

Motion to Enhance and Support Niagara Region's Public Facing Communications

WHEREAS timely, accurate and effective two-way communications with elected officials and the public are of vital importance at all times;

WHEREAS the importance of these communications had been heightened since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic;

WHEREAS the provision of high-quality, exceptional communications between the Niagara Region and elected officials and members of public is dependent on internal coordination, information sharing and adherence to established strategies guiding all regional departments;

WHEREAS successful public communications are also dependent on strong relationships with external partners such as the Niagara Health, Brock University, Niagara College, the school boards, the provincial and federal government, the private sector and, most importantly, the 12 local area municipalities;

WHEREAS the Region's Strategic Communications and Public Affairs division provides a full suite of services to all Regional Departments (with the exception of Public Health) with a total staff compliment of 9 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs);

WHEREAS the Public Health Communications Team, whose services are limited to their department, has a current total staff compliment of 13 FTEs (with some of these positions being on contract for the duration of the pandemic);

WHEREAS a number of the communication positions in Public Health are funded all or in-part by provincial dollars;

WHEREAS Regional Council accepts the proposition that it is an important priority to ensure that communications with the public and other elected officials occur in the most efficient, effective and timely way possible;

WHEREAS Regional Council respects the need at times for all departments to be able to communicate in a confidential manner potentially sensitive information in the interest of the public's health, safety and general wellbeing;

WHEREAS it is critical during a time of pandemic that the messaging and communications emanating from all departments be aligned and respond to the need for the public and elected officials to receive timely, consistent, concise and comprehensible information;

WHEREAS the reporting structure of communications at Niagara Region can be rationalized without detrimentally affecting the ability of the Acting Medical Officer of Health to exercise his legislative authority under the Health Promotions and Protections Act; and

WHEREAS a reorganization of the Region's FTEs with a core public relations and communications responsibility into a consolidated department would enhance the objective of a strong communications team by allowing for a better sharing of resources, a reduction in silos within the organization thereby expediting the decision making process, a more streamlined interface for key stakeholders and partners, increased cooperation in regards to strategic planning and a strong potential for increased operational efficiency.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

1. That Niagara Regional Council/Board of Health **DIRECTS** the Acting Chief Administrative Officer and Acting Medical Officer of Health to ensure the immediate alignment of messaging and communications emanating from the Niagara Region Public Health Department and the Niagara Region on all matters related to the current COVID-19 pandemic and provide a progress report at the May 2021, Committee meetings; and
2. That Regional Council **DIRECTS** the Acting Chief Administrative Officer to:
 - a) Provide a report to the Corporate Services Committee for its May 12, 2021, meeting on the potential reorganization of the core communication resources found in all departments of Niagara Region, including Public Health, with a view to creating a unified strategic communications entity; and
 - b) Determine what memorandums of understanding and/or service level agreements may be necessary to satisfy the needs of provincial funders in regards to any communications positions in public Health paid for, wholly or partially, by the Ministry of Health.