

Strategic Plan 2019 – 2022

Mid-Term Highlights

Table of Contents

Supporting Our Community During Covid-19

Introduction	4
Response Measures and Actions.....	4
Economic Recovery Table	5
Community Response Planning Table	6
Corporate Response	7
Public Health	9

Priority 1 – Supporting Businesses and Economic Growth..... 11

1. Economic Development Long-Term Strategy	11
2. 2021/22 Summer Games.....	12
3. Expand Broadband Infrastructure and Capacity	13
4. Niagara Region New Official Plan.....	14
“How Else Are We Achieving This?”	15

Priority 2 - Healthy and Vibrant Community 18

1. Health Equity Informed Planning	18
2. Long-term Care Redevelopment.....	19
3. Community Safety and Well-Being Plan	20
4. Mental Health Addictions and Systems Planning.....	20
5. Affordable Housing	21
“How Else Are We Achieving This?”	22

Priority 3 – Responsible Growth and Infrastructure Planning 27

1. GO Train Service Expansion	27
2. Inter-Municipal Transit	28
3. Waste Management Strategy	29
4. Implementation of the Asset Management Plan	31

5. Transportation Master Plan Implementation	31
6. Connective Transportation Initiatives	32
“How Else Are We Achieving This?”	33

Priority 4 – Sustainable and Engaging Government	37
1. Communications Master Plan	37
2. Government Relations Strategy	37
3. Regional Development Charges (RDC) by-law	38
4. Community Benefit Charge	39
5. Grants and Incentives Review	40
6. Capital Financing Strategy	41
7. Regional Sustainability Review	42
8. Sponsorship Revenue Strategy and Policy	43
“How Else Are We Achieving This?”	43

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the lives of millions of people around the world. It has impacted the delivery of services and products by governments and businesses. To protect the community, Regional Council:

- declared a state of emergency – declared by the Regional Chair
- implemented actions to protect the community's most vulnerable populations
- prioritized essential services
- approved financial relief efforts, and
- promoted critical public health measures

Response Measures and Actions

Our response also included:

- Activating the Regional Emergency Operations Centre (REOC) and Public Health Emergency Operations Centre (PHEOC)
- The closure of Regional facilities to the public
- Active screening at Regional facilities. Health and safety measures in place to protect employees and contractors
- Alternative working arrangements for many employees, including working from home
- Redeployment of over 478 Regional employees to support pandemic response with an additional 64 supporting the Emergency Operation Centres
- Opening an isolation site for the homeless who present with COVID symptoms or have COVID, expanding the shelter system to support greater physical distancing, and launching a housing-focused shelter pilot
- Offering emergency childcare to support frontline workers
- Establishing a Public Health Call Centre to support the Customer Contact Centre with increased health-related calls
- Passing a temporary face-covering by-law (By-law 2020-46)

- Proactive coordination of response with community partners, Ontario and local municipalities.

The Region established two (2) COVID-19 Response Tables (Economic and Community) and an Internal Recovery Team to ensure that the local, internal and external immediate response and recovery planning aligned with the Provincial Recovery Framework.

Economic Recovery Table

On March 18, 2020, the Regional Chair and Niagara's Mayors came together to launch the Niagara Economic Rapid Response Team (ERRT); a collaboration of all the economic development offices in Niagara and in consultation with local stakeholders. The purpose was to help connect Niagara business with the support and resources they needed to survive and recover.

Supported by the Region's Economic Development Division the ERRT:

- Developed an Economic Recovery Plan based on survey responses from businesses and input from additional industry and sector consultation. The Plan included more than 50 actions most of which have been initiated and some completed
- Monitored and communicated new federal and provincial funding available to businesses
- Actively informed the business community of public health protocols and restrictions
- Administered Fed Dev's Tourism Adaption and Recovery Funding and supported 168 tourism-dependent businesses in grant allocations to adapt to restrictions and remain solvent (\$2M)
- Doubled the amount of available funding to local area municipalities (LAM's) for economic and recovery initiatives
- Launched two (2) Niagara COVID-19 Business Impact Surveys in 2020. The first one was to understand the business and economic impacts of the pandemic, the second one looked at the business impacts, but also helped us understand what types of programs would be helpful in recovery.
- Joined the weekly GTA Economic Recovery Alliance meetings to tie the Niagara Economic Recovery Plan into a larger effort and share best practices.

- Launched ‘Open in Niagara’ to Economic Development Officers and stakeholders as a complimentary tool to use to promote business that are open and offering modified services in Niagara
- Created a dedicated COVID-19 business support page on www.niagaracanada.com website to act as an information hub for updates from the Provincial and Federal Governments on the programs available to businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Developed a Niagara PPE Directory with support from the Niagara Industrial Association that included all Niagara-based companies who produced or sold PPE
- Supported local small businesses by amplifying local area municipalities’ ‘buy local’ campaigns and created new campaigns for communities that did not have one

Community Response Planning Table

The Community Response Table was a pivot for the existing multi-sectoral Advisory Committee working on the development of Niagara’s Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (CRPT). CRPT is a local leadership table comprised of sector leads from across 20 different organizations spanning health care, education, social services, child protection, emergency services, municipal government and others.

The CRPT membership enabled more effective coordination and information-sharing within the human services system during the recovery plan phase of the COVID-19 pandemic recognizing the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on vulnerable populations who were already at risk of harm, crime and victimization.

- The CRPT launched a survey to understand how the pandemic has affected local non-profit and public agencies / organizations across Niagara, including:
 - Status of operations and service adaptations to address emerging community needs
 - COVID-19 specific relief funding received and anticipated resource pressures
 - Lessons learned and identified opportunities
 - Concerns related to recovery planning
 - Tools, skills, training and resources to support recovery efforts
- The results of the survey provided the CRPT with information to assist in identifying approaches to support the local human services system in short-term recovery planning efforts with:

- Training opportunities – course descriptions, facilitator/ trainer contact information
- Practical tools to navigate HR during COVID-19
- Practical tools to navigate IT during COVID-19

Corporate Response

The COVID-19 response has been the longest duration emergency event experienced by Niagara Region and will likely be a record breaking event. The Corporate response occurred at two levels:

1. the activation of the Emergency Operations Centres to ensure timely and effective dissemination of information and to provide a venue for decision-making
2. the activation of the business continuity plans for Departments for essential service delivery with ongoing reporting to Council on short-term and medium-term service impacts

Highlights of the Corporate response include:

- The redeployment of 478 staff with an additional 64 supporting the EOC units
- Technology and supports to enable staff to work from home. Prior to COVID-19 the daily average number of remote connections was approximately 90 users, current daily average is 1270 users
- The development of operational data driven dashboards for Public Health, Community Services and EOC to help monitor and manage workload and staff capacity
- Automation of Public Health EOC status reports for daily briefing and Ministry submission
- Implementation of technology and processes to accommodate electronic public participation in Council and Committee meetings
- Re-establishing and supporting the process of hearing appeals from NRH tenants and applicants through virtual platforms
- Using existing 360 camera imagery and drone technology, typically used for asset management and maintenance, to conduct virtual site visits for contractors
- Consultations with the community on projects, usually done at a venue in-person, were moved online using remote conferencing software, as well as social media and the website to inform and gather feedback as part of legislative requirements
- Went live with the “Homelessness Reporter” for Community Services to allow staff to track and monitor homeless encampments in Niagara

- Upgraded Regional facilities with social distancing barriers, screening signage, enhanced COVID cleaning requirements, protective screens and preferred payment method by tap with debit / credit card to continue safe operations
- Implemented enhanced infection prevention and control measures, public health guidelines, and Ministry of Health (MOH) and Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC) directives, across all eight Regional long-term care (LTC) homes to ensure the safety of residents, staff, essential caregivers, and families (e.g. active screening and testing, cohorting of staff, physical distancing measures, increased cleaning, etc.)
- On transit, across all transit systems, implemented transit driver protection bio-barriers, plexi-glass shields, social distancing in effect on all buses, rear door boarding (no fares collected) to protect drivers, enhanced cleaning regimes, application of anti-microbial sprays, seating capacity restrictions to ensure social distancing, non-essential trip limitations, and required passenger masking per Regional bylaws to ensure transit remained safe, reliable
- Implemented COVID-19 protocols for consultants, contractors and project managers at plant facilities to ensure avoid disruption to capital work on critical W-WW infrastructure projects
- Setup static sanitation stations in all staffed W-WW facilities, deployed mobile sanitation kits for all fleet vehicles and developed a divisional staffing mitigation strategy to deal with any staff shortages that may occur due to COVID-19.
- Developed common area max occupancy signage, screening signage, screening protocol and limited door access in all staffed W-WW buildings.
- Made arrangements for temporary housing for essential service workers at Brock University - 27 rooms available with option of an additional 14 should they be needed
- Implemented staff initiated innovation in Public Works by obtaining a licence to produce hand sanitizer. Prepared and distributed 180 litres of hand sanitizer and disinfectant spray for internal use when external supplies were difficult to obtain during pandemic.
- Collaborated with McMaster University in the COVID-19 Wastewater Surveillance Program
- Received \$22M in federal and provincial Safe Restart funding and \$13.8M in COVID-19 Municipal Transit Funding

Public Health

Public Health began work in response to COVID-19 on January 8, 2020. As the volume of activities grew, the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre was partly activated on

January 28, 2020 to ensure coordination of work and central leadership. By March 9, staff had begun to be redeployed from regular duties to supporting the activities of the Emergency Operations Centre, which was fully activated at this time.

Currently over 200 staff work in COVID-19 emergency response (equivalent to 70% of the staff complement in Public Health), with close to another 100 being recruited currently.

Emergency Operations have now transitioned to the new temporary Pandemic Response Division to consolidate most pandemic response activities, and streamline reporting lines and management processes.

- Public Health in conjunction with Privacy, Corporate IT, Public Health Communications, and the Data Analytics team built a public facing COVID dashboard to keep the public apprised of case counts in Niagara. These webpages had over a million views
 - Over 4.3M hits to the Region's COVID webpage
- Early proactive deployment of Public Health Inspectors (PHIs) quickly identified gaps to improve long-term care/retirement home practices to help prevent virus transmission and possible outbreaks. These enhancements contributed to better health outcomes and reduced outbreaks.
 - When outbreaks occurred, PHIs responded quickly to these locations to provide additional guidance and ensure emerging Provincial mandates and standards were implemented
- Collaboration between Emergency Services and Public Health to modify its Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Housing program to enable "live" inspections of all TFW housing for the 2021 season. Inspections were expedited and completed within 3 months in comparison to 12 months. Working closely with nursing staff, Inspectors completed 569 inspections and supported 11 outbreaks across farms and greenhouses in Niagara.
- Niagara EMS completed over 2000 COVID swabs in homes and congregate living settings, and have performed 272 presentations on PPE usage in health care settings, providing instruction to 2,324 individuals in 2020

- Public Health's School Health Program facilitated 120 school inspections in partnership with the Environmental Health team, while Niagara school health nurses played an essential role in case and outbreak management
- Public Health has launched mass immunization clinics. As of March 2021, clinics are vaccinating up to 1000 persons a day. The goal is to continue to scale this volume up over time to several thousand a day as more staff are hired and trained, and more vaccine supply becomes available

Priority 1: Supporting Businesses and Economic Growth

Niagara Region continues to work collaboratively with our business community to create the conditions the Region needs to see sustained economic growth. Prior to the pandemic, Niagara saw a sustained 2.1 per cent decline in unemployment from 2016-2019. From 2019-2020, total disposable household income increased significantly by 8.7 per cent. During the same time period, Niagara gained 480 businesses with employees.

Despite COVID-19, investment in building construction has remained strong in 2020 with permit values totaling \$1.4 billion. Residential building permit values grew by 2.5 per cent, while non-residential building permit values grew by 6.6%.

The Region is forecasted to grow by 210,000 new residents and 81,000 new jobs by 2051. To prepare for this anticipated growth, the Official Plan is being comprehensively reviewed and updated for the first time in almost 50 years. This is also a reflection that the Region's planning objectives and needs have matured beyond the original focus of protecting farmland and establishing urban boundaries. A new progressive lens will be applied that considers environmental sustainability and climate change mitigation, natural heritage preservation, affordable housing needs, and employment lands.

In the first half of this term of Council, the Region has supported several major initiatives that aim to build social, cultural and economic prosperity in Niagara. Looking beyond the obvious challenges faced in recovery from the economic impacts from COVID-19, the Region continues to plan for long-term economic growth, and the outlook remains hopeful.

Priority Projects

Economic Development Long-Term Strategy

Objective

The goal of the Economic Development Long-term Strategy is to improve and sustain Niagara's economic growth over the next 10 years, informing a wide range of decisions along the way and integrating closely into other Regional plans and strategies. Partnerships with Niagara's economic development community, post-secondary institutions, businesses, and other stakeholders will be leveraged to ensure the Plan is supported by robust research and stakeholder consultations throughout its development, and reflects Niagara's unified vision for economic success.

Milestones/Achievements

1. Creation of a Long Term Economic Development Strategy Advisory Council consisting of all 9 economic development offices to support the collaborative development of a 10 year Economic Development Strategy
2. Letters of commitment signed by the Mayors, CAO and Economic Development staff from all 8 local municipalities with economic development offices. The other four will be represented by a Regional team member

Looking ahead to 2021

- The Strategy Advisory Council will develop and finalize the project scope, methodology and timeline for the 10 year Economic Development Strategy and begin research, analysis and stakeholder consultations. The final strategy will be presented to the Planning and Economic Development Committee in the spring 2022

2021/22 Summer Games

Objective

Niagara Region was selected as Host Community for the 2022 Canada Summer Games. The Games will showcase Niagara's attributes while driving the development of sustainable infrastructure to be used now and for future recreation. The Games will establish Niagara as a foundation for national and international elite sporting events for partner organizations.

Although Federal and Provincial partners agreed to postpone the Games until 2022 to protect the health and safety of athletes, visitors, and the Niagara community, it is anticipated that the Games will support Niagara's post-COVID economic recovery by utilizing local suppliers and businesses while also capitalizing on opportunities for community benefits such as volunteers and artwork.

Milestones/Achievements

1. In June 2020 with the approval from Regional Council, responsibility for construction of the Canada Games Park was transitioned to the Region which offers increased accountability and ability to meet deadlines

2. Federal and Provincial government support through a cost-shared investment of \$29M for the construction of the new sport facilities, which will support athletes and bring new jobs to Niagara Region
3. Significant Summer Games infrastructure milestones complete or nearing completion include: site works (excluding landscaping), storm water management, outdoor athletic facilities (excluding volleyball courts and outdoor storage), west parking and driveways, foundations, below slab building services, superstructure (structural steel and concrete block), structural steel and gymnasium slab

Looking ahead to 2021

- Construction remains on track to reach substantial completion by December 1, 2021 with full completion by February 2022

Expand Broadband Infrastructure and Capacity

Objective

Secure Federal and Provincial funding to improve Niagara's fibre technology infrastructure to prepare for 5G. This has wide-reaching economic benefits for Niagara, including:

- supporting the growth of small businesses in rural areas by expanding access to online and e-commerce tools; and,
- better connecting residents in rural communities with online information and services

Milestones/Achievements

1. Secured representation on the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) Advisory Tables – a program is currently overseeing a \$209M broadband expansion plan to bring service to more than 50,000 underserved households and businesses throughout the Region by 2024
2. Letters of support provided to internet service providers
3. In January 2021, the Governments of Canada and Ontario signed all contracts and committed \$8.9M for broadband infrastructure that will deliver reliable internet access to nearly 5,629 homes and businesses across Niagara Region
4. 10 proposals received, 4 contracts awarded; total project cost \$21.4M

Looking ahead to 2021

- The implementation of Niagara broadband infrastructure projects will commence in 2021

Niagara Region New Official Plan

Objective

The Niagara Official Plan is a long-range, policy planning document to shape Niagara's physical, economic and social development. The Plan includes land-use policies that cover topics like Niagara's natural environment, land needs, growth allocations, housing, transportation, urban design, employment lands, and agriculture. An overwhelming consensus from stakeholder groups has prompted a focus of the Plan on measures to reduce the impacts of climate change. With proper planning and an effective land strategy, Niagara Region will not only increase its supply of affordable housing stock, but increase its competitiveness to attract investment, increase job creation, and generate opportunities for higher paying jobs and skilled labour.

Milestones/Achievements

1. Commenced study of the Official Plan which has not been comprehensively reviewed in nearly 50 years
2. Completed all six public information centres regarding the Official Plan background studies (November 2019)
3. All four background studies completed
4. Completed drafts for 10 policy sections with 8 associated draft mapping Schedules for the Niagara OP as well as 3 sets of draft criteria for assessing changes to settlement areas
 - This includes the mapping of Employment Lands, Employment Areas, as well as including policy to enable for the application to the Province for Provincially Significant Employment Zones to ensure Niagara will remain a destination for new investment
5. Executed 6 virtual Official Plan open house sessions for Land Needs Assessment, Regional Structure, Housing and the Settlement Area Boundary Review, Employment Lands, Secondary Plans and District Plans and Urban Design (October 2020)
 - Additionally, consultations have occurred with Technical Advisory groups including Local Area Municipality Planning Departments, and other stakeholders with an emphasis on the environmental policy options. A presentation was also delivered to the Niagara Peninsula Conservation

Authority with respect to the Regional Official Plan environmental work plan

Looking ahead to 2021

- Spring 2021 – Preparation of a comprehensive Council report that sets out how all components of the Plan are interrelated. It may include policies on subjects that are sufficiently advanced, such as aggregates, Regional structure, employment, housing, secondary planning, as well as information relating to environmental options
- Develop draft policies and mapping prior to producing the Draft Niagara Official Plan before end of year

“How Else Are We Achieving This?”

Attracting New Investment and Growth Opportunities to Niagara

- The implementation of a five-year Economic Development Strategic Action Plan, 2019-2024 in partnership with Brock University, Niagara College, local businesses, industry associations, chambers of commerce and community stakeholders. The activities are focused on strengthening the Region’s competitive advantages, as well as addressing weaknesses and gaps in the Regional economy
- Through the Niagara Gateway Economic Zone and Centre Community Improvement Plan (Gateway CIP) provided eligible property owners/ projects with property tax reductions of between 40% and 100% for five to ten years in the municipalities of Fort Erie, Niagara Falls, Port Colborne, Thorold and Welland. These projects are also eligible for grants to cover Regional Development Charges
 - 6 applications were received in 2020 with a total value of approximately \$2.3M. 128 jobs will be created while retaining another 100 existing jobs in Niagara
- The Niagara Region maintains an Industrial Development Charge Grant Program to provide manufacturers and industrials users with a grant to offset 100% of their development charges for new construction and expansions
- Between January 2019 and December 2020 participated in 167 foreign direct investment meetings with potential clients. The trade and investment portfolio currently has approximately 98 active leads and of those six are currently identified has high priority based on their fit with Niagara and on-going client discussions with staff

- Promoted the critical function of the Niagara-Hamilton transportation corridor on international trade by serving as an expert panelist for an event hosted in partnership with Transport Canada and the McMaster Institute for Transportation and Logistics bringing together governments, industry specialists and the business community to encourage continued investments and policy to support the corridor
- In partnership with the Niagara Community Observatory and Brock University, Niagara Region was profiled in a Transportation and Logistics policy brief regarding the merits of Niagara as a strategic economic hub for investors

Increasing Employment Prospects for Youth and Vulnerable Peoples

- Supported retention and development of a skilled labour force through the launch of 75 per cent of Niagara Region Environmental Lab co-op students into full time employment with Niagara Region or area municipality
- Through Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities services, achieved provincial employment performance targets in 2019 (percentage of clients with a job and case closures due to employment), which resulted in maximum performance funding of \$8.1M

Priority 2: Healthy and Vibrant Community

During the COVID pandemic, Niagara Region demonstrated the importance of providing a strong community support system that offers the necessary and tailored services for residents to thrive and meet their full potential. The Region is committed to eliminating the health and social inequities that have commonly existed in society with the introduction of new programs, initiatives, and communication with the public.

Significant achievements have been made in expanding, supportive housing programs, shelter diversions, building more affordable housing projects, and modernizing long-term care homes. Niagara Region has joined the ambitious Built for Zero (BFZ) initiative, a national change effort helping a core group of leading communities end chronic homelessness - a first step on the path to eliminating all homelessness in Canada.

Niagara Region's high standard of health care service has been further enhanced with the successful recruitment of 20 new physicians and the introduction of its new, first of its kind in Canada, Emergency Communications Nurse (ECN) program. This comprehensive nurse triage system provided vital pandemic support and received Accredited Centre of Excellence designation – only the fourth service in the world to achieve this standard.

Despite the demands of the pandemic, Niagara Public Health continued to provide exceptional service to families, particularly those most vulnerable, by adapting its positive parenting programs to include both virtual and in-person visits to assist with parenting and child development. These innovative ways to connect with families also ensured families experiencing mental health concerns triggered by the pandemic received the necessary care and supports that were critical to their well-being.

Niagara Region is listening and engaging on the unique needs and voices of the community. Consultations were held with four educational institutions, 22 community organizations, and six municipalities across Canada to better understand the current state of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) within the Region which will inform a new DEI Advisory Committee and Action Plan. This work has also resulted in stronger, more meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities and First Nation governments.

Throughout the remainder of the Council term, Niagara Region will continue to build equity into Regional programs to ensure all of the Region's diverse perspectives and needs are met.

Priority Projects

Health Equity Informed Planning

Objective

The Health Equity Informed Planning (HEIP) Project aims to address the unintended health impacts that result when decisions are made in non-health sectors. This will be accomplished through integrating Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) into project planning processes across the corporation with the aim for Niagara of becoming one of the 25 healthiest communities in Canada. The work of this project will influence changes in decision-making practices and increase access to health equity data and partnerships, understand health and health equity impacts in community and infrastructure design and improve individual health outcomes.

Milestones/Achievements

1. A cross-sectional team of staff have been identified to guide the HIA work for 2021
2. 11 Niagara Priority Profiles were posted on the external Health Equity website to support the objective of having all relevant externally facing department websites use the same health equity related data by end of 2021
3. Completed three of five sections of an HIA Guidebook with supplementary tools
4. Completed Niagara specific HIA excel templates to use in all five steps of an HIA
5. Screened 10 projects in 2020 with four identified to complete HIA pilots for 2021 including three pilot projects within the Public Works Department, and one in the Planning and Development Services Department
6. At the June 25, 2020 Council meeting, Regional Council approved the following motion

“That Niagara Region COMMIT to considering social determinants of health, including income, education, employment, early childhood development, food insecurity, housing, social exclusion and social safety network, health services, aboriginal status, gender, race, and disability, in all future program and budget decisions including revising the Region Budget By-Law Principles to include healthy communities”

Looking ahead to 2021

- An HIA Guidebook with supplementary tools and training sessions will be completed by the end of 2021

- Four Health Impact Assessment (HIA) pilot project reports will be completed with recommendations on how to reduce potential negative impacts
 - Recommendations will also support the advancement of potentially positive impacts for the whole community as well as targeted priority populations that would be directly affected by the selected projects
- In conjunction with the 2021 pilot projects, plan to identify and screen all net new 2022 capital projects for consideration on whether to proceed with a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) and to understand a best approach for future state integration with the CAMRA process

Long-term Care Redevelopment

Objective

The goal of this project is to increase the capacity of long-term care across the Region to meet the needs of the aging population. Through the redevelopment of the Gilmore Lodge and Linhaven, these two redevelopment projects will maximize efficiencies while increasing capacity for approximately 421 residents. These projects will contribute to economic growth for nearby businesses, create jobs for local workers, and provide our long-term care residents with a breadth of locations to shop, eat, and play.

Milestones/ Achievements

1. Obtained various project approvals from the Ministry of Long Term Care
2. Site plans applications submitted
3. Obtained Record of Site Condition for Gilmore site
4. Finalized LTC Home design for Linhaven and commenced work on construction documents
 - Redevelopment of Linhaven and Gilmore Lodge are being designed to the WELL building standard and are targeting a WELL Silver rating (first WELL-certified LTC homes in Canada – WELL is the leading tool for advancing health and well-being in buildings globally)
5. Issued Pre-Qualification for General Contractors and Request for Proposal for Commissioning Consultant

Looking ahead to 2021

- Issue tenders for Linhaven and Gilmore (March - May 2021)
- Obtain Municipal Planning Approvals (March - May 2021)
- Obtain Ministry of Long-Term Care Approvals (March - July 2021)
- Obtain Council approval (June 2021)

Community Safety and Well-Being Plan

Objective

The goal of this project is to develop a Community Safety and Well-Being Plan as legislated under the Police Services Act. The Plan is being developed using a cross-disciplinary approach, connecting police services, providers in health/mental health, education, community/social services and children/youth services and neighbourhood stakeholders as appropriate. This Plan will make our communities safer and healthier guided by four pillars: social development, prevention, risk intervention, and incident response.

Milestones/Achievements

1. Established a Community Safety & Well-Being Advisory Committee
2. Completed Phase 1 of the community consultation that involved in-person and virtual focus groups including over 150 staff from across 70 different organizations and over 85 clients or advisors from across eight lived experience or advisory groups
3. Release of the Phase 1 Report: Identifying Local Priorities Interim Report on Community Consultation
4. Convened Community Recovery Planning Table

Looking ahead to 2021

- Initiate Part 2 related to identifying priorities
- Select strategies and determine outcomes
- Present Niagara's Community and Well-Being Plan to Regional Council – June 2021
- Implement Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan

Mental Health Addictions and Systems Planning

Objective

To develop a service model of the mental health and addictions system in the Niagara area that provides seamless coordinated care across the continuum including acute, community, and primary care services. Through the Quadruple Aim lens, providers will work together to make advances in health equity, expand evidence based practices, and improve access to a core bundle of services by building sustainable capacity with existing resources. This will better coordinate the mental health and addictions

services, decrease admissions for mental health and addictions, and decrease wait times for service.

Milestones/Achievements

1. 50% of projects complete
2. Doubled Niagara service providers to 32 direct and allied community agencies working with 6 lived experience participants
3. Consulted with more than 100 community members across the Region about their experience with mental health and addiction services

Looking ahead to 2021

- Prepare a 3-year implementation plan for change across the service sector
- Co-design of a service delivery system with providers and people with lived experience working together
- Develop a scorecard of system indicators for continuous quality improvement

Affordable Housing

Objective

The objective of this project is to advance the Regional Affordable Housing Strategy through Niagara's updated Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP). In addition, the project will link the Plan to components of the Official Plan and strategic financial investments, in order to increase Niagara's access to affordable housing stock. The Strategy will facilitate an increase supply of affordable housing and achieve the objectives and performance targets of the updated HHAP.

Achievements/Milestones

1. Creation of a Niagara Housing Statement
 - Linking the new Official Plan and the HHAP to provide, for the first time, data on Niagara's current and future need for affordable housing, to be used for informing affordable housing initiatives at the Regional and Local Area Municipality levels
2. Built for Zero (BFZ)
 - Niagara was accepted into the national BFZ campaign in July of 2019

- BFZ is an ambitious national change effort helping a core group of leading communities end chronic homelessness - a first step on the path to eliminating all homelessness in Canada
- Niagara achieved a quality By-Name List in September 2020 when the objectives of BFZ-C's By-Name List scorecard was completed by the Region

Looking ahead to 2021

- Homelessness Services was successful in securing Provincial capital funding for a Bridge Housing project in partnership with the City of Niagara Falls and Niagara Regional Housing. A 20 unit supportive housing build will open in 2021.
- 15 new supportive housing units coming on board in collaboration with the YWCA

“How Else Are We Achieving This?”

Considering All Voices in the Foundation of a Healthier Community

- Partnered with Public Health and Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre to facilitate a five session Indigenous Speakers Series in February and March 2021. A combined total of 135 participants participated in the sessions, 13 speakers came from 11 Indigenous organizations
- Regional Council approved the establishment of a new DEI Advisory Committee
- Conducted 40 community based and 20 staff based focus groups to get inform on current state, barriers, success factors, and opportunities for improvement to support the development of a DEI Action Plan
- Completed stakeholder engagements with 4 Educational Institutions and 22 community organizations in Niagara, and staff members from 6 municipalities in Canada to support an understanding current state of DEI and establish relationships with local organizations
- Achieved significant milestones under key project streams outlined in the NRPH&ES departmental Health Equity Strategic (HES) Plan including:
 - *Data & Program Planning*: Collecting and using data to reorient our programs to best address health equity and support priority populations.
 - *Skills & Capacity*: Provide staff the knowledge and tools to improve health equity and support priority populations including the launch of the 2021 Health Equity Learning Plan
 - *Collaboration*: Work with our partners and population to jointly impact health equity. i.e An Indigenous Consultant was hired and completed the report:

Creating Our Way Forward: Recommendations for Improving Niagara Region Public Health and Emergency Services' Indigenous Engagement 2019

- *Communication & Awareness*: Build community understanding and support for addressing health inequities, particularly at the policy level.

Providing Direct Mental Health Supports and Preventative Care

- Resulting from the successful recruitment efforts in 2018/2019, Niagara Region's Physician Recruiter Program secured a record number 20 new physicians in 2020, while also supporting six physicians to provide coverage for maternity leaves or walk-in-shifts in the area
- Public Health continued Environmental Health inspection despite suspending food handler training & certification and special event approvals during the pandemic. Although food services throughout the Region reduced operations in 2020, food premise inspections declined by less than half in comparison to 2019's inspections. An increase in inspection at facilities occurred in 2020 as a result of enforcing COVID-19 Public Health measures
- To further support families experiencing mental health concerns triggered by the pandemic, Niagara Parents offered innovative ways for parents to connect with a Public Health Nurse about parenting and children's health
- In addition, positive parenting programs have served some of the most vulnerable families by offering virtual and in-person visits to assist with parenting and child development
- Reinforced positive and healthy early childhood education and experiences through the delivery of high quality and affordable child care services
- The Region's new Emergency Communications Nurse (ECN) program, the first of its kind in Canada, provided pandemic support and received Accredited Centre of Excellence designation – only the fourth service in the world to achieve this standard. The ECNs provided appropriate care options for 3,499 non-emergency patients and increased ambulance availability to respond to patients with more time-sensitive medical needs

Supporting the Most Vulnerable in Making Niagara A Place to Call Home

- More than 600 programs, events and activities (e.g. Homework Help and Community Gardens) were arranged in Public Housing
- A new shelter diversion pilot program expanded from one shelter to three in 2020 and contributed to the successful shelter diversion of 227 individuals
- Launched a new "Homelessness Reporter" that will allow staff to track and monitor encampment homelessness in Niagara

- Implemented a housing focused shelter pilot, for clients accepted into supportive housing programs
 - In 2020, a 23-bed housing-focused shelter pilot was established, which supports individuals who are the most chronically homeless in Niagara. The work at the shelter pilot connect people to permanent housing solutions through Home for Good and Housing First Programming. The shelter has had 48 intakes of which nearly half have secured permanent housing
- Introduced the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB), a portable rent benefit that provides applicants on NRH's Centralized Waiting List with rental assistance to their current landlord in the private market. At the end of 2020, 254 of these applications had been accepted
- Niagara Assertive Street Outreach (NASO) established new tools and resources to promote, connect, and coordinate access to the range of supports available across Niagara's Homeless-Serving System including homeless encampments a new mapping tool and encampment clean-ups, and a centralized community intake line to address concerns for individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness
- Homelessness Services undertook a full system review in 2019, which included a comprehensive consultation process with service providers and resulted in ten recommendations intended to transform the system to better serve clients with targeted outcomes measured through new key performance indicators
- New Housing Assets in the Community to help Address Homelessness
 - Carlton Street in St. Catharines – 85 new units completed in 2019
 - In partnership with Community Services, 17 new supportive housing units were also included within the NRH Carlton Build
 - Construction began for a \$20.9M, 73-unit development consisting of two apartment buildings on Hawkins Street in Niagara Falls
 - In partnership with Community Services, 10 new supportive housing units will also be included within the NRH Hawkins Build
 - 5 new units of affordable housing in Thorold
 - 6 Specialty Safe House Beds for Victims of Human Trafficking piloted in 2020.
- Sustainable, energy-conserving, and innovative practices that will reduce maintenance costs, improve operational efficiency and increase neighbourhood acceptability through Heat Management Systems being implemented in 10 out of 12 NRH buildings, with an additional 10 buildings included in the next budget round with secured funding
- Increased the number of total housing stock and opportunities for low-income residents by 154

Supporting Families Through New Child Care Initiatives

- Increased the number of licensed child care spaces by 334 to provide more child care opportunities for working families
- With the support of the Province's 2018 Community Child Care Builds Fund allocated funds to various community organizations adding 215 new spaces between 2019-2020

In partnership with the Province, collaborating on the creation of a strategy to support the recruitment and retention of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE)

Promoting a Safer Community

- Initiated the Vision Zero Road Safety Plan to enhance safety and community wellbeing for Niagara's residents and visitors. A five-year action plan is underway, focused on reducing traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries on Niagara's streets
- Constructed 10 new community safety zones through Vision Zero throughout Niagara Region

Priority 3: Responsible Growth and Infrastructure Planning

Niagara Region has taken action to ensure that responsible growth and infrastructure planning is fostering a healthy, prosperous and sustainable community. New investments in key infrastructure remains a priority. Enhancements to transit networks, like the new NRT OnDemand service, are helping to build complete communities by making it easier for rural residents to live and work in Niagara with connections to urban areas. With the completion of the Niagara Transit Governance Study in November 2020 and the advancement of a consolidated transit system, Niagara is establishing a more holistic approach to inter-municipal transit delivery that ensures transit gaps are addressed and greater mobility is offered to all residents.

We are working together in partnership with every level of government – federal, provincial, and municipal – to construct new infrastructure such as GO Transit stations and the Glendale/QEW diverging diamond interchange project - the first of its kind in Ontario - that will support the overall comprehensive Glendale District Plan and provide for a new gateway into the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

As the effects of climate change continue to have an impact on Regional infrastructure, compounded by a growing population, Niagara Region is taking charge to adapt and mitigate its effects. Investments in water/waste water upgrades, retrofits, and maintenance have helped reduce the occurrence of wet weather overflows, while the future construction of the South Niagara Falls Wastewater Treatment Plant will be critical to supporting growth in the area including service to the new hospital. The introduction of every-other-week waste collection has achieved new service delivery enhancements, cost savings, and waste reduction to Niagara landfills.

The Region is continuing to explore new ways to drive environmental protection and address climate change, including new technologies for capturing Renewable Natural Gas from wastewater processes. With the support of the Ontario Climate Consortium (“OCC”); the revitalization of the Region’s 2018 Climate Change Work Program; and the Regional Greening Initiative, Niagara Region will provide decision makers with regionally-specific climate data that will help inform future policy decisions at the Region, local municipal partners, and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

Niagara has applied new innovations to its infrastructure practices that have made the Region a leader in environmental stewardship. The Region is a recipient of three prominent awards - Association of Municipalities 2020 Federal Gas Tax award for introducing a trenchless technique on the Stamford Interceptor Rehabilitation Phase 1 project; the Consulting Engineers Award of Excellence for the Bender Hill Sewage Pumping Station Environmental Assessment; and Municipal Waste Association

Promotion and Education Silver Award for the 'Recycling Matters' campaign. Niagara Region is demonstrating its ingenuity and commitment to reducing GHG emissions.

Priority Projects

GO Train Service Expansion

Objective

Expanded GO Train service will increase access to serve communities through bus-meets-train connectivity and promote ridership growth. Niagara Region is promoting and protecting for transit-oriented development and undertaking key transportation infrastructure projects adjacent to and supportive of the four identified GO station sites at Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Lincoln, and Grimsby. We are working with Metrolinx to increase service frequency and levels of weekday and weekend GO Train service to link Niagara with the GTHA.

Milestones/Achievements

1. Weekday, two-way GO Rail service established at St. Catharines and Niagara Falls (Jan. 2019) stations – four years ahead of schedule
2. Confidential multi-site Station Development Strategy approved by Council (August 2019)
3. Weekend GO Rail service extended to year-round (Sept. 2019) to capitalize on off-peak tourism demand
4. Leveraged and reaffirmed the role and mandate of the GO Implementation Office, municipal and regional political champions, and ongoing partnerships between the Region, local area municipalities and Metrolinx
5. Updated Metrolinx Initial Business Case released for Niagara GO Rail Extension (Nov. 2019) which demonstrates service patterns, capital infrastructure and rail corridor improvements
6. Significant GO station-supportive infrastructure identified, budgeted, and EA's initiated (or completed) including Bridge Street (Niagara Falls); Ridley Road/Louth Street/St. Paul Street West CN Bridge replacement (St. Catharines); Casablanca Blvd (Grimsby)
7. Multiple site-specific deliverables from Confidential Station Development Strategy actioned, as directed by Council, now pending Provincial direction
8. Ensured effective bus-meets-train connections established at active GO Rail station sites (St. Catharines and Niagara Falls); established new NRT OnDemand service at Grimsby to ensure first mile, last mile connections for future GO Station

Looking ahead to 2021

- Advance significant additional deliverables of Council's Confidential Station Development Strategy
- Advocate immediately for reinstatement of GO Rail service paused due to pandemic
- Anticipated levels of pre-pandemic GO rail service to increase once reinstated
- Completion of significant station-supportive infrastructure including:
 - Niagara Falls Station – complete Victoria Ave Roundabout and Thorold Stone Road Extension
 - Niagara Falls Station – completion of Bridge Street EA
 - St. Catharines Station – completion St. Paul Street West CN Bridge detailed design
 - St. Catharines Station – completion of Ridley Road EA and begin St. Paul Street West CN Bridge replacement construction
 - Grimsby Station – complete Casablanca Blvd detailed design and proceed to phased construction

Inter-Municipal Transit

Objective

Niagara Region is advancing the operational harmonization and integration of local transit into a single, fully integrated transit system to service all of Niagara. A reformed consolidated transit system will provide greater connectivity of all 12 municipalities and foster ridership growth. This proposed system consolidation will provide significant customer experience improvements including increased consistency in service hours and transit access across all 12 communities.

A key component is completing a comprehensive governance review and modelling development in anticipation of a decision to transition to a new transit entity.

Milestones/Achievements

1. Leveraging previous unanimous triple majority support for the Region to operate intra-municipal transit, approved extensions of agreements for the operation of Niagara Region Transit services in 2018 and 2021
2. Inter-municipal Transit Working Group (IMTWG) made significant progress to harmonize the operations, policies, and standards of the existing transit providers in Niagara including full upload of all inter-municipal routes to NRT, significant NRT fleet expansion, a near doubling of NRT service hours, consolidated after hours customer service, moved all agencies to a single digital platform (Transit

app), aligned all federal/provincial capital program requests, and implemented the Universal Support Person Pass, among many others

3. Completed the Specialized Transit in Niagara Study and operational review of Niagara Specialized Transit
4. Linking Niagara Transit Committee directed the completion of the Niagara Transit Governance Study with a Full Commission identified as the preferred governance model for a future consolidated transit agency.
5. Launched the NRT OnDemand pilot program in Grimsby, Lincoln, Pelham, Wainfleet, and West Lincoln in August 2020 with expansion to Niagara-on-the-Lake in November 2020

Looking ahead to 2021

- Winter 2021 - Presentations to Local Area Municipalities allowed local Councils the opportunity to provide feedback related to the preferred governance and financial models. The themes of financial strategy, service planning, and board composition emerged as areas requiring additional discussion
- Spring 2021 – The Governance Steering Committee, comprised of the CAOs of all 13 local area municipalities, will undertake a series of workshops to address the themes that emerged through consultation through revised governance and financial models
 - Summer 2021 - Regional and local councils will have the opportunity to review these resolutions and provide additional feedback
- Fall 2021 - A final report will be brought to Regional and local councils, initiating the triple majority process required for consolidation. Lead by a project team comprising of staff from across the IMTWG membership, the fare technology harmonization strategy continues to move forward with hardware orders now awaiting fulfillment. Ongoing discussions between the project team and the vendor should allow a schedule for implementation to be developed for the next phase
- Brock University and Niagara College are both making arrangements to return to on-campus learning in September 2021, while maintaining contingency plans should additional provincial restrictions be implemented. For Brock University, that also means a return to the U-Pass program

Waste Management Strategy

Objective

Niagara Region will develop a 25 year, long-term strategic plan for Waste Management Services, to ensure resource recovery, sustainable long-term disposal infrastructure, and to enhance revenue opportunities. This will be a guiding document to support

decisions related to Waste Management infrastructure, programs and policies. It will provide innovative strategies and solutions for management of Niagara Region's solid waste stream that minimize landfill disposal. Other community benefits include a decrease in greenhouse gas emissions, long-term facility sustainability, and opportunities to increase revenue.

Milestones/Achievements

- Work to commence in 2021

Looking ahead to 2021

- Preparation of a Request for Proposal to develop the Waste Management Strategy
- Consultation with community stakeholders in creating the strategy and assessing how emerging technology, trends and provincial legislation will contribute to the best approach for Niagara
- RFP Award – July 2021
- Fall 2021 – Summer 2022 Extensive stakeholder consultation
- Completion of Waste Management Strategic Plan – Q4 2022

Implementation of the Asset Management Plan

Objective

With the implementation of the Asset Management Plan, the Region will: optimize asset management principles and practices when considering infrastructure renewal needs across the organization; ensure responsible funding of infrastructure projects; and reduce future infrastructure funding gaps. This approach will reduce operational costs and optimize asset performance, but apply Corporate Assessment Management Resources Allocation's (CAMRA) environmental and social risk assessment to ensure consideration of health, safety and well-being into future infrastructure projects.

Milestones/Achievements

1. Pilot completed for the Corporate Assessment Management Resource Allocation (CAMRA)
2. Work commenced on the development of the 2021 Asset Management Plan in accordance with Reg. 588
3. Initiated development of a Corporate Asset Registry focusing on the asset hierarchy to support the 2021 AMP

Looking ahead to 2021

Continuing to move forward with the implementation of the Asset Management Plan

Transportation Master Plan Implementation

Objective

Niagara Region is transforming the transportation network and the way people and goods move in the Region that contribute to a high quality of life. The implementation of the Transportation Master Plan (TMP) will align with other Regional strategic planning documents and support GO Station Planning, transit expansion, and Municipal TMP Studies. The TMP will also establish clear policies to address active transportation, complete streets, multimodal road network, wayfinding, transportation demand and system management, while facilitating the strategic integration of transit, marine, rail, road, and airport(s)

Milestones/Achievements

The following policy, studies and environmental assessments have been completed:

1. Policy Development – Regional Official Plan Amendment completed in Q3 of 2019
2. Casablanca Blvd (Regional Road 10) Environmental Assessment, notice of completion filed in Q1 of 2019
3. Livingston Avenue (Regional Road 512) Environmental Assessment, notice of completion filed in Q2 of 2020
4. East Main Street Bridge (Regional Road 27), Schedule A completion 2020
5. St. Paul CNR Bridge (Regional Road 81), notice of completion filed in Q4 of 2019

Looking ahead to 2021

Notices of Completion filed by end of 2021 for the following Environmental Assessments:

- Bridge Street (Regional Road 43)
- Montrose Road (Regional Road 98)
- Merritt Road (Regional Road 37) and Rice Road (Regional Road 54)
- York Road (Regional Road 9) and Four Mile Creek Road (Regional Road 100)
- Lakeport Rd (Regional Road 87), Main Street, Lock Street
- Niagara Street Bridge (Regional Road 50)
- Main Street Reconstruction (Regional Road 87)
- Twenty Mile Creek Arch Bridge (Regional Road 81)

Connective Transportation Initiatives

Objective

The Transportation Master Plan (TMP) identified the need for additional north-south transportation system capacity crossing the Niagara Escarpment and additional east-west transportation system capacity to access Fort Erie / Buffalo international border crossing (Niagara to Greater Toronto Area (NGTA) East corridor). These projects will provide additional system capacity to move people and goods, provide system redundancy, improved safety and alternate travel routes to reduce traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, these transportation systems will support responsible growth while fostering environmental sustainability and stewardship.

Milestones/Achievements

1. Conversations have commenced with various project and government stakeholders related to Joint Partnership Environmental Assessment studies, Cost Sharing Agreements, Funding Applications and other areas for potential collaboration
2. Spearheaded four meetings with the Minister of Transportation to generate ongoing support for the project

Looking ahead in 2021

- Commence the first phase of project implementation which is to confirm the Region's transportation needs and project requirements through Environmental Assessment studies
 - Prepare the Individual Environmental Assessment terms of reference and necessary studies for the Niagara Escarpment Crossing

“How Else Are We Achieving This?”

Generating Economic Prosperity Through Responsible Growth

- Despite the Pandemic, development applications were up slightly by 0.73% with 971 applications in 2020 in comparison to 964 applications in 2019
- Leading the Baker Road Pollution Prevention and Control Plan and additional flow monitoring work through the coordination with local municipalities
- Education and awareness training for staff on the Land Care Niagara; the Region's local delivery agent for Forest Ontario's 50 Million Tree Program and the benefits and logistics of this program
- Due to the high level of interest and success of the Public Realm Investment Program (PRIP), in 2021 the program increased its funding level to facilitate 27 public realm enhancement projects across nine local communities that has leveraged a total of over \$6.4M in capital investment in the public realm in Niagara
- Engaged Lundy's Lane Business Improvement Association, City of Niagara Falls and utility organizations in Lundy's Lane working group to coordinate capital works projects in the area in order to minimize the impacts of works on area businesses and the local community
- Despite the pandemic, permit applications through Transportation for works on regional roads increased by 29% with 1503 permit applications in 2020 in comparison to 1941 applications in 2020

Building Environmentally Sustainable Infrastructure to Support a Growing Niagara

Key Project:

The 2021 Water & Wastewater Master Servicing Plan (MSP) update project is designed to proactively plan for and anticipate where growth will occur, where sustainability/security upgrades are needed and to ensure the effective planning of the Region's infrastructure. This is an important project for Niagara Region because it has experienced a significant increase in growth over the last five years which is driving demands for improvements and upgrades to Regional and local area water and wastewater infrastructure. The results from the MSP will inform the Development Charges Background Study and by-law update.

- The project is progressing with the majority of work to be completed by end of 2021. Milestones include:
 1. Consultant assignment has been awarded
 2. Initial Public Information Centre has been conducted
 3. Initiated discussions with area municipalities

In addition:

- Received \$2.5M in funding from Ontario Power Generation for the detailed design of the Niagara Falls Water Treatment Plant Intake Relocation
- Received more than \$6.95M from Canadian Water and Wastewater Fund to support sustainable fiscal management of W-WW capital project delivery
- Identified programs, facilities, and processes to enhance efficiencies and cost savings in W-WW – including the upgrade or future upgrade of communications systems at 90 W-WW facilities improving performance and reliability with an expected savings of nearly \$200,000; multiple staff-led initiatives to achieve efficiencies through innovative use of technology in data recording, reporting and meeting provincial compliance requirements and to allow local municipal partners access to critical infrastructure and operations information
- Executed Internal Upgrade Program realizing cost savings and eliminating the need for inclusion of these works in an already pressured W-WW capital program
- Opened the Niagara-on-the-Lake Wastewater Treatment Plant resulting in increased wastewater treatment capacity for residential and commercial growth in the area. In addition, the hauled sewage disposal location at this facility greatly increased the Region's capacity to process winery waste, with an increased capacity 66 per cent compared to most other plants
- Negotiated new waste collection contracts that would provide for every-other-week garbage collection in October 2020 and supplemented by an extensive

public awareness campaign regarding the amended service resulting in increased waste diversion from Regional landfills

- Developing and implementing wet weather management programs and education in partnership with the Local Area Municipalities and the Combined Sewer Overflow
- Complete Environmental Assessment for the South Niagara Falls Wastewater Treatment Plant that will be critical to supporting growth in the area including service to the new hospital
- Demolition of Old Central Sewage Pumping Station in Niagara Falls to allow for GO parking lot in downtown Niagara Falls
- Completed combined sewer overflow tank and upgrades at Chippawa Low-Lift in partnership with the City of Niagara Falls. The project accommodates effects of climate change on excess storm water resulting in reduced incidents of overflow events from three to four times a year to zero
- Developed stormwater and hydrogeology guidelines for the Niagara Region
- Constructed 2 new roundabouts in the Township of West Lincoln
- Constructed 6 new traffic signals and 2 traffic signal rebuilds
- Repaired nine Regional watermain breaks in collaboration with area municipalities
- Reviewed 60 area municipal projects and development projects to facilitate a coordinated approach to projects and support growth.

Priority 4: Sustainable and Engaging Government

Niagara Region is improving day-to-day operations by streamlining service delivery, effectively managing municipal assets, leveraging partnerships for collaboration and advocacy, and building a more inclusive, equitable and engaging corporate culture. Our financial position is sound through effective financial planning and risk management achieving Standard and Poor's AA Stable Credit Rating.

As the COVID pandemic has thrust Niagara Region into a new digital age, we have transformed the way staff can work by adding 1,180 average daily users of remote connections and adding greater flexibility to staff work-life balance. Niagara Region has embraced the new modern era of open government ranking 3rd in regional governments in the 2019 Public Sector Digest as Canada's Top 20 Most Open Cities. With a 30% decline in Freedom of Information requests since 2018 and a 70% increase in website traffic between 2018 and 2020, we are consistently increasing the number of valuable data sets to provide greater transparency and more accessible information to the public.

Consistent with the organization's commitment to continuous improvement, a comprehensive KPMG service review identified a number of opportunities to enhance Regional operations and ensure sustainable operations over the longer term. Complementing this work were a number of collaborations between the Region and local area municipalities. A CAO Working Group is studying further options for consolidating or sharing services that will reduce administrative costs, minimize duplication, and simplify services.

We are building a high performing organization that creates and fosters a culture and environment that allows our employees to succeed. Our employee engagement survey in 2019 had a participation rate of 78% and an overall positive engagement score of 70%. We continue to develop action plans to support delivering on results of our employee surveys, including refreshing our people strategy later this year and into 2022 to ensure employees feel valued, recognized, healthy and well, and supported in their development.

Priority Projects

Communications Master Plan

Objective

The purpose of creating a Communications Master Plan is two-fold. The first is to provide the organization with an opportunity to evaluate its communications strategy. The second is to set the direction for Strategic Communications as the organization continues to implement its vision as set out in the Strategic Plan

The Master Plan seeks to promote, support and nurture a community that is aware, well informed and engaged – ultimately it will contribute to higher community satisfaction in how the municipality is managed and governed and will increase civic pride.

Milestones/ Achievements

1. A consulting firm was retained to conduct research and stakeholder engagement to inform the development of the Communications Master Plan. Although the consultant completed this work, the drafting of the plan has been delayed due to COVID-19

Looking Ahead to 2021

- An RFP is planned in 2021 to retain additional consulting support to refresh the research and draft the Plan

Government Relations Strategy

Objective

The objective of this project is to develop a coordinated and strategic approach to intergovernmental relations that showcases the Region's achievements, advances key priorities, and builds partnerships with stakeholders and governments. The Strategy will ensure an aligned approach to advocacy and funding requests to senior levels of government that will help position Niagara Region as a 'municipality of influence' within the regional, provincial and federal contexts, improving our ability to advocate effectively on behalf of residents and the local area municipalities in achieving our corporate strategic priorities. Together with local area municipalities, Niagara Region will build a stronger, united voice

Milestones/Achievements

1. Research complete - Review of corporate documents, background information, literature reviews that will inform the Strategy
2. Completed interviews with senior leadership, Area CAOs and some Mayors to identify Regional issues impacting a number of local area municipalities
3. Presented proposed advocacy issues for the remainder of the term to Council in February 2020. This led to a refinement and scoping of issues
4. Reaffirmed LAMs priorities during presentation and discussions with CAOs and GR leads in November 2020

Looking Ahead to 2021

- Council endorsement of a government relations framework and strategy and confirmation of alignment with proposed advocacy initiatives for the balance of the term of Council
- Development and implementation of External Funding Review strategy

Regional Development Charges (RDC) by-law

Objective

Procure the services of a development charges consultant to complete legislated requirements in advance of the current development charges by-law expiry date of August 31, 2022. The Region currently collects approximately \$50M per year in development charges and represents an important funding source for growth related infrastructure requirements.

Milestones/Achievements

1. RFP issued and awarded to Watson & Associates Economists for consulting services on the DC background study and by-law within approved budget
2. Engage with internal and external stakeholders
3. Completed Niagara 2051 Kick Off Meeting with support of DC consultant

Looking ahead to 2021

- Regional Development Charge Policy Task Force Kick Off
- Collaboration within the overall Niagara 2051 project to align the DC background study, Water/Wastewater Service Management Plan, Transportation Master Plan

and Official Plan as well as with the incentive review team to ensure consistency with overall grant review

Community Benefit Charge

Under Provincial Bill 108, the Region would be required to create a Community Benefit Charge Strategy in order to continue with the collection of soft service categories (i.e., Social Housing, Long-term care, EMS, Health, POA and General government) with growth related infrastructure costs that were previously collected through Development Charges.

Note: As a result of recent changes in Provincial legislation, upper-tier municipalities are excluded from adopting a community benefit charge. Therefore, this project has been closed.

Grants and Incentives Review

Objective

A Grants and Incentives Program Review will ensure incentives offered in this program align with current and future priorities and responsibilities, address current and future needs, provide meaningful and measurable results and are sustainable, clear and accountable.

Milestones/Achievements

1. Reported to Council on financial implications of Regional incentives (May 2019)
2. Report and presentation to Regional Council / COTW on Regional incentives (September 2019) – four priority areas established
3. Engagement meeting with LAM staff (September 2019)
4. Adaptation of some Regional incentives to COVID restrictions (March-December 2020)
5. Engagement meeting with LAM (July 2020)
6. Conducted Online Surveys with municipal partners, stakeholders and residents, along with information sessions centred on 4 priority areas

Looking ahead to 2021

March – April 2021

- Public Zoom webinar on Regional Incentives and Review
- Public and Stakeholder Survey on Regional Incentives
- Collate survey results
- Coordination with Regional Development Charge Task Force and Regional Official Plan
- Retained KPMG to conduct a review and comparative analysis of the Niagara Region's incentive programs to other municipalities in Ontario

April – June 2021

- Finalize proposed incentive recommendations for Council
- Information session for Regional Council
- Potential engagement with LAMs

June -- July 2021

- Incentive Review Recommendation report

Capital Financing Strategy

Objective

The purpose of this project is to align short-term actions with long-term financial management to ensure the Region is in a sound financial position to finance capital projects in alignment with the other key Regional Plans including the Asset Management Plan. This strategy will help address the growing infrastructure deficit due to deferred capital projects and concerns related to sustainable funding.

Milestones/Achievements

1. Approval of the Capital Financing Policy 2019
2. 2020 & 2021 Capital Budget and updated 9-year forecast
 - Council approved two significant capital budget investments to support community well-being and economic growth. In 2020, Niagara Region, in accordance with the Capital financing policy, included a separate 1.54 per cent levy for the redevelopment of two long-term care facilities designed to create new capacity and meet the needs of the aging population, while 2021 saw funding allocated toward the construction of the South Niagara Falls Wastewater Treatment Facility
3. The 10-year infrastructure deficit forecast has been reduced from 1.1 billion to 0.8 billion (by \$300M) with the approval of the 10-year Water and Wastewater Financial Plan and the approval of incremental capital levy increases.
4. The Capital Financing Policy has been applied in funding decisions of all subsequent capital budgets. This ensures that the assets built within each Capital project are paid for by their beneficiaries
5. Increased sustainable annual contributions to capital reserves for Regional departments (excluding ABCs) from \$60M to \$64M (by \$4M)
6. Council approved a 1% increase on the departmental levy to support infrastructure renewal in the 2021 budget

Looking ahead to 2021

- Preparation of the 2022 Capital Budget and updated 9-year forecast in accordance with the Capital financing policy

Regional Sustainability Review

Objective

The purpose of the service sustainability review (SSR) is to review the Niagara Region's programs and services in an effort to determine whether services provided by the Niagara Region are effective, efficient, and impactful. The Review is an opportunity to explore opportunities for innovation, integration, and alternative service delivery with the goal of identifying opportunities for cost savings or repurposing to ensure all programs and services provided by the Niagara Region are sustainable and appropriately funded in particular with the objective of repurposing dollars to address the infrastructure funding deficit.

Milestones/Achievements

1. Developed and finalized project charter and conducted 5-8 senior executive interviews to gain their perspective
2. Developed service profiles for all of the Niagara Region's services, including benchmark and performance metrics
3. Identified opportunities for cost savings by
 - developing opportunity ranking criteria
 - ranked the opportunities identified
 - receiving approval from the Steering Team and Regional Council on the top five opportunities
4. KPMG final project report and presentation to Council, in tandem with the development of five business cases and implementation roadmaps
 - In conjunction with the Region's Sustainability Review, established a CAO Working Group to collaborate and identify local and Regional service delivery areas that can be enhanced, become more efficient, and offer potential shared or consolidated services

Looking ahead to 2021

- With the KPMG report complete, one opportunity business case has been implemented relating to internal audit services. An incentive review opportunity is ongoing
- Provincial Audit and Accountability Funding received to expand scope of Sustainability Review to include an additional opportunity business case
- Development of implementation plans for three of KPMG's six highest ranked opportunities

Sponsorship Revenue Strategy and Policy

Objective

In order to identify opportunities to increase revenue without increasing taxes, the Niagara Region is engaging in a collaborative policy development plan to produce an inventory of revenue generating prospects. A pilot will be established first with the City of St. Catharines that will inform the development of a Regional policy. This policy will be considered for broader application across the remaining 11 local area municipalities.

Milestones/Achievements

1. Project initiation meeting and first onsite meeting, generation of the needs list submission, and, review/analysis and site tours to validate inventory
2. Draft report with inventory and sponsorship potential prepared and presented to Regional Council

Looking ahead to 2021

- Draft policy and strategy to be created with input from Regional asset managers
- Policy to be presented and considered by Regional Council with execution strategy to follow.

“How Else Are We Achieving This?”

Creating a more Inclusive, Equitable and Engaging Corporate Culture

- The Region and 12 Local Area Municipalities (LAMs) signed a joint declaration to participate in the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities
- In partnership with the Fort Erie Native Friendship, Niagara Region endorsed the signing of a Declaration of Mutual Commitment and Friendship in conjunction with the AMO/OFIFC Declaration of the same, which recognizes each have a responsibility to collaborate on a variety of initiatives that improve Indigenous quality of life and have had tangible community impacts
- In consultation with Indigenous communities, updated the Indigenous Acknowledgement for the Region and the LAMs
- Created three new working groups to support the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion work: a corporate DEI Working Group (15 members from all departments), a corporate DEI Interest Group (15 members from all departments), a working group of Local Area Municipality representatives (19 members from 11

municipalities), and collaborating with a Diversity Group from Seniors Services (13 members from the division)

- Of 32 Regional Councillors, 30 (or 94% of Council) attended at least one session, and 22 attended both sessions of a two part Diversity and Inclusion training facilitated by Leela MadhavaRau, the Director of Human Rights and Equity at Brock University in October and December 2020. Seven staff members attended both sessions, including the Acting CAO, two Commissioners, and the Acting Medical Officer of Health, and three staff members attended one of the two sessions
- Developed a best practices guide for human resources recruitment, hiring, and promotion, to be shared with the LAMs, including resources for adjusting language in job postings, asking more inclusive job interview questions, providing a list of organizations to share job postings with, and a diversity audit tool, the aim of this document is to help improve the diversity of people recruited, hired, and promoted within the Region and the LAMs
- Collected voluntary staff demographic data from 1490 staff with six diversity related questions to establish a baseline of staff demographics regarding race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and disability. This preliminary data will be used to ensure diverse staff voices are heard in creating the DEI Action Plan, and will guide the measurements of success to be proposed in the DEI Action Plan
- 2019 Corporate Engagement Survey received 78% response rate with 70% overall favourable engagement and surpasses the 70% benchmark for like organizations.
- Steady employee interest in corporate leadership development with continued enrollment in the Region's Leader's Edge program.

Working Together with Government Partners to Build a Better Niagara

- In collaboration with the Cities of Niagara Falls and Thorold, successfully advocated for the Ministry of Transportation to ensure the Thorold tunnel remained open during the winter months
- In combination with the 2019 & 2020 AMO and ROMA delegations, secured 17 meetings with various Ministers that resulted in:
 - Partnership established with the Province to build Transitional Housing
 - Capital funding received from the province for this project
 - Consideration of a partnership with the Province is in progress related to the development of a Mobile Integrated Health Model pilot program being launched in Ontario

- Province conducted consultations and implemented measures on eliminating barriers to LTC redevelopment projects
- Successfully advocated for municipal operation funding resulting in the Region receiving \$22M in federal and provincial Safe Restart funding and \$13.8M in COVID-19 Municipal Transit Funding
- Over 62 formal government consultations, submissions, and meetings occurred between 2019 to the end of 2020 that have influenced numerous senior government policy decisions.
- Orchestrated a successful Ending Homelessness Presentation with guest speaker Iain DeJong that attracted approximately 500 housing and community stakeholders resulting in significantly greater alignment with best practices and increased collaboration with community housing and homelessness advocates
- In consultation with First Nation governments, developed an Indigenous Engagement Protocol for capital infrastructure projects to support relationship building and provincial consultation requirements

Ensuring Continued Financial Sustainability through Effective Financial Planning and Risk Management.

- The five-year forecasted use of DC reserves for capital continues to have growth related projects. For the Region to be sustainable, development charges will facilitate growth projects being paid by growth and thus reduce the cost burden on existing taxpayers
- The Region's quarterly financial report has been enhanced with additional metrics that gives more transparency to work in progress and forecasted expenditure
- Achieved Standard and Poor's AA Stable Credit Rating indicating Niagara Region has a very strong capacity to meet its financial commitments

Launching the Region into a New Modern Digital Era of Open Government

- Managing a community based Open Data Portal with data from 12 organizations
Community partners include municipalities, education (K-12, Higher Ed) and local organizations
- 299 data sets currently available to the public providing increased transparency and accountability to Niagara Region to residents
- Ranked 11th overall and 3rd in regional governments in the 2019 the Public Sector Digest (PSD) as Canada's Top 20 Most Open Cities
- Freedom of Information Requests declined by 30% since 2018 suggesting an increase in accessible information to the public

- Traffic to the Regional website increased by 70% from 2018 to 2020 and is currently on a similar trajectory for 2021
- As a result of the success from the virtual Open House for the Regional Woodland By-law Update and the virtual consultations related to the Regional Official Plan, staff will be working with community and private sectors stakeholders to create new and effective public engagement platforms that will replace the traditional in-person public/town hall meetings
- Social Assistance Services introduced modernized electronic document management system, online discretionary benefits portal, and transitioned 91% of clients to the new automatic electronic payment methods.
- Transformed staff ability to work remotely by increasing the daily average number of remote connections from approximately 90 users to 1270 average daily users
- Expanded online payments on the external Regional website to provide the public with alternative ways to pay for services
- Built EMS live time alerts dashboard showing ambulance capacity/ availability
- NRPH, in collaboration with Corporate Information Management team, developed a new robust records management system to ensure the safe, confidential storing of the rapid increase in highly sensitive personal COVID-related information. Mechanisms were created to ensure secure access to this information remained available to aid in providing evidence and informed decision-making on matters related to the pandemic.
- To adapt to the public health measures, Information Technology Services, in collaboration with Corporate Communications provided video conferencing solutions to support the Regional Chair's virtual "State of the Region" address