

BACKGROUND

Heritage Framework Transformation



**PROTECT
ONTARIO**

Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism

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Ontario 

Overview

As part of Ontario's broader efforts to reduce red tape, improve government services and support economic growth, the government is bringing forward proposals to advance its commitment to become the fastest permitting jurisdictions in the G7. The measures would form part of legislation that the government intends to introduce in the near future.

The **Heritage Framework Transformation** is a multi-year initiative to transform Ontario's heritage system. A key objective is to improve archaeology processes to better protect Ontario's heritage while providing greater certainty to businesses by supporting faster approvals for development and land-use planning projects.

Through the Heritage Framework Transformation, the government is streamlining archaeology approvals, expanding the archaeology sector capacity, improving digital tools and services and enhancing transparency and engagement with stakeholders and Indigenous communities.

Building on substantial progress to date, Ontario is proposing legislative changes that would further improve the archaeology process. The proposed changes would cut red tape by better aligning Ontario's approach with best practices in other Canadian and international jurisdictions, supporting investment and economic growth.

If approved, the changes would be implemented through a phased approach, with some measures coming into effect earlier in 2027 and additional measures introduced over time to support implementation across the sector.

The Need for Action

Ontario is growing, increasing demand for housing, infrastructure and economic development projects across the province. Since 2020, development activity has increased by approximately 30 per cent, creating greater demand for archaeological services and reviews. Today, approximately 98 per cent of archaeological assessments are undertaken as part of development and infrastructure projects and the ministry receives approximately 3,500 archaeology reports annually.

The Heritage Framework Transformation has already delivered significant improvements. The initiative eliminated the archaeological report review backlog, which at its peak exceeded 3,000 reports.



Since April 2026, service delivery was improved by implementing an enhanced report screening process allowing **80 per cent of reports filed** to be entered into the report register within 10 business days.

However, further action is needed as Ontario's archaeology framework continues to rely on processes, regulations and digital tools developed decades ago that do not fully reflect current operational needs, sector best practices or development pressures. As a result, project proponents can experience lengthy timelines, increased costs and uncertainty, while homeowners may face additional costs and delays when undertaking property improvement projects such as decks and fences.

Ontario's archaeology sector also faces growing demand and capacity pressures, with only approximately 250 licensed professional archaeologists leading projects across the province. Complex archaeological assessments can take up to five years to complete, creating additional challenges for housing, infrastructure and economic development projects.

Proposal Overview

The government has implemented early operational improvements, including elimination of the archaeology report review backlog, Information Technology enhancements and piloting new standards and guidelines. These measures have already started to accelerate project delivery and approvals, improved customer service and enhanced transparency and predictability in the review process.

While important progress has been made, a three-pronged approach is being taken to further reduce archaeology timelines, address low compliance rates, expand the sector and fix persistent inefficiencies that delay projects:



The proposed changes would create a more efficient, predictable and transparent archaeology process. The changes are expected to reduce approval **timelines by up to 80 per cent, increase sector capacity by 45 per cent** and **support the timely delivery of housing, infrastructure and other job-creating projects across Ontario.**

Stakeholders and Indigenous communities would benefit from clearer, more transparent processes, improved access to information, user-friendly digital services and meaningful opportunities for engagement and consultation.

Proposal		Expected Outcome
Streamline Archaeology Approvals	Implement a new permit process to support faster approvals and support conservation.	Proponents More predictable timelines and approval process to plan projects with confidence and additional archaeology sector capacity to support projects which will address resource challenges that delay projects. E.g., the permit model will put proponents in the lead, giving them greater control and accountability. Archaeologists More career opportunities, less reporting and administrative burden to work without delay. E.g., additional qualified persons will be eligible to conduct archaeological work. Indigenous Communities Increased Indigenous participation in archaeology assessments, earlier engagement in the archaeology assessment process and clear requirements and processes to support Duty to Consult obligations. E.g., Indigenous communities will receive early notice of planned projects, enabling Indigenous interests, concerns and knowledge to be identified and considered earlier in the process. Decision makers Less red tape, faster approvals, clearer rules and timely access to information. E.g., approval timelines could drop from 64 months to 18 months for advanced archaeology-projects, and from 29 months down to 6 months for exploratory archaeology. Homeowners Simpler, faster and less costly approvals for property improvements. E.g., small scale projects such as decks and fences can proceed faster.
Expand the Archaeology Sector	Eliminate the licencing requirements to expand who can conduct archaeology aligning Ontario with the rest of Canada and increase monitoring to improve compliance with provincial requirements.	
Use Advanced Digital Solutions	Centralize data to improve access to information and support coordination for stakeholders and Indigenous communities.	

Current and Proposed Future State

	Current State	Future State
Streamlined Archaeology Approvals	- Licensed Consultant Archaeologists conduct a four-stage assessment process that can take up to 64 months. - Approximately 3,500 reports submitted annually. - Approximately 250 professional archaeologists province-wide. - Approximately 80 per cent of archaeological resources are of Indigenous interest.	- MCM is proposing a streamlined process that regulates archaeology by issuing a site-specific authorization, to the proponent that sets out requirements/conditions that must be met before work begins. - The new process will replace the current archaeology assessment process with a streamlined, risk-based process that includes: - Low Risk - Exemptions for small scale projects and residential projects where there is no archaeology potential (e.g., previously assessed land), - Medium Risk - Permit-by-rule project registration, where work could proceed if mandatory requirements are met, - High Risk - MCM issues authorization with requirements that must be met before archaeology fieldwork proceeds. Archaeology fieldwork required is dependent on project (size, excavation time, etc.) - New approval process will reduce overall archaeology assessment timelines to 4–6 months, down from 29 months, for 80 per cent of projects and 12–18 months, down from 64 months, for the remaining 20 per cent. - Increased proponent control over projects and timelines under new approval process. - New ministry tools to improve conservation outcomes, including conditions on approvals and new investigation and inspection powers. - New Indigenous engagement and consultation requirements embedded in the archaeological approvals process. Earlier Indigenous involvement to improve communication and avoid costly project delays. - Archaeology exemptions for small-scale residential projects that will reduce administrative and financial burden for homeowners. - A new archaeology approval process that keeps Ontario competitive in the midst of growing economic challenges while also conserving vital archaeological resources.



Depending on complexity of the projects, new archaeology approvals timelines are **expected to be reduced by 80 per cent.**

Current and Proposed Future State

	Current State	Future State
Enhanced Sector Oversight and Compliance Framework	- Ontario's heritage framework requires archaeological fieldwork to be conducted by ministry licensed archaeologists, which is inconsistent with the rest of Canada and creates a barrier for archaeologists from other provinces/territories to work in Ontario. - The framework does not recognize Indigenous-led training or experience as meeting some qualification criteria nor provide for early Indigenous involvement which can result in concerns being raised late in the process which can create costly delays later in the project. - The compliance approach is limited and largely reactive, relying on licensing, desktop assessments, limited field inspections, stop orders in select cases, and referrals to partner ministries for investigations.	- Eliminating licensing requirements and broadening requirements for qualified persons will remove barriers to sector entry, enable mutual recognition of qualifications and support interprovincial/territorial labour mobility. - Reducing barriers to Indigenous participation in archaeological work by recognizing Indigenous-led training and experience to increase capacity for archaeological work throughout the province. - These changes will increase the number of people authorized to undertake archaeology, expanding the size of the sector by 45 per cent, which will also help reduce project timelines and potentially overall project costs. - Expanding the range of compliance and enforcement actions such as enhanced guidance and training, proactive risk-based inspections, fines and compliance orders will improve compliance.



Strengthening the archaeology sector, with capacity **expected to increase by approximately 45 per cent.**

Current and Proposed Future State

	Current State	Future State
Advanced Digital Solutions	• Outdated and cumbersome Information Technology system with limited data capture, reporting and analytical capacity, including for Indigenous-identified areas of interest. • Archaeological sites documented across paper records, partial digital files and some digital mapping resulting in lengthy manual processes. • These system and data gaps result in: ◦ Assessments taking longer as archaeologists don't have timely access to information required to complete assessments. ◦ Incomplete information about Indigenous archaeological sites to ensure that they are appropriately considered as part of archaeology assessments. ◦ Proponents not having access to information about project approvals.	• Enables new heritage and archaeology Information Technology functionality, supported by improved integrated mapping and spatial data, and access to real-time status updates on approval progress as part of Ontario's Centralized Digital Permitting Service. • Changes will improve the accuracy and detail of archaeological assessment mapping, providing system users (e.g., proponents, archaeologists, municipalities, Indigenous communities) with timely information to support archaeology assessments and project decision-making. • Improved and more timely information sharing with archaeologists, project proponents, municipalities and Indigenous communities to expedite projects through evidence-based reviews and approvals. • Improved access to site-specific and compliance data to enable continuous improvement, strengthen regulatory oversight and proactively address site-specific risks before they escalate.



Advanced digital solutions will **improve user experience, transparency, and report reviews.**

Looking Ahead

If fully implemented, these proposed legislative changes will cut red tape and better align Ontario's approach with best practices in other Canadian and international jurisdictions, improving the archaeology process while also creating a more competitive environment for investment and economic growth.

The government will continue working with archaeologists, approval authorities, development stakeholders and Indigenous communities to support implementation of these new processes, if passed, to facilitate faster approvals, greater certainty and stronger protection of archaeology in the future.

Transformation efforts would create a more efficient archaeology system that supports growth while maintaining public confidence in heritage protection.

People across Ontario, stakeholders and Indigenous communities would benefit through clearer processes, greater confidence in decisions and protection of archaeological heritage.