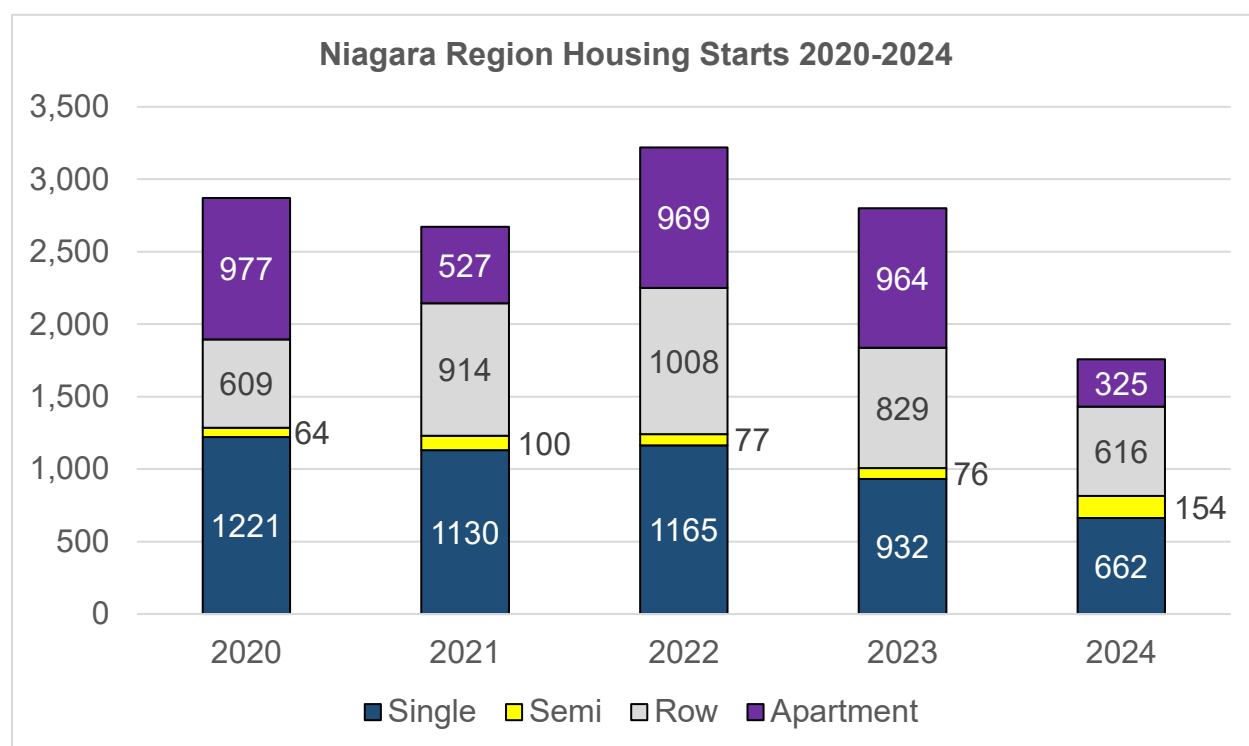
Housing Starts and Completions

In 2024, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) recorded 1,757 housing starts in Niagara. Of these, 46% were single-detached or semi-detached homes, 35% were row/townhouses, and 19% were apartments. The “apartment” classification includes all dwellings other than those listed, including structures

commonly known as stacked townhouses, duplexes, and triplexes. This marks the third consecutive year of decline in housing starts across the region, with 2025 starts trending toward another decrease. From January to April 2025, only 490 housing starts were recorded—the lowest total for this period since 2016.

This downward trend reflects a broader provincial pattern. Across Ontario, housing starts in 2024 were down 22% compared to 2022, when 91,885 new homes were started. Market factors including rising construction costs, worker shortages, high interest rates, coupled with the impacts of recent tariffs have all been identified as contributing factors to a decline in housing starts.

Figure 4: Niagara Region Housing Starts (2020 – 2024)

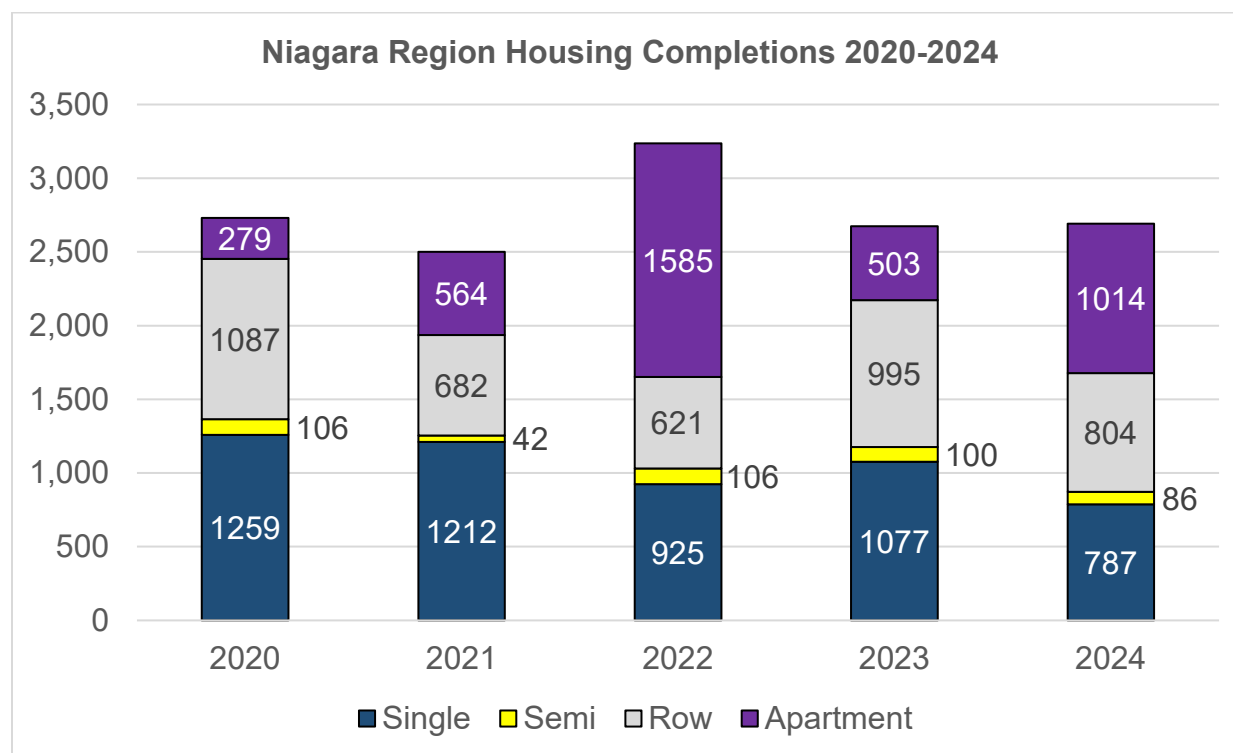


*Does not include West Lincoln

Source: CMHC, Housing Market Information Portal

In 2024, there were 2,691 recorded housing completions—a decline from the post-COVID peak in 2022, when 3,237 completions were recorded. This mirrors the downward trend seen in housing starts over the same period.

Figure 5: Niagara Region Housing Completions (2020 – 2024)



*Does not include West Lincoln

Source: CMHC, Housing Market Information Portal

Housing Supply Inventory

The unbuilt housing supply inventory, prepared by Regional staff is a bi-annually updated dataset comprised of site plans, plans of condominium, plans of subdivision and Ministerial Zoning Orders (MZOs) in various stages of the development approval process. In the inventory, the development approval process is grouped into four categories, including:

- Registered Unbuilt: Units that are within a Registered development but have not yet received a building permit.
- Draft Approved: Units that are within a Draft Approved development.
- Proposed/Under Application: The total number of units that are within development applications that are part of an application currently under review but do not have an approval.
- Ministerial Zoning Order: Units that have been approved for development by the Province of Ontario.

In consultation with local municipal staff, the data set is used to evaluate existing housing supply inventory and monitor impending growth in specific geographic areas. Units within the registered unbuilt and draft approved categories are considered more likely to come to market within the short-term whereas units within the proposed/under application and MZO are typically considered on a longer-term timeline.

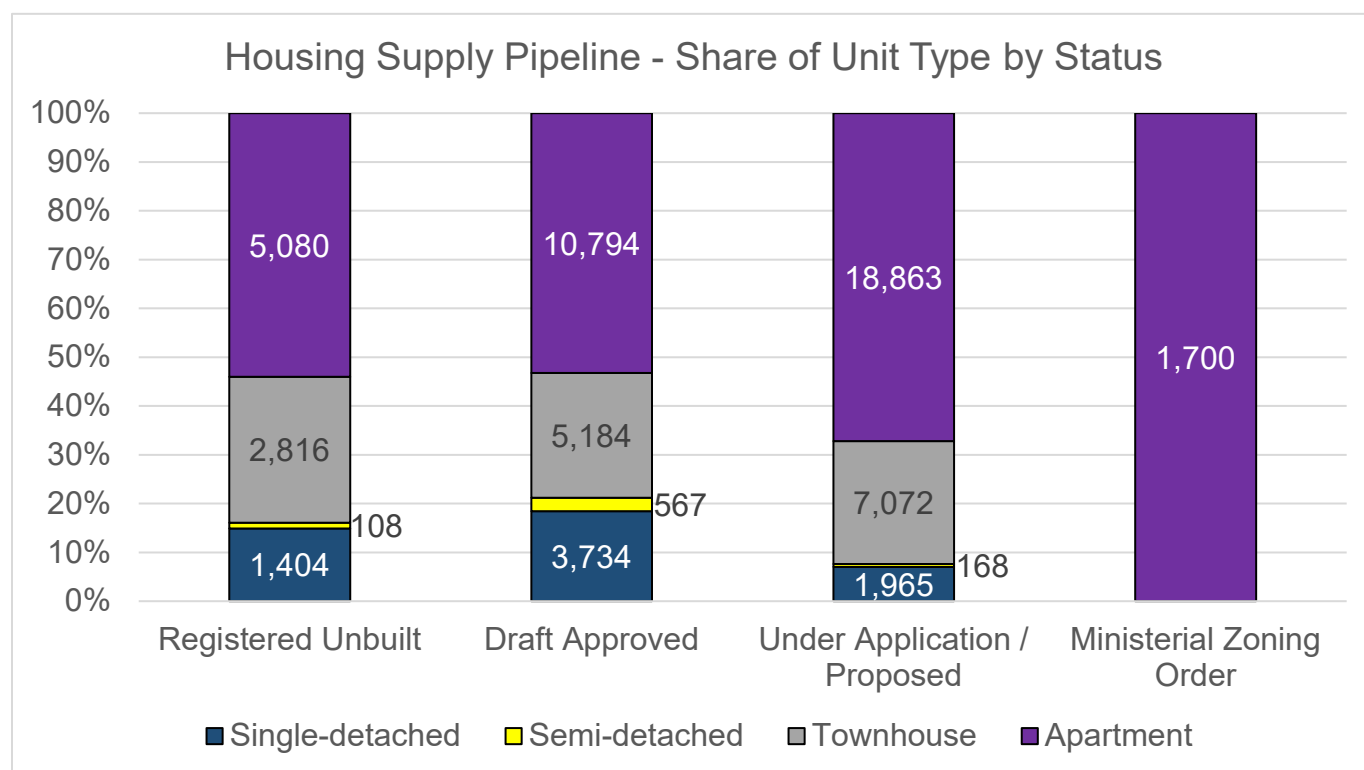
Table 1. Housing Supply: Number of Units by Application Status (end of year 2024)

Application Status	Single-detached	Semi-detached	Townhouse	Apartment	Total of all Types
Registered Unbuilt	1,404	108	2,816	5,080	9,405
Draft Approved	3,734	567	5,184	10,794	19,443
Under Application / Proposed	1,965	168	7,072	18,863	28,068
Ministerial Zoning Order ¹				1,700	1,700
Total	7,103	843	15,072	36,437	59,455

¹Ontario Regulation 592/22 Zoning Order does not specify housing unit types and is located in a Major Transit Station Area in Niagara Falls. Housing units associated with this MZO have been recorded in the apartment category for the purpose of this analysis.

Overall, there are 59,455 unbuilt units in the housing supply across the region as of January 1, 2025. Based on the anticipated rate of development (number of units expected to be built each year) derived from building trends in the last 5 year, there is an approximate 18-year supply of housing units across the region if current building activity rates remain the same. The share of unit type across the housing pipeline is illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Housing Supply Pipeline Share of Unit Type



More than 50% of total units across all applications, regardless of stage in the development pipeline, are in the apartment category, with single and semi-detached units making up just 13% of the total supply. Unit type can be used to infer an estimate of population using a “persons per unit” factor for each unit type.

Tracking Growth is Important to Inform Future Growth Planning

Updated statistics, housing pipeline data, and other growth indicators help staff anticipate both short- and long-term growth across Niagara. Growth forecasting is a continuous process that involves analyzing and interpreting data to inform regional capital projects and planning initiatives.

Niagara is projected to grow steadily to 2051, with the Ministry of Finance forecasting a population of 723,000 by that year—26% of whom are expected to be over age 65. Growth forecasts are based on geographic zones, including traffic analysis zones and wastewater catchment areas. Key areas of anticipated growth and intensification include:

- Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs): Significant growth expected around higher-order transit stations in Grimsby, Lincoln, St. Catharines, and Niagara Falls.
- Urban Expansion Areas: Identified in the 2022 Niagara Official Plan for West Lincoln, Thorold, Pelham, Welland, Niagara Falls, and Fort Erie to accommodate growth to 2051.
- Intensification Areas and Corridors: Designated by local municipalities for higher-density development.

Forecasts to 2051 and beyond—based on population, housing supply, and employment data—are essential inputs for upcoming updates to the Regional Master Servicing Plan and Transportation Master Plan (both due in 2026). These forecasts will inform infrastructure needs, capacity constraints, and the timing and funding of capital projects, including road and servicing upgrades.

They will also support the 2027 Regional Development Charges Background Study and Bylaw Update, helping determine appropriate funding strategies for growth-related infrastructure. Staff are currently developing preliminary growth forecasts to support these planning efforts. Future updates will be provided through reports linked to the master plan projects.

Coordination

Policy section 6.2 of the Provincial Planning Statement (2024) identifies the need for a coordinated, integrated, and comprehensive approach, when dealing with planning matters within municipalities, across lower, single and/or upper-tier municipal boundaries. This includes ‘managing and/or promoting growth and development that is integrated with planning for infrastructure and public service facilities.’ As such, coordination with local municipalities on current and expected growth is essential to ensuring regional roads, water and wastewater services can be planned appropriately.

Growth management staff continue to collaborate with project managers and capital planning teams in the Water and Wastewater, and Transportation divisions to effectively plan for both short- and long-term growth impacting Regional infrastructure and services. Public information sessions will play a key role in updating the master plans in 2026 and 2027. Additional collaboration with Finance staff will occur as the background work for the Regional Development Charges By-law begins next year.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

This report provides information on growth management analytics and inputs for the implementation planning of capital projects. This relates to Council’s Strategic Priorities of Effective Region, Green and Resilient Region, Equitable Region and Prosperous

Region, through ensuring orderly, efficient, and fiscally responsible development and growth.

Other Pertinent Reports

[CWCD 2024-196: Mid-Year 2024 Housing Supply Update](https://niagararegion.ca/council/Council%20Documents/2024/council-correspondence-nov-22-2024.pdf)

(<https://niagararegion.ca/council/Council%20Documents/2024/council-correspondence-nov-22-2024.pdf>)

[CWCD 2024-131: Housing Supply Update and CityView Software](https://niagararegion.ca/council/Council%20Documents/2024/council-correspondence-aug-02-2024.pdf)

(<https://niagararegion.ca/council/Council%20Documents/2024/council-correspondence-aug-02-2024.pdf>)

[PW 20-2025: 2024 Reserve Water and Wastewater Treatment Capacities](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=42824)

(<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=42824>)

[ED 4-2025: Niagara Economic Update](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=42790)

(<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=42790>)

[PDS 2-2025: 2024 Niagara Employment Inventory Results](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=41284)

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