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Memorandum

CHR 03-2023

TO: Corporate Services Committee

FROM: Jim Bradley, Regional Chair

DATE: June 7, 2023

SUBJECT: Provincial Advocacy Debrief

Given the success we experienced at Niagara Week, I wanted to provide Council with a fulsome debrief of how the Region's advocacy priorities were moved forward with the Provincial Government, as well as the next steps we are considering based on our discussions with members of cabinet and other MPPs.

While there were many successes coming out of Niagara Week (detailed below), I believe the outcome most worth celebrating is a commitment, in principle, from Premier Ford that the Provincial Government will financially support the South Niagara Wastewater Solutions Project with 1/3rd funding and will be an active advocate with the Federal Government to secure funding from Ottawa.

Since taking office in 2018, it has been one of my top priorities to secure a financial commitment from senior levels of government for this critical infrastructure project. Knowing we have support from the Province will now let us refocus our efforts with our Federal partners.

Advocacy Requests

Council will recall that there was wide-spread agreement that our advocacy efforts should be narrowly focused, and all best efforts should be made to avoid diluting our priorities with a large number of topics.

As approved by Council at our February 23 meeting (through report CAO 3-2023), the four advocacy requests presented to Provincial leaders included the following:

- **South Niagara Wastewater Solutions Project**

Request: that the Province provide one-third funding of the estimated \$400M project, expedite approvals and work with the Region to advocate to the Federal government.

- **Our Plan to Build More Homes (Consolidated Housing Master Plan Support)**

Request: that the Province provide long-term capital funding to increase the supply of community housing units. This request also included additional information on Council's recently approved Attainable Housing Team.

- **Modernizing Municipal Services (Support for Shared Services)**

Request: that the Province reintroduce the Municipal Modernization Program with a renewed focus on shared service implementation between two-tier municipalities. This request also included additional information on Council's recently approved Shared Services Team.

- **EMS Offload Delays**

Request: that the Province provide reimbursement for emergency EMS funding and work with local regional hospitals to identify long-term solutions for offloading delays, including introducing an additional Family Health Team in Niagara.

Meeting Outcomes

Each meeting lasted approximately 30 minutes, with some being extended due to the interest of the Minister (including the meeting with the Premier that lasted over an hour). To ensure our advocacy requests received support from as many Cabinet members as possible, Ministry selection was based on the relevancy our ask had to the Ministry's portfolio. To help make the needed connections, strategic positioning was used to demonstrate how the ask supported the Ministry's objectives.

As topic area experts, select Commissioners were also in attendance to provide technical information when requested by Ministerial staff. The inclusion of staff in these types of meetings is standard for both the region and province and is to be expected.

In all, 10 face-to-face meetings were held, allowing for more in-depth discussions than would be available in an alternative setting (such as the annual AMO conference). Having more dedicated time with representatives of the Provincial Government provided an opportunity for more of a two-way discussion to take place.

In addition to the verbal commitment from the Premier regarding the South Niagara Wastewater Solutions Project, many ministers expressed a heightened interest in the

Region's priorities, requesting additional information and briefings, as well as the coordination of formal visits to Niagara to tour sites. Moreover, building relationships with these Ministers is an important component to our government relations and advocacy efforts.

Detailed outcomes:

| Ministry | Topics of Discussion | Key Outcomes |
|--|---|---|
| Ministry of Infrastructure Amarjot Sandhu, PA to the Minister | Wastewater Solutions Project Shared Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MOI indicated they were supportive of advocating that the Federal Government reintroduce an infrastructure program to help fund the project Receptive of Council's creation of a Shared Services Team to find efficiencies and expressed an interest in learning more |
| Office of the Premier Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing Doug Ford, Premier Hon. Steve Clark, Minister | Wastewater Solutions Project Shared Services Plan to build more homes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secured commitment, in principle, from the Premier for the 1/3rd funding for project Commitment to support joint Federal advocacy efforts Premier and Minister Clark expressed interest in learning more about the Shared Services and the Attainable Housing Team |
| Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services Hon. Michael Parsa, Minister | Plan to build more homes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As the Ministry responsible for Ontario Works, demonstrated the connection between the Community Housing Master Plan (CHMP) and its benefit to poverty reduction Discussed the need for further Provincial support to manage the influx of asylum seekers in Niagara |
| Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services | Plan to build more homes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As the Ministry responsible for Ontario Works, demonstrated the connection between the CHMP and its benefit to poverty reduction |

| Ministry | Topics of Discussion | Key Outcomes |
|---|---|--|
| Charmaine Williams, Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity | Women in the economy (by request) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As requested by the Associate Minister, information was provided on women's participation in the agricultural, tourism and food and beverage processing industries within Niagara As a result of this meeting, Associate Minister Williams attended the GNCC's May 17 meeting to learn more about Niagara's wine industry <p>This meeting was also attended by GNCC CEO Mishka Balsom</p> |
| Ministry of Long-Term Care Hon. Paul Calandra, Minister | EMS Offload Delays | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussed innovative ways to reduce offload delays in Niagara, including the need for more home care, enhanced services at LTC homes and the introduction of an additional Family Health Team in Niagara The Minister requested data on ED visits from LTC homes to better understand the issue |
| Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Trade and Skills Development Hon. Monte McNaughton, Minister | Plan to build more homes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrated that support for the CHMP would aid in increasing the number of job opportunities within the skilled trades industry Discussed how MLITSD can support the Region's advocacy to IRCC regarding the recent influx of asylum claimants in Niagara |
| Ministry of Health (Associate Minister) Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of | Mental health and addictions issues (by request of the Minister) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conversation focused on the impacts mental health and addictions have on Niagara's health care system Following the meeting, staff provided the Minister's Office with reports on |

| Ministry | Topics of Discussion | Key Outcomes |
|--|------------------------------|---|
| Mental Health and Addictions | | <p>how mental health services across the region can be further enhanced</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Associate Minister also expressed a keen interest on visiting Niagara in the summer to see firsthand the innovative services being offered within our region, including the Bridge Housing site |
| Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade Hon. Victor Fedeli, Minister | Wastewater Solutions Project | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrated the economic importance of the South Niagara Wastewater Project to unlocking the economic potential of five local area municipalities• Minister acknowledged this project will help harness the potential of the QEW corridor by supporting future job growth within the area• Minister Fedeli also expressed interest in learning about opportunities for identifying new large-lot signature sites within Niagara in the coming months to help attract new investment and job creation |
| Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks John Yakabuski, PA to the Minister | Wastewater Solutions Project | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussed how the project will support the Ministry's sustainable growth efforts as the Province continues to build 1.5 million homes by projecting the Great Lakes and using energy efficient technologies to reduce combined sewer overflows• MECP also committed to following up on the Environmental Assessment submitted for the project in January 2023 to provide assistance in expediting approvals |

| Ministry | Topics of Discussion | Key Outcomes |
|---|----------------------|---|
| Ministry of Red Tape Reduction Hon. Parm Gill, Minister | Shared Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information on Council's recently approved Shared Service Team was well received by Minister Gill• The Minister expressed interest in how a number of potential shared service initiatives could help streamline service delivery and reduce red tape for residents and businesses within Niagara• Requested that future reports and/or work plans for the new team be shared with his office so that opportunities for collaboration can be further explored |

News Coverage and Communications

News coverage of the event was widespread and positive. The Niagara Daily Papers, Toronto Star and several radio stations promoted the advocacy requests the Region brought forward, while referencing the success of past Niagara Week events.

Based on comments from several staff and MPPs, the event also helped strengthen Niagara's intergovernmental relationship with the Province. The commencement of Niagara Week was announced in the Ontario Legislature prior to Question Period on May 15, with the four advocacy asks mentioned and details of the MPP reception shared.

Additionally, several MPPs and Cabinet Ministers made positive social media posts regarding the Region's time at Queen's Park.

As part of Niagara Week, an advocacy webpage has been launched on the Region's website to further promote how senior levels of government can co-invest and partner in large-scale Regional projects. The [Growing Better, Together](http://www.niagararegion.ca/growing-better-together/default.aspx#:~:text=Niagara%20is%growing.,essential%20to%20support%20this%20growth) (<http://www.niagararegion.ca/growing-better-together/default.aspx#:~:text=Niagara%20is%growing.,essential%20to%20support%20this%20growth>) webpage provides additional details on the four priorities brought forward and highlights the progress Regional Council and staff have made thus far to move each initiative forward. To promote the website, each briefing note provided to

Ministry staff and individual reception takeaways included a QR Code that directs the reader to the webpage.

Having a web presence for Regional advocacy work ensures senior levels of government have access to information pertinent to key requests. It also provides residents with information on ongoing efforts to enhance program and service delivery.

MPP Reception

As has been customary of past Niagara Week events, the Region hosted a reception on Monday, May 15 from 5 - 7 p.m. The reception allowed for meaningful networking and helped highlight the ongoing partnership between the Region and the Province, as well as some of Niagara's best culinary offerings.

A number of senior members of government were in attendance, including Minister Lecce, Minister Calandra, Minister Lumsden, Minister Thompson, Associate Minister Williams and Minister Clark (who provided remarks on behalf of the government).

Other provincial attendees included senior Minister Office staff, Niagara's four MPPs and party leaders, such as interim Liberal Party leader John Fraser.

A large number of Regional Councillors, local area CAOs, Regional Corporate Leadership Team members, local business leaders and representatives from the GNCC, Brock University and Niagara College were also in attendance.

The reception showcased the Niagara Region and featured the talents of locally owned businesses and organizations. A Niagara-based company, Ricky + Olivia, provided catering; Niagara College and 13 Street Winery provided beer and wine; Monks Chocolate provided the individual takeaways; and in-kind prize baskets were contributed by our local area municipalities, Brock University, Niagara College, and 13 Street Winery.

Financial Considerations

The total cost associated with Niagara Week was \$34,995. Final expenditures were less than the \$40,000 budget that was allocated for these advocacy activities. Efforts were made to manage costs, including transportation, which utilized car pooling when appropriate, and a 56-passenger bus was chartered to reduce individual mileage claims for the reception.

It is important to note that the most substantive costs incurred were through accommodations and the catering for the May 15 MPP reception. Apart from accommodations, all vendors used for the event were local businesses, ensuring all monies spent were reinvested in the region's economy.

Region Delegation Attendance

In addition to myself, Councillors Foster, Huson, Redekop and Ugulini attended formal meetings. CAO Tripp, Commissioners Jugley and Sergi, Dr. Hirji, Chief Ferron and my Chief of Staff, Daryl Barnhart, also attended meetings as appropriate.

Next Steps

To build off the success of Niagara Week, follow-up letters will be sent to each Ministry thanking them for their time and requesting next steps on meeting outcomes. Staff were closely tracking any requests that came out of the meetings with MPPs and are working on responses as appropriate.

Additionally, Regional Council will continue conversations with members of the Provincial Government during the forthcoming Association of Municipalities of Ontario Conference taking place in August. Events like Niagara Week, and our participation in the AMO conference, are just two ways that we advocate for our Regional priorities; there are many opportunities throughout the term for members to bring our priorities forward to decision makers in Ottawa and Toronto.

Finally, as I expressed in previous comments, my office is happy to discuss any ideas you may have to make future advocacy efforts most effective. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me, or a member of my staff, directly to share your thoughts.

Thanks,

Jim Bradley
Niagara Regional Chair