

## **2024 Budget Mitigation Measures**

WHEREAS the past practice of Regional Council was to provide staff (departments) and associated Agencies, Boards and Commissions (ABCs) with a budget guidance benchmark prior to the development and presentation of the annual budget;

WHEREAS the purpose of this budget guidance benchmark was to direct staff to produce an annual budget in accordance to this Council direction, with prioritization of projects and programs;

WHEREAS this past practice, for unknown reasons, appears to have stopped;

WHEREAS the 2023 total (operating and capital) budget was \$1,512 million, which after revenues, translated to a \$38.3 million (or 9.43%) increase to the levy, that was reduced 1.85% via assessment growth, AND, a rate increase of \$11.3 million (or 8.59%) in water and wastewater, AND, an increase of 2.3 million (or 5.6%) in a special waste management levy, AND, another \$56.5 million (or 100%) in a special transit levy;

WHEREAS the 2022 total budget was \$1,447,877,873, which after revenues, translated to a \$17 million (or 4.19%) increase to the levy, AND, a rate increase of \$8.7 million (or 5.24%) in water, wastewater and waste management services;

WHEREAS the 2021 total budget was \$ 1,559,292,828, which after revenues, translated to a \$12.7 million (or 3.24%) increase to the levy, AND, a rate increase of \$4.2 million (or 2.60%) in water, wastewater and waste management services;

WHEREAS the 2020 total budget was \$1,390,740,868, which after revenues, translated to a \$26.8 million (or 7.34%) increase to the levy, AND, a rate increase of \$9.5 million (or 6.25%) in water, wastewater and waste management services;

WHEREAS the 2019 total budget was \$ 1,248,177,885, which after revenues, translated to a \$19 million (or 5.47%) increase to the levy, AND, a rate increase of \$6.5 million (or 4.43%) in water, wastewater and waste management services;

WHEREAS staff have presented a 2024 budget with a projected levy increase of 9%;

WHEREAS from 2019 to 2023, the overall levy has increased \$113.8 million (or 19%) in property taxes and another \$42.5 million in rates;

WHEREAS household incomes have not increased 19% over this time, and will not increase another 9% in 2024;

WHEREAS net revenue for small businesses have not increased 19% over this time, and will not increase another 9% in 2024;

WHEREAS housing affordability has become a crisis in Niagara Region;

WHEREAS operating a small business in Niagara has become unprofitable; and

WHEREAS Regional Chair Jim Bradley released a statement on the 2024 budget that read, in part, “I want to publicly state that I find an increase of this amount to be unacceptable, and it is my expectation that senior staff will work with Regional Council to find ways to manage the increase and bring in a budget that is more affordable to taxpayers.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

1. That Regional Council **ADOPT** the following budget mitigation measures:

a) That all regional departments and ABCs adopt a 2.5% budget guideline for 2024;

b) That the Region of Niagara implement an immediate hiring freeze, and that all special circumstances for additional staffing in 2024 be submitted via a Business Case to the appropriate Standing Committee for consideration; and

c) That all non-unionized staff earning greater than \$125,000 per annum have their wages frozen based on their 2023 compensation.