



March 4, 2021

Planning and Economic Development Committee
Niagara Region, Thorold, ON L2V 4T7

Dear Chair Huson:

RE: Request for Support & Legal Review Follow-up: Niagara River Ramsar Site Designation

The Niagara River Ramsar Binational Steering Committee continues to seek the Regional Municipality of Niagara's support for the designation of the Niagara River as a Ramsar Site. We are requesting the Regions support, through resolution, for the symbolic designation of the river as a Ramsar Site of International Importance. To clarify, the committee is not asking for endorsement, which can be perceived to imply financial considerations, nor are we requesting the Region to act in the capacity of Ramsar Site nominator, as the Region is not the landowner. We are looking for a nod of approval, acknowledging the river's ecological importance and global conservation contributions.

The Ramsar Binational Steering Committee would like to also thank council for recognizing that the legal advice contained in report PDS 2 – 2021 is rightfully public information, not meeting the threshold of being treated as a confidential matter. The legal opinion confirms our consistently maintained position that the Ramsar Convention is a voluntary global treaty, promoting the conservation and wise use of water-based ecosystems. It validates Ramsar is not a regulatory instrument and has no punitive sanctions for violations, nor does a Ramsar designation create regulatory requirements, especially for monitoring or reporting. We point to the fact that the Niagara River is currently governed and regulated by the **Boundary Waters Treaty**, the highest regulatory regimen possible for the river. Further, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) ask to be notified by the Ramsar nominator (landowner) to changes in ecological character. Ecological character as defined by the Ramsar Convention refers to any changes to Ramsar Site designation criteria (i.e., Niagara Falls as globally unique), and not changes to the river's ecology or water quality.

The sustainable development goals of the Ramsar Convention align with councils' mission of serving Niagara's *"residents, businesses and tourists through collaborative leadership, responsible policy and the provision of effective and efficient community-focused services, while maintaining environmental and economic sustainability"*. The members of the Ramsar Steering Committee share councils desire to *"achieve a prosperous, safe and inclusive community that **embraces our natural spaces** and promotes holistic wellbeing and quality of life"*. A Ramsar designation is certainly a path to get us to this mutually desired goal.

We look forward to achieving this globally significant designation together, and request this letter be included on the March 10th PEDC agenda and included with Friday March 5th council weekly correspondence.

Sincerely,

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Cc: Ann-Marie Norio, Niagara Regional Clerk
Chair Bradley, and all members of Regional Council