



REPORT: Niagara Region – 2024 Budget Consultation

November 2023

Background and Methodology

- In planning for Regional budgets, Niagara Region wanted to consult with residents and business leaders to understand their priorities when it comes to the services offered by the Region. To do this, a multi-step research project was conducted. The steps are as follows:
 - **A quantitative survey was conducted among Regional residents.** The purpose of this survey was to get a quantitative read on a list of Region priorities to understand if residents believed the services should be increased - with an increase to taxes, maintained - with an increase of taxes at the cost of living, reduced - by maintaining taxes, or cut - reducing taxes. This survey was on the Region's website and was supported through advertising and social media efforts. This survey was open to all residents. In total, 980 residents completed this survey. Due to this methodology, it is important to note that results are not representative of the Region as a whole.
 - **A set of five qualitative focus groups were conducted:** four with residents of the Region and one with business leaders (with contacts provided by the Region). The purpose of this phase of research was to get a more in-depth understanding how residents/ business leaders feel about each issue area and the role it should take in the budget.
- This report contains results of both phases of the research. Due to the length of the focus groups, not all issues included in the survey were asked. Specific descriptions of all services are included in the appendix of this report. All research was conducted in November 2023.
- Relevant verbatim comments from focus groups are highlighted throughout the report and presented in speech bubbles.

Key takeaways

Budget Considerations

- Overall satisfaction with Niagara Region is high. That said, both residents and business leaders feel the Region needs to do more to manage their budgets that do not include an increase in taxes or a reduction in services. Instead, the Region needs to look for efficiencies or creative solutions to provide service within their current budgets.
- Despite that, many understand the predicament the Region is in and understand that their may need to be a cost-of-living increase to their taxes. However, they feel unable to shoulder an increase higher than the cost of living
- While areas of priority will be shown in this report, it is important to note that most residents and business leaders believe funding for these priorities should come primarily through current funding means.

Areas of Highest Priority

- Services for specific populations, such as **seniors, vulnerable populations or homeless** need to be a priority. However, the Region should work closely with organizations already involved in this work, rather than trying to take over what others are already doing so well.
- While there is little appetite for increasing funding for new infrastructure projects, many agree that **existing infrastructure is a priority** and services at least need to be maintained. Residents and business leaders can understand the need to keep on top of the maintenance but believe careful consideration must be taken as to what projects are vital, and how to keep budgets for these projects under control.
- Residents and business leaders understand **the importance of affordable housing** in the Region. However, they are concerned that additional funding will not go to help the right people, and that current solutions used to create affordable housing are not working.

Key takeaways... continued

Areas of Moderate Priority

- The importance of **development incentives is met with mixed reaction**. Quantitatively, residents have very little appetite for increasing funding for this initiative. However, when discussed, residents and particularly business leaders see the importance of increasing business and jobs in the Region. It is particularly important that new jobs pay at least a living wage and provide a diversity of business and employment types.
- The **importance of transit is also met with mixed reaction**. Quantitatively, half of residents feel funding should be reduced. Qualitatively, while most participants do not take transit regularly, they understand how important it could be for some people. Business leaders particularly say this is necessary to allow them to fill jobs. Most agree the current system is not meeting the needs of the Region.
- The maintenance of **current levels of road safety is important, but it does not need to be increased**. Some question the use of funding for some projects, but overall are satisfied with their current level of service.

Areas of Lower Priority

- While people **understand the importance of Niagara Regional Police Services, they do not feel it needs more funding** than it already has. Additionally, many would like to see this funding redistributed into areas that could better increase public safety. The most often given example is the use of mental health professionals, rather than police, to deal with those in crisis.
- **Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, along with Climate Change, are thought to be lower priorities**. While residents believe the conservation of green space is important, they are not clear on the mandate of the NPCA and believe this is an area that could be reduced, in this economic time.

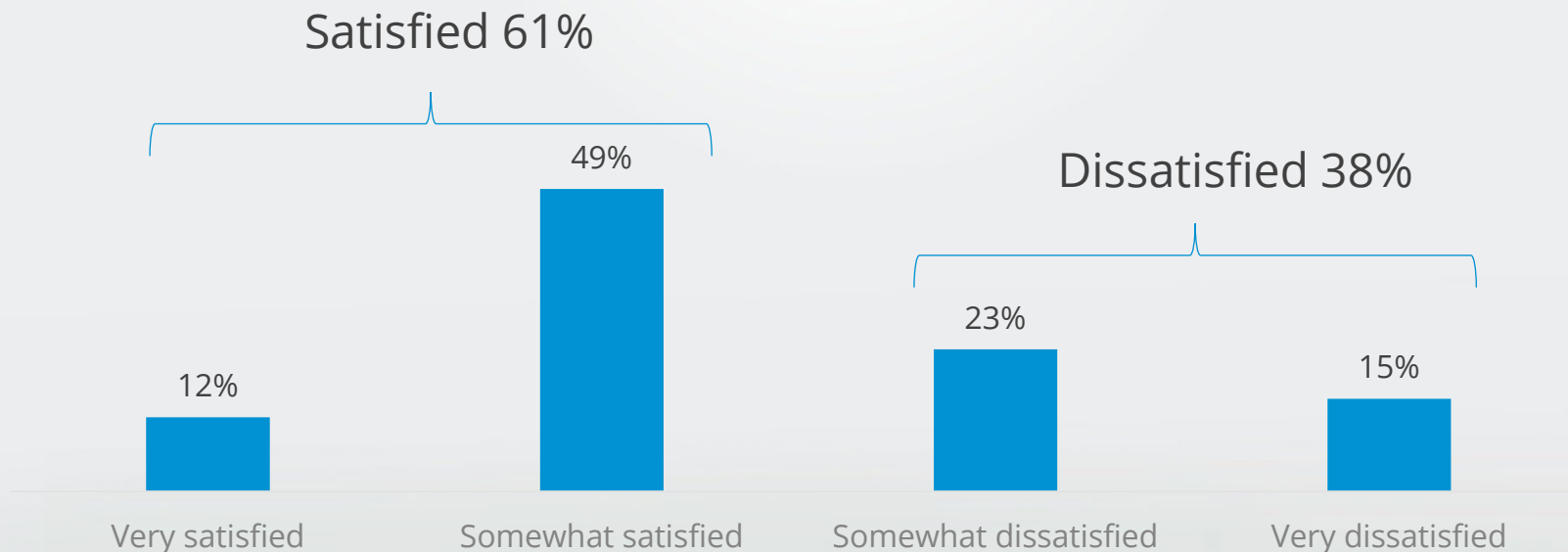
Results in Detail

Budget Considerations

Residents are satisfied with the services provided by the Region



- Three-fifths of residents are satisfied with the services provided by Niagara Region, with most saying they are somewhat satisfied (49%) and 12% being very satisfied. One-third (38%) are dissatisfied with these services.



Residents want the Region to work smarter with the budgets they have

- Overall, residents and business leaders found the process of prioritizing budget issues to be very difficult. While they understand the importance of financing these issues, they are also dealing with their own stretched budgets and will have a hard time paying a much higher tax bill.
- Some who live in more rural areas of the Region are also concerned about these increases in taxes, because they feel they are paying for services they do not get.
- Many believe there are other options, rather than increasing taxes or decreasing services. They want to make sure that all spending is efficient and believe there are cost savings to be had. Business leaders feel even more strongly about this, expecting the Region to think creatively and to use the money they have more efficiently. Specific examples are shown in each budget issue, as applicable.

I'm on pension. And I get a small cost of living increase. Every year, the CPP the OAS, and even my personal pension goes up by the cost of living. So, I'm fine with having services go up by the cost of living. But it's very hard for me to look at it and say, Yes, keep raising taxes above the cost of living.

I'm hoping that there are people on the other side of the coin looking at what we need to add with these services, and that should not automatically mean that adds tax dollars. There are places that we can find savings, find inefficiencies, find all of these duplications. Because that's what we do in business, we have to run on a very strict overhead line. No matter how much work we have. We have an overhead limit. I hope that the Region has that same sort of thinking.

What makes us a little crazy sometimes is when we have clients who aren't quite sure what they want, not sure what to do, not sure how to do it. And then they come to us. And we're kind of the last step instead of the middle step. What they should be doing is really understanding what their needs are.

I feel like there should have been a choice that, yes, we're maintaining, and we're going to give the cost of living, but the service has to change, There has to be some accountability, there has to be some changes, You're gonna get an increase, but it's not just status quo, figure this out, do something better.

I live on the outskirts of town in Beamsville. So I have garbage pickup every two weeks, I have septic which means I have water trucked in, so I don't have sewers on my street. And I do not have lights on my street. But my property taxes increased 6.86%. I will be getting over a two-year period because of the company I work for. 4.8%. they're asking for all these increases; how can we sustain this? It's going to be very difficult to sustain.

Areas of Highest Priority

Homeless Supports



- Most feel this **should be a priority, either maintaining services or increasing services.**
- Many residents and business leaders talk about the perceived **growing number of homeless people in the Region** and believe that something needs to be done to support them, particularly as we come to the cold weather.
- Many suggest that this program must include more than just housing. Instead, **it needs to help these people to get them off the streets.** This includes mental health supports, job training, etc.
- Some have the same hesitation with this initiative as they feel the help might not go to the people who really need it. Others question if this is really the job of the Region. They talk about **other charitable organizations who do this work and feel that they would be better equipped to handle it than the Region.** Business leaders especially believe that the Region needs to bring in the experts in this area rather than trying to take on the work themselves.

I would definitely say I've personally noticed a lot more homelessness in the last few years since COVID. I think these programs are crucial at this point, because there are so many people, hardworking people that have lost their homes, their jobs, and now they can't afford to get an apartment because they have no money for a down payment. That we need these programs.

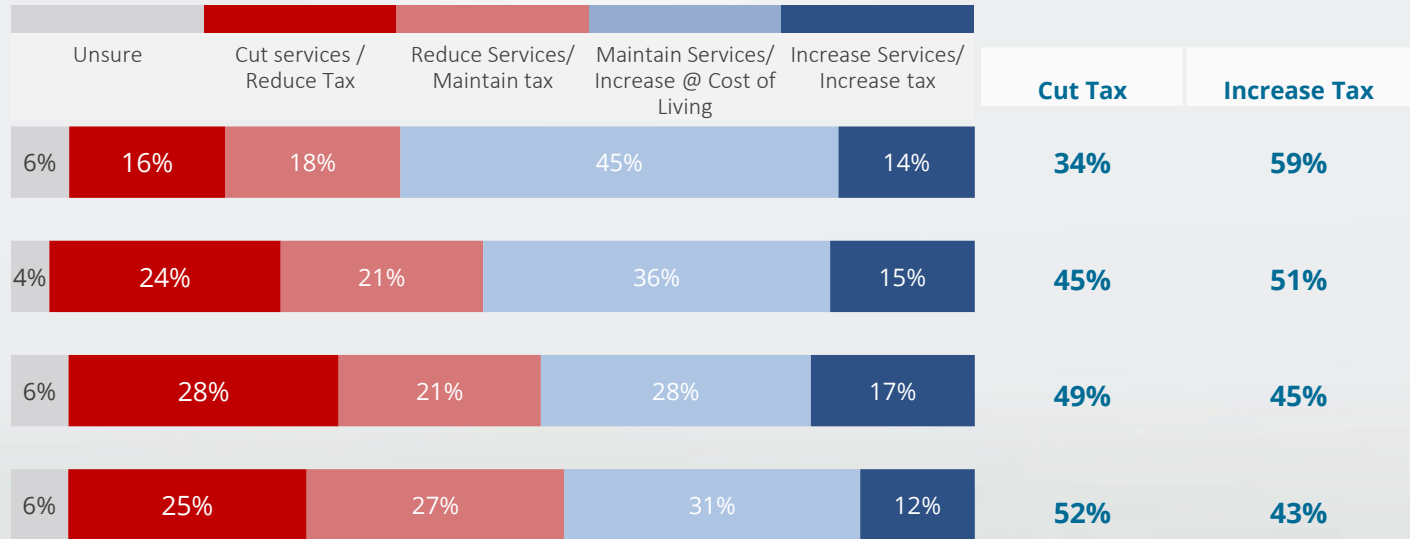
And I think there's tremendous services and knowledge and people in the community that are doing amazing work, harness them. Rather than trying to be the ones who raise taxes to do more, or just give more services from the region. No, think differently about the way you could raise the boat of some of the people in the community are already doing fantastic work. And maybe we'll get to a solution there.

We, most of us, probably are only a couple of paychecks away from severe debt or homelessness. But I have also personally seen this system be abused in several ways, so it's hard that because you want to be a humanitarian and don't want to see anyone struggling and want to see all of the supports for people, but also logically, again, economically, we're not at that point in our Region right now where we can increase the supports.

Support for seniors and vulnerable populations are a priority to residents



- When it comes to helping specific populations in the community, residents put the most priority on seniors, followed by vulnerable populations, with less than half thinking there needs to be an increase in taxes to support homeless or childcare.
- That said, less than one-fifth believe taxes should be increased beyond the cost of living to increase any of these services.



Existing Infrastructure



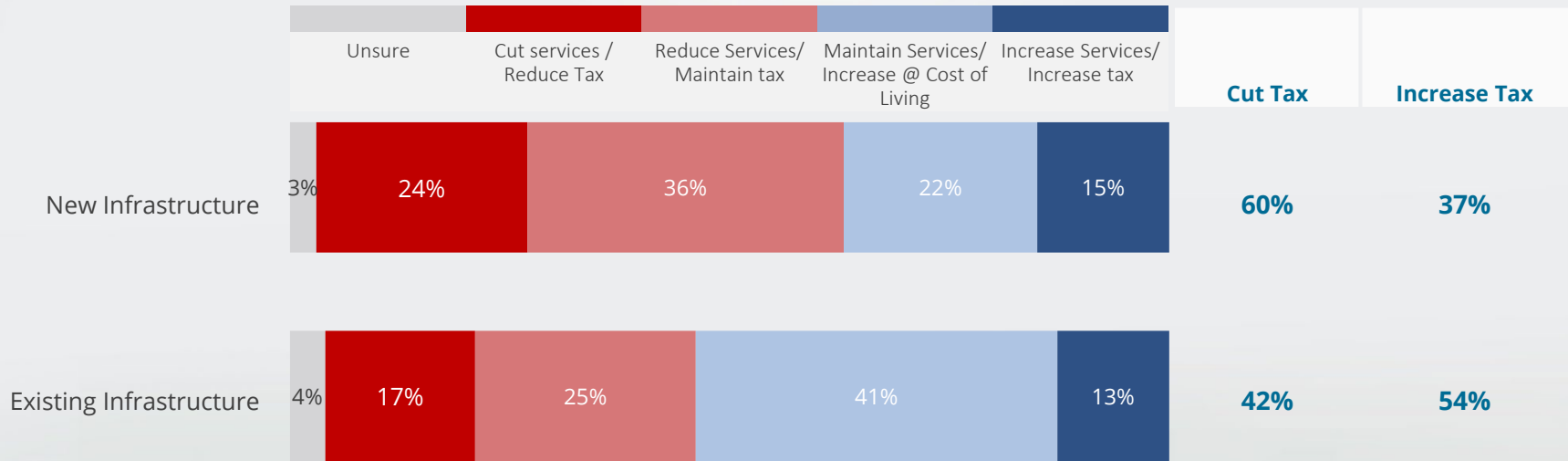
- Most feel this should be a priority: either maintaining or increasing services.
- Residents and business leaders can understand the importance of this issue. They know what the infrastructure provides them (roads, water, sewage) is important and can understand why a delay in this upkeep would be more costly in the long run. Some could offer specific examples of areas in the Region where infrastructure is crumbling.
- Some feel that money should not be given to this issue carte blanche. Instead, they believe it is very important for the Region to plan carefully, to ensure that the most important projects be tackled now, and the less vital projects be put off. Others are surprised that the Region does not already have a long-term plan for this.
- Business leaders feel even more strongly about this. While they understand the importance, they do not think it needs more budget, but instead believe the budget they have could be better spent. They also mention that while more infrastructure will be needed for a growing population, they will also bring in more taxes to pay for it.

We have what's called a contingency fund, and a reserve fund. So, if we know that the roof has a 25-year lifespan, every year we put aside a little bit at the end of 25 years the roof needs replacing the money's there to replace it. The government, doesn't matter the level, they seem to run on no plan. It's like Let's spend what we got today and oh, we need more money next year. Let's just soak it to the property owners raise the taxes. There is no contingency fund. There's no forward planning. And I think that's something that's not addressed.

Many of these services like water and sewage are regulated. If you want to drink water, we are going to pay all these costs for all these upgrades. It's going to mean that other things will be more in the category of wants, as opposed to needs, So roads will get paved less often, sidewalks will barely get maintained under the premise that you can walk on that old sidewalk

We have a bridge that is falling apart. And now it will take three years to complete the work instead of a year and half because they waited to long to repair it. Yes, that is a priority.

Residents are more likely to believe existing infrastructure should be maintained than new infrastructure built



Housing



- Most feel this should **be a priority, either maintaining or increasing services.**
- This priority holds meaning for many respondents, as **they can easily see how difficult it can be to afford housing.** Some also mentioned experiences where people they know have been on a list for affordable housing for ten years or more.
- Some express concern about **what is considered “affordable”.** They see new properties being developed, but think they are luxury units, which is not going to help the “poorest people” in the region. One person mentioned affordable housing in another region, that wasn’t affordable at all. All agree that if money is going to be put into housing, it needs to make sure it is helping the people who need it.
- **To business leaders, red tape is a big deterrent** when it comes to the issue of housing. They see red tape at each phase of a development process which leads to more expense and longer timelines.
- Business leaders are aware of **efforts to make developers include affordable housing units,** either through grants, or through specific requirements (in other regions). This is not considered a viable solution, as the affordable units will still be unattainable, and additional costs will be passed on to at market units, driving up the prices even more.
- Business leaders want the Region to **come up with creative solutions on this front as well.** They give suggestions such as multi-generational housing units or modular homes.

A 15 years waiting list for a family of five is a joke. It's why my three grandchildren live with me. Because their parent cannot get a proper place for them to raise them.

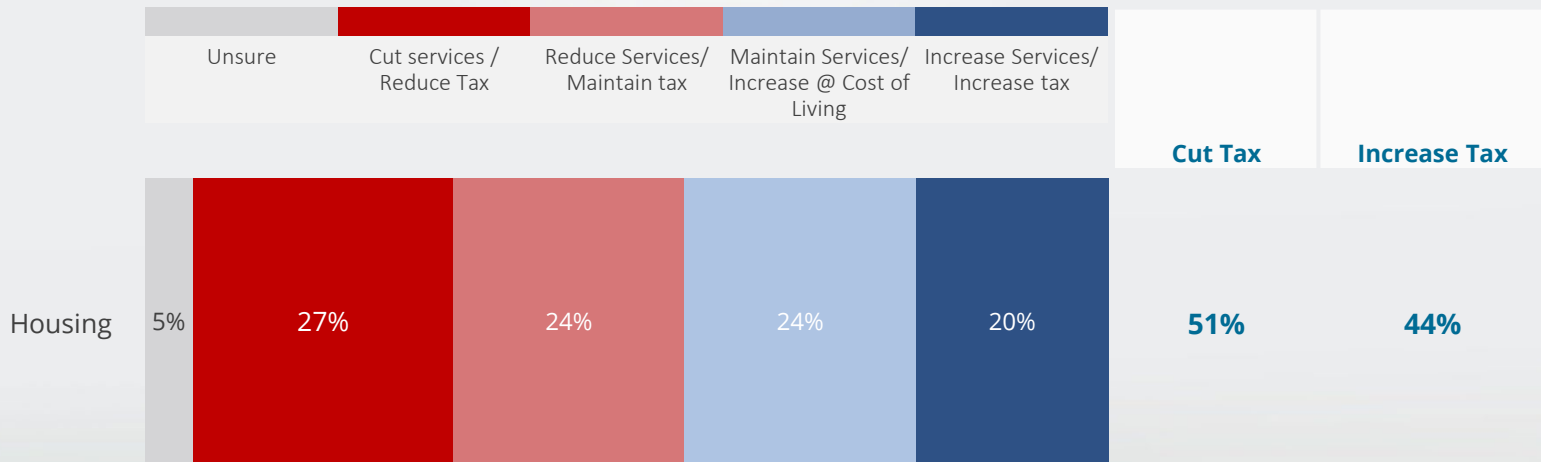
There's so much new building going on, most of which are classified as affordable housing based on the tax breaks that the developers are getting. However, when the units go in, they are generally very small, the equivalent of a one-bedroom apartment, which is fine and dandy, but doesn't help a family of 2, 3, 4 or 5. And these rental units are basically sold in in the guise of a condo, which means increasing rate pricing. And that means that the rents will start at about \$2300 a month and goes up from there. And that is far from affordable.

One of the biggest concerns is also the red tape, especially if you're going to have to go through approval through a Regional Council and then through Municipal Council. And then if staff comes with a recommendation, and council send stuff back, there's red tape from every aspect, things are not streamlined

Residents have mixed impression on the importance of Housing



- Half of residents believe taxes should be maintained (24%) or reduced (27%) when it comes to housing. Conversely, 44% believe this is a priority that needs more funding.
- Younger residents (18 to 34 years of age) are more likely to saying this issue deserves an a higher than the cost-of-living increase in taxes compared to older residents (31% vs. 35–54-year-olds 18%, 55+ 17%).



Areas of Moderate Priority

Development Incentives



- Most residents feel this **is somewhat of a priority**, with most thinking the initiative should be maintained and a few thinking it should be increased
- Residents and business leaders understand the importance of this initiative. **They want to see more companies coming into the Region to provide jobs** close to where they live. There is a belief that young people will not stay in the Region now, because there is no work for them. Some volunteer examples in other regions where brownfield sites were revitalized to great success and would like to see the same here.
- Business leaders talk about **how expensive it is to do business in Canada**. They feel incentives are needed to bring new businesses to the Region, particularly since these incentives are being offered in other areas, in Canada and the US.
- Most offered **caveats to the type of businesses that should receive this incentive**. They want it to be companies that offer more than a few jobs, who offer employment at different levels and who pay more than minimum wage. Some also feel these jobs should be outside the tourism or seasonal space.
- **Some business leaders agree that there should be caveats to the type of business, but this can be tricky if politics gets involved**. People pushing for one type of business or not another must not slow the process down, or these businesses will go to other areas that are more welcoming without the red tape.

If it's a business that that just hires five or six people getting paid minimum wage, that's not going to help anybody. But if there's if they're going to start bringing factories back here, they will make over minimum wage. Maybe a few more office buildings, things like that. But not seasonal, not tourist stuff.

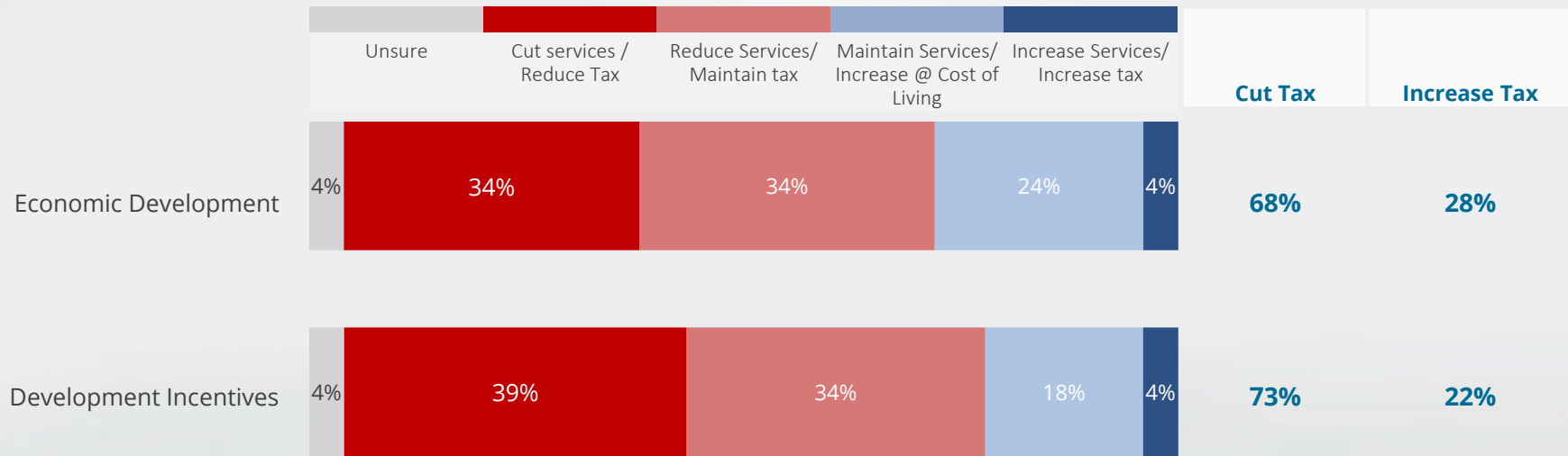
A lot of other communities do that already. In fact, I have a client coming in from Europe next week, want to build a factory here. But they're being wooed by the United States, the States fight amongst themselves, to bring business to their state. They know long term it is the right thing. They're employing people who will pay taxes, who will build houses, who will go to restaurants, things like that. So I'm a big proponent of incentivizing industry and, and business to grow in the region.

Doing business in Canada is very expensive. But the reality of attracting new businesses, if any of those decisions are made on a political stage, it is it is very difficult to get anything done. Because if a neighborhood group doesn't want that business, those decisions can just stall. And there's other places that are wooing businesses to come there. So if you start going up against an inhospitable political environment, they'll throw up their hands and say, well, thanks very much. We'll go somewhere else.

While qualitative research shows a need for developmental incentives, this is less apparent in quantitative research



- Only one-quarter believe that taxes should be increased to maintain or increase the services in either economic development or development incentives. Instead, the majority believe these services should be reduced with more than one-third saying they should be cut.



Transit



- Most residents feel this is **somewhat of a priority, with the majority saying funding should be maintained**, while some feel it should be increased.
- Most people in the groups rarely use transit themselves. **That said, they understand its importance**, and believe it will become more important, if there is an increase in affordable housing and jobs in the area and also as the aging population is unable to drive. Business leaders consider this particularly important, as a better system would make it easier to hire part-time student staff.
- Currently, **the transit system in Niagara is not thought to be very good**. People talk about it taking hours to get anywhere and the service being inconsistent. The On Demand service is also not liked. People say, again, it is unreliable, and rides will sometimes get cancelled after they are ordered. Business leaders mention these services do not run at night; the time necessary for students to get home from their jobs.
- **A few mentioned that they do not see the need for further funding for Transit**. They say they will often see buses with only a couple of people on it, so if more money is going into funding, it needs to be sure it is going to the right place.

There's no transit that goes to Lincoln and Grimsby even though we're Niagara Region. They did introduce the NRT, which was basically Ubers that are available to come to West Niagara. However, they operate during times that don't help when we have youth that get off their job at 8, 9 or 10pm and have no way of getting transit home. When we're hiring students in the summer, we really have to pick from students that have a vehicle. We really cut ourselves off when we have to rely on students, they can't hop on a bus and come to West Niagara. So, transit, is it a huge issue and the temporary solution that they have for the Uber like service is not making the cut for what we need.

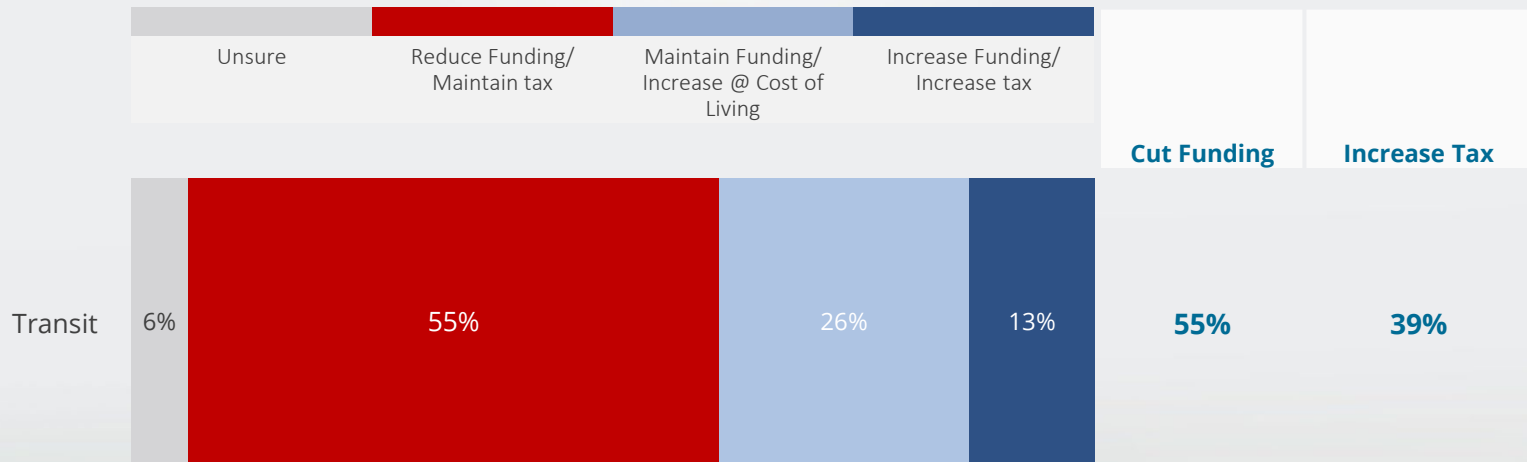
We have NRT (on demand) - it is a bus that drives around. I've never used it. However, I've heard it's very unreliable and sporadic with its pickups. I work beside the new super school and at the border of Beamsville in Grimsby, and the kids that can't get buses and the parents can't drop them off have to rely on NRT (on demand), and its not reliable for them.

I know that for those people who use the buses regularly, it can be the difference between having a job and not. It can be the difference between having childcare and not, having groceries and not. So, me personally, I believe that it's one of those things that really needs to be looked at, maintained and kept well above minimum.

Many feel Transit funding should be reduced



- While focus group participants could see how transit would benefit the community as a whole and therefore should be maintained or increased, the survey participants were less likely to see this benefit, with half (55%) saying funding should be reduced to maintain property tax.
- While 18- to 34-year-olds are more likely to think this funding should be increased (20% vs. 13% of 35–54-year-olds and 9% of 55+), still half of this group thinks it should be reduced (49%).



Road Safety



- Most residents feel this initiative should be **maintained, with a few thinking it could be reduced.**
- Most residents and business leaders **understand the importance of keeping roads safe.** They feel the Region is doing a good job of this now, and do not feel it needs to be increased. Some question the types of jobs that have been completed under this umbrella in recent years, such as putting in roundabouts. Some believe this has been a waste of money.
- A few say they **do not see the benefits of the road safety initiatives, due to where they live.** While they understand that activities such as plowing are very important, they find it annoying that they pay the same amount for it, but do not get the same amount of service because they are in a less busy area.
- Business leaders **say it is important for the Region to think creatively on this issue as well,** to ensure the work they are doing lasts. The example specifically given is the need to consistently re-pave roads. They say there is new material that would last longer, but the Region needs to do their research.

There's got to be a better material than this asphalt. It seems they tear it up every two years and put it back again. This is the best we can do? The Romans have roads that are still existing 2000 years later! We need potholes filled every two years? There's a lot of technologies out there... like tires, they're now to get rid of the tire problem. Companies are grinding up tires, and putting that in asphalt, and it lasts a lot longer. It's a lot more durable. I mean, these are good ideas that don't take a lot.

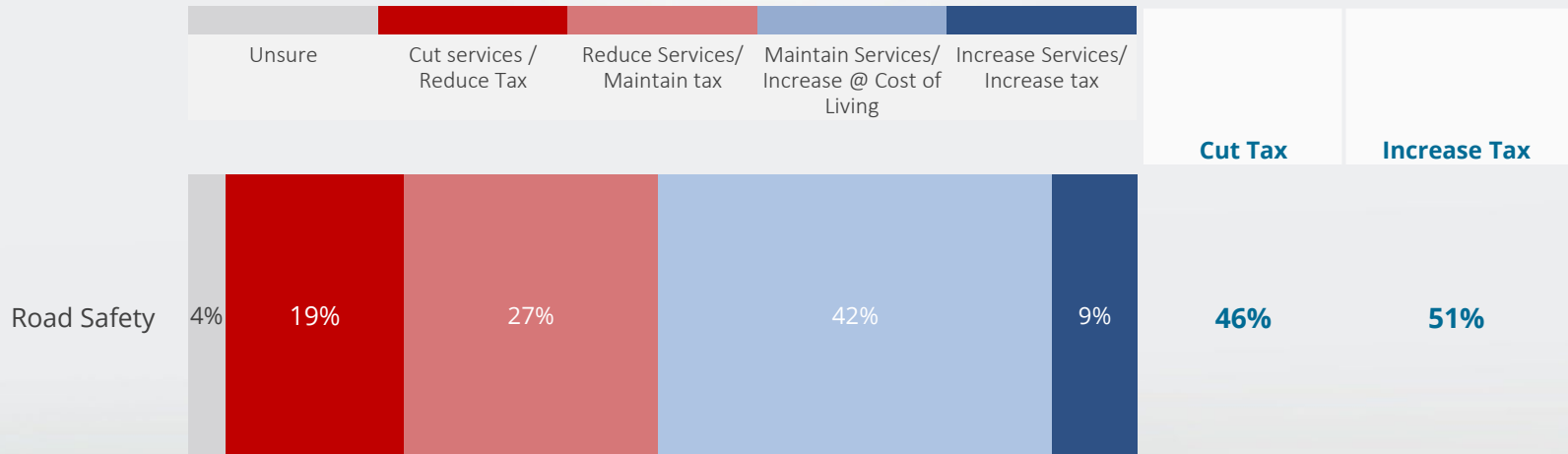
Ya, this needs to be a priority. I don't want to be driving down the road and running into potholes and then it's costing me a fortune. So, I think maintaining the roads and the highways and the snowplows and all that I think it really, for me as a driver, I think it's really important.

You need to maintain the roads, but you're putting in these different things like the weird interchange at Glendale and putting roundabouts everywhere, in places that really don't need, it seems like they're spending a little bit too much extra money on putting in unnecessary stuff rather than just maintaining the roads.

Residents believe road safety needs to be maintained.



- Like qualitative findings, residents believe road safety needs to be maintained with a cost-of-living tax increase, but few (9%) believe services need to be increased.



Areas of Lower Priority

Niagara Regional Police Services



- Most residents feel this initiative should be **maintained or reduced**.
- While all residents and business leaders **understand the need to have police, many do not think they need more funding than they already have**. These people feel the police are doing a good job now and should continue rather than the need to increase this funding.
- Quite a few mentioned they would like to see police funding **moved to other areas that could better help public safety**. This primarily involved having mental health providers involved in calls related to people in mental health crisis, instead of having police at these calls that may be less equipped to deal with them, compared to mental health professionals. Some also mentioned “intermediate officers” who could receive less training, be paid less and could deal with issues such as traffic accidents.

If there was a reallocation to the funding model for things like training or alternative types of training, de-escalation, these those sorts of things, then not only you're not going to have the same need for like the armed police officers, you'll have intermediate officers, which many places across Canada have picked up instead. They're not going to be paid as much as a full police officer because they don't have to have all the extra training, but their training will be in specific occurrences, which happen a lot more. So, your policing budget will then instead of steeply increasing every year, it'll kind of plateau a little bit with gentle rises.

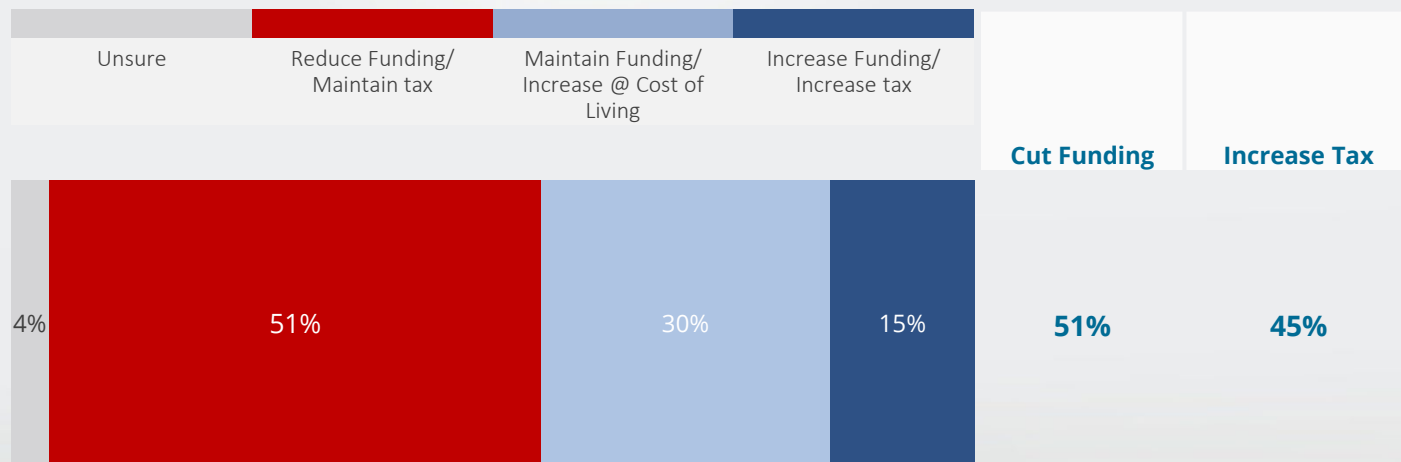
I'd like to see more prevention. I support the police and it's a crappy job, I wouldn't want to do it. But I'd like to see tools for them, to deal with the issues that aren't gun related. Like, mental health, mental health doesn't need guns, mental health needs help. So, the spending has to be where it will help... even if it stays with the police, have the them trained, have the right people hired. Like I said prevention...Work on that.

They are talking about population increases, more people coming to Niagara. As more people come, there will be more problems, more crime. And they are going to need more police. Right now, in Fort Erie, there are only two officers on duty at any time. For the whole town of Fort Erie. There needs to be more than that.

Many feel NRPS funding should be reduced



- Like qualitative findings, residents believe the NRPS should be reduced, or, to a lesser degree, maintained. Few believe this funding should be increased.



Niagara Regional Police Services

Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority



- Most residents feel funding to this organization should be **maintained or reduced**, with no one thinking it should be increased.
- Many residents are **unsure of this organization and do not fully understand what it provides**. Some mention enjoying the parks and outdoor spaces in the Region and feel these spaces should be maintained. A few talk about the dangers of flooding and appreciate that they are helping to prevent that.
- However, even those who believe this organization is important, when having to make choices for the budget, **all thought this was an area that did not need more funding**.
- Business leaders see this **function as more than just providing green space, but also protecting the environment**. As such, this issue has somewhat of a higher priority to this group.

While it is important, I don't think there needs to be more funding. Divert money to it instead of spending more. I mean, there's other ways to save money. And it wouldn't take much to be honest, these projects are not expensive. You know, compared to say, building a nuclear station. They don't provide as much power obviously, but it's part of the solution. And so, you know, to me, it's working smarter, not harder. We could do a lot better in that world.

We are losing so many green spaces around here, like the farmlands are being sold off for housing and development. There's not really a lot of recreational spots. We're losing backyards. We're losing spots for wildlife to roam. I think it should be a focus, because I don't want to turn into these Metropolis cities like Toronto or Brampton. That's not why we're here

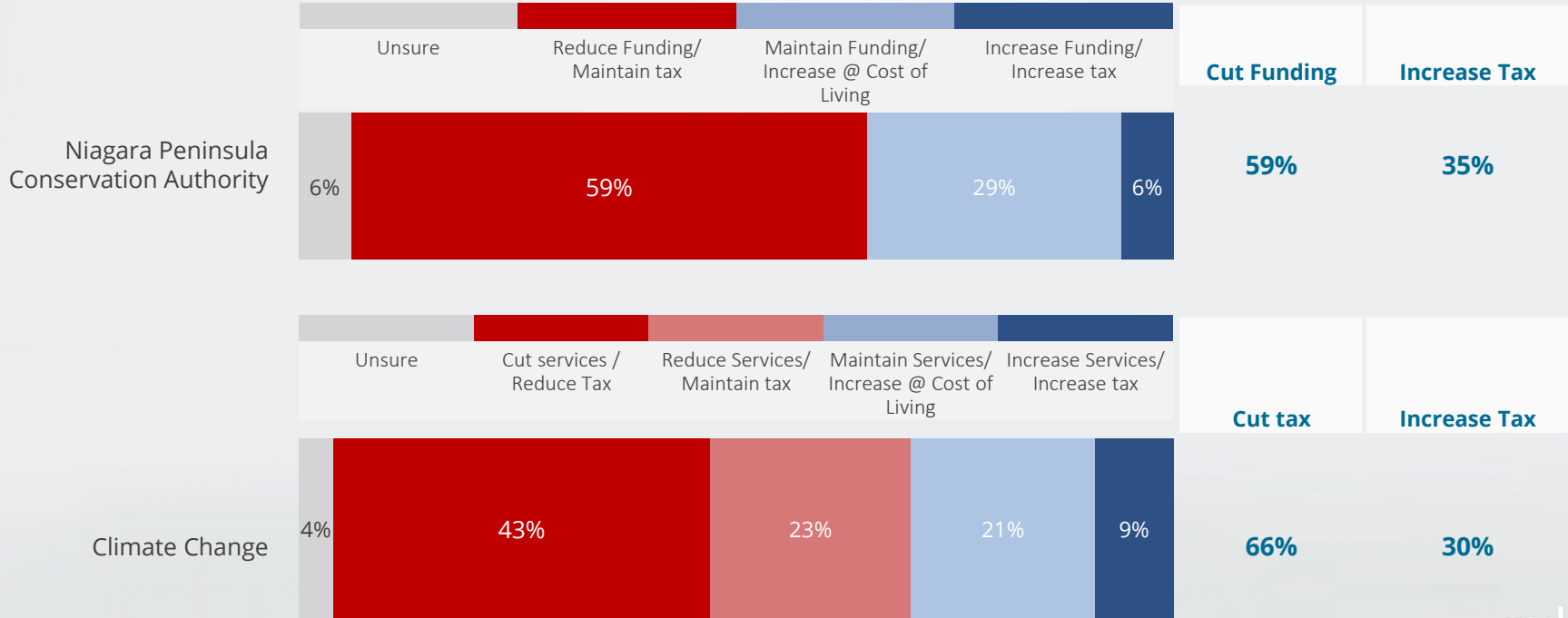
You know how in BC and in Quebec, you'll see in the news that they'll have flash floods and houses will get washed away. That doesn't happen here in Ontario, because we have things like the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority saying yeah, that's not a good place to build.

I think the work that the NPCA does tries to balance the broader economic development needs and development opportunities that we have with the realities of the environment. Given the changing environment that we are all going to face over the next decade or two.. The intensity of storms are already picking up. I think if we start ignore or if we defund those basic protections that we're putting in place, it will be to our peril.

Many feel NPCA and climate change funding should be reduced



- Like qualitative findings, residents believe the NPCA should be reduced (59%). Only 29% feel the funding should be maintained with very few thinking it should be increased.
- Climate change is also not thought to be a high priority, with two-thirds saying the initiative should be cut.



Appendix – Priority Descriptions

Quantitative Priority List

- The following are the descriptions of the services provided in the survey.

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|--------------------------------|---|
| New Infrastructure | Over the last number of years, significant investments have been made to support a growing community by building and improving water treatment facilities, roads, transit, etc. However, as resources are limited the Region cannot complete all the work that is needed, and projects are delayed. With tightening budgets, more projects may have to be delayed until funding is available. |
| Existing Infrastructure | Niagara Region owns approximately \$9 billion in physical assets such as water treatment plants, long-term care homes, vehicles, machinery and works yards. To continue providing services at a level residents expect, the Region should invest toward replacing aging pipes, water systems, and other valuable assets. |
| Vulnerable populations | Niagara Region assists some of the most vulnerable people in our community, from infancy to senior years. This includes serving our aging population with senior's community programs, providing supports to the poor and offering Public Health services to residents. |
| Seniors Services | Niagara Region serves its seniors population with the operation of <u>eight</u> long-term care homes. In 2024, the Region will complete the redevelopment of long-term care homes in St. Catharines and Fort Erie. More major renovations of Regional long term care facilities will be required in the future to serve our aging population. |
| Housing | The Region is investing in building more affordable housing and supporting activities to make housing more attainable in our community. |

Quantitative Priority List Continued (2)

- The following are the descriptions of the services provided in the survey.

| Homeless Supports | Niagara Region supports some of the most vulnerable people in our community. To address growing homelessness in the community, Niagara Region continues to invest in supporting those in need, including providing supportive and short-term accommodations to people transitioning from homelessness to permanent housing. |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Economic Development | The role of an economic development office is to promote and facilitate growth and investment. Attracting employers and supporting existing business provides opportunities and a better quality of life for resident. As the Region continues to support economic development efforts to create an environment where businesses and residents can thrive, what should the Region do? |
| Development Incentives | Niagara Region is committed to creating an environment that allows businesses to flourish. Every year, Niagara Region supports projects aimed at attracting new growth to Niagara. Given the limited revenues sources available to the Region for programs and services, what should the Region do at this time with respect to incentivizing development? |
| Road Safety | Niagara Region is working to improve road safety for all users. This requires adding safety measures on busy roadways, winter and summer maintenance including activities such as snow plowing and road repair and upkeep. |
| Police | Policing is an important service to our community. It is also the largest component of our municipal budgets. |

Quantitative Priority List Continued (3)

- The following are the descriptions of the services provided in the survey.

| Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority | The core mandate of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) is to undertake watershed-based programs to protect people and property from flooding and other natural hazards, and to conserve natural resources for economic, social and environmental benefits. |
|---|--|
| Transit | In recent years, Niagara Region has worked with local municipalities to provide transit locally and across Niagara to give residents more options to get around. In 2023, local area municipalities amalgamated transit services under one regional commission called Niagara Region Transit to oversee the service. As regional transit continues to ramp up more investment will be required for service improvement and equipment like buses. |
| Childcare | Niagara Region is responsible for the planning, administration and financial support of approximately 11,000 licensed childcare spaces in Niagara as well as providing planning and management of EarlyON Child and Family Centres in Niagara. |
| Climate Change | Niagara Region is committed to reducing environmental impacts, protecting the health and well-being of Niagara residents, and sustainably managing resources. Niagara Region's efforts to address climate change will require upgrades to both facilities and practices to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions. |

Qualitative Description

- The following are the descriptions of the services read to respondents during the focus groups.

| Existing Infrastructure | Niagara Region owns approximately \$9 billion in physical assets such as water treatment plants, long-term care homes, vehicles, machinery and works yards. To continue providing services at a level residents expect, the Region should invest toward replacing aging pipes, water systems, and other valuable assets. This is called an Asset Management Plan. It is important to mention that delaying these projects in the past is what has contributed to the need to make largest investments now. For many of our assets, especially in water and sewage, they were built in the 1970s and are nearing the end of their useful life. Delaying rehabilitations that just defer work and don't eliminate the project actually will likely add costs to the projects deferred because of rising inflation. There is also the increase in risk of the infrastructure failing leading to service disruptions. Lastly for equipment purchases deferrals just increase maintenance costs until ordered. Also, wait time for these purchases are close to 18 months delivery. Similar to your house if you have a leak in the roof, you may be able to reasonably repair and extend the life of your roof, if you don't repair and let the roof fail then not only does the whole roof need to be replaced but you have probably damaged other parts of your home as well. You've also had to live with water in your house. |
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| Housing | The Region is investing in building more affordable housing and supporting some of the poorest people in our community. In addition, Niagara Regional Housing provides and supports low-income housing in Niagara through Public Housing (owned units) and New Development. In 2023, the Region approved \$14 million toward the rehabilitation of existing housing stock and invested millions more in the construction of new affordable units across Niagara. |
| Homeless Supports | Niagara Region supports some of the most vulnerable people in our community. To address growing homelessness in the community, Niagara Region continues to invest in supporting those in need, including providing supportive and short-term accommodations and programs to people transitioning from homelessness to permanent housing. |

Qualitative Description... continued

- The following are the descriptions of the services read to respondents during the focus groups.

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| Development Incentives | Niagara Region is committed to creating an environment that allows businesses to flourish. Every year, Niagara Region supports projects aimed at attracting new growth to Niagara. Some of these projects include financial incentives for new businesses or businesses planning on expanding to provide more jobs in Niagara, grants for the improvement of areas within the region that have been abandoned or are unused (brownfield sites) when these areas will have significant economic, environmental, social and health benefits, financial incentives for the development or improvement of housing or rental properties, etc. |
| Road Safety | Niagara Region is working to improve road safety for all users. This requires adding safety measures on busy roadways, winter and summer maintenance including activities such as snow plowing and road repair and upkeep. |
| Niagara Regional Police Services | Policing is an important service to our community. It is also the largest component of our municipal budgets. The requests to reduce budget impacts would be towards cost avoidance and a reduction in organizational growth. |
| Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority | The core mandate of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) is to undertake watershed-based programs to protect people and property from flooding and other natural hazards, and to conserve natural resources for economic, social and environmental benefits. |
| Transit | In recent years, Niagara Region has worked with local municipalities to provide transit locally and across Niagara to give residents more options to get around. In 2023, local area municipalities amalgamated transit services under one regional commission called Niagara Region Transit to oversee the service. As regional transit continues to ramp up more investment will be required for service improvement and equipment like buses. |