
Subject: Government Relations 2023 End of Year Review

Report to: Regional Council

Report date: Thursday, January 25, 2024

Recommendations

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the corporate Government Relations (GR) activities Niagara Region participated in throughout 2023 to advance Council's Strategic Priorities.
- As one of 444 municipalities in Ontario and 3,573 in Canada, effective GR is critical in ensuring the Region's perspective is considered within Government of Ontario and Government of Canada policy and funding decisions.
- Over the course of a year, municipalities have limited opportunities to directly engage with upper levels of government, making consistent GR efforts paramount.
- Amid changing municipal landscapes, the Region must continue to educate the public and other levels of government on how it is collectively working with its twelve (12) local area municipalities (LAMs) to achieve shared provincial and municipal objectives, while simultaneously fulfilling its independent vision of creating modern communities growing better together.
- In 2023, ten (10) corporate GR initiatives were undertaken to advance Council's Strategic Priorities, strengthen the Region's intergovernmental relationships and ensure the following GR functions were supported:
 - **Educating** the public about Regional GR efforts and thought leadership;
 - **Informing** staff and Council about provincial and federal policy changes;
 - **Partnering** with local organizations, LAMs and other levels of government to advance shared priorities; and
 - **Advocating** for Regional priorities during annual and ad hoc events.
- Details on these ten (10) initiatives are provided in the analysis section.
- To build off 2023 achievements, a Government Relations Strategy will be brought forward to Council in Q1 2024. The strategy will outline how staff and Council can continue to bolster Niagara's GR portfolio through specific actions that can be measured by Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Priorities and actions identified

within the strategy will directly support Council's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, as well as Niagara's core advocacy priorities, as presented in Report CAO 3-2023.

Background

Everyday Niagara Region works to build positive intergovernmental relationships. By engaging with the Government of Ontario, Government of Canada and First Nation governments, the Region is working to enhance programs and services delivered to residents. Through effective GR, the Region can ensure its perspective is considered in policy and program decisions made by upper levels of government.

Throughout the year, departments request GR support for specific, shorter-term initiatives, such as assistance in grant research or writing correspondence to upper levels of government. Additionally, many Regional departments act as municipal service managers on behalf of the provincial government. As such, senior staff are in frequent communication with their provincial counterparts to address operational matters directly related to service delivery. It is important to note that, while complementary to corporate GR efforts, department support and independent department initiatives are not reflected in this report.

Corporate GR initiatives focus on advancing longer-term, core advocacy priorities related to Council's Strategic Plan. They also support Council's objective of being an effective and unified voice when advocating with senior governments by building a clear and consistent narrative for Regional GR activities. By doing so, corporate GR supports a consistent approach when meeting with senior governments on pertinent issues that will require longer-term engagement through annual and ad hoc opportunities.

Analysis

The federal and provincial governments are important partners in supporting growth across Niagara. Policies and programs set by these upper levels of government directly influence the Region's ability to deliver services that residents and businesses rely on. As Niagara continues to witness substantive population growth and the demand for local services increases, effective GR supports the Region in requesting enhanced federal and provincial co-investment for key growth-related projects. It also allows the Region to respond to policy changes introduced by upper levels of government that impact municipal service delivery and budget planning.

While all municipalities are provided with annual opportunities to engage with upper levels of government through pre-budget consultations, the Federation of Canadian

Municipalities (FCM) conference and the Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO) conference, targeted one-on-one discussions focused on Niagara specific initiatives are ad hoc. Given the unpredictable nature of ad hoc GR, a clear and consistent narrative around the Region's core priorities is critical.

Throughout 2023, considerable efforts were made to be proactive in Niagara's GR approach to ensure Regional priorities were showcased to upper levels of government on an ongoing basis. In addition to participating in annual advocacy initiatives, the Region continued to establish positive relationships with local partners and other levels of government, launched unique branding for the Region's core priorities and hosted Niagara-specific advocacy events. These efforts helped bolster the Region's reputation as a municipal leader while showcasing how Niagara is working to advance areas of mutual interest with the provincial and federal governments.

Below is a summary of the ten (10) corporate GR activities that were undertaken throughout 2023. Activities have been categorized as either annual or ad hoc initiatives, with summaries of each action detailing how it supported core GR functions of educating, informing, partnering and/or advocating.

Annual Events

2023 Provincial Pre-budget Submission (February 10, 2023)

- Introduced the Region's 2023 advocacy priorities to the Government of Ontario. Doing so enabled Council and staff to begin provincial engagement on advocacy requests that would be continued throughout the year.
- Nine (9) requests were included within the submission. Each emphasized the need for greater provincial co-investment and partnership to support growth so that Niagara can continue to be a top-tier destination for livability, investment and job creation.
- Niagara's submission also introduced the Growing Better Together advocacy branding, supporting the promotion of a clear and consistent GR messaging.
- **GR function supported: advocate.**

Analysis of Provincial and Federal Budgets (March 31, 2023)

- As the core policy document for any government, the budget sets the direction and priorities for an administration. Provincial and federal budgets typically detail new programs and services that will be introduced to support lower levels of government, businesses and residents.

- Council correspondence CWCD 2023-36 and CWCD 2023-64 provided analyses of the 2023 provincial and federal budgets and detailed potential impacts for Niagara Region. CWCD 2023-36 detailed which pre-budget requests were not addressed by the provincial government, therefore requiring further advocacy.
- **GR funding supported: inform.**

Association of Municipalities Ontario Conference (August 21 – 23, 2023)

- The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) hosts an annual conference that provides members with an opportunity to network with provincial officials and advocate for local priorities. This year Niagara Region participated in seven (7) delegations, four (4) of which were in partnership with LAMs.
- Participation in the AMO conference provided members of Council and senior staff with an opportunity to continue conversations with the province on Niagara's core growth-related priorities. It also allowed Niagara to showcase how the Region and LAMs are continuing to work together to achieve shared goals, such as creating growth-related infrastructure, introducing new large-lot employment sites, increasing Niagara's affordable housing supply and implementing new shared services.
- **GR functions supported: advocate and partner.**

Analysis of Provincial and Federal Fall Economic Statements (November 2023)

- Fall Economic Statements detail how provincial and federal governments allocated funding throughout the year and often announce new programs that were not included in the government's budget.
- Council correspondence CWCD 2023-220 and CWCD 2023-229 provided analyses of the 2023 Fall Economic Statements released by the Government of Ontario and Government of Canada, detailing potential impacts for the Region.
- **GR funding supported: inform.**

Mayors and Regional Chairs of Ontario Participation (January – December 2023)

- Mayors and Regional Chairs of Ontario (MARCO) is comprised of regional chairs and city mayors from large, single-tier Ontarian municipalities. The group works collaboratively to advocate for policy action related to provincial and federal matters. Members traditionally meet each quarter; however, ad hoc meetings can be held if required.
- In 2023 Niagara Region participated in five (5) MARCO meetings. Meetings included updates from FCM and AMO staff regarding advocacy work with the

federal and provincial governments, as well as roundtable discussions related to how each municipality was responding to common community challenges.

- **GR function supported: partner and educate.**

Ad Hoc Initiatives

First Nations Intergovernmental Relationship Building (April – July 2023)

- Niagara Regional Council and staff remain committed to fostering meaningful relationships with Indigenous governments. To support this commitment, Chief and Chair meetings were held between Chair Bradley and Chief LaForme of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation on April 19, as well as Chief Hill of the Six Nations of the Grand River Elected Council on July 19.
- As the first engagement between Chair Bradley and Chief Hill, the meeting supported positive relationship building between the two heads of government.
- By meeting with the Chief's, the Region was able to begin exploring areas of mutual interest that could support longer-term partnership and cooperation with the First Nations.
- **GR function supported: partner.**

Niagara Week (May 15 – 17, 2023)

- 2023 witnessed the relaunch of Niagara Week, a targeted advocacy event held at Queen's Park. Over the course of the three-day event, ten (10) in-person meetings were held with provincial leaders to discuss core growth-related Regional priorities, as approved by Council through Report CAO 3-2023. Meeting outcomes, as detailed in CHR 02-2023, included a verbal commitment from the Premier regarding funding support for the South Niagara Wastewater Solutions Project, as well as follow up meetings and site visits with provincial officials throughout the year.
- Niagara partnered with the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce (GNCC) to host an MPP reception on May 15. This allowed for meaningful networking and promoted Niagara's business community.
- In support of Niagara Week, a Growing Better Together website was launched to educate provincial officials about the Region's core growth-related priorities and detail opportunities for provincial partnership and co-investment.
- **GR functions supported: advocate, partner and educate.**

Federation of Canadian Municipalities Support (June – September 2023)

- Following the success of Niagara Week, efforts were made to advance federal advocacy related to the South Niagara Falls Wastewater Solutions Project.
- A letter was sent to the federal Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities requesting that the Government of Canada introduce an infrastructure program with a one-third cost sharing structure with provincial and municipal governments. The correspondence was supported and signed by eight (8) FCM Ontario Caucus members.
- Additionally, an update on Niagara's advocacy efforts was provided to FCM's Ontario Caucus and meetings with FCM staff were held to discuss opportunities to further advance Niagara priorities.
- **GR functions supported: educate, partner, advocate.**

Launch of Government Relations and Advocacy website (November 2023)

- A dedicated GR and Advocacy website was launched to promote Regional efforts. The website includes summaries of Niagara Week and AMO conference outcomes, as well as information on core Regional priorities.
- **GR function supported: educate.**

Federal Advocacy (November 20 - 21, 2023)

- In conjunction with FCM's Advocacy Days, Niagara Region's FCM board member and select senior staff held two meetings with federal representatives.
- Discussions with the Ministry of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities built upon advocacy efforts requesting a new federal infrastructure program that supports a one-third cost sharing structure with provincial and municipal governments.
- A meeting was also held with the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to request that municipalities be included in future discussions regarding how planning, assessment and relocation processes within the in-Canada asylum system can be enhanced.
- **GR function supported: advocate.**

Financial Considerations

As approved through the 2023 operating budget, GR expenditures supported in-person advocacy initiatives including hosting Niagara Week at Queen's Park, attending the annual AMO conference and participating in federal advocacy meetings. By participating in these in-person events, the Region was able to further build positive

intergovernmental relationships with upper-levels of government. As highlighted under Key Facts, Niagara Region is one of 444 municipalities in Ontario and one of 3,573 municipalities in Canada, making consistent and frequent interactions with upper levels of government imperative to advancing Niagara's priorities.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

2023 GR initiatives supported Council's 2023-2026 Strategic Priority of creating a Prosperous Region.

Other Pertinent Reports

- [CAO 3-2023 Niagara Week 2023](#)
- [CWCD 2023-63 Province of Ontario 2023 Budget Analysis](#)
- [CWCD 2023-64 Government of Canada 2023 Budget Analysis](#)
- [CAO 8-2023 Proposed Associate of Municipalities of Ontario Conference Delegation Requests for 2023](#)
- [CHR 03-2023 Provincial Advocacy Debrief](#)
- [CWCD 2023-156 AMO Conference 2023 Overview](#)
- [CWCD 2023-220 Province of Ontario 2023 Fall Economic Statement Analysis](#)
- [CWCD 2023-229 Government of Canada 2023 Fall Economic Statement Analysis](#)

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