

**THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF NIAGARA
PUBLIC HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
OPEN SESSION**

**PHSSC 3-2021
Tuesday, March 9, 2021
Council Chamber/Video Conference
Niagara Region Headquarters, Campbell West
1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way, Thorold, ON**

Committee Members Present in the Council Chamber: Chiocchio (Committee Co-Chair), Greenwood (Committee Co-Chair)

Committee Members Present via Video Conference: Bellows, Bradley (Regional Chair), Butters, Darte, Foster, Gibson, Insinna, Ip, Jordan, Nicholson, Rigby, Sendzik, Villella, Whalen, Witteveen

Staff Present in the Council Chamber: E. Fabiani, Technology Support Analyst, Dr. M. M. Hirji, Acting Medical Officer of Health, A. Jugley, Commissioner, Community Services, A.-M. Norio, Regional Clerk, R. Tripp, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

Staff Present via Video Conference: A. Alfieri-Maiolo, Director, Clinical Services, C. Cousins, Director, Homelessness and Community Engagement, S. Kearns, Director, Environmental Health, H. Koning, Director, Senior Services, K. Lotimer, Legislative Coordinator, D. Lorenzo, Associate Director, Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention, S. McElhone, Director, Organizational and Foundational Standards, J. Shickluna, Manager, Housing Programs, Niagara Regional Housing, J. Sinclair, Homelessness Action Plan Advisor, K. Smith, Chief/Director, Emergency Medical Services, M. Todd, Manager, Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities, L. Watson, Director, Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities, D. Woiceshyn, Chief Executive Officer, Niagara Regional Housing

1. CALL TO ORDER

Committee Co-Chair Chiocchio called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

2. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no disclosures of pecuniary interest.

3. PRESENTATIONS

There were no presentations.

4. DELEGATIONS

4.1 Motion to Support Niagara's Agriculture Sector and Temporary Foreign Workers (Correspondence Item COM-C 13-2021 (Agenda Item 5.3))

4.1.1 Aidan Johnson, Niagara Community Legal Clinic

Aidan Johnson withdrew his delegation request.

5. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 COM 4-2021

Niagara Prosperity Initiative Review

Moved by Councillor Whalen

Seconded by Councillor Witteveen

That Report COM 4-2021, dated March 9, 2021, respecting Niagara Prosperity Initiative Review, **BE RECEIVED** and the following recommendations **BE APPROVED**:

1. That the Brock University executive summary report titled "Connecting the Pieces: An Evaluation of the Niagara Prosperity Initiative and Call for a Broader Poverty Reduction Strategy for Niagara", **BE RECEIVED** for information; and
2. That Regional Council **DIRECT** staff to:
 - 2.1 Complete a comprehensive review of the analysis and recommendations; and
 - 2.2 Present the "Connecting the Pieces: An Evaluation of the Niagara Prosperity Initiative and Call for a Broader Poverty Reduction Strategy for Niagara" report and staff recommendations to Public Health and Social Services Committee (PHSSC) no later than September 2021.

Carried

5.2 COM-C 12-2021

Request from Niagara Regional Housing for Endorsement of "An End of Mortgage" Position Paper

Moved by Councillor Insinna
Seconded by Councillor Ip

That Correspondence Item COM-C 12-2021, being a letter to A.-M. Norio, Regional Clerk, from Niagara Regional Housing, dated February 19, 2021, respecting Request for Endorsement of "An End of Mortgage" Position Paper **BE RECEIVED** and the "An End of Mortgage" Position Paper **BE ENDORSED**.

The following friendly *amendment* was accepted by the Committee Chair, and the mover and seconder of the motion, so the motion reads as follows:

That Correspondence Item COM-C 12-2021, being a letter to A.-M. Norio, Regional Clerk, from Niagara Regional Housing, dated February 19, 2021, respecting Request for Endorsement of "An End of Mortgage" Position Paper **BE RECEIVED** and the "An End of Mortgage" Position Paper **BE ENDORSED**; and

That a copy of Consent Item COM-C 12-2021 BE CIRCULATED to the local area MP's, MPP's and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO).

The Committee Chair, called the vote on the motion, as amended, and declared it,

Carried

5.3 COM-C 13-2021

Motion Respecting Niagara's Agricultural Sector and Temporary Foreign Workers

Moved by Councillor Witteveen
Seconded by Councillor Foster

WHEREAS agriculture plays a crucial role in Niagara's economy, contributing over \$1.4 billion to the Regional GDP;

WHEREAS Niagara's 1,800+ farms provide over 20,000 jobs to residents and temporary foreign workers;

WHEREAS Niagara's farms provide over 43% of the total agricultural economic impact of the Golden Horseshoe, despite only having 23% of the total farmland;

WHEREAS many of Niagara's farms play an important role in ensuring Ontario's food security;

WHEREAS the operations on many of these farms require the use of temporary foreign workers in order to meet processing demands;

WHEREAS the Federal Government requires farms that employ temporary foreign workers to complete a labour market screen in order to demonstrate that these positions to be filled cannot be done by domestic labourers;

WHEREAS the Federal Government protects temporary foreign workers under Canadian law, requiring farms who utilize temporary employees to ensure that they are paid for their work, the workplace is safe, they are provided with break time and days off and that the terms of their written contracts are respected;

WHEREAS since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, issues have been raised by numerous concerned groups regarding the living conditions of the temporary foreign workers and the potential impact of these conditions on the spread of the virus;

WHEREAS Regional Council acknowledges that many farmers in Niagara have made meaningful enhancements to their operations to address these concerns;

WHEREAS temporary foreign workers integrate into the Niagara community while they are in the country, including visiting retail and restaurant establishments;

WHEREAS a recent report published by the CBC found that temporary foreign workers are at least 10 per cent more likely to contact COVID-19 than compared to the general population;

WHEREAS since the beginning of the pandemic, over 1,600 temporary foreign workers have contracted the virus, meaning almost 1 in 5 of Niagara's cases was a temporary foreign worker;

WHEREAS temporary foreign workers have died of COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic;

WHEREAS ensuring the health and safety of temporary foreign workers is crucial to protect their lives, the operational continuity on the farms and the amount of COVID-19 in circulation in the Niagara community;

WHEREAS the costs associated with improving these living conditions may be economically detrimental to farm owners due to drastic increases in construction materials, permitting and other fees and charges; and

WHEREAS the Federal Government is currently seeking input on the migrant farm-worker accommodation issue to strengthen its policies.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

1. That the Regional Chair **BE DIRECTED** to advocate to the Federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship advocating for the federal government to:
 - a. Oversee (and provide the necessary financial assistance) for the mandated quarantine of migrant workers upon arriving in Canada and in the event of an outbreak;
 - b. Continue to make federal subsidy funding available for farms that employ temporary foreign workers so that the costs associated with protecting their health and safety not be an exceptional burden on Niagara's local farms; and
 - c. Ensure that internet access to rural farm locations continues to be a high priority;
2. That the Regional Chair **BE DIRECTED** to write a letter to the provincial Minister of Health and the Solicitor General advocating that temporary migrant workers be considered a priority group to receive the COVID-19 vaccine when made available; and
3. That Regional staff **BE DIRECTED** to explore, as part of the 2022 Development Charge By-law update, policy options that the Regional Municipality of Niagara, in partnership with the Local Area Municipalities, may consider pursuing that would be designed to provide financial relief (from local permitting, fees and development charges) for farm owners who are seeking to improve the living conditions of temporary foreign workers.

The following friendly **amendment** was accepted by the Committee Chair, and the mover and seconder of the motion so that clause 1(b) reads as follows:

- b. ~~Continue to make~~ **Increase** federal subsidy funding available for farms that employ temporary foreign workers so that the costs associated with protecting their health and safety not be an exceptional burden on Niagara's local farms; and

The Committee Chair called the vote on the motion, as amended, as follows:

1. That the Regional Chair **BE DIRECTED** to advocate to the Federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship advocating for the federal government to:
 - a. Oversee (and provide the necessary financial assistance) for the mandated quarantine of migrant workers upon arriving in Canada and in the event of an outbreak;
 - b. Increase federal subsidy funding available for farms that employ temporary foreign workers so that the costs associated with protecting their health and safety not be an exceptional burden on Niagara's local farms; and
 - c. Ensure that internet access to rural farm locations continues to be a high priority;
2. That the Regional Chair **BE DIRECTED** to write a letter to the provincial Minister of Health and the Solicitor General advocating that temporary migrant workers be considered a priority group to receive the COVID-19 vaccine when made available; and
3. That Regional staff **BE DIRECTED** to explore, as part of the 2022 Development Charge By-law update, policy options that the Regional Municipality of Niagara, in partnership with the Local Area Municipalities, may consider pursuing that would be designed to provide financial relief (from local permitting, fees and development charges) for farm owners who are seeking to improve the living conditions of temporary foreign workers.

Carried

6. CONSENT ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Correspondence Item PHD-C 7-2021 was considered separately.

Moved by Councillor Gibson
Seconded by Councillor Whalen

That the following items **BE RECEIVED** for information:

COM-C 10-2021

COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Community Services

COM 2-2021

Evaluation of 2018 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Projects

COM 3-2021

Seniors Services Quality Improvement Report – October to December 2020

COM-C 9-2021

Activities related to Niagara's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan for December 2020, January and February 2021

COM-C 11-2021

Niagara Regional Housing Quarterly Report - October to December 2020

PHD-C 6-2021

COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Health and Emergency Services

Carried

6.7 PHD-C 7-2021

Opioid Work Update

Moved by Councillor Gibson
Seconded by Councillor Rigby

That Correspondence Item PHD-C 7-2021, being a memorandum from Dr. M. M. Hirji, Acting Medical Officer of Health/Commissioner, Public Health, dated March 9, 2021, respecting Opioid Work Update, **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Carried

7. OTHER BUSINESS

7.1 Universal Income Program

Councillor Witteveen enquired whether staff have received a reply from the various levels of government in response to the request from Niagara Region to be considered for inclusion in any Universal Basic Income pilot projects. Adrienne Jugley, Commissioner, Community Services, advised that no reply had been received to date.

7.2 Well Water Testing

Councillors Gibson and Butters advised that the Town of Wainfleet and the City of Port Colborne will begin accepting well water samples from residents within the next few weeks and will be providing instructions on their websites regarding the process for residents to drop off water samples.

8. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 13, 2021, at 1:00 p.m. in the Council Chamber, Regional Headquarters.

9. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:37 p.m.

Councillor Chiocchio
Committee Co-Chair

Councillor Greenwood
Committee Co-Chair

Kelly Lotimer
Legislative Coordinator

Ann-Marie Norio
Regional Clerk