

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Planning and Economic Development
April 13, 2023

Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner

Streamlining Development Approvals and Supporting Provincial Housing Targets

1. Recommendations

1. Regional staff continue to engage with the local municipalities, the Province and the development industry to advance opportunities to streamline and improve the development approval process.
2. The Province, through the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, be requested to:
 - (a) Amend the *Planning Act* to:
 - a. account for resubmissions by proponents of development applications in the approval timelines for municipalities.
 - b. provide a mechanism to “stop the clock” when a municipality is waiting for an applicant to submit or resubmit information.
 - (b) Commit to improve all Provincial Ministry response times in development review to ensure municipalities can meet the legislated timeframes set out in the *Planning Act*.
 - (c) Consider establishing Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) as the aggregated source of building and occupancy permit data for Ontario.
3. Local municipalities be requested to confirm support for:
 - (a) Local development tracking systems to support data exchange and sharing of planning application data with the Region to enable common real-time housing supply and monitoring for Regional servicing capacity allocation.
 - (b) The Collaborative Application Preparation (CAP) process as a consistent standard for intaking development applications to ensure high-quality, complete submissions.
 - (c) Participation in a Planning Innovation Team with the Region and other stakeholders to advance modernization of the planning process.

4. The Regional Clerk forward this report to the School Boards, Conservation Authorities, Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD), Area Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and local municipalities for information and support of this initiative.

2. Summary

This report provides an update on the Region's planning application modernization project using the Provincial Streamline Development Approval Fund to improve the development review and approval process across the Region.

Key Points:

- York Region's development tracking system YorkTrax has modernized the review and approval process for development applications
- Incomplete and poor-quality submissions lead to delays, resubmissions, and costs for both the applicant and municipality. Over the last three years, York Region waited between seven days to over a year for site plan application resubmissions.
- There is a need for municipalities to right size and scope the amount of information required to make planning decisions
- In 2022, the Region received funding through the Provincial Streamline Development Approval Fund to develop data standards, adopt a common approval process, expand data exchange between municipalities and leverage technology to improve customer experience
- The Region formed a working group with all nine local municipalities and Conservation Authorities to work with consultants to develop common planning data standards and processes through 19 workshops held between April and December 2022 including:
 - A common development application form with plain language that streamlines the amount of data required to start an application. This work will support future data exchange initiatives and has been shared with the Province
 - Standardized Terms of Reference to scope application requirements for the most used reports for adoption and use by local municipalities
 - A new consistent process known as the Collaborative Application Preparation (CAP) process has been developed with the local municipalities and Conservation Authorities for accepting development applications incorporating local best practices to achieve quality application submissions. The Township of King and Town of Newmarket are piloting this new process

- York Region is committed to continuous improvement of the planning process through a Planning Innovation Team with representatives from local municipalities and Conservation Authorities as a forum to continue the advancement of planning modernization across the Region (e.g., standardization, data exchange, new technology) with input from the Building Industry and Land Development Association

3. Background

YorkTrax has streamlined the development approval process and is the “single source of truth” for development application data at the Region

In 2017, the Region launched a development tracking system (YorkTrax) built in-house using existing technology solutions at the Region. The system is used by over 200 staff across multiple departments and has provided several efficiencies (Appendix A):

- Streamlined development application review/approval process and increased transparency across departments involved in development review
- Real-time application process tracking

YorkTrax also provides critical data to track key regional priorities such as Housing Supply and Servicing Allocation and application processing metrics.

The shift from paper processes to digital review has highlighted new opportunities for process efficiencies through data sharing. Similar development data is currently entered into multiple individual systems (e.g., local municipality, MTO, Region). Moving to a single input of development data shared across multiple systems could significantly improve the ability to collectively process applications quickly and access quality data to make data-informed decisions. The next evolution of YorkTrax will focus on sharing data more efficiently and increasing transparency for all stakeholders involved in development approval. All stakeholders involved in the process should be able to clearly understand the status of a file and what actions are needed to keep the process moving.

Funding secured through the Provincial Streamline Development Approval Fund supports process improvement across the Region

In April 2022, the Region received a commitment for up to \$500,000 through the Provincial Streamline Development Approval Fund (SDAF) to facilitate process improvements for development application approvals. In January 2023, the Province announced an extension to the final report deadline from February 28, 2023, to November 1, 2023.

York Region leveraged this funding to initiate a business transformation across the Region, local municipalities and Conservation Authorities supported by process improvement, standardized trusted data and modern technology. Key project deliverables are highlighted in Table 1. Final project results and recommendations will be posted on the Region’s website in Q3, 2023.

Table 1
Streamline Development Approval Fund - Project Summary of Deliverables and Results

Project Deliverables	Results
1. Develop common planning data standards	<p>A common application form (data fields) was developed through Working Group and shared with the Province's Data Standards for Planning and Development Application Working Group led by Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery</p> <p>25 Common Terms of Reference for application submission reports is now available for use by local municipalities in the Region to adopt</p>
2. Establish a common process to start development applications	<p>New common process has been established by the Working Group based on local municipal best practices known as the Collaborative Application Preparation (CAP)</p>
3. Enhance the Region's internal development tracking system (YorkTrax)	<p>Enhancements have been made to further streamline documents, and manage onboarding/offboarding of YorkTrax users</p> <p>Changes to support data exchange between municipalities (underway)</p>
4. Boost cross-organization data exchange (Data Co-Op)	<p>Technical readiness analysis and identification of Phase 1 data exchange elements were discussed with local municipal planning and information technology staff</p>
5. Increase transparency and data quality	<p>Developed Dashboards to track data quality, application processing metrics</p> <p>Region Development Application Status Map have been posted online and shared with local municipalities</p> <p>Housing Supply Dashboard is to be shared with local municipalities</p> <p>Servicing Allocation Dashboards is to be shared with local municipalities</p> <p>Increased staff access to YorkTrax has been provided through the development of a map-based version of YorkTrax</p>
6. Improve customer experience through a common planning portal prototype	<p>Developing a prototype is underway</p>

A new approach to development review needs to address recent legislative changes

In 2022, the Province passed Bill 109, *The More Homes for Everyone Act* and Bill 23, *The More Homes Built Faster Act* that introduced several changes to streamline development approvals to support building 1.5 million homes in Ontario within the next 10 years. Some of the more impactful changes to municipalities include reduced timeframes for approvals and requirement for municipalities to refund planning fees if statutory timelines are not met. The Region's Streamline Development Approval Project was adjusted to include a process review to align with and respond to these new Provincial requirements.

4. Analysis

Planning Data Exchange is essential to streamline the development approval process and support informed decisions

In this age of data driven decisions, governments need to invest in improving data exchange practices. Data exchange allows municipalities to maintain current development tracking systems while improving processing of development applications. More efficient exchange of development application data:

- Reduces errors, duplication and allows staff to focus time on value-added tasks to support faster development review
- Supports faster approvals through automatic transfer of application data, documents and comments between systems and organizations
- Supports the flow of critical data needed to support real-time data analytics at all levels of government (e.g., Housing Supply and Servicing Allocation Dashboards)
- Improves customer experience by providing standardized application requirements and process
- Increases transparency for all stakeholders

Through the SDAF project, the Region has looked at opportunities to improve data exchange and increase transparency with local municipalities. Each local municipality is at a different stage of their journey towards digitization. Many local system upgrades require commenting agencies to log into a local system to retrieve data related to development applications. This creates a roadblock because only one commenting staff can be logged into the local system at a time to retrieve documents or upload comments. Application data inputted into the local system (e.g., applicant name, address, description) is not available through this current process. The circulation and review of applications can be improved through consistency and data exchange. Investment in local system readiness to support data exchange would

ensure a continuous flow of data for development applications to support faster review and approvals and increase transparency for all stakeholders.

The Region has well established partnerships through the YorkInfo Partnership and several platforms (Data Co-op) that currently facilitate efficient data sharing with the Region and external partners (e.g., servicing infrastructure, construction) that could be expanded to include development application data.

The Region is using provincial funding to enhance YorkTrax to support data exchange with local municipalities. Local municipalities are requested to upgrade development tracking systems to support and pilot data exchange with the Region to speed up development approvals and real-time data and support monitoring of growth. The Project also focuses on developing data standards to support data exchange, as discussed below.

Region is working with Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) to improve building permit data

Building and occupancy permits provide essential data for monitoring housing supply, demand for infrastructure (e.g., servicing), triggering property tax assessments and generating revenues for municipalities. Currently, municipalities produce several building permit reports for various stakeholders including MPAC in a variety of formats. Establishing MPAC as the aggregated single source for this data could help streamline this process and provide a consistent data in the Province for all stakeholders (e.g., school boards, utility companies).

The Region has championed the need for better data quality and sharing of permit information to ensure monitoring reports are accurate and timely, and that property tax assessment revenues are processed efficiently. The Region continues to work with MPAC to promote the larger benefit of permit data and the importance of improving and maintaining high quality data across the Region for the benefit of all taxpayers.

It is recommended that the Province consider establishing MPAC as the aggregated source of building and occupancy permits in Ontario, that this data be available to all interested stakeholders, and that municipalities continue to provide the data in a timely and accurate manner.

Establishing common planning standards is key to improving the customer experience and expediting development review

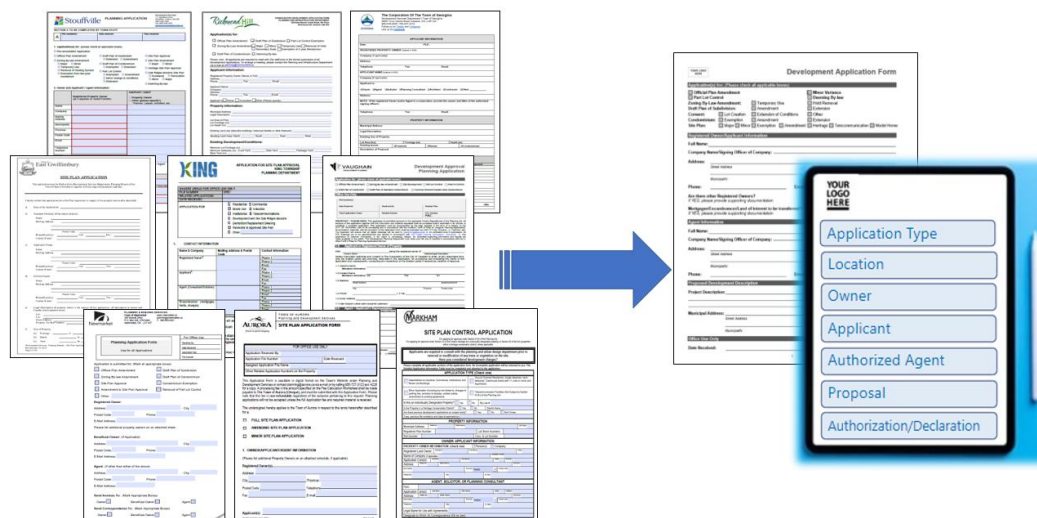
There is wide variation in application forms/checklists and data collected by municipalities as part of an application. The creation of data standards is a key driver for supporting efficiencies in the development approval process.

The Region and its nine local municipal partners and Conservation Authorities came together in 2022 to develop planning data standards. Nineteen workshops were held between April

and December 2022 to develop a minimum viable product “MVP” for planning standards that leverages plain language and simplifies the process and improves customer experience.

The Working Group has defined the minimum amount of data needed to start a planning application including streamlining application types (Figure 1), common Terms of Reference, and common process to start a development application (Attachment 1), discussed below. Newly developed application standards reflect a combination of local best practices and new thinking.

Figure 1
Developing a Common Application Form



Changes implemented through Bill 109 do not protect planning revenues from poor quality submissions

A key challenge in expediting the development process is the quality of drawings and reports submitted in support of a development application. Poor quality submissions lead to resubmissions, delays, and costs for both the applicant and the municipality. Through consultation, both municipalities and BILD agreed that the quality of submissions could be improved. Some examples of poor quality cited by the Working Group include:

- Content does not satisfy agreed Terms of Reference
- Technical drawings are missing signature and/or professional stamp and do not address comments made by municipalities/commenting agencies
- Site Plan/survey do not show new property lines required to reflect road widening requirement which impacts overall site design

- Lack of integrated design process – reports from different disciplines are prepared in isolation of one another or even conflict with one another

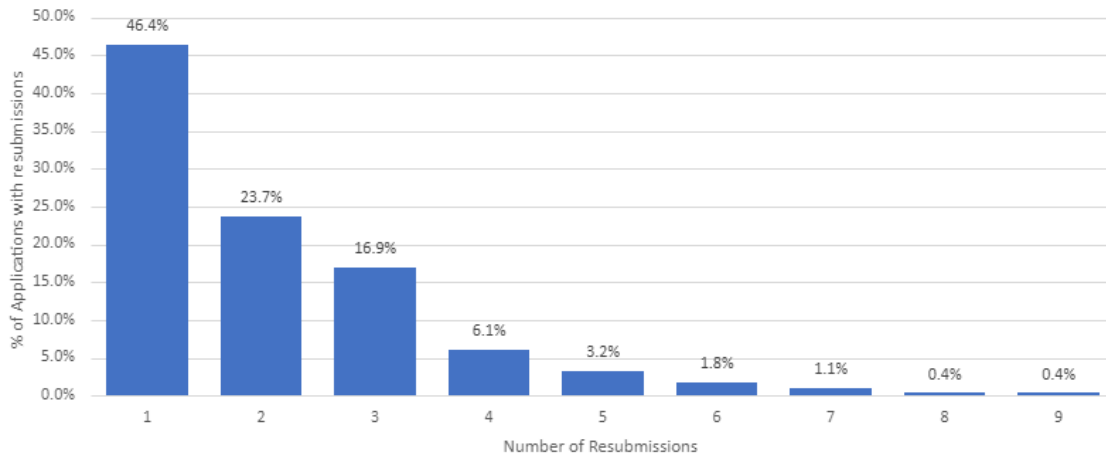
Staff analyzed Regional site plan application data in YorkTrax given the reduced timeframes for application processing introduced through Bill 109. Over the last three years approximately 46% of the applications required only one resubmission and the remaining 54% of applications had between two and eight resubmissions, as shown on Figure 2. Consultants typically budget up to three resubmissions per project, which aligns with YorkTrax data that shows that 87% of applications are completed within three submissions (Figure 2).

For site plan applications with one resubmission, planners/engineers waited between seven days to over one year for a resubmission from an applicant, as highlighted in Figure 3. It is recommended that the *Planning Act* approval timeline requirements account for resubmissions required as part of development review.

A municipality cannot meet the timelines set out through Bill 109 with the current application metrics. The Province should provide a mechanism to stop the clock (like a chess clock) when a municipality is waiting for information, similar to the tool afforded Provincial approval of local official plans. There is currently no incentive for an applicant to submit quality submissions in a timely manner. Poor submissions will be rewarded with a planning fee refund and the municipal revenue loss will be passed on to the taxpayer. The Region’s consultant has proposed a new process discussed below that will provide applicants and consultants with clear requirements, a consistent process, and a commitment to right-size information to help improve submission quality. This will require a commitment from applicants and consultants to submit complete information to municipalities in a timely manner.

Figure 2

Percentage of site plan applications by number of resubmissions from 2020-2022



Source: YorkTrax

NOTE: This data only captures resubmissions that were circulated to the Region. There may be additional resubmissions submitted to local municipalities to address local site plan matters.

Figure 3
Number of days to receive a resubmission for a site plan application requiring only 1 resubmission between 2020-2022



Source: YorkTrax

NOTE: This data only captures resubmissions that were circulated to the Region. There may be additional resubmissions submitted to local municipalities to address local site plan matters.

Provincial agencies need to improve commenting times to municipalities

Provincial ministries are often circulated applications by municipalities where there are areas of Provincial interest (e.g., adjacent to a Provincial highway). Generally, Provincial comments to municipalities can take months for a response. Like municipalities, there is need for the Province to find efficiencies and commit to improve their response times to ensure municipalities can meet legislated timeframes set out by the Province.

Applicants and consultants want municipalities to right size and scope application requirements

The Region consulted with BILD through workshops and surveys. BILD was generally supportive of the collaborative work to establish common Terms of Reference and data standardization. BILD comments on the current process included:

- Municipalities require too much information upfront in the process (e.g., engineering details for official plan amendments). Information needs to be right sized, scoped and requested at the proper time in the process
- Consider eliminating requirement for peer review and accept studies/plans with a professional stamp
- The back end of the process needs to be reviewed related to clearing of conditions and draft plan conditions and agreement templates need to be standardized across municipalities
- Technology does not fix everything and must be supported by an improved process

The concept of a “minimum viable product” submission was extensively discussed throughout project workshops with local municipal staff as it relates to information required to make a planning decision.

Working Group developed a new common Collaborative Application Preparation (CAP) process that focuses on scoping applications and improving quality submissions

The start of the application process is the most critical – the quality of an initial application submission dictates how efficient the review process will be. Investing time at the front end of the process will ensure quality information is submitted and applications are processed efficiently. A new Collaborative Application Preparation (CAP) process was developed by the Region’s consultant through the Working Group to improve the start of a development application that leverages best practices. BILD members were involved in the development of this new process.

There are four key stages to the new CAP process (Figure 4):

Phase 1 – Mandatory Consultation seeks to establish clarity

- Municipal staff work with the applicant to provide clear and comprehensive direction for the project in the pre-application stage and provide direction on what is required to assemble a complete submission package (e.g., common terms of reference)

Phase 2 – Advance Review to ensure quality submissions

- This Phase of the process focuses on the quality of the submission prepared by the applicant. Municipal staff will undertake a quick review of the submission to ensure it meets Terms of Reference and design standards set out through the consultation (Phase 1).

Phase 3 – Complete Submission

- Complete application is submitted by the applicant with formal signoff by reviewers that they are satisfied with the information submitted and confident their work can be completed within the legislated timeframe. The applicant is committing to their role in providing further information to support the reviewers in their final work.

Phase 4 – Legislated Timeframes

- Quality submission means the municipality is equipped to achieve the required Council approval or decision by the mandatory deadline.

Figure 4
New common process developed by the Working Group for starting a development application



Timeframes identified are aspirational and depend on the minor or major nature of the project.

A full description of each Phase is provided in the consultant's report in Attachment 1 supported by 29 recommendations.

BILD has been asked to support the new CAP process through pilot projects in the Town of Newmarket and Township of King

BILD expressed concerns that the CAP process is shifting statutory review to an upfront non-statutory review process before an application has been submitted, which is not in the spirit of the *Planning Act*. The CAP process employs a similar process used in building permit issuance. Building permits undergo a series of reviews and resubmissions before they are accepted and processed by a municipality. The CAP is a starting point to be improved upon with input and support from local municipalities, commenting agencies, developers, and consultants. The bottom line is both municipalities and applicants will need to make prescribed timelines work. BILD has been asked to embrace this change and participate in pilot projects across in the Region to make improvements as a Region-wide process solution.

The Town of Newmarket and Township of King have started piloting the CAP process. The Region will work with local municipal staff, applicants, and consultant to obtain feedback on the new process and share findings with members of the Working Group and BILD for continuous refinement of the CAP process.

Continuous Improvement Group with local municipalities and other partners is required to lead efficiencies in development review

There are more opportunities for standardization and process alignment in planning to support further efficiencies in development review. To build on the momentum of this Project, the Region is establishing a continuous improvement group (Planning Innovation Team) to provide a forum to share best practices, encourage data sharing and advance planning modernization. BILD are a key partner in developing workable solutions and they have agreed to participate on this Working Group.

5. Financial

The Project is funded through the Provincial Streamline Development Approval Fund. The Region has received \$250,000 in funding to date and the remaining \$250,000 will be provided at project completion. This funding is being used to hire consultants and one GIS staff to advance the project.

6. Local Impact

The collective work of the local municipalities and the Region has generated consistency and support for the standards developed through this project that include:

- Common Collaborative Application Preparation (CAP) process that focuses on scoping applications and improving quality submissions
- 25 common Terms of Reference to provide applicants with consistent standards for applications
- Streamlined development application form
- Participating on the Planning Innovation Team to continue process improvement and data sharing initiatives

7. Conclusion

Streamlined development review requires municipalities, applicants and commenting agencies to work collaboratively on a mandate of clarity, efficiency and trust. It also requires a broader vision that involves streamlining services across multiple organizations involved in

development review and increasing transparency for all stakeholders. York Region is using Provincial funding from the Streamline Development Approval Fund (SDAF) to lead this bigger transformation with support from the local municipalities, conservation authorities and input from BILD.

Planning data exchange is necessary to streamline the development approval process and support informed decision making. Data exchange allows municipalities to maintain their current development tracking systems and provides several efficiencies (e.g., critical data for real-time analytics, transparency, faster approvals). Investment in local system readiness to support data exchange would ensure a continuous flow of data for development applications to support faster review and approvals and increase transparency for all stakeholders.

Through this project, the Region and its nine local municipalities and conservation authorities developed planning data standards for a development application, 25 common terms of references and a common process for starting an application known as the Collaborative Application Preparation (CAP) process. These standards are based on local best practices, provide applicants with greater clarity, support quality submissions and faster approvals. A Planning Innovation Team has been established with representatives from local municipalities and BILD to identify opportunities for further efficiencies.

The Region will continue advocating to the Province to expand digitization of the development application process. The final Project report will be posted online in Q3 - 2023.

For more information on this report, please contact Teema Kanji, Manager of Process Improvement at 1-877-464-9675 ext.71506 and Julie Millson, Program Manager, Data Analytics and Visualization Services ext.71565. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.



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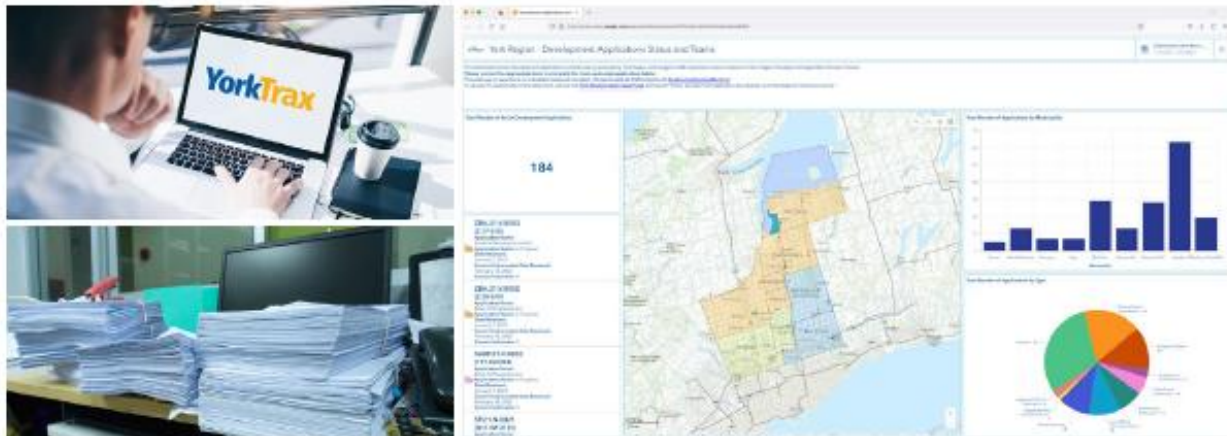
March 23, 2023

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Attachment 1 – Data Standardization within York Region (Consultant Report) – Collaborative Strategies for Modernizing Local Municipality Development Application Processing (Maureen McCauley and Pat Moyle)

Appendix A – Efficiencies through YorkTrax

YORKTRAX - GROWTH and DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION TRACKING




233,000
 DOCUMENTS
 EXCHANGED


8,200
 APPLICATIONS
 REVIEWED


10,000
 COMMENT
 LETTERS SENT


5,000
 DAYS SAVED
 SEARCHING
 for DOCUMENTS

The Region has been on a journey to transform the planning process.

In 2017, the Region launched a development tracking system built in-house using existing technology solutions at the Region (Salesforce and Esri). This new system has had a big impact on development review at the Region and several efficiencies have been realized for the business including:

- Streamlined the review/approval process
- Centralized application information in one place saving close to 5,000 days of staff time
- Provided transparency in the review process across Departments involved in development review
- Reduced application circulation times from 3 days to 0.5 hours
- Provides metrics on the development approval process – identifies opportunities for further efficiencies
- Single source of truth for development application data in the Region
- Allows Data informed decisions through Dashboards (e.g., Housing Supply, Development Application Status)

WHATS NEXT (evolution) – remove data duplication in the development application approval process by leveraging the Region's Data Coop and working with local municipalities and other commenting agencies (Conservation Authorities, School Boards) to increase planning data exchange to provide transparency and further efficiencies in the process.

