
Subject: Development Applications Monitoring Report - 2019 Year End

Report to: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Report date: Wednesday, March 11, 2020

Recommendations

1. That Report PDS 4-2020 **BE RECEIVED** for information; and,
2. That a copy of Report PDS 4-2020 **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 2019 development application activity in Niagara Region.
- Regional Development Planning and Engineering staff reviewed 629 development applications in 2019.
- Regional Development Planning and Engineering staff provided comments for 613 pre-consultation meetings in 2019.
- The Region received \$879,832 in review fees for development applications in 2019 (19% decrease from 2018 fees).

Financial Considerations

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

Analysis

Development Applications

Regional Development Services staff reviewed 629 development applications in 2019, representing a 12% decrease from the 2018 total of 718. Figure 1 illustrates the number of applications considered by Development Planning and Engineering staff from 2013 to 2019. These development applications are circulated to the Region based on Provincial legislation requirements and the existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Region and Local Area Municipalities for planning in Niagara. This may be attributed, in part, to uncertainty in the development industry as a result of local interim control by-laws passed by certain municipalities and to the development industry wanting to see the proposed Provincial changes to the Development Charges Act.

Staff expects the total number of development applications to be higher in 2020 than in 2019. It should also be noted that in 2020 and beyond, Planning and Development Services has the ability to waive its review function on certain types of minor development applications in local municipalities. This represents an effort to increase efficiency in the planning review function in Niagara and is a result of recent changes to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Niagara Region and Local Area Municipalities.

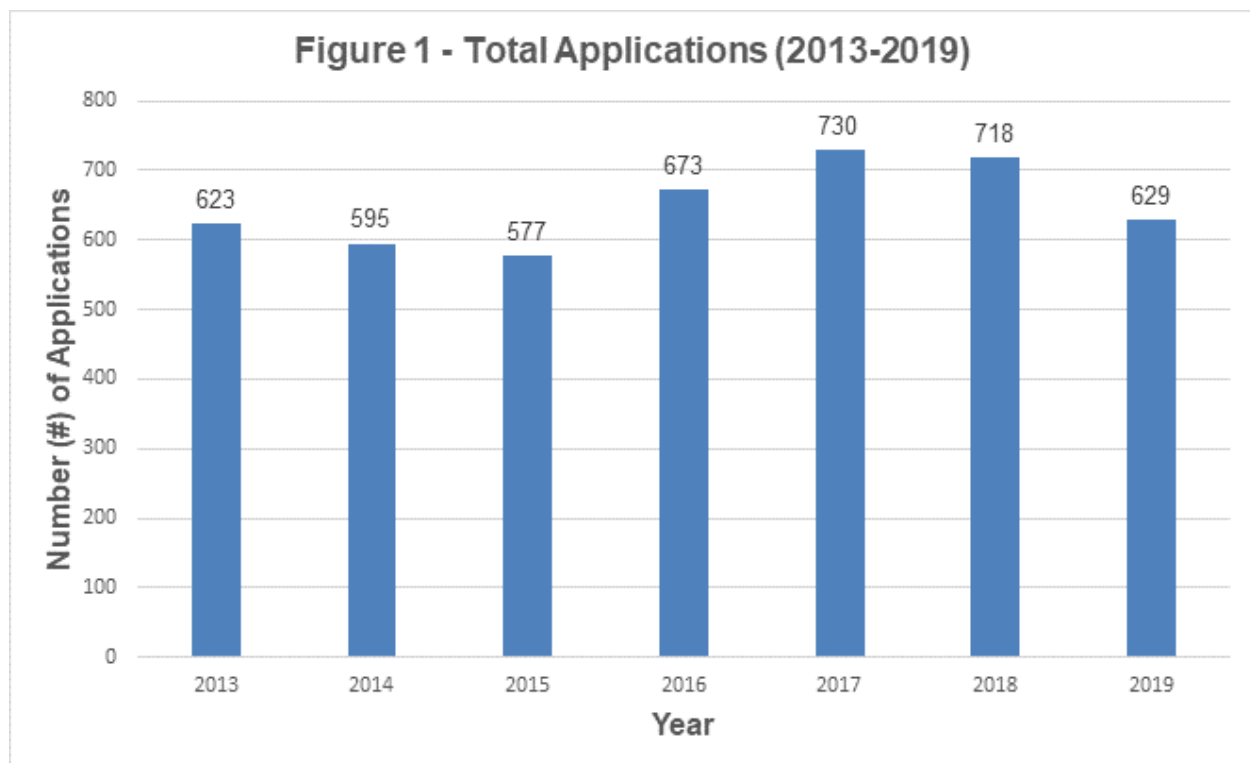


Figure 2 below provides the breakdown of development applications, by type, reviewed by Regional staff in 2019. Some complex development proposals often require multiple planning approvals. As an example, subdivision and condominium applications may also need amendments to the municipal Official Plan and/or Zoning By-law to facilitate the development. The categories with the most applications considered by Regional staff were Zoning By-law Amendments (119), followed by Site Plans (106), Consents (84), and Minor Variances (64).

Figure 2 - Total Applications by Type (2019)

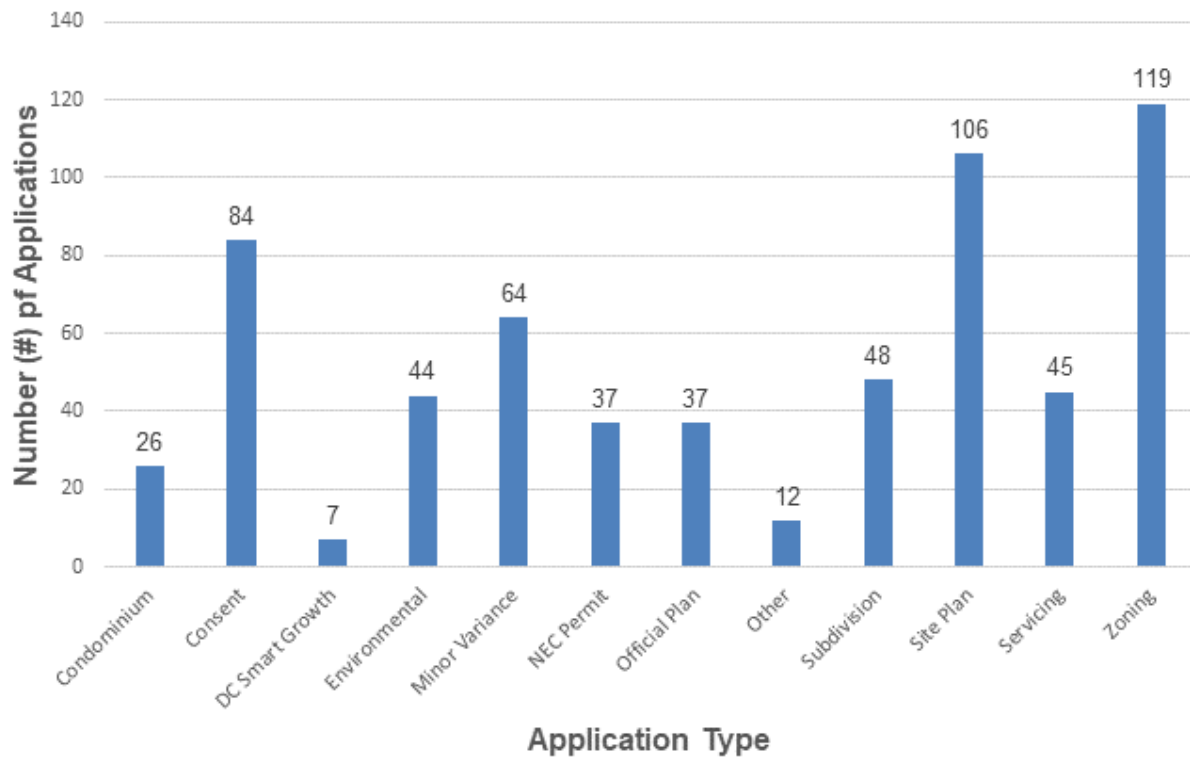
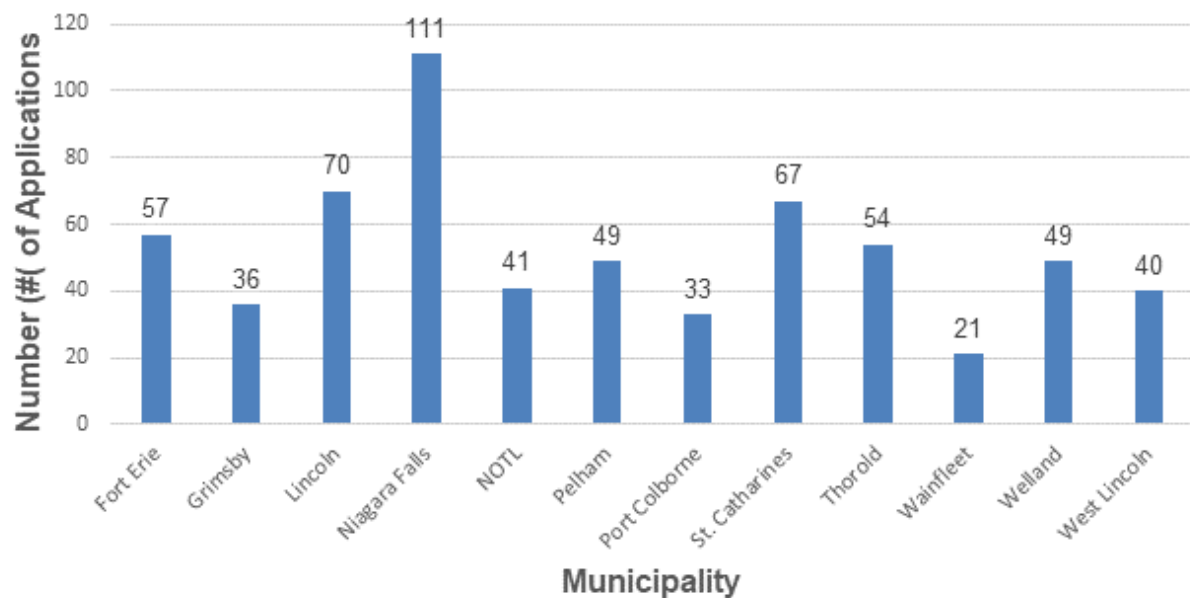


Figure 3 - Total Applications by Municipality (2019)



The distribution of applications circulated to the Region by local municipalities during 2019 is shown on Figure 3. This information indicates relatively high levels of development activity in several communities. The municipalities with the most applications circulated to the Region in the year were Niagara Falls (111), Lincoln (70), St. Catharines (67), Fort Erie (57) and Thorold (54). As stated previously, application volumes were lower in 2019 compared to recent years; few municipalities experienced an increase in volume from 2018 to 2019.

Despite the reduced application volumes, Regional Development Services staff was involved in reviewing several complex development applications, as highlighted later in this report, which often requires more extensive review functions. This can include, among other tasks, internal staff discussions as well as meetings/discussions with the local area municipality, developer and/or consulting team to discuss and resolve issues that can result in the submission and review of revised plans and/or technical studies, and preparation of follow-up Regional comments.

Pre-consultation Meetings

Development Services staff are scheduled to attend regular pre-consultation meeting sessions two days each month in each local municipal office. These meetings are intended to determine complete application submission requirements and assist in the processing of applications. Developers, property owners, local staff and agencies are normally present at pre-consultation meetings. In 2019, Regional staff attended 613 pre-consultation meetings which is a 12% increase from the 2018 total (see Figure 4). Generally, the number of pre-consultation meetings is an indicator of future development applications; accordingly, staff expect development application numbers to increase in 2020 from 2019.

Figure 5 illustrates the number of pre-consultation meetings by municipality in 2019 that involved Regional staff. The municipalities with the highest levels of pre-consultation activity were Fort Erie and (94) and Niagara Falls (93), followed by West Lincoln (64) Welland (63) and Niagara-on-the-Lake (55).

Figure 4 - Preconsultation Meetings (2013-2019)

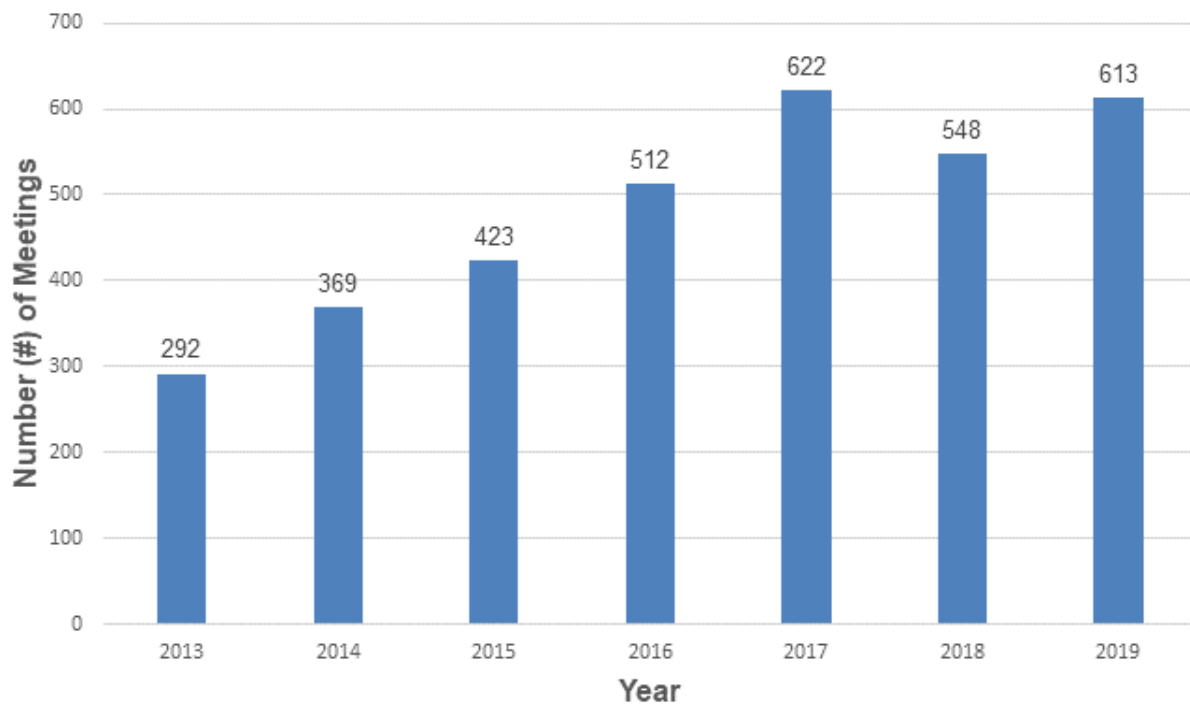
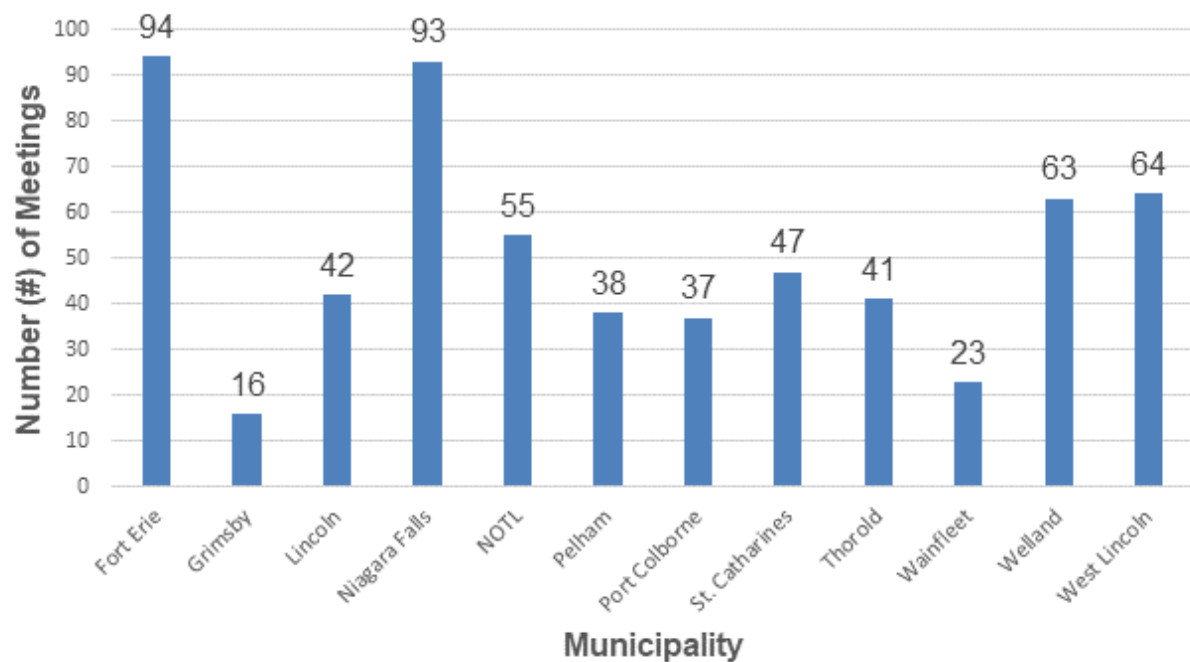
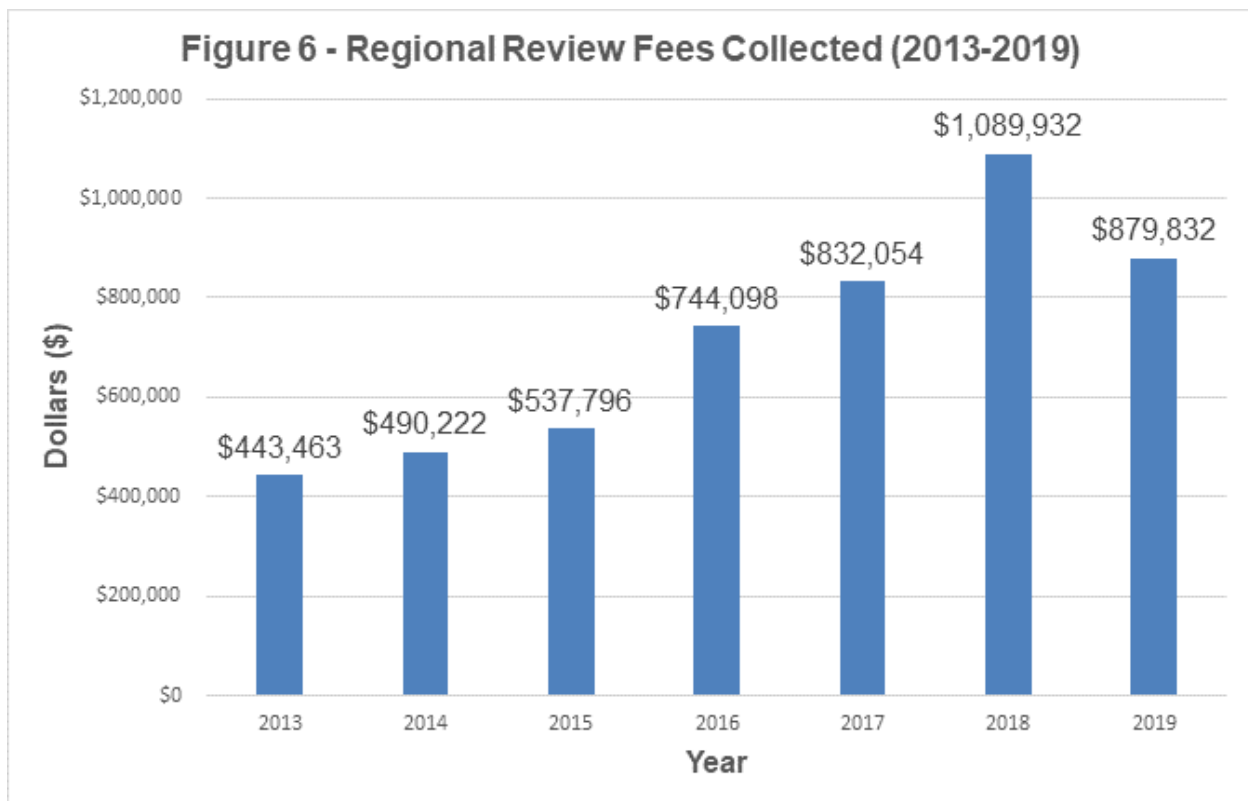


Figure 5 - Preconsultation Meetings by Municipality (2019)



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 2019 for the Regional review of development applications. The 2019 total of \$879,832 represents a decrease of 19% from 2018, which relates to the decrease in total number of applications. As the total volume of development applications will likely increase from 2019 to 2020, development review fees are also expected to increase, although not to the 2018 level.



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 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

90% of all Development Planning and Engineering applications with due dates in 2019. Committees of Adjustment applications (i.e., consent and minor variances) represented almost one-third of responses which were past the timeline target. Committee of Adjustment review processes are often condensed and commonly result in delayed comments. In all cases, Regional staff communicate with local staff when timeline targets will not be met.

Current Major Development Applications

Planning and Development Services Staff participated in the review of a number of major development applications in 2019, highlighted in the table below.

Municipality	Application	Developer	Details	Status
Grimsby	Fifth Wheel site redevelopment; Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment and Draft Plan of Subdivision	Losani Homes	6 mixed use buildings with 1,240 residential units and 46,000 ft ² of employment space; 36 townhouse units; 19,500 ft ² of commercial space; 2.25 ha of parkland and open space	In process; Public Meeting held on January 28, 2020
Lincoln	Prudhommes Landing site Redevelopment; Zoning By-law Amendment and Draft Plan of Subdivision	FBH Ontario Inc.	Estimated total of 1,173 residential units; single-detached, semi-detached, townhouse and apartment units; 3.92 ha of open space; 3.88 ha of natural area	Draft Plan of Subdivision Approved

Municipality	Application	Developer	Details	Status
Niagara Falls	Riverfront Residential Community; Zoning By-law Amendment and Draft Plan of Subdivision	GR (CAN) Investments Ltd.	Estimated total of 1,045 residential units; single-detached, semi-detached, townhouse and apartment units; 1.86 ha of parkland and open space; 17 ha of natural area	In process; Public Meeting to be scheduled
Niagara Falls	Splendour Residential Development; Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment and Draft Plan of Subdivision	Cobas Developments Inc.	104 single-detached dwellings; 16 semi-detached; 148 townhouses; 1 block for future school(s) site	Draft Plan of Subdivision Approved
Niagara Falls	New South Niagara Hospital; Campus Plan	Niagara Health System	Campus Planning for new Niagara South Hospital site	Campus Plan finalized in September 2019; incorporated into Ministry of Health Functional Program Submission
Thorold	Canada Summer Games Complex; Site Plan	Games Operations, 2021 Canada Summer Games	Canada Summer Games Building and Playing Fields	Site Plan Approved; site works in progress

Municipality	Application	Developer	Details	Status
Welland	Hunter's Pointe Golf Course Redevelopment; Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment and Draft Plan of Subdivision	2599587 Ontario Ltd.	735 single-detached dwellings; 250 townhouses; 170 residential units and 60,000 ft ² of commercial space within mixed use buildings	In process; Public Meeting to be scheduled

Commissioner Comments

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 (MOU) with the Local Area Municipalities was completed in 2019 and is now endorsed by all municipalities and in effect.

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. The Urban Design review function within Development Planning is a key component to elevate the quality of development in Niagara and achieve industry leading results, reflecting positively on the Niagara brand.

It is important to keep in mind that the development approval process is not intended to be a substitute for community planning. In the past, some municipalities have only relied on the development approval to achieve their land use objectives, mainly due to resource and staffing constraints. This is not a best practice and undesirable on a go forward basis. Municipalities should anticipate more growth and invest and increase their capacity for proactive planning such as Secondary Plans and Neighbourhood Plans in order to manage that growth, achieve desirable results and meet community expectations. In the coming years, local municipalities will also be challenged to respond to updated Provincial plans and policies as well as the new Regional Official Plan, likely causing even further demand for staffing and resources.

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 and supports a sustainable and engaging government through ensuring high quality, efficient and coordinated core services.

Other Pertinent Reports

- PDS 3-2019: Development Applications Monitoring Report - 2018 Year End
- PDS 21-2019: 2018 End of Year Growth Report

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