

SWOT Analysis

Current Niagara Region Departmental Makeup

At the time of writing this report, the divisional service areas by department are as follows:



Community Services

- Children's Services
- Homelessness Services
- Seniors Services
- Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities



Enterprise Resource Management Services

- Business Licensing
- Finance
- Facilities
- Information Technology
- Internal Control and Organizational Performance
- Legal
- Procurement



Office of the CAO

- Clerks
- Economic Development
- Human Resources
- Strategic Communications and Public Affairs



Planning and Development

- Community and Long Range Planning
- Infrastructure and Development Engineering
- Development Approvals



Public Health

- Public Health Services
- Emergency Medical Services (EMS)



Public Works

- GO Implementation Office
- Transportation Services
- Waste Management Services
- Water / Wastewater

Niagara Region Departmental SWOT

Organization Wide



Organizational Strengths

- Ability to leverage global brand recognition: Niagara Falls, Niagara Wine Industry, Welland Canal and all surrounding attractions
- Collaboration with local community organizations, post-secondary institutions
- Partnerships with local area municipalities to better serve residents such as development and customer service
- Economic designations and incentives to drive growth
- Ongoing work to build connective transportation network
- Building organizational maturity around data driven decisions, project management and asset management



Organizational Weaknesses

- Coordination with local area municipalities and Region to bring a singular voice to higher levels of government and customer service
- Ability to handle future increases in service demand. Including, factors such as growth from Greater Toronto Area and aging population.
- Sustainable funding for Regional services such as infrastructure projects and social services
- Widespread densely populated areas, service delivery reach can be challenging
- Customer service including opportunities to increase hours of operation or access to services



External Opportunities

- Geographic location, access to Greater Toronto Area and Buffalo, natural assets and greenspace
- Potential provincial or federal funding opportunities
- Emerging economic sectors, such as sports tourism and cannabis
- Explore broadband opportunities for rural areas
- Opportunities to align services to emerging higher level government priorities. Such as federal requirements for integration of services
- Enhance organization's reputation including transparency, trust and accountability



External Threats

- Provincial and federal unknowns in policy and funding
- Workforce pressures such as the inability to retain and recruit skilled workforce
- Lack of succession planning in local businesses
- Dependency on seasonal and precarious employment
- Youth and young family retention
- Increasing housing prices
- Impact of aging population on regional services and economy, however these could present as potential opportunities

Niagara Region Departmental SWOT

Office of the CAO



Organizational Strengths

- Privacy breach response, and consent management programs
- Comprehensive learning and development programs (leadership development)
- A renewed commitment to drive employee engagement to serve the community
- Experienced staff capable of meeting a wide range of public relations, graphic design and web / social media needs
- High user satisfaction with Region's website and social media channels



Organizational Weaknesses

- Workforce management (ability to recruit and retain a skilled workforce) particularly for hard to fill roles and the right fit for senior leadership
- Perceived lack of organizational transparency can lead to media and public mistrust
- Need for a review and update of communications related policies and procedures
- Resource limitations impact turnaround time for social media campaign monitoring / responses and tasks



External Opportunities

- Procedural by-law amendments with changes for public and with council
- Fully leverage technology to maximize Human Resource tools and analytics for strategic decision making
- Improve the organization's reputation
- Ability to strengthen relationship with media and public through engagement
- Create an overall strategy and direction for the Region's communications efforts
- New, more robust website platform to improve user experience
- Potential to create additional online presence where needed



External Threats

- Marketability of Niagara as a top employer, and local shortage of skilled labour and workforce talent
- Changing municipal act legislation requirements around conflict of interest, integrity commissioner, etc.
- Provincial interest arbitration decisions / impacts with consideration for ability to pay
- Urgency to address staff psychological health, prevent psychological harm and manage escalating costs
- Lack of clarity / consistent messaging can allow for misinterpretation or misinformation
- Lack of traditional communications channels and the need for more diverse channels for communication with all residents and stakeholders

Niagara Region Departmental SWOT

Office of the CAO - Economic Development



Organizational Strengths

- Collaboration with post-secondary institutions and local organizations to facilitate research and growth
- Gateway Economic Zone & Centre, Foreign Trade Zone designation
- Availability of incentives
- Relationships with local area municipal staff (Team Niagara)
- Work on GO transit and connective transportation across Niagara
- Ability to leverage our strong economic sectors
- Leveraging global brand recognition
- Niagara's Strategic Location



Organizational Weaknesses

- Consistency in application and availability of incentives, processes and designations across each local area municipality
- Need for an employment land strategy and a Niagara port strategy to better guide future planning, in development
- Lack of integrated regional transit
- Broadband not available in rural areas of the region.
- Natural gas not available in rural areas of the region.



External Opportunities

- Potential federal and provincial funding (ex. for federal designation as an Economic Trade Corridor)
- Opportunities in emerging industries (ex. cannabis, sports tourism)
- Location (GTHA Corridor, Proximity to US) for trade and to leverage growth
- Strategic initiatives (Hamilton Niagara Partnership)
- Niagara Foreign Trade Zone (working to support export orientated companies)
- Development of the Niagara District Airport
- Seaway lands available for development/partnership with the Hamilton Port Authority.



External Threats

- Provincial legislation restrictions for growth (Greenbelt and Provincially significant wetlands)
- Shortage of skilled trades and labour
- Lack of succession planning in local businesses
- Reliance on precarious employment
- Youth and young family retention
- Increasing housing prices
- Lack of shovel ready industrial land
- High hydro costs, particularly in comparison to New York State

Niagara Region Departmental SWOT

Community Services



Organizational Strengths

- Leveraging community partnerships for optimized service delivery
- Variety of services aligned to the client: supporting the unique needs of Niagara's population segments (seniors, homeless, children's etc.)
- Improvements in service delivery to provide higher value to clients (ex. BENN)
- The redevelopment project provides the opportunity to build operationally efficient LTC homes and to defer LTC placement through strategic co-location of services



Organizational Weaknesses

- Limited affordable housing stock
- Sustainable funding for services with reliability on provincial or federal funding
- Low vacancy rates; high rent costs/ increases
- Provincial funding for staffing levels in the LTC Homes remains below recommended levels for resident care and safety
- Relatively higher social assistance caseload as compared to other comparator municipality



External Opportunities

- Potential federal funding opportunities (ex. housing and homelessness services)
- Opportunities to align services/work/projects with new provincial government as priorities are identified (ex. Human services integration and coordinated intake)
- Seniors is a priority population for the province (reducing regulations, increasing LTC beds, ending halfway healthcare and focusing on the front lines)
- Opportunity to leverage technological innovations to enhance care and services in Seniors Services.
- Province has indicated greater focus on employment outcomes in Social Assistance, which aligns with Niagara's strategic work in this area.



External Threats

- Provincial funding for core services remains uncertain (pending budget anticipated early spring 2019). Some indication of policy changes. Effects could be to core services, such as social assistance, childcare, homelessness/housing and senior's care
- Historical challenges with funding allocation model for homelessness services
- Limited services available to meet the needs of seniors and the rapidly growing seniors population in Niagara

Niagara Region Departmental SWOT

Enterprise Resource Management Services



Organizational Strengths

- Centralized Finance division and Financial Specialists imbedded in each line of business facilitates promotion of fiscal responsibility, accountability and transparency
- Optimal spending decisions to benefit residents and the organization
- Continuous improvement lens through internal audit, corporate performance measures and business improvement reviews
- Building organizational maturity around data driven decisions, project management and asset management
- IT data centre with public sector partnerships (LAMs, school boards, etc.)



Organizational Weaknesses

- Gaps in resourcing needs and consistent corporate structure to manage capital assets
- Technology systems to facilitate customer service, being addressed through customer service strategy work
- Sustainable funding for services and infrastructure to deal with budget pressures



External Opportunities

- Service Sustainability review approved by Council, led by ERMS will provide strategies to address long term financial planning and sustainability
- Integration of partnerships: working with Province for additional funds beyond short term financial plans (ex. integrate with local municipalities and advocate for funding of enhancement and integration of transit; provincial or federal funding for South Niagara water / wastewater treatment plant)
- Broadband opportunities for rural Niagara



External Threats

- Costs of Development Charge discretionary exemptions puts pressure on operating budgets and ability to construct infrastructure to facilitate growth
- Provincial interest in municipal restructuring (amalgamation) – would be a large financial project
- Provincial and federal unknowns around funding and policies
- Continued growth in the region may increase pressures on Regional services

Niagara Region Departmental SWOT

Planning and Development Services



Organizational Strengths

- Optimizing natural assets in planning decisions: waterways, greenspace, urban design, etc.
- Protection of agricultural assets
- Pre-consultation meetings with developers to ensure smoother, more timely service
- Coordination and relationships with staff at local area municipal level



Organizational Weaknesses

- Differences in planning visions of local area municipalities and the Region
- Increasing demand for consideration of multiple facets to address specific planning needs (ex. Climate change, age friendly, etc.)
- Large grants and incentives portfolio, being addressed by a review



External Opportunities

- Comprehensive Plan for development in South Niagara Falls (new Hospital, employment uses). Align growth with infrastructure servicing (new Water Wastewater Treatment Plant with servicing strategy)
- Work with local area municipalities to meet their unique needs (growth)
- Work with partners internally and externally to support increasing rental and affordable housing stock
- Develop new natural systems, policies, and mapping aligned with needs and priorities in Niagara, Provincial direction, and development needs
- Employment land stock
- Include climate change in urban and rural land use policies
- Provide new guidelines for Stormwater Management and Environmental Impact Studies for greater clarity
- MOU for improved planning process for development approvals, and improved development industry processes and expectations
- Create a Niagara Region online development portal



External Threats

- Population forecasts evolve over time and are assumed by some to be static
- Urban planning regulations and policies are limited in their ability to resolve challenges that are not land use based, for example affordable housing

Niagara Region Departmental SWOT

Public Health and Emergency Medical Services



Organizational Strengths

- Partnerships with local community organizations
- Integrating data driven decisions to inform program planning and delivery
- Innovative strategies to deliver service in accessible, convenient locations for customers (ex. Health care centre of excellence model, outreach services)
- Transforming the way Niagara Emergency Medical Services (EMS) deliver service, through the EMS transformation and hub projects
- Well-educated and motivated staff



Organizational Weaknesses

- Ability to provide more services outside of typical business hours
- Integration of client information (internally and externally) as a driver of improved client service delivery and to streamline client intake
- Complexity of some health issues can pose challenges in executing strategies across sectors
- Interventions may take years to change health outcomes leading to improved health and health equity of residents



External Opportunities

- Enhance digital service delivery for clients to access services
- A corporate and public health movement towards outcome focused and data driven decisions, alignment with health outcomes (i.e. Power BI tool).
- Existing good practice in inter-sectoral cooperation can be built on and extended; multi-sectoral cooperation for the broader health determinants can be established
- Integrating data driven decisions to inform program planning and delivery



External Threats

- Potential provincial funding and policy changes with the new Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC)
- Emerging issues in health and unknowns (ex. Opioids, legalization of cannabis)
- Climate change impacts on environment and health status in Niagara
- Significant increases in demand on Emergency Medical Services (ex. aging population, mental health, etc.)
- Decreased trust of science and expertise
- Changing social norms (e.g. cannabis use, vaping, sedentary behaviour)
- Economic downturn

Niagara Region Departmental SWOT

Public Works



Organizational Strengths

- Working to build a connected transit system across Niagara, connecting with GO System to build a local, inter-municipal and inter-regional system
- Leveraging community partnerships for seamless transit services, roads and cycling infrastructure
- Excellent customer service with a Customer Relations Management System to ensure actions are taken in a timely and organized manor
- Strong diversion programs for the residential, industrial, commercial and institutional sectors
- Asset management – Working to further efficiency, reliability, affordability, and informed decisions to support capital investment



Organizational Weaknesses

- Distance between Niagara's densely populated areas leading to challenges in building sustainable transit networks
- On-going performance issues with the Region's Collector Contractor, being addressed
- Public desire to use public transit
- Consolidated Niagara Transit System – significant net new financial consideration
- Funding for infrastructure projects



External Opportunities

- Development Charge by-law update to include transit, as an additional funding source
- East-West Transportation Corridor to relieve traffic congestion, truck traffic on local roads and Greater Toronto Area pressures
- Innovations in service and funding opportunities
- Material recycling opportunities for road construction
- Potential for smaller funding opportunities through Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) for capital projects
- New technologies in water and wastewater



External Threats

- Active transportation changes can increase maintenance costs
- Aging infrastructure, impending failure in water and wastewater systems, and the corresponding funding gap
- Increasing construction costs (trade tariffs)
- Climate change impacts (more severe or wet weather)
- Provincial and federal funding unknowns
- Provincial legislation and regulation changes (ex. divertible material service standards, Ministry of Environment surplus soil policies, MPAC restrictions on data use, Cap and Trade & Provincial Gas Tax leading to higher energy costs)