

Digital transformation and continuous improvement



At the City of Guelph, digital transformation means making strategic investments over time that create better value for citizens and business, enables more efficient service delivery, supports innovation and ultimately helps us become the modern and customer-centric City our community expects.

Digital investments in the 2021 budget include:

- Moving the organization to a new Office 365 platform that will allow staff to work from anywhere and enhance collaboration through document sharing and video conferencing.
- Replacing core systems including Corporate Payment System and Property Tax Billing to improve customer service.
- Creating a new appointment booking solution for the public who require meetings with staff including marriage licenses and commissioning of documents.
- Implementing new software to improve internal payroll processes including time and attendance and performance management.
- Implementing new expense management software that will automate the current paper-based expense reimbursement and corporate credit card reconciliation processes as was recommended through an internal audit.

The transformation also requires a different way of thinking and working to solve problems and produce better outcomes at a time when people have come to expect speed, convenience, and simplicity in their interactions with government. In short, digital transformation is about applying the culture, practices, processes and technologies of the internet-era to respond to citizens' raised expectations.

The City is taking a coordinated approach to digital transformation through an internal, cross-functional steering committee governance structure. This committee is considering the corporate functional requirements that span all services like single-sign-on for web-based citizen services, document management, corporate human resource systems, a corporate payment web interface, and centralized customer service.

In addition, the City is committed to continuous improvement in the ongoing effort to improve digital products, services, and processes. Small changes at the front-line process level can create the capacity to handle the increasing volume of calls and transactions that come with a growing City. Some recent examples include the implementation of Varonis to streamline the process for making changes to system permissions, automation of the Request for Proposal evaluation process, new recreation and facility booking software, and incrementally working towards the elimination of all manual forms across the City.

How does digital transformation translate to budget savings?

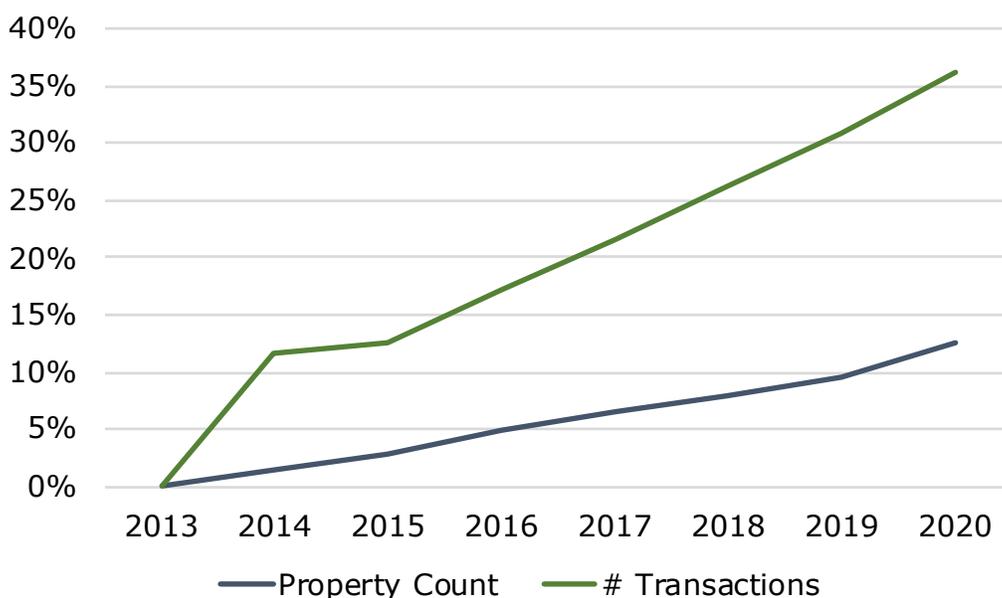
Guelph is growing, and if we do not make the investments to become a modern, tech-savvy government, we will fail to meet the service delivery standards of our community. Digital transformation will enable the City to handle increasing volumes of transactions without adding as many positions as may otherwise be required.

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A simple example of this is in our property tax department. As the number of households and businesses grow annually, the City relies on that assessment growth to pay for the growing cost of providing services to more residents and businesses. The volume of tax collection transactions, citizen queries, and other requests are increasing annually.

Graph 1: Growth Impacts on Property Tax Collection Division



From 2013 thru to 2020, the number of properties in Guelph has increased 13 per cent and the volume of individual payment transactions has increased 31 per cent. Increases in citizen queries and questions have also escalated through this time period. Through this growth, the property taxation collection team staffing level has not changed. Guelph is expected to reach over 200,000 people or increase by 50 per cent by 2051, meaning this trending will continue to increase.

Without digital investment and continuous improvement projects to create capacity, the tax department could not keep pace with growing transaction volumes and would need to seek additional human resource support through a budget expansion.

Initiatives like new preauthorized payment plans, continued promotion of the tax department email—tax@guelph.ca—instead of calling, and the implementation of [tax certificate purchases online](#), creates the capacity to manage through the impacts of population growth. In 2021, a new property tax billing software replacement will give citizens and businesses direct to their property tax bills further extending the capacity of the tax team. These initiatives have lower budget impacts than investment in additional human resources, and will modernize our processes in a way that citizens expect to be served.