SHAPE NIAGARA

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

WHAT IS SHAPE NIAGARA?

Shape Niagara is a community engagement initiative focused on collecting feedback from Niagara's residents and community stakeholders on what the next Niagara Regional Council should focus on in the development of their 2019-2022 strategic plan.

Objective of the Initiative

The scope of this community engagement effort was intended to be wide reaching and inclusive. It utilized a variety of methods of engagement (online and in-person) to collect information from a diverse range of community stakeholders (residents, community partners, organizations and businesses).

The Region collects feedback from the community on specific projects and initiatives on a regular basis. Incorporating what was heard from the community throughout the term from relevant past surveys reinforces what was heard through this initiative and assists with the prioritization of what is most important to Niagara's residents.

Council's Strategic Plan

Niagara Regional Council's strategic plan underpins all of the activities undertaken by the organization during the term of Council. The plan guides which projects and initiatives staff will work on, what is considered a priority and how best to resource these activities.

As the end of each Council term approaches, staff typically prepare a background report which serves to inform the incoming Council on the current state of Niagara, providing the relevant information that can be used to create a new strategic plan. In preparation for this background report, relevant information on the current state of Niagara is gathered and is coupled with community feedback. This **What We've Heard** report comprises the community feedback component. A secondary report with the remainder of the background information will go to the new Council at the beginning of 2019, and Council will go through a full strategic planning process at that time.

Six Areas of Focus

Six areas of focus were identified to provide a means for data to be sorted and to gather context around feedback submitted.

Infrastructure and Services
Transportation, roads and bridges, waste, water, senior services, child and family services, housing and homelessness

Economy and Growth
Fostering an environment for jobs and prosperity, development supports.

Health and Wellness
Public health services, bike lanes and pathways, ambulances and emergency services

Governance and Advocacy
Proactive leadership, fiscal responsibility, open government, adocacy for Niagara

Environment
Environmental protection, driving sustainable development

Quality of Life
Safely, community planning, walkability, engagement, newcomer supports

WE ARE HERE

PHASE 1 Gather Data

PHASE 2 Stakeholder Engagement

PHASE 3 Inform New Council

PHASE 4 Develop Strategic Plan

PHASE 5 Approve & Implement

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Shape Niagara addresses the importance of incorporating the voice of Niagara's residents and community partners using a multi-modal approach to increase the reach of the engagement initiative.

Why Community Engagement?

Community engagement is vitally important to the development of a strategic plan. Providing Niagara's new Council with what the community sees as priorities will ensure our strategic direction is well informed, and that Council's focus is aligned with the expectations of residents. When residents contribute meaningfully, and are able to see their ideas and feedback represented in the plan, they can take pride in the successes of Niagara.

Principles of Engagement
The following principles underpinned the Shape Niagara initiative:

Accountability

The objective of the initiative was made clear to participants. Summarized feedback will be provided in a final report for Council, for consideration in the development of their 2019-2022 strategic plan.

Transparent

The story unfolded on the Shape Niagara webpage, and was accessible publicly throughout the initiative. The final report will be made public, as will the resulting strategic plan.

Coordinated Approach
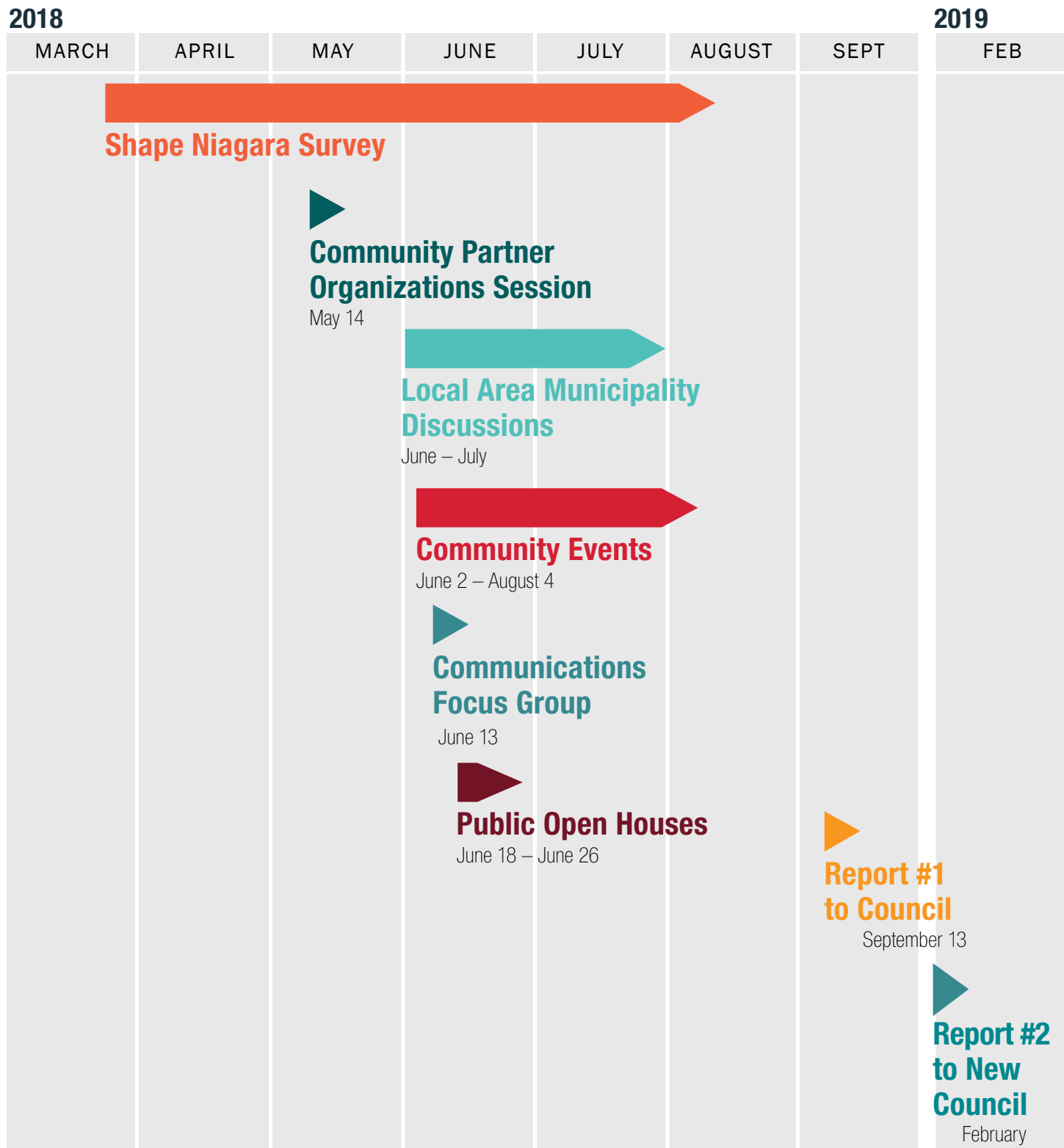
The initiative combines what was heard through Shape Niagara with what the Region has heard throughout the term, incorporating resident feedback collected from other surveys held by the Region.

Inclusive

A multi-modal approach was used to hear from a wide range of residents, businesses, organizations and local area municipalities, using multiple formats including online, and in-person.

Shape Niagara Timeline

The engagement initiative was conducted over the course of a six month period, utilizing multiple types of engagement to ensure a broad reach across the community. Senior Regional staff will be engaged separately in the development of the accompanying background report that will be prepared for early 2019, and again in the planning process with the new Council.

2018   **2019**

| MARCH | APRIL | MAY | JUNE | JULY | AUGUST | SEPT | FEB |

Shape Niagara Survey

**Community Partner
Organizations Session**
May 14

**Local Area Municipality
Discussions**
June – July

Community Events
June 2 – August 4

**Communications
Focus Group**
June 13

Public Open Houses
June 18 – June 26

**Report #1
to Council**
September 13

**Report #2
to New
Council**
February

Methodology

The community feedback collected through the Shape Niagara initiative is qualitative, text based data, representing the perceptions and ideas of participants to assist the next Regional Council in identifying and effectively addressing the needs of Niagara and its residents.

Data Collection
Data was collected from the community through multiple engagement methods, capturing open-ended qualitative feedback through online and in-person opportunities as outlined in the Types of Engagement section of this report.

Thematic Analysis
A thematic analysis is one that looks across all the data to identify reoccurring themes and summarize the views collected. In addition to identifying the themes that cut across the data, the narrative within each theme was reviewed, to capture the story and context behind the feedback. Themes were identified using a coding scheme, and a frequency analysis of these codes was conducted.

Frequency Analysis
Frequency analysis refers to how often an idea was identified as a priority throughout the data collected. A triangulation method was used to cross-validate findings by comparing themes collected from each type of engagement. For example, concept or ideas collected from a public open house was also heard within the online survey, at community events or within previous Regional surveys. Hearing themes through more than one type of engagement strengthens confidence in having identified the important issues.

Text Mining Software
Text mining software was used to further explore and analyze the data, to validate and confirm the themes and provide context as identified through the thematic and frequency analysis.

Data Analysis Process

Data Collection	Thematic Analysis	Frequency Analysis	Text Mining	Bringing it all Together

*This report provides a high-level qualitative analysis of the most prominent themes and issues. While it's not possible to include all the detailed feedback received, feedback that was relevant to the objectives of Shape Niagara was analyzed and prepared for consideration in the development of the next Regional Council strategic plan. Feedback relevant to services or projects outside of the scope of the Shape Niagara initiative will be shared with relevant parties as appropriate. The comments collected may not necessarily be extrapolated to the entire population.

INTERACTIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY

The objective of the Shape Niagara initiative was to reach across Niagara to maximize participation and access.

Legend:
- Community Events
- Public Open Houses

Map labels: Grimsby, Lincoln, Niagara-on-the-Lake, St. Catharines, West Lincoln, Pelham, Thorold, Niagara Falls, Wainfleet, Welland, Port Colborne, Fort Erie

Reach

Recognizing that not all residents are able to attend a scheduled public open house, or may not have access or exposure to the online survey, staff took the initiative to the residents directly, attending 28 local community events, and meeting directly with local area municipal staff (locations shown in the map above). The reach of the engagement initiative was also driven by distribution of business cards, posters, mobile survey access at events (iPads), promotion through our partners and stakeholders, print and online newspaper ads and articles, and through social media platforms including use of the hashtag #ShapeNiagara.

The Shape Niagara initiative received positive traction in the community, stakeholders who saw the importance of the initiative bolstered circulation through grass roots efforts. As an example, one of Niagara's non-profit organizations provided and promoted access to the survey on their premises for clients who may not otherwise have had access to a computer. The initiative was also promoted in a community newsletter that CERF Niagara puts out with distribution to their French speaking networks throughout Niagara. Shape Niagara also received letter and email submissions, validating the recognition by residents and organizations of the importance in being given a voice in this process.

FACEBOOK

👍 **453** LIKES | 💬 **104** COMMENTS

291,261 IMPRESSIONS

263 SHARES

21 POSTS

LOCAL AREA MUNICIPALITY

12 MUNICIPALITIES

6 SESSIONS

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSES

5 OPEN HOUSES
70 PARTICIPANTS
173 UNIQUE QUOTES

3522 UNIQUE WEBSITE VISITS

1523 Total Participants

STAFF FEEDBACK

128 Unique Quotes

3 Channels to submit feedback

TWITTER

47,162 IMPRESSIONS
483 Engagements
56 times #ShapeNiagara
21 Tweets on Region account

COMMUNITY EVENTS

28 Community Events

85 Unique Quotes

Approximately **1500** in-person interactions

5 FACEBOOK EVENT PAGES

42 Responses

3996 People Reached

Newspaper Advertisements

5 ads in district newspapers

9 media articles

PARTNER SESSION

70 PARTICIPANTS

60 Partner Organizations

16 Topic Areas

8 Local Municipalities

19 Business Sector

10 Education Sector

25 Non-Profit Sector

8 Health Sector

ONLINE SURVEY

1002 Survey Responses

304 Infrastructure and Services

359 Economy and Growth

357 Health

433 Environment

242 Governance

337 Quality of Life

# of ideas submitted for each Area of Focus

WHAT WE HEARD

VISION

Residents were given the opportunity
to provide input to be used to inform a
refresh of the Region's vision statement.

Residents were asked to provide 3 words that best describe Niagara

Nature Beautiful Tourism Friendly Home Wineries Green Diverse Historic Potential Safe Clean Growing Scenic Falls Fun Lush Aging Rural Quiet Unique Culture Exciting Water Warm Canal Community Relaxed Agriculture Awesome Garden Escarpment Town Fresh Picturesque Welcoming Busy Farms Family Attractive Pretty Food Variety Space Quaint Affordable Accessible Small Peaceful Vineyards Charming Fruitland Traffic Opportunity Scenic Central Local Heritage Destination Development Adventurous Entertaining Comforting Niagara Transportation Sport Seasonal Border Inclusion Open Educated Vacation Construction Lifestyle Geographic Spacious Serene Changing Multicultural Recreation Inviting Weather Location Vibrant Innovative Expanding Greenbelt

> "I see Niagara known as a region that is multi-faceted and offers residents full-scale, balanced lifestyles where they can feel they have job security, a full spectrum of community supports for young and old, and options to enjoy the benefits offered by the area's geographic location."

> "I hope Niagara is known for being a dynamic, environmentally friendly, socially conscious, inclusive city with a thriving and vibrant arts community, world class restaurants and wineries and plenty of things to do. I hope it's a place where young families can stay, make a good living and afford to live."

> "I hope Niagara is known as an incredibly progressive, diverse, welcoming community that is known for its abilities to work together, listen to each other and collectively create innovative ways of being a community."

> "I see Niagara known for being an inclusive and equitable community who values all members as part of a rich and fair Niagara"

What do you hope Niagara is known for in 10 years?

Niagara will be a thriving economic hub, with a focus on supporting local businesses, and actively recruiting new, diverse industries with a focus on secure and stable opportunities. Niagara will leverage our proximity to major cities in order to create a strong, prosperous economy.

Residents hope to see Niagara maintain its unique traits, focusing on celebrating history, protecting our environment and land assets, and further marketing our natural features. Niagara will leverage our ample greenspaces to increase eco-tourism and become a leader in green industry.

Niagara residents will feel a sense of belonging, and have a high level of engagement regarding local issues. Residents of Niagara will have their voices heard, and together we will shape Niagara into a community we are all proud of.

Niagara will be welcoming and inclusive for all, with superior services with ease of access for all ages and social status; including transportation, community and health services, and opportunities for leisure. Niagara will be an affordable place to live, attracting and supporting diversity.

Niagara will be a vibrant community with ample employment opportunities, allowing youth and young families to plant roots. Niagara will place an emphasis on ensuring urban amenities are available for residents, access to natural space, connectivity and a vibrant arts and culture scene.

What Did Staff Have to Say?

Regional staff were given an opportunity to participate as residents through the online survey. Additionally, staff were asked to comment from a corporate lens with what they think the Region could focus on to better the Region as an organization. Here's what Regional staff had to say:

- Continue to foster cross-departmental collaboration and communication at the Niagara Region to approach issues with a multi-disciplinary focus
- Facilitate opportunities to improve the use of data and idea sharing across departments to ensure evidence informed decision making
- Foster a work environment with a focus on continuous improvement and innovation
- Continue working to improve organizational culture, brand and reputation

Senior Regional staff will be engaged additionally during the strategic planning process and will provide input into the accompanying background report.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE COMMUNITY

This section of the report provides an overview of what was heard across each type of engagement method, summarized by the six areas of focus.

Community Partner Organization Session

📅 May 14

Niagara Region works closely with many organizations in the community. These partner organizations were invited to a workshop where participants were asked to provide their ideas around what the Region should focus on from the perspective of their organizations, and more importantly, their clients.

Invitees and participants included local businesses, local area municipal staff, non-for-profit organizations, education sector, health care sector, and community organizations. The Shape Niagara initiative also received written letters of submission from partner organizations, and that feedback has been included in this section.

> Fostering an environment for jobs and prosperity means more than ensuring employment opportunities are available, it includes encouraging a living wage.

Here's What We Heard:

Infrastructure and Services

Safe and Affordable Housing
- Affordable housing solutions inclusive of all residents, including young people, single earners and renters
- Capitalize on funding and development opportunities from higher levels of government
- Ensure affordable housing remains a priority of the housing action plan

Navigating Regional Services
- Streamline navigation for municipal and social services across all levels or providers
- Use data to identify top needs and gaps in services
- Access to services - removing barriers (costs, transportation) for those on low incomes

Transportation Connectivity
- Develop and maintain affordable, accessible transportation to support residents getting to work, school, appointments, and amenities; will also support reduction of social isolation

Economy and Growth

Growing Youth and Young Families in Niagara
- Market employment opportunities to attract and retain young families
- Support youth in developing roots in Niagara as active citizens of the Region

Supporting Niagara's Businesses
- Connect local business owners with tools for success
- Transportation to connect municipalities to support region-wide access
- Foster environment & supports for entrepreneurship and small businesses

Economic Diversification
- Shift focus to innovative emerging clusters
- Align economic strategies across municipalities
- Diversify our tourist sector and developing a collective vision for tourism

Fostering an Environment for Jobs and Prosperity
- Ensure employment opportunities are available, and encouraging a living wage to ensure residents experience better quality of life and improved health outcomes

Health and Wellness
Healthy Population
- Address gaps in senior care, palliative care, addiction and mental health services; creation of a region-wide harm reduction strategy and a comprehensive physician recruitment strategy
- Integration of alternatives to traditional health care delivery models
- Adopt a client-centered, equitable approach to the delivery of public health services, programs and emergency services to support people living on a low income and people experiencing homelessness
- Improve transportation and access to health services
- Ensure a social justice and human rights approach for those living in poverty, to address the attitudes, bias and prejudices to help people move beyond poverty

Governance and Advocacy
Engaging the Community
- Consultation and inclusion to give a voice to the community, and hear unique perspectives

Environment
Sustainable Development
- Prioritize environmental protection, encourage recycling, protect greenspace and agriculture in the planning process
- Balance sustainability and meeting current needs of rural issues

Quality of Life
Socially Responsible Procurement
- Support local enterprises for work done through Region's procurement, foster sustainable business practices

Public Open Houses

📅 June 18 – 26

Public open houses were held in five municipalities: Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Welland, Beamsville and Port Colborne. The open houses were geographically spaced out to cover the major population centers allowing for a wider span of participation and access, shown in the map below. As a public participation technique, the open houses provided a formal drop-in event that allowed attendees to provide comments in person. Staff were there to outline the objective of the events, answer questions and capture the feedback provided by residents who attended.

> " We need to play off of our current strengths to create a prosperous economy- those strengths being our proximity to the GTHA and border, post secondary institutions and our strong agricultural industry "

Here's What We Heard:

Infrastructure and Services
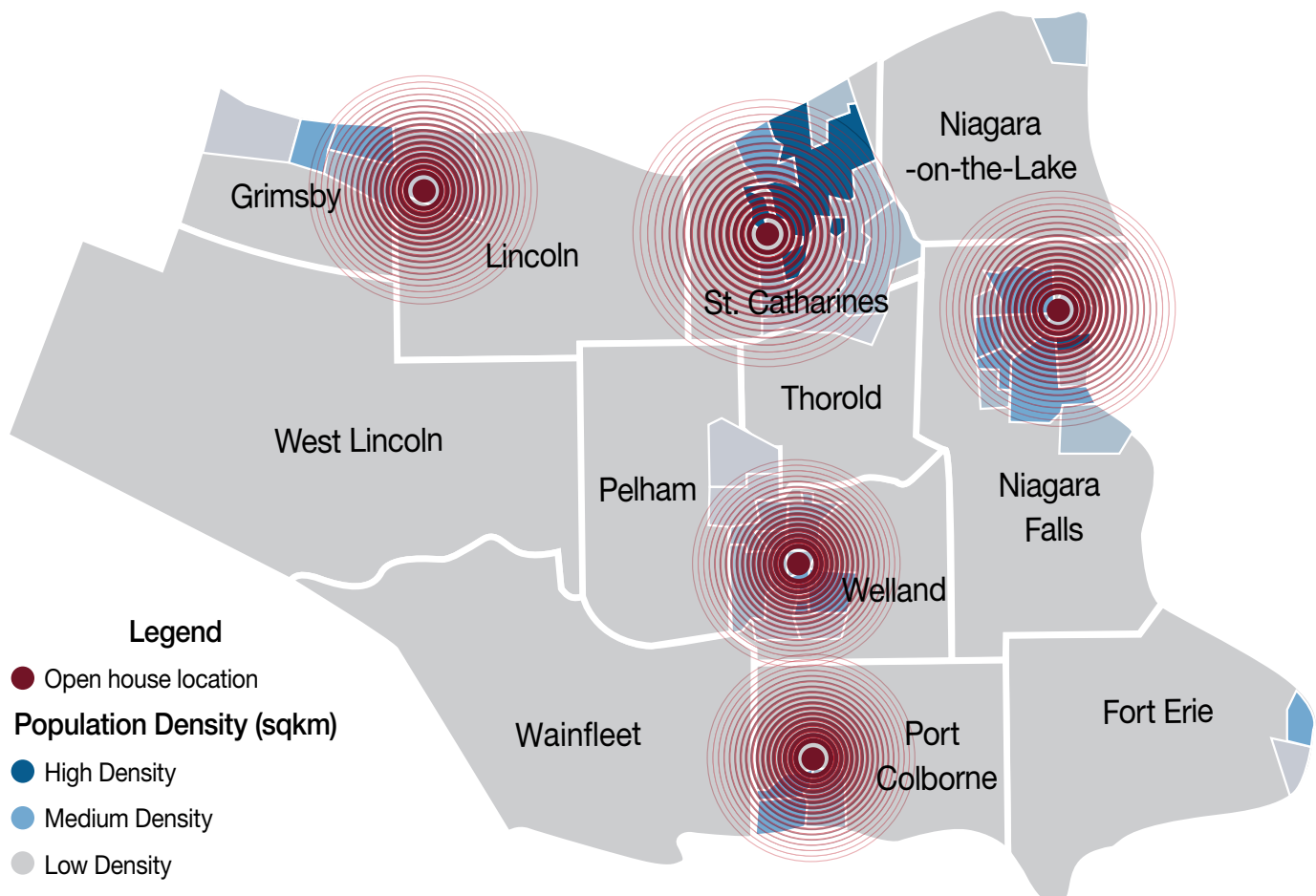
Transportation Connectivity
- Improve connectivity between Niagara's municipalities and outside of region

Affordable Housing
- Affordable housing and alternative solutions to combat homelessness

Roads and Bridges
- Improve roads, bridges and physical infrastructure to meet demands of increasing population and traffic flow
- Ensure we are adequately prepared for the expansion of GO to Niagara

Legend
- 🔴 Open house location

Population Density (sqkm)
- 🔵 High Density
- 🔵 Medium Density
- ⚪ Low Density

Economy and Growth

Socially Responsible Business
- Stimulate our economy through the use of local companies for Regional projects

Marketing Niagara
- Utilize our strengths to attract diverse industry

Business Retention
- Streamline support for development and Niagara's businesses

Youth Retention
- Leverage partnerships with post-secondary institutions to increase youth retention

Health and Wellness

Access to Heath Services and Preventative Care
- Improved centralization and access to necessary health services
- Supports for increasing effectiveness of emergency services within our communities
- Integration of public health services; including school outreach, senior services, mental health and addiction support

Active Transportation
- Bike lanes and sidewalks to encourage active transportation

Governance and Advocacy

Accountability
- Open, transparent and accountable governance following a set of standards for conduct

Community Engagement
- Engage residents on boards and committees, as well as throughout decision making processes

Advocacy
- Streamline advocacy efforts to best serve all Niagara residents

Environment

Protection of Natural Assets
- Protect our greenspaces and natural resources

Sustainable Development
- Ensure developments follow sustainability guidelines

Environmental Education
- Increase educational initiatives to ensure residents understand the importance of environmental conservation

Community Engagement
- Consultation with stakeholders to capture voice for preservation of natural assets in Niagara

Quality of Life

Safety
- Police visibility within our communities and at events

Supports for Populations in Need
- Work to support our multicultural growth, supporting newcomers and marginalized populations in Niagara

Sense of Belonging
- Vibrant culture, entertainment opportunities

Community Events

📅 **June – August**

One of the keys of successful engagement is to make it easier and more convenient for people to participate. The project team took the initiative to places where people were already gathering, setting up at community events and popular destinations. This made it easier for community members to provide their comments and guidance without having to attend a separate meeting, and allowed the initiative to reach more residents and cover more geographic area.

The project team attended a total of 28 community events. Examples of event locations included: Niagara VegFest, Niagara Falls Ribfest, Canada Day celebrations, Pelham Supper Market, Ridgeway Summer Festival, Niagara on the Lake Lavender Festival and Farmers Markets, etc.

> We need one sustainability framework and goal for the whole region. We need united action to protect the environment.

Here's What We Heard:

Infrastructure and Services

Transportation Connectivity
- Comprehensive Region-wide public transportation system, including active transportation options

Roads and Bridges
- Improve quality of Regional roads to match increases in growth

Navigating Regional Services
- Easier access to Regional services and information

Economy and Growth

Youth Retention
- Increase youth retention by providing employment opportunities for recent graduates

Supporting Business
- Increase in support for small businesses, entrepreneurship and existing businesses in Niagara

Diverse Industry Sectors
- Diversify our economic clusters in order to promote economic prosperity, increase average income, reduce precarious employment

32 events | Approx. 1500 in person interactions

Health and Wellness

Mental Health Supports
- Increase access to mental health services for all ages, working to reduce stigma within the community

Preventative Health Care
- Address social determinants of health such as addiction, social services and job stability services, understanding that a healthy social community leads to improvements on a population's physical health

Senior Services
- Improve connectivity between health services for seniors

Governance and Advocacy

Openness and Trust
- Openness, accountability, transparency and trustworthiness on Regional Council

Community Engagement
- Ensuring Council represents their residents by increasing community consultation on important issues, and keeping residents informed

Environment

Sustainable Development
- Better balance between development and sustainability, ensuring experts are consulted prior to development

Education
- Improve education regarding proper recycling and environmental sustainability practices

Protection of Natural Assets
- Protection of wildlife and their habitats, waterfronts and greenspace

Quality of Life

Smart Land Use Planning
- Improve community planning to ensure communities serve their residents across the life course
- Ensure developments are designed with walkability in mind

Support for Populations in Need
- Increase accessibility for newcomers and immigrants, including literature and outreach in multiple languages

Local Area Municipalities

📅 **June – July**

> We need to ensure we are using a unified approach between the Region and municipalities, building on our prior successes. A multi-level approach will lead to a stronger voice for Niagara.

Niagara's local area municipal (LAM) staff were engaged in a number of ways including an invitation to the community partner organization session, and through attendance at area planners, economic development, treasurers and CAO meetings. All local area CAOs were invited to a facilitated session to capture feedback and generate fulsome discussions, fostering collaboration between upper and lower tier governments.

Here's What We Heard:

Infrastructure & Services

Transportation

- Support growth through effective transportation network, corridors to ease congestion (North / South escarpment, mid-pen corridor, integrate existing infrastructure with GO), complete the big tasks we've started: close on GO and airport initiatives
- Effective planning for connectivity - people and goods movement strategy, improve transportation and mobility hubs, transportation and connectivity coordinated amongst all partners, linking active transportation across municipalities (i.e. circle route), explore opportunities with ports in Port Colborne and St. Catharines

Economy & Growth

Planning for Growth

- Integrate diversity into the strategic growth plan, coordinate to attract residents across all of Niagara's LAMs, proactive planning rather than reactive
- Be visionary with land-use planning, using successful cities as an example. A coordinated growth and development plan, growth in the right places, intensification, advocate province to properly designate lands, protect the future of agriculture, educate public / developers on topics such as smart growth and affordable housing
- Recognize LAM differences to meet the needs of municipalities that are growing and also those that are not growing. Working with LAMs on official plans to build a region-wide approach
- Assessment base growth needs to grow away from reliance on residential. Plan and address building stock, inventory, land restriction issues (i.e. wetlands), re-zoning of industrial to residential is affecting future needs

Economic Prosperity
- Re-branding of region as a whole to attract new residents and business investment, foster working together to ease competition issues between local municipalities, rural / urban approach such as Durham Region, focusing not only on pushing big sites, but pockets of sites, emulate successes of like-regions, effective incentives with criteria to meet objectives and drive marketability (i.e. we don't need to incentivize where growth is already happening, focus incentives to where the impact will be the greatest)
- Focus on future job market, position Niagara for a new economy, fostering entrepreneurship, diversified economic activity, look at how to increase Niagara's employment participation rate
- Preserve affordability, effective transportation, appropriate servicing to potential areas such as Seaway lands, broadband opportunities
- Partnerships – leverage strengths of neighbouring municipalities (City of Hamilton, GTA, Buffalo), build a labour force for new economy through relationships with post-secondary institutions (i.e. advocate for engineering, advanced manufacturing programs)
- Expand cooperative economic development approach, unified economic development strategy and action plan across the two-tiers, need a business retention and expansion strategy, define role in tourism to reduce confusion and be inclusive of all municipalities

Governance & Advocacy

Inter-Municipal Relations
- Alignment between upper and lower tier priorities, co-operation and / or support between upper and lower tiers, strong inter-municipal relations, align strategic plans to focus on working together to get things done, opportunity for a common or complementary strategic pillar(s)
- Better communication with Regional Council at LAM Councils, fostering working relationships between Region and LAM staff and ensuring alignment of documentation and strategies between the two levels
- Ensure aligned customer service and ease of navigation for residents and staff, warm handoffs between tiers
- Come together with one voice to higher levels of government, collective strategy, approach and advocate as one, all go together
- Asset management planning, investment policies, cooperation between local municipalities and Region mean we can come together to find solutions that all municipalities can use

Communications Focus Group

📅 **June 13**

The Region's Strategic Communication & Government Affairs division conducts a resident survey with a focus on communication preferences. The 2018 survey aligned well with the launch of the Shape Niagara initiative, and questions that would specifically benefit the Shape Niagara initiative were included in the focus group portion of the initiative.

> "[Transit] brings people together, makes jobs, improves business and improves tax revenues, and that will make more money available for other improvements."

28 participants over 3 focus groups

Here's What We Heard:

Infrastructure and Services

Roads and Bridges
- Improve road maintenance for new and existing assets

Transportation Connectivity
- Improve public transit system functioning as a single system with one schedule and one fare, incorporation of GO trains into regional system

Affordable Housing
- Housing for seniors and affordable housing

Navigating Regional Services
- Increase accessibility of services across the region

Environment

Balancing Growth with Sustainable Development
- Concern for loss of greenspace and protecting the rural character of the Region
- Improve planning to match infrastructure with development and community needs

Economy and Growth

Economic Prosperity
- Niagara needs to be a place to not only live but to work in as well, with quality jobs to ensure Niagara is not a bedroom community for greater Toronto and Hamilton
- Secure employment opportunities - priority for the region is job creation, for youth and young families, with higher pay

Governance and Advocacy

Accountable Spending
- Accountable spending at the Region and the LAMs

Collaboration
- Communication between the Region and LAMs with common goals

Community Engagement in Development
- Ensure transparency in development plans for residents across all local municipalities

Health and Wellness

Health Care Services
- Improve and expanding mental health services
- Increase support for Public Health services

Online Survey

The primary tool to collect community feedback was through an online survey accessed through the Shape Niagara website. Participants ranked their top three Areas of Focus, and asked participants to elaborate and identify how they might leverage Niagara's strengths and weaknesses as opportunities.

> Improving transportation is necessary. Niagara's communities will be better connected, which will improve everything from employment rates, to the local economy, to health.

1002 survey responses

Here's What We Heard:

Infrastructure and Services

Infrastructure
- Ensure roads and bridges are adequately maintained for safe and timely travel
- Ensure roads and transit system are prepared for the influx of usage with future GO service
- Connective corridors to mitigate the increasing levels of traffic on major arteries

Services for Populations in Need
- Look for innovative strategies to support residents finding safe, affordable places to live
- Supports for homeless population, including housing, health care, addiction support and jobs

Services for Families
- Increase child supports to make Niagara an attractive place to live for young families; lobbying upper levels of government for increased affordable childcare options and public health supports for the early years

Waste Management
- Increase education initiatives to increase organics and recycling, more waste sorting bins in public facilities

Water Quality
- Ensure drinking water resources are adequately protected, maintain current quality; explore solutions to improve water cleanliness at beaches for safe swimming
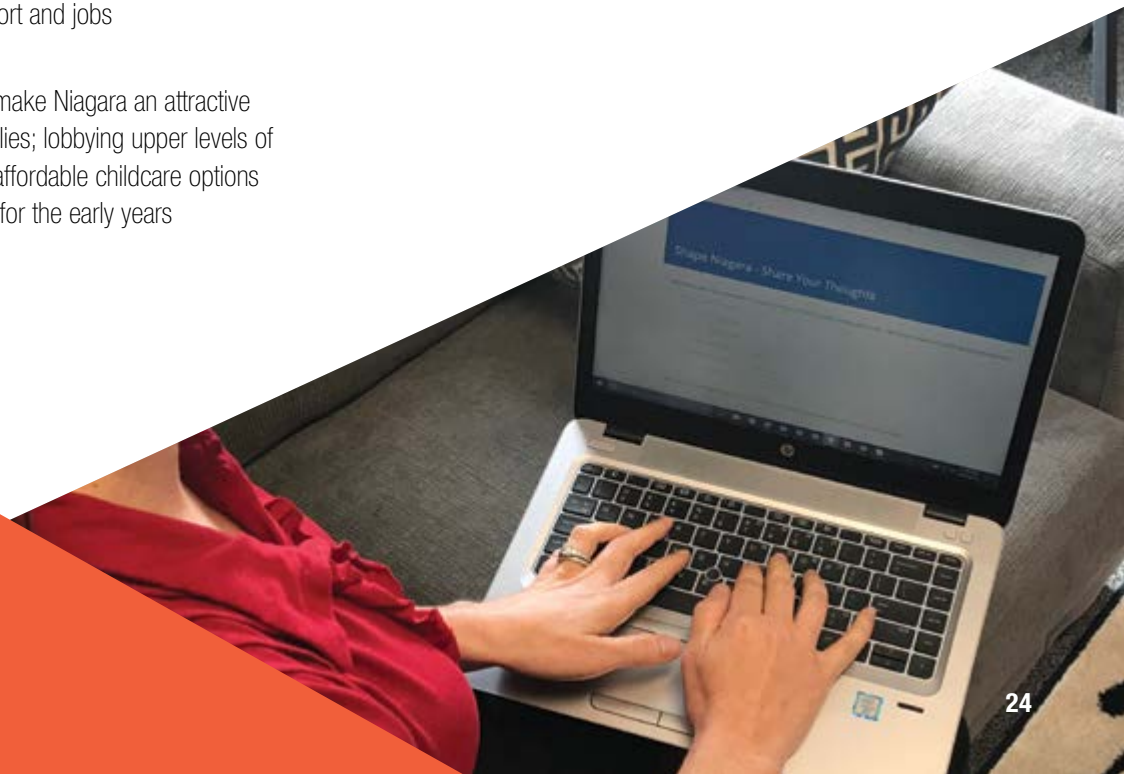
Economy and Growth

Diverse Industry Sectors

- Attract new and diverse industry to Niagara; use of targeted incentives, and matching businesses with vacant properties
- Drive growth in downtown cores, adjacent to our waterfronts and repurpose brownfields
- Focus on attracting industry in sectors with proven longevity and a high rate of growth

Secure Employment Opportunities

- Need to move away from part-time, seasonal employment; work with higher levels of government to attract secure employment opportunities and reduce precarious employment

Business Retention

- Centralized support for businesses; established lasting connections

Marketing Niagara

- Market Niagara's strengths, such as greenspace, high quality of life and proximity to higher education, to attract both businesses and potential employees.
- Utilize traditional and innovative media channels; create comprehensive region-wide marketing strategy to attract more tourists, investors, future residents and businesses

Youth Retention

- Comprehensive youth retention strategy, fostering strong partnerships between post-secondary institutions and business sector to match local graduates with employment opportunities and ensure education programs fill gaps in the workforce

Collaborative Government

- Create a defined economic focus across all local area municipalities to attract industry, create one set of economic development procedures across all municipalities

Tourism

- Work to expand tourism industry across all municipalities; continue to invest in alternative forms of tourism, such as eco-tourism and sport tourism; and leverage Niagara's strengths

Transportation Connectivity

- Transportation plays an important role in economic growth; centralize future development along highways and the future GO route, and in areas with existing services

> "
> [Success is] realized when communities work together, and should not be one-off's. It should be the result of deliberate and consistent effort of key strategic alliances between communities, as well as with the private, education and healthcare sectors.
> "

Health and Wellness

Active Transportation
- Increase in trail systems, cycling paths; ensure safe active transportation opportunities

Preventative Healthcare
- Continued focus on preventative health care to reduce stress on our health system
- Increase focus on social determinants of health such as income equity, homelessness, employment rates, supports for marginalized populations, addiction services and supports and harm reduction strategy
- Respondents indicated that the public is not aware of all of the services provided by Public Health, and suggest improved marketing towards target audiences to increase usage and increase education on important health concerns
- Shifts towards medical centres of excellence require an increase outreach services such as increase in home care, outreach to outlying communities and a stronger network of community organizations to connect residents with available services in their area

Caring for Seniors
- Increase supports for Niagara's aging population: localized health services, affordable senior housing and outreach for older population

Transportation Connectivity
- Work towards a unified transit system to allow all residents to access needed health services, regardless of what municipality they reside in

Mental Health Supports
- Continued focus on mental health issues through services, early intervention and education in schools for youth

> **"**
>
> Income equity is the key to all wellbeing measures. We need to create a sense of belonging for all citizens, no matter their age, cultural background, or socio-economic background. We need to create opportunities for diverse populations to interact in the community by how it is planned and structured.
>
> **"**

Governance

Advocacy & Collaborative Government

- Advocate for Niagara as a whole, attract businesses and new residents by unifying LAM and Regional priorities; Niagara is stronger working together with a common vision, where all viewpoints are valued in decision making
- Increase collaboration between levels of government including collaborative strategic planning
- Regional Councillors co-operating with one another, reducing inner conflict to accomplish all tasks efficiently with integrity

Accountability

- Accountability for Regional Council through the establishment of a clear code of conduct and rules of governance
- A more responsive government, easily accessible to discuss issues with constituents
- Increase presence of Regional politicians at community events, to help build a stronger rapport between residents and their representatives

Community Engagement

- Increase opportunities to have residents voices heard; prior to each major decision or plan, residents would like community consultation sessions where residents, politicians and organizations can have meaningful discussions
- Diverse representation on Regional committees, engage subject matter experts to sit on appropriate committees

Fiscal Responsibility

- Keep residents informed regarding budgets, spending, decision-making and timelines for Regional projects
- Ensure responsible spending by reducing inefficiencies and duplication. Explore alternatives to our current governance model to reduce overlap of services
- Transparency in spending, with guidelines on appropriate expenses for elected officials

Be honest and open with citizens about the tough decisions that need to be made for our benefit.
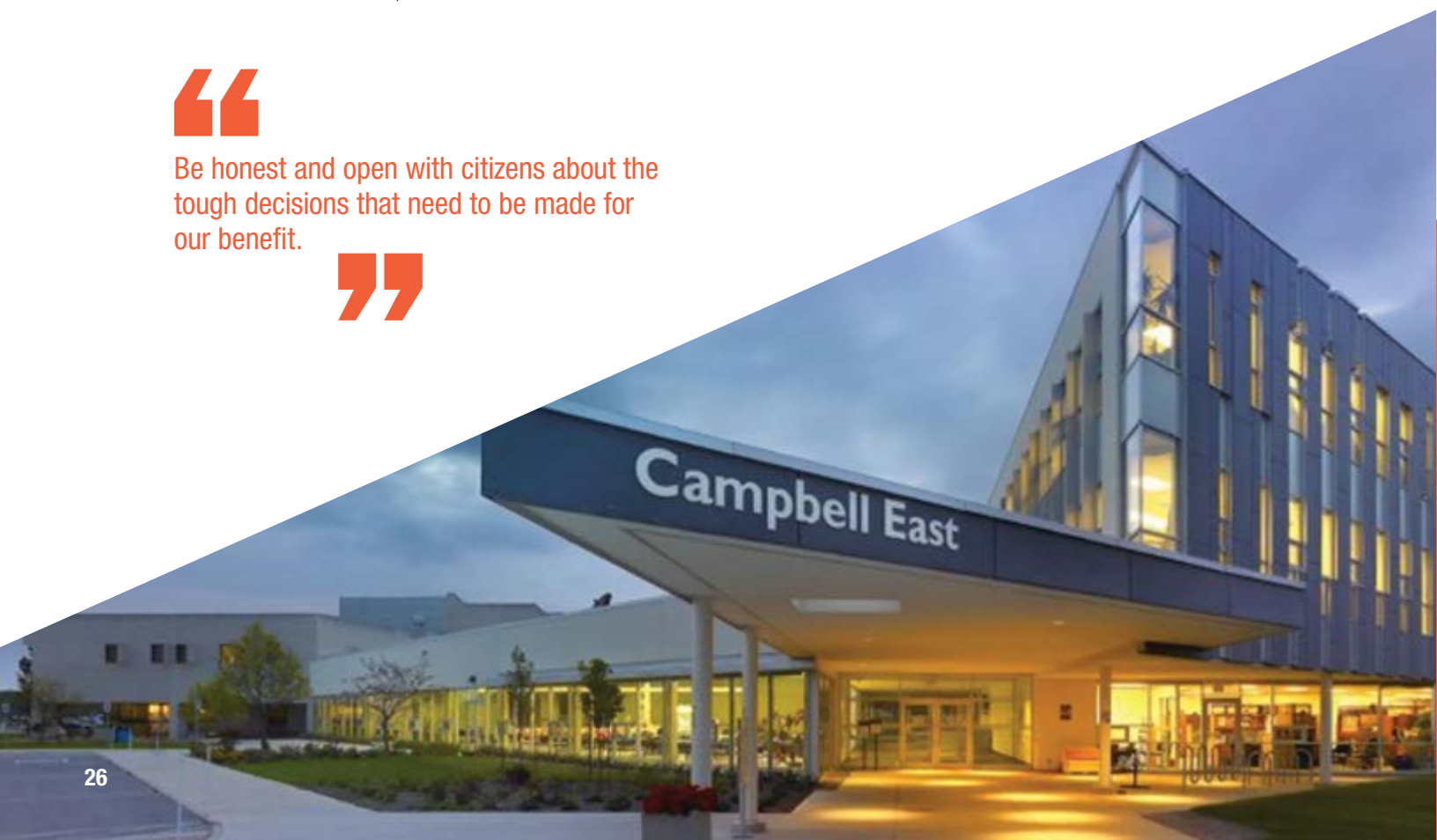
Environment

Protection of Natural Areas

- Respondents were passionate about the protection of Niagara's environment; including wetlands, farmlands and greenspaces; ensure these lands are not subject to zoning changes
- Ensure Niagara's wildlife and ecosystems are protected through the creation of a natural heritage system
- Opportunities to utilize natural areas within the region, including improved access to the waterfront, and an increase of natural areas for physical activity
- Ensure all new developments provide ample park space and green space in their plans

Sustainable Development

- Ensure future developments are sustainable, focus on infill and developing brownfields as an alternative to urban sprawl
- More stringent rules for developers that plan to build on sensitive lands; focus incentives towards developers that are repurposing current vacant land, and developers that are passionate about preserving our heritage and the environment

Environmental Protection

- Explore alternative energy options to maintain Niagara's clean air; limit the use of fertilizers and pesticides, educate the public on environmental issues, such as recycling, endangered species and composting
- Connected public transit system, to reduce reliance on vehicles and reduce carbon footprint

> We need both the protection and the sustainable development. It can be done with embracing the gifts we have, and opening our minds to safe, clean, healthy and attractive development, that has a sustainable future.

Quality of Life

Transportation Connectivity

- Create a comprehensive inter-municipal transit system, integrated with the future GO route, to support travel of residents and tourists. Niagara's large geographic area can be a challenge for transit, explore alternative transportation to reach outlying communities
- Improve access and use of active transportation modes, such as walking and cycling

Community Engagement

- Opportunities for residents to provide input into decisions that affect their community

Sense of Belonging

- Foster a greater sense of belonging through community hubs, local tourism opportunities to support interactions between community members, and foster Niagara's unique culture

Responsible Development

- Residents are passionate about the unique features that make Niagara home, ensure natural features such as waterfronts and the environment are protected from over development
- Increase consultation prior to major developments to ensure greater sustainability and the voice of residents is captured

Safe Community

- Safe neighbourhoods greater police visibility, increased lighting, improved monitoring of roads and highways

Supports for Populations in Need

- Ensure the most vulnerable populations such as newcomers, the homeless and those struggling with addiction are adequately supported

Balanced Services

- Balance services to meet the needs of families, business owners and professionals
- Balance of rural and urban priorities to drive a high quality of life

Arts and Culture

- Increase support for arts and culture, including community festivals, galleries and museums
- Protect and restore historic towns and villages to make Niagara more attractive to new and current residents
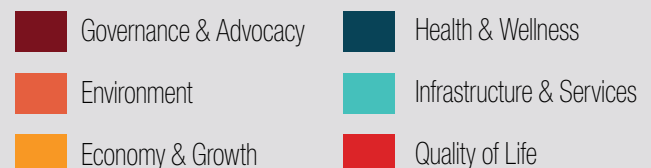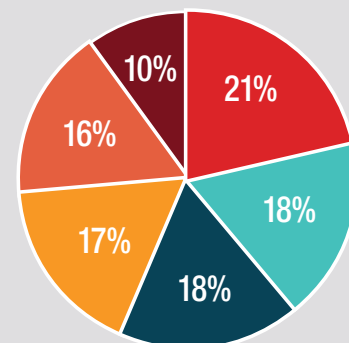
"

We need to build a better sense of community in Niagara, where people feel they are encouraged to contribute their skills to make life better for everyone.

"

Selected as Top 3 Priority

Participants were asked to rank the Areas of Focus, this chart shows the proportion of times each Area of Focus was selected as a top 3 priority.

10%
21%
16%
18%
18%
17%

- Governance & Advocacy
- Environment
- Economy & Growth
- Health & Wellness
- Infrastructure & Services
- Quality of Life

WHAT ELSE THE COMMUNITY TOLD US

A review of recent and relevant surveys hosted by the Region was conducted and pertinent responses were incorporated into the Shape Niagara results to validate what was heard.

Surveys Included:

- Smart Cities Survey
- Niagara Employer Inventory Survey
- Go Hub and Transit Station Survey
- Joint Strategy on Youth Retention Survey

Other Relevant Surveys

Here's What We Heard:

Smart Cities Survey

This survey was conducted to gather insights from Niagara residents about the greatest challenges affecting Niagara that may be improved through data and technology. This data helped to inform Niagara's submission to Infrastructure Canada's Smart Cities Challenge in 2018.

Infrastructure and Services

- Police visibility to foster a sense of safety
- Explore innovative solutions to the housing crisis
- Road and infrastructure to accommodate population growth
- Inter-municipality transit with consideration around jobs and those accessing the service Example: those working in the service industry, with schedules based on demand / usage
- Active transportation opportunities
- Leverage technology to improve maintenance of Regional roads

Economy and Growth

- Focus on attracting new employers to the Region to improve job prosperity
- Support for small and medium sized businesses through a technology hub
- Advocate post-secondary industry to match programs to emerging economic clusters, with a focus on leveraging technology and connectivity
- Support employment opportunities for individuals to work from home in remote locations

Health and Wellness

- Mental health care for all residents, of all ages
- Access to health services for pocket communities
- Support for innovative health services to treat addictions
- Focus on preventative medicine to alleviate stress on the health system and physician recruitment
- Adapt to meet the needs of an aging population through technology

Governance and Advocacy

- Increase opportunities for residents to provide feedback to Regional Council
- One Niagara - unifying strategies across municipalities
- Focus on bottom-up leadership, where government leads from behind to build capacity

Environment

- Focus on sustainable development within the planning process

Quality of Life

- Embrace multiculturalism
- Community engagement and fostering a sense of community belonging for all ages
- Local community hubs
- Improve digital connectivity
- Community planning focusing on proximity between commercial and residential areas

Employer Inventory Survey

The Region conducts annual in-person surveys with businesses across Niagara. Results from the survey contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Niagara's current employment landscape by providing reliable data on employment numbers, types of employment and job / industry locations. Businesses were also asked what the Region could do to support them.

Infrastructure & Services

- Include online information about regional small businesses in the form of a business directory
- Expand public transit service to support employees
- Expand bike lanes in the Region to allow for greater access to stores and workplaces

Economy

- Encourage inter-business networking
- Highlight employment opportunities across the region
- Assist in keeping and attracting business in Niagara

Health & Wellness

- Increase funding for mental health services
- Support cycling and sporting events that will attract tourists, encourage healthy living and increase economic spinoff

Governance & Advocacy

- Continue to promote Niagara as open for business
- Remain politically active in ensuring procurement stays open and transparent
- Promote and support a "buy local" campaign in order to increase public awareness of the importance of Niagara agriculture and farmers
- Streamline permits and approvals

Environment

- Educate and promote usage of garbage and recycling programs

GO Hub and Transit Station Survey

This Regional infrastructure project included a resident survey to capture feedback surrounding the development of GO hubs and transit stations in Niagara. Relevant feedback as it aligns to the objective of Shape Niagara has been captured below.

Infrastructure & Services

- Prioritize active modes of transportation to support increase in density within municipalities

Economy

- Expand business options and create well-designed transit in order to achieve economic success and regional growth
- Increase development in the older parts of the Region to take pressure off of urban sprawl

Health & Wellness

- Encourage active transit to foster a healthy community

Governance & Advocacy

- Integrated transit and infrastructure attractiveness can be used as a way to promote the region to residents and tourists.

Environment

- Consider protection of land and environment when developing transit and infrastructure

Quality of Life

- Support connectivity through integrated transit, pedestrian-friendly communities and mixed-use work and living spaces

Joint Strategy on Youth Retention with Post-Secondary Institutions

This project focused on the creation of a comprehensive, multi-partner strategy with Niagara's post-secondary institutions aimed at retaining and attracting youth.

Infrastructure & Services

- Smart transportation supported by technology solutions; advocacy for active transportation

Economy

- Support for partnerships promoting technology and innovation in the education sector, supporting business and investment attraction
- Support for skill development of Niagara's labour pool
- Promotion of Niagara's health care industry with linkages to other partners and regions

Governance & Advocacy

- Council can continue to encourage the collaborative approach to services and community prosperity Niagara has seen as a result of working across municipalities
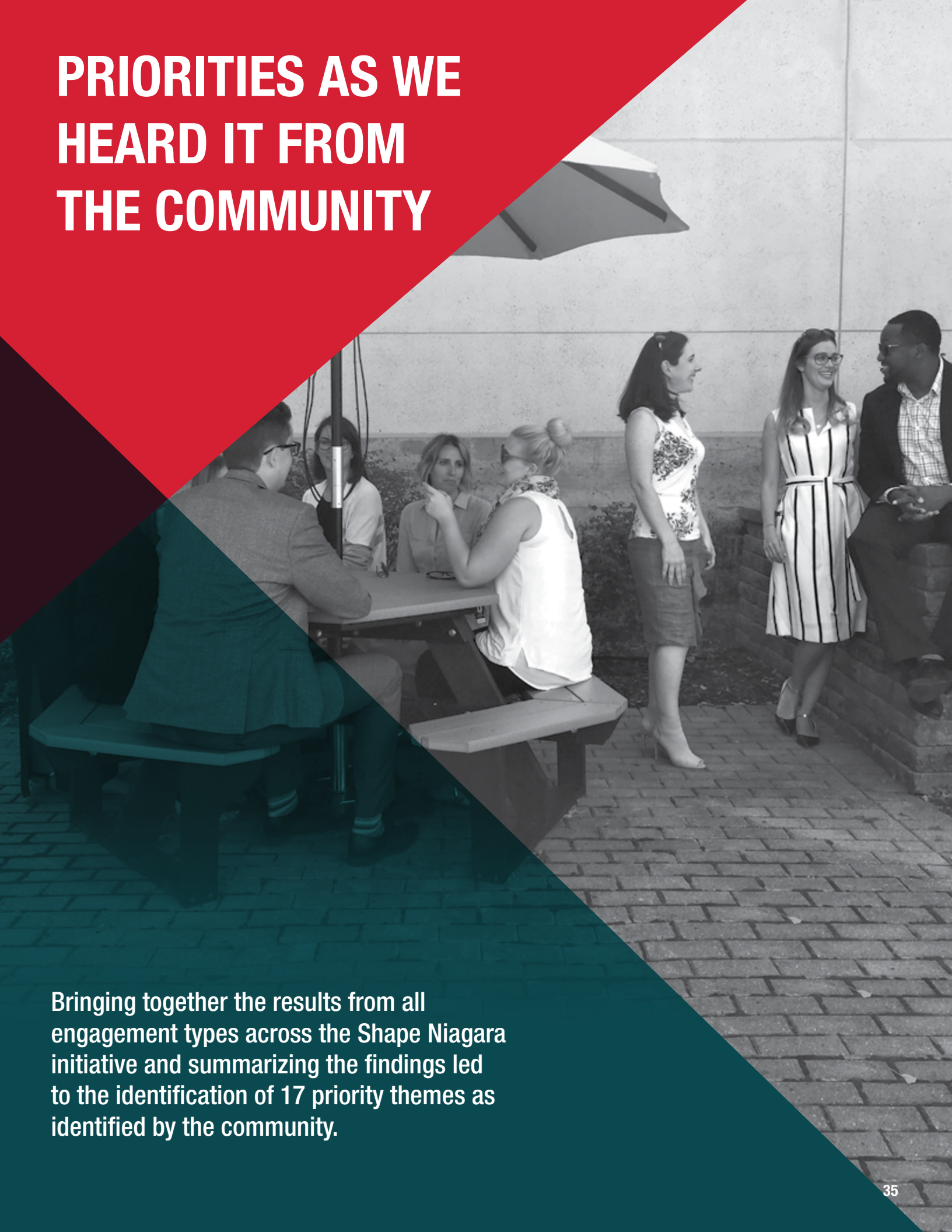
Quality of Life

- Rebrand Niagara to tell the positive stories to improve our image, promote attractions and benefits of living in Niagara

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

PRIORITIES AS WE HEARD IT FROM THE COMMUNITY

Bringing together the results from all engagement types across the Shape Niagara initiative and summarizing the findings led to the identification of 17 priority themes as identified by the community.

Bringing It All Together

From the analysis of the feedback and data collected, 17 top themes were identified by Niagara's residents, businesses, organizations and local area municipalities. They have been summarized and presented in order of priority, beginning with the most frequently cited.

1 Jobs & Economic Prosperity

- Advocate for, and rebrand Niagara as a whole, create a clear vision in attracting new industry; market Niagara's strengths to attract business through various media channels
- Actively solicit businesses to locate in Niagara through incentives and supports; ensure this business growth is across a wide range of industry; attract businesses that provide non-precarious employment and socially responsible businesses
- Encourage economic growth in downtown cores, brownfields and municipalities that may not traditionally attract industry
- Support small businesses and entrepreneurs to help them thrive
- Use of local companies for Regional projects; i.e. Those hiring local talent
- Partner with community organizations, post-secondary institutions and the business community to strategize economic development opportunities
- Move away from investment in part-time, seasonal and low-paying employment, move towards secure jobs that pay a living wage
- Better understand the link between sustainability in the job market and quality of life of employees (i.e. health care, housing)
- Focus on diversifying our economic clusters (away from tourism and service industries) and shift towards emerging industries, or those with proven longevity (i.e. health, technology)
- Work to consolidate economic focus and drivers across all local municipalities to better refine our economic strategic planning
- Work to ensure all necessary supports are in place to foster an environment for economic prosperity and success through streamlined processes, right-sized taxes, smart incentives directed towards results

2 Transportation Connecting People to Jobs & Services

- Recognize and promote secondary benefits that come with a unified transit system; improved access to health care, improved access to job opportunities across municipalities, reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, improved social engagement and reduction in congestion on major arteries
- Continue with the creation of a comprehensive inter-municipal transit system, integrated with the future GO route
- Ensure current and future transit is accessible, frequent and affordable, routes and schedules matched to needs of users
- Explore transportation alternatives, beyond buses, such as high-speed inter-city rail, ferry services and increasing usage of Niagara's airport

3 Supporting Populations in Need through Employment, Affordable Housing, Transit

- Support populations in need by ensuring necessary services are provided including affordable housing and transportation options, that services such as health care are accessible and that affordable housing needs of the community are met
- Adapt services to meet the needs of Niagara's aging population
- Innovative solutions to address homelessness, unemployment, and addictions
- Populations in need as identified by respondents include seniors, homeless, new residents, immigrants, those experiencing addictions, and vulnerable / marginalized

4 Environmental Responsibility & Sustainable Development

- Environmental protection and sustainable development go hand in hand
- Protect Niagara's greenspace, greenbelt lands, farmland, wetlands by reducing development or sprawl on these lands
- Ensure future developments are sustainable by building on brownfields rather than greenfields; more stringent rules for developers that plan to build on sensitive land; offer incentives and prioritization for developers that are repurposing current vacant land, and to developers that are passionate about preserving our heritage
- Be visionary in response to growth for land-use planning across Niagara, ensuring planning policies and approvals protect Niagara's natural assets and are tied to resident's needs and feedback

5 Accountable & Collaborative Government

- Better collaboration between levels of government, Niagara's needs are best met through a common vision; working together with lower-tier municipalities to create a defined strategic focus for key industries (i.e. economic growth, tourism)
- Continue to advocate for Niagara's needs to upper levels of government, all municipalities advocating together as one, for the needs of Niagara as a whole
- Improve representation of resident needs by ensuring Councillors do not allow partisanship or professional interests to guide decision making
- Work to repair relationship with media and press; restore credibility of Regional Council by acting with integrity and respect
- Improve cooperation between Councillors to accomplish tasks in a timely fashion; implement a clear code of conduct and ethics guidelines; ensure there are repercussions for behaviour that deviates
- Increase diverse representation on Regional Committees by including subject experts
- Increase presence of Regional politicians at community events to foster a sense of two-way communication
-

6 Active Transportation

- Promote utilization of active transportation through the creation of a transit supportive community with bike lanes, pathways, and trail networks integrated with public transportation
- Support connectivity between neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces to ensure residents can safely travel to daily destinations using active transportation
- Design future developments with a community planning lens; ensure new developments have sidewalks and community space

7 Preserving Niagara's Natural Assets

- Concern for loss of greenspace and protecting the rural character of the Region
- Educate and provide incentives for green initiatives and green technology
- Protect and preserve key natural assets including: waterways, farmland, beaches, wetlands, parks and trails, green spaces, wildlife, tender fruit
- Preserve agricultural land and foster sustainable farms; advocate for the agriculture sector and encourage farmers to come to Niagara

8 Infrastructure In Support of Growth

- Improve connective corridors to mitigate increasing levels of traffic on major arteries during peak hours
- Ensure roads and bridges are adequately maintained for safe and timely travel to meet increased usage due to growth
- Ensure infrastructure is matched to growth and development to support upcoming residential, commercial and industrial development (i.e. road expansions, sewage systems, bridges, traffic lights)
- Incorporate new technologies and quality infrastructure (road, bridge, facilities) to ensure infrastructure lasts longer

9 Affordable Housing

- Respondents recognize many issues stem from a lack of affordable housing and want innovative strategies to increase access to safe, affordable places to live for all; a disconnect between available housing prices / rent and earnings is identified
- Affordable housing solutions need to be inclusive of all residents of Niagara (youth and young families, seniors, single / low income earners, those with disabilities, and renters)
- Alternative solutions in connection with affordable housing to combat homelessness, which is perceived as a problem in Niagara

10 Quality of Life and Public Safety

- Quality of life is defined by respondents as being connected to their community, having access to housing, and feeling safe
- Respondents feel strongly about creating a sense of belonging for all residents and highlighted the need for inclusivity and empowering diverse populations
- Increase community belonging for residents and tourists through community and cultural events, festivals, supporting the arts, and preserving the cultural history of Niagara
- Police visibility and upstream police interventions to foster a feeling of safety
- Modifications such as lighting, increasing walkability and transit options will make people feel safer and more connected to their community

11 Equitable Access to Regional Services

- Improve centralization and access to services across the entire region, services distributed with consideration of means of getting to services
- Continue to focus on preventative programs and services that support equity
- Consider integration of alternatives to traditional health care delivery models including outreach services; advocate for increased funding for our health care system and develop a comprehensive physician recruitment strategy; promote and invest in Public Health and Emergency Services

12 Water & Waste Management

- Protect natural environment through responsible waste diversion and water treatment; educating public on these matters
- Use technology to be the leader in recycling and water conservation
- Increase uptake of recycling by allowing for more items to be recycled and identify ways to reduce or ease sorting requirements by households

13 Tourism as an Economic Driver

- Respondents are proud of Niagara's strong tourist sector; expand this industry across all municipalities utilizing a collective vision and defined roles
- Promotion and preservation of natural, agricultural, and historical sites which bolster Niagara's quality of life and attractiveness
- Leverage strengths by continued investment in alternative forms of tourism, such as eco-tourism and sport tourism
- Tourism and transportation are intrinsically linked; better transportation infrastructure supports tourism

14 Communication and Engagement with the Community

- Increase opportunities for residents to have their voices heard; respondents want to see their input being incorporated and the impact of their voice
- Ensure Regional government is transparent; open communication and engagement with residents and stakeholders on decisions that affect their community with consideration for all the different needs of the community (marginalized or specific population segments, wildlife, natural assets, rural and urban needs)
- Easier access to Regional and municipal information and services including physical access and improved navigation; align customer service and ease of navigation between Region and LAMs
- Increase opportunities to create a sense of community

15 Youth and Young Family Retention

- Support a comprehensive youth retention strategy to retain a qualified labour force, meeting future needs of industries and economic growth.
- Retain youth and young families by fostering strong partnerships between post-secondary institutions and business sector to match local graduates with employment opportunities; ensure education programs fill gaps in the workforce; foster creation of new, quality jobs in emerging sectors such as technology; create an entrepreneur and technology friendly region
- Attract youth and young families through marketing of employment opportunities; provide supports and promote reasons for young people to start or bring families here
- Ensure that input from youth and young families is used to focus retention efforts and validate the needs of the generation

16 Responsible Spending

- Respondents would like to be better informed on where their tax dollars are going through increased transparency in government spending, budgets and decision-making
- More stringent guidelines as to what are appropriate expenses for elected officials, and what are appropriate expense amounts
- Ensure the reduction of inefficiencies and duplication is a priority; re-evaluate the current governance model to reduce duplication between Regional and LAM services

17 Mental Health Services

- Ensure comprehensive mental health services are available in a timely fashion; targeted services for seniors, children and young adults
- Improve accessibility to mental health services through localizing services in community hubs, allocate mental health staff to outreach programs, programming in schools
- Work with all levels of government to create a comprehensive mental health strategy in provision of services and to reduce stigma
- Foster improved collaboration between organizations that provide mental health services to best service all residents; Region can act as a leader in forming a network and marketing available supports

SUMMARY

Concluding Remarks

This report is the first of two that will be provided to the next Regional Council. This first report provides Council with a summary of What We Heard through the Shape Niagara community engagement initiative. It will be accompanied by a second report, a background report, which will provide an overview of the current state of the Region and current influencing factors such as provincial, federal and global considerations. With this information in hand, the next Regional Council will develop their strategic plan for the 2019-2022 term of Council, and an implementation plan will be created which will identify how the Region will accomplish the objectives set out for themselves.

Where We Go Next

PHASE 1
Gather Data

PHASE 2
Stakeholder Engagement

PHASE 3
Inform New Council

PHASE 4
Develop Strategic Plan

PHASE 5
Approve & Implement

Following this report, the second background report will go to the new Council in 2019 to inform the development of their strategic plan. Once the new Regional Council develops this plan, it will be made available to the public on the Niagara Regional website: **www.niagararegion.ca/priorities.**

"

I would like to see the region known as a place where you can live anywhere within it and be able to stay there for your entire life because the job opportunities, transportation, public facilities, and living accommodations will meet your needs.

"

We would like to thank everyone who took the time to participate in the Shape Niagara community engagement initiative. An accompanying background report will be provided to the new Regional Council in early 2019, and will inform the development of the 2019-2022 Council strategic plan.

Once the plan is developed, it will be available along with progress reports throughout the term at:

niagararegion.ca/priorities

Niagara Region