

# Building permits: Flash estimates, March 2020

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In the context of the rapidly-evolving situation around the novel coronavirus (also known as COVID-19), Statistics Canada remains committed to providing timely information to all Canadians. As such, the agency is releasing March 2020 preliminary flash estimates of building permits for select regions. The following estimates are based on open-source building permit reports for 23 large municipalities, as well as municipal building permit reports submitted to Statistics Canada by April 2, 2020. Combined, these municipalities comprised approximately 29% of total building permits by value in 2019.

All figures in this report are not adjusted for seasonality, and are compared with the same municipalities on a year-over-year basis for the month of March.

On a year-over-year basis, the value of building permits issued by Canadian municipalities fell 23.2% to \$1.4 billion when compared with March 2019. Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec had the strongest declines, likely reflecting provincial measures put in place mid-month to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Municipalities in central Canada showed the largest declines, as both Ontario and Quebec declared emergencies in mid-March to combat the threat posed by the novel coronavirus. In Montréal, the number of permits filed declined 37.6% in March compared with the same period a year earlier. In Ontario, the value of building permits issued fell by 50.5% compared with March 2019.

Outside of central Canada, investment intentions in the Maritime provinces showed resilience with building permits in Halifax surging 153.1%, as both the residential (+\$31 million) and non-residential (+\$28 million) sectors increased compared with March 2019. Additionally, the number of permits in Charlottetown increased by 31.6% (+12 permits) from a year ago.

In Western Canada the value of building permits declined 3.2% to \$861 million as the fall in investment intentions for British Columbia (-26.8%) offset gains made in Alberta (+11.7%). As British Columbia reported many of the earliest Canadian cases of COVID-19, construction intentions likely slowed earlier than in the rest of Western Canada. A change in development fee costs in January for Vancouver may also have pulled some permits forward as builders avoided cost increases by submitting permit applications earlier than usual.

## Note to readers

*This is the first release of flash estimates for building permits published by Statistics Canada.*

*While every effort has been made to standardize the data, publicly available data published by municipalities are not necessarily directly comparable to data submitted to Statistics Canada during the regular collection process. Additionally, not all variables are available for all municipalities or regions when using open-source data.*

*Data presented in this release are in current dollars and are unadjusted for seasonality. While many of the usual validation steps have been taken, caution should be exercised when using these estimates.*

*Updated statistics for March building permits are scheduled to be published on May 8.*

*Building permits data are often used as a leading indicator of building intentions for the construction industry.*

*The value of planned construction activities presented in this release excludes engineering projects (such as waterworks, sewers, or culverts) and land.*

*Data for **residential permits** include both single and multi-family dwellings.*

*Data for **non-residential permits** include the industrial, commercial and institutional components.*



**Table 1**  
**Value of building permits, select municipalities**

	March 2019	March 2020 <sup>1</sup>	March 2019 to March 2020	March 2019 to March 2020
	millions of dollars		difference in millions of dollars	% change
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,876.4</b>	<b>1,440.5</b>	<b>-435.9</b>	<b>-23.2</b>
Residential permits	1,089.6	712.2	-377.4	-34.6
Non-residential permits	786.8	728.4	-58.5	-7.4

1. March 2020 data are flash estimates, use with caution.

**Note(s):** Percentage changes are calculated using unrounded data.

**Source(s):** Building permit (2802).

**Table 2**  
**Value of building permits for select municipalities, by region and province**

	March 2019	March 2020 <sup>1</sup>	March 2019 to March 2020
	millions of dollars		% change
<b>Canada</b>	<b>1,876.4</b>	<b>1,440.5</b>	<b>-23.2</b>
Non-residential	786.8	728.4	-7.4
Residential	1,089.6	712.2	-34.6
<b>Maritime provinces</b>	<b>65.8</b>	<b>119.8</b>	<b>82.1</b>
Nova Scotia	42.9	101.2	135.8
Non-residential	15.9	43.2	170.9
Residential	27.0	58.0	115.1
Prince Edward Island	4.4	1.1	-75.9
Non-residential	0.7	0.0	-100.0
Residential	3.7	1.1	-71.3
New Brunswick	18.4	17.5	-5.1
Non-residential	4.9	1.0	-80.3
Residential	13.5	16.5	22.5
<b>Central Canada</b>	<b>921.0</b>	<b>459.4</b>	<b>-50.1</b>
Quebec	29.4	17.9	-39.1
Non-residential	10.2	4.1	-60.3
Residential	19.2	13.9	-27.8
Ontario	891.5	441.4	-50.5
Non-residential	356.6	198.6	-44.3
Residential	535.0	242.9	-54.6
<b>Western Canada</b>	<b>889.7</b>	<b>861.4</b>	<b>-3.2</b>
Manitoba	11.9	10.2	-14.2
Non-residential	7.0	2.3	-66.7
Residential	4.9	7.9	59.5
Saskatchewan	2.4	4.3	80.9
Non-residential	1.1	3.2	182.8
Residential	1.2	1.1	-12.6
Alberta	535.4	598.1	11.7
Non-residential	237.1	335.7	41.6
Residential	298.3	262.3	-12.1
British Columbia	340.1	248.9	-26.8
Non-residential	153.3	140.4	-8.4
Residential	186.8	108.5	-41.9

1. March 2020 data are flash estimates, use with caution.

**Note(s):** Percentage changes are calculated using unrounded data. Insufficient reported or open data were available for Newfoundland and Labrador at the time of publication.

**Source(s):** Building Permits (2802).

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**Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [2802](#).**

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).