

Municipal Benchmarking Study

HALIFAX



OVERALL RANKING

Halifax jumped from the #8 position in the 2022 study to second place in 2024. The municipality saw the best improvement in timelines with a decrease of 11 months.

Rank	Municipality	Planning features (1=Best)	Approvals timelines (1=Best)	Government charges Low-Rise (1=Lowest)	Government charges High-Rise (1=Lowest)
1	Edmonton	6	4	8	9
2	Halifax	1	13	6	2
3	London	5	7	9	15
4	Regina	14	3	5	8
5	Calgary	7	6	13	10
6	Moncton	18	2	1	1
7	Charlottetown	22	5	2	3
8	Kelowna	15	8	11	5
9	Kamloops	21	10	7	6
10	Surrey	11	9	14	13
11	Saskatoon	16	1	18	7
12	St. John's	20	12	3	4
13	Ottawa	8	17	10	16
14	Winnipeg	23	14	4	11
15	Oakville	4	15	21	21
16	Burnaby	17	18	16	14
17	Vancouver	12	11	17	12
18	Brampton	9	16	20	20
19	Hamilton	10	23	12	17
20	Pickering	13	19	19	18
21	Toronto	3	22	23	23
22	Markham	2	20	22	22
23	Bradford West Gwillimbury	19	21	15	19

This study compares 23 Canadian municipalities, examining how their processes, approvals timelines, and government charges and fees contribute to housing affordability and supply issues in major housing markets across Canada.

Whether at the top or the bottom of the list, each city can learn from best practices of others and continue to improve.



RANKINGS

The ranking reads as a report card to show which municipal governments are currently leading in which of the three pillars of the study (planning features, approvals timelines, and government charges), and provides an overall ranking. This ranking does not assess anything beyond what was analyzed and is not reflective necessarily of the engagement and cooperation between industry and local governments.

PLANNING FEATURES

Each municipality is scored on whether they have features that can support an efficient planning approvals system, and increase transparency for developers, the public, or other interested parties. This edition of the study makes some modifications to the review of features from the previous study. After an internal review and feedback of the scoring process from the previous study, the number of themes that include features within them has been reduced from five (5) to three (3). The total number of features being reviewed has been reduced from 16 to 13.



OVERALL SCORE FOR PLANNING FEATURES

Theme	Feature	Score
APPLICATION PREPARATION	(1) Application Support Materials (2) Zoning By-law in Interactive Map (3) Zoning By-law in Machine Readable Format (4) Staff Contact Information	94%
APPLICATION SUBMISSION	(1) Planning Application Submission Options (2) Planning Application Payment Options (3) Building Permit Submission Options (4) Building Permit Payment Options	100%
APPLICATION TRACKING	(1) Active Application Information Website (2) Status Indicator for Applications (3) Historical Planning Data Availability (4) Interactive Map of Planning Applications (5) Availability of Application Submission Documents	90%

MUNICIPAL CHARGES

The report provides a high-level overview of a blended rate of government charges levied by municipal governments and attempts to quantify the costs these charges and fees generate for developers, home builders, and ultimately, home buyers.

LOW-RISE



\$30,500 / UNIT

HIGH-RISE



\$4,400 / UNIT



**9.8
MONTHS**

APPROVALS TIMELINES

We estimate typical approval timelines for development applications – from complete application to planning approval. The nature of the ‘planning approval’ can take many forms.

Delays in approvals impact housing affordability. Months of delays can add tens of thousands of dollars to the cost of a home.

INDIRECT COSTS DUE TO DELAYS

There are indirect costs that accumulate on a development as its application goes through the application process including: property taxes, financing costs, and cost escalation of construction materials and labour due to inflation.

LOW-RISE



\$2,920 / UNIT / MONTH

HIGH-RISE



\$2,696 / UNIT / MONTH

SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES

To achieve a second-place ranking, Halifax has several elements working well, and others requiring improvement.

WORKING WELL



HALIFAX IS CONSIDERED "BEST IN CLASS" WITH ITS APPLICATION SUBMISSION PROCESS

Municipalities were ranked on the level of digitization adopted in the application submission process by allowing for electronic submission and payment of applications and building permits.



ZONING REFORMS

Halifax is permitting for up to four units per lot in suburban residential neighbourhoods and introducing more flexible regulations for secondary suites, backyard suites, and shared housing;



ZONING REFORMS

Halifax is increasing permitted density on proposed Rapid Transit corridors and is allowing up to 8 units per lot in the Regional Centre (subject to lot requirements & design standards)



HIGHER MUNICIPAL FEES FOR LOW-RISE DEVELOPMENT THAN OTHER ATLANTIC CANADIAN CITIES IN THE STUDY.

While still on the low range, Halifax does have higher fees than Moncton, Charlottetown, and St. John's.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

ABOUT THE CHBA MUNICIPAL BENCHMARKING STUDY

www.chba.ca/municipal-benchmarking



The Municipal Benchmarking Study was commissioned by the Canadian Home Builders' Association (CHBA) and delivered by Altus Group. The study assessed municipalities on features, approvals and government charges, drawing out best practices. All cities can learn from each others' experiences, continually improving policies and operations to increase housing supply and affordability.

The 2024 edition of the study provides further detail on how a municipality's performance on approval timelines, municipal fees, and planning features influence housing outcomes, including affordability and availability of housing for young families, and the total cost implications of these municipal processes and policies. There was also greater direct participation from most municipalities to help support the research.

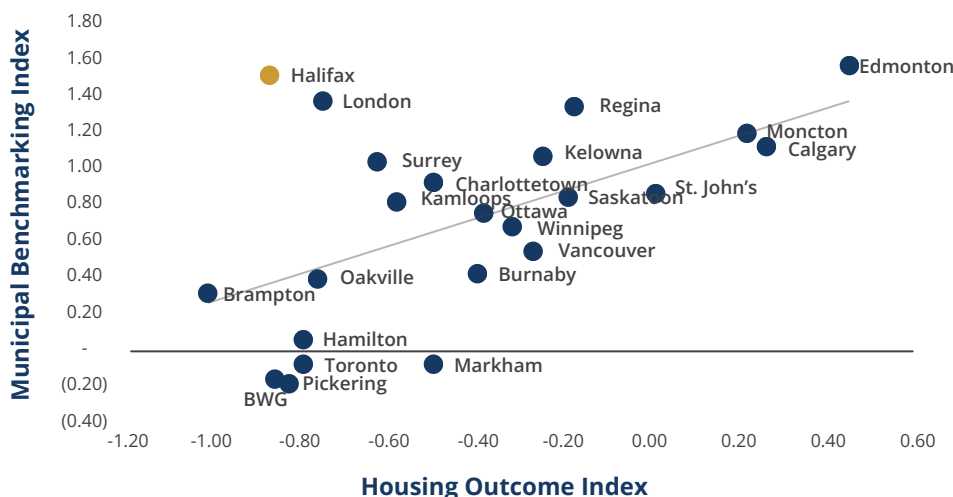
This edition also includes two additional areas of scoring: indirect costs of the residential development application process, and a housing outcome measure. The chart below shows that in general, **municipalities that score low on the municipal benchmarking index have worse housing outcomes**. Higher Municipal Benchmark Index scores are positively related to a blended measure of improved housing affordability, lower suppressed household formation rates, a balanced vacancy rate, and net positive municipal migration. Poor Benchmark scores create a high likelihood that a municipality experiences relatively poor housing outcomes—the opposite of the four blended measures. Outlier cities like Halifax and London illustrate how housing policy changes for new supply need time before measurable housing outcomes improve.

"This study is intended to facilitate conversations among all levels of government, especially municipal governments, on how land-use planning-related factors can be improved to encourage more housing supply, and help improve affordability for Canadians across the country. Municipalities often face similar challenges, and learning from each other can help improve housing outcomes for all."



**-Kevin Lee
CEO, CHBA**

Housing Outcomes Index VS. Municipal Benchmarking Index, 2024



NOTES

The research started with data from June 2022 onwards (to avoid overlap with the previous study). The study does not include any potential impacts on housing as a result of the changes a municipality may have made as a result of receiving money from the federal Housing Accelerator Fund.

The results are independent of the quality of the relationship between the municipal government and the residential construction industry.