
Subject: Growing Better Together: 2023-2026 Council Strategic Priorities Update

Report to: Committee of the Whole

Report date: Thursday, April 4, 2024

Recommendations

1. That the report Growing Better Together: 2023-2026 Council Strategic Priorities Update be **RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of the report is to provide Council with an update on the implementation of the 2023-2026 Council Strategic Priorities.
- In July 2023, Council approved the 2023-2026 Council Strategic Priorities which included four Priority Areas: Effective Region, Green and Resilient Region, Equitable Region, and Prosperous Region.
- To ensure the Region remains focused on the Priorities, Objectives and Actions, staff developed an operational and communications plan to support implementation.
- People Leaders have been working to ensure 2024 workplans are aligned with the implementation of the Council Strategic Priorities.
- Staff will report to Council on the progress of the Strategic Priorities, along with performance measures throughout 2024-2026.

Financial Considerations

The 2024 Regional Budget, supports fiscal responsibility and continues to focus on delivering the 2023-2026 Strategic Priorities while responding to fiscal challenges, including increasing resource and supply costs, as well as changes in Provincial funding and legislation. Actions identified in the 2023-2026 Council Strategic Priorities will be brought forward for consideration in the annual budget process.

The Region's budget and associated impacts directly affect our ability to achieve Council's Priorities. The budget is developed in part to support the four Priority Areas

and changes to planned budgetary allocations would require revisiting commitments identified in the Strategic Priorities.

Analysis

Background

In July 2023, Council approved the 2023-2026 Council Strategic Priorities (CAO 10-2023), guided by the vision of “Modern communities growing better together.” To achieve the vision, a mission, guiding principles, four priority areas, objectives and planned actions were developed.

The four Priority Areas were identified by Council to meet key community needs for the 2023-2026 term of Council and include:

- Effective Region
- Green and Resilient Region
- Equitable Region
- Prosperous Region

Appendix 1 provides an overview of the Council Strategic Priorities.

In past years, Council has received annual updates on the progress and status of implementation of Council Strategic Plans, as well as a summary of accomplishments. This term of Council staff is planning to report more frequently and in various methods to Council and the community.

Council Strategic Priorities Organizational Alignment

In 2023, an operational plan and communications plan were developed to support implementation, as well as inform and engage Niagara Region Council, staff, and the community on the progress of the Priorities. Actions identified in both plans were determined based on meeting the following goals:

1. Integrate the Council Strategic Priorities into the Region’s operations as the guiding direction for what we do as an organization.
2. Publicly demonstrate the alignment and implementation of the Council Strategic Priorities with community needs and Provincial directions.

Operational Plan

The goal of the Operational Plan is to embed the Strategic Priorities into the Region's day to day operations and planning, including department workplans and budget, performance accountability and learning and development for staff.

The operational tactics include:

- Strategic Priority Operational Teams (SPOT)
- Corporate Business Plans
- Council report template updates
- Non-union people leaders' performance objectives
- A spring People Leaders' summit focused on the Council Strategic Priorities
- Annual budget development aligned with the Priorities
- Council and community reporting and performance measures

More details on the above actions, their description and implementation timing can be found in Appendix 2.

Communications Plan

The purpose of the Communications Plan is to provide a detailed and comprehensive overview of the various objectives, key messages, audiences, and communications tactics for the 2023-2026 Council Strategic Priorities. The communications plan works to achieve the following objectives:

1. Establish a narrative that re-enforces Council Strategic Priorities through storytelling to highlight connections between the priorities and Niagara's growing communities using a "Growing Better Together" brand.
2. Integrate Council Strategic Priorities into the Niagara Region workplace culture using an internal communications strategy designed to provide staff with the resources, tools and reminders needed to achieve Council's goals.
3. Increase awareness of Niagara Region's initiatives and actions to key audiences by in real-time using digital and traditional communications tactics to reach a larger audience.
4. Demonstrate Niagara Region's alignment with provincial directions through marketing techniques to target key audiences and potential decision makers.

The actions planned and their implementation status to achieve each of the above four objectives can be found in Appendix 2.

Council Strategic Priorities Reporting Framework

There are multiple components to the Council Strategic Priorities reporting framework that will allow the Region to measure the success of achieving the goals and objectives of the Priorities and ensure the work we do aligns with the Strategic Priorities.

The reporting framework components are:

- Council Strategic Priority highlight reports aligned with Finance in-year updates
- Mid-year and year-in-review Council Strategic Priorities report
- Corporate Business Plan alignment and reporting
- Strategic Priority Progress Public Dashboard

The reporting framework has been developed to measure the Region's progress in terms of achieving the goals and objectives of the Council Strategic Priorities. The close alignment between the budget process and business plans, will ensure we are taking steps to implement the Strategic Priorities. Additionally, creating a dynamic and accessible dashboard will create increased awareness and transparency to the implementation of the Priorities.

Council Strategic Priority highlight, mid-year and year-in review reports will provide more frequent and manageable updates to Council on the status and work that has been achieved within each of the Priority areas. The content and updates will be supported by the cross-divisional Strategic Priority Operational Teams (SPOT) members.

Corporate Business Plans across the Region will include initiatives that contribute to work plans for departments and divisions. These business plans not only implement the Strategic Priorities but also serve to implement the capital and operating budgets. As the initiatives in the business plans progress, the goals and objectives of the strategic plan get further implemented. Reporting on the Priorities will also include updates to work identified in the Business Plans.

The Strategic Priority Progress Dashboard will be developed through the continued implementation of the Region's strategic plan reporting tool Envisio. This public dashboard will provide Council and staff the opportunity to identify areas that the Region is making progress on and areas that may require some additional focus or resourcing.

Performance Measures

Performance measures, aligned with the implementation of the Council Strategic Priorities are in development with collaboration from the Strategic Priority Operational Teams (SPOT).

The final performance measures will be included in the mid-year and year-in-review update report. The measures are meant to capture how well a Regional service is working to contribute to Council's Strategic Priorities goals and objectives, communicate service performance, and ensure accountability for results.

2024 Strategic Priority Highlights

The Region has made significant advancement in each of the four Priorities with 32 out of 37 of the actions launched or in progress. Highlights on actions will be brought to Council frequently to ensure enhanced communication with Council and the community on the implementation of the Council Strategic Priorities.

Appendix 3 highlights two actions within each of the four Priority areas that have recently made progress.

Conclusion

The Council Strategic Priorities guide the Region's planning, budgets, corporate business plans and day-to-day operations, enabling the organization to dedicate adequate resources to address the priorities and actions approved by Council. Embedding the Priority actions into the organization, along with reporting to Council on the implementation of the priorities is essential to creating trust, accountability, and transparency to the community.

Other Pertinent Reports

- [CAO-10 2023](#) Growing Better Together: 2023-2026 Council Strategic Priorities

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Appendices

Appendix 1 2023-2026 Council Strategic Priorities Overview

Appendix 2 Communication and Operational Tactics

Appendix 3 March 2024 Council Strategic Priorities Highlights

Growing Better Together

Vision

Modern communities growing better together.

Mission

Niagara Region delivers service excellence through collaborative and innovative leadership.

Guiding Principles

The guiding principles form the foundation for Council's Strategic Priorities by helping to steer and influence Council decisions on how Niagara Region should deliver its services to the community.

1. Strategic Lenses

- Diversity, equity, inclusion and Indigenous reconciliation
 - Fiscal responsibility
 - Innovation
 - Sustainability and climate change
2. Partnerships

3. Transparency and Accountability

Regional Council has identified the following priorities for 2023-2026:

Effective Region

Remaining an employer of choice by transforming service delivery in a way that is innovative, collaborative and fiscally-responsible.

Objectives

- 1.1 Implement continuous improvement and modernized processes to ensure value-for-money in regional services and programs
- 1.2 Explore and implement opportunities to improve service delivery outcomes through shared services
- 1.3 Deliver fiscally-responsible and sustainable core services
- 1.4 Invest and support a skilled and aligned workforce at Niagara Region

Actions

- Service, Effectiveness and Accountability Reviews
- Data Management Plan
- Transportation Sustainability
- Water and Wastewater Asset Sustainability
- Shared Services Strategy
- Annual Budget and Long-term Forecast Planning
- Human Resource Plan

Green and Resilient Region

Focusing on reducing our collective carbon footprint and preparing to adapt to climate change impacts by ensuring current and future infrastructure is resilient.

Objectives

- 2.1 Deliver operations and services in alignment with the Region's greenhouse gas emission target and climate change goals
- 2.2 Partner with the Local Area Municipalities and community organizations to advance climate change and resilience in the Region
- 2.3 Build resiliency into our Regional infrastructure to support growth and prepare for the impacts of climate change

Actions

- Corporate Climate Change Plan
- Green Fleet Plan and Policy
- Energy Conservation and Demand Management Plan
- Waste Management Plan
- Community Energy Plan
- Climate Adaptation Plan
- South Niagara Wastewater Treatment Plant
- Water, Wastewater Master Servicing Plan Implementation
- Wastewater Biosolids Management Plan
- Greening Strategy

Equitable Region

Providing opportunities for a safe and inclusive Niagara by listening and responding to our current community needs and planning for future growth.

Objectives

- 3.1 Ensure the Region is inclusive, welcoming and free of discrimination
- 3.2 Support growth and development post Bill 23
- 3.3 Improve access to affordable and attainable housing

Actions

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan
- Indigenous Relations Action Plan
- Health Equity Strategic Plan
- Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Community Safety and Well-being Plan
- Growth Management and Staging of Infrastructure Strategy
- Vision Zero Road Safety Initiative Implementation and Complete Streets Guidelines
- Attainable Housing Strategy
- Housing and Homelessness Action Plan/Built for Zero Homelessness Plan
- Consolidated Housing Master Plan
- Support for Affordable and Attainable Development

Prosperous Region

Advocating with senior governments for future growth and enhancing Niagara's transportation network to help support a diverse economy by creating a Region where new and existing businesses can thrive and grow locally, nationally and internationally.

Objectives

- 4.1 Attract and retain businesses, create jobs and support a skilled workforce in Niagara
- 4.2 Build "Niagara" as a global brand and invest in the growth of its emerging sectors
- 4.3 Invest and enhance access to transit, active transportation and other transportation systems in the Region
- 4.4 Be an effective and unified voice to advocate with senior governments on behalf of Niagara

Actions

- Economic Development Strategy
- Labour Force Development Partnerships
- Agri-business Strategy
- Signature Site Strategy
- Core and Emerging Sector Focus
- Expansion of GO Transit
- Transportation Master Plan Update
- Niagara Region Transit Service Support and Growth
- Government Relations Strategy

2023-2026 Council Strategic Priorities

Operational Tactics

Tactic	Description	Status and Timing
Corporate Business Plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will provide staff with a guiding plan for the operational day to day work that drives the organization into the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business plans will be created for each department and division across the Region. Business plans include initiatives that contribute to workplans for departments and divisions. These business plans implement the Strategic Priorities and serve to implement the capital and operating budgets. 	<p>In Progress</p> <p>Planned Completion Q2 2024</p>
Strategic Priority Oversight Teams (SPOT) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teams provide a structured approach for priority setting, managing progress of the key activities and developing and reporting on implementation of the Council Strategic Priorities and the corporate performance measures. The teams ensure a cross-corporate lens on Strategic Priority deliverables, promote corporate-wide accountability, encourage teamwork and departmental information sharing and will provide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Four teams have been formed to ensure oversight of the progress towards completion of the Strategic Priorities. SPOT teams will meet throughout the year to discuss progress on implementation of the Priorities. Deliverables and performance measures will be identified. Progress updates on actions will be updated by SPOT team members or supporting staff into the Envisio tool. 	<p>Launched in January 2023</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

Tactic	Description	Status and Timing
Council with timely updates showcasing successes and challenges.		
Council Staff Report Template	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff will review the current Council staff report template and determine methods to integrate content on considerations of the Council Strategic Priorities' guiding principles and lenses into staff recommendations and Council decision making. 	Q4 2024
Non-Union Leaders Performance Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For 2024, People Leaders will have a corporate-wide shared objective to champion, align and implement the Council Strategic Priorities. 	Complete
Leadership Summit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host a People Leaders summit for all leadership staff in the organization focused on the Council Strategic Priorities. 	In progress Event planned for March 26
Reporting Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a standard report framework to demonstrate to Council how the Council Strategic Priorities are progressing. Reporting on Council Strategic Priorities to coincide with year-in finance reports. Develop a Council Strategic Priorities public dashboard to showcase outputs and outcomes 	In progress

Tactic	Description	Status and Timing
	accomplished. Performance Measures and analytics will be included.	
Annual Budget Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Strategic Priorities will be integrated into the budget development process. • Communicate how the Priorities drive operating and capital budget decisions and resource requirements 	In progress

Communication Tactics

Tactic	Description	Status and Timing
Growing Better Together Brand	Develop a new “Growing Better Together” brand including a narrative to support the project.	Complete
Internal Communications and Workplace Tools	Develop digital and traditional graphic assets to further promote the “Growing Better Together” brand as well as provide staff with additional resources to incorporate the Council Strategic Priorities into their everyday work.	In progress
External Communications	Promote Council Strategic Priorities updates and milestones to key interested parties using digital and traditional communications channels.	Ongoing

Council Strategic Priorities

March 2024 Highlights

Effective Region

Action	Highlights
Shared Services Strategy	<p>The work on shared services addresses four underlying principles established by the Area CAOs, serving the public good, increasing efficiency and effectiveness, improving customer services, as well as, coordinating the use of resourcing and staffing.</p> <p>In October 2023, Report PDS 30-2023 provided an update on the first phase of activities for shared services, including a building services review, identified opportunities for procurement process, policy governance review and expanding on joint procurement. In partnership with Area CAOs, work has commenced on the Building Services Review and Joint Procurement initiatives by outlining workplans, developed in collaboration with subject matter experts.</p> <p>A comprehensive update on these initiatives, as well as other shared services work will be provided to the Planning and Economic Development Committee in April 2024.</p>
Human Resource Plan	<p>The launch of the People Plan aims to support employee's health and wellbeing while also providing opportunities and resources needed for growth. Activities focused on cultivating top talent and reducing employee turnover have commenced.</p> <p>These include, recognizing staff who advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles within their work. In 2023, eight staff were given an award in this category. A corporate learning calendar was promoted and made available to staff, to encourage employees and leaders to advance their skills, along with implementing leadership exploration pathways for non-leaders to understand potential career options.</p> <p>In Q3/Q4 2024, an engagement survey will gather feedback from all Niagara Region staff, and the benefits compensation review will be completed.</p>

Green-Resilient Region

Action	Highlights
Corporate Climate Change Action Plan	<p>The development of the Corporate Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) is underway due to the successful selection of an external consultant and the creation of the internal cross-division corporate action plan sub-committee. The CCAP will provide the Region with short- and long-term strategies to align with meeting the corporate greenhouse gas emission reduction target of net-zero GHG emissions by 2050. This includes actions for energy reduction at corporate facilities, wastewater treatment plants, fleet vehicles, and street lighting, as well as policies and initiatives throughout our operations and service delivery. A draft plan is aimed to be completed in Q2 2024, following that will be a presentation to Council in Q3 2024.</p>
Energy Conservation and Demand Management Plan	<p>The 2019 to 2023 Energy Conservation and Demand Management (CDM) Plan has been completed and work is underway to create a new Plan for 2024-2028. Achievements for the 2019-2023 plan include, establishing the Niagara Region Energy Working Group, quarterly meetings with client groups to find energy reduction opportunities, embedding energy reduction goals and guidelines into Service Level Agreements (SLA's) with Region Departments, and establishing a LEED Silver minimum standard for new facility construction. These efforts helped to reduce energy use in Corporate and Long-Term Care buildings by 8% combined electricity and natural gas reduction on a per square foot basis since 2018.</p> <p>The new Plan will be developed in parallel with the Corporate Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) and will help to define the goals for corporate energy and greenhouse gas reduction over the next five years. Development of a new CDM Plan includes a comprehensive review of the progress made over the last five years (2019-2023). The goal is to have an updated CDM Plan, with an evaluation of past achievements and establishment of future targets, submitted to Committee in Q2 of 2024. Additionally, from Q2-Q3 2024, staff will be working with consultants to develop a Pathway to Net Zero for 8-12 corporate buildings, as well as, an in-depth feasibility study for deep carbon cutting measures at the Region's Headquarters building. This includes a soil thermal conductivity test to confirm the feasibility of geothermal heating/cooling.</p>

Equitable Region

Action	Highlights
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan	<p>The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Action Plan reaches all Niagara Region staff and community members. It aims to build welcoming and inclusive communities and workplaces, while eliminating barriers. A new employee recognition category celebrated twenty staff who advanced DEI work in the organization or community. A DEI Community of Practice was established in Niagara with over 100 members. The DEI team developed a learning curriculum for staff, Councillors, and volunteers. The development of a DEI handbook is underway. This resource will help staff incorporate DEI into their daily work. It will provide advice in areas such as communication, leadership, and community engagement.</p>
Community Safety and Well-being Plan	<p>The Community Safety and Well-being Plan (CSWB) is working to improve responses to 9-1-1 calls involving mental health/ addictions. In 2023, CSWB collected and analyzed data, reviewed identified pain points with the Action Table, and engaged in jurisdictional scans and a literature review to develop recommendations to improve 9-1-1 responses. On March 5th 2024, the report COM 9-2024 CSWB 911 Action Table: Findings and Recommendations was put forward for consideration and approved at Committee.</p> <p>In collaboration with community agencies, the CSWB team devised a region-wide plan to expand the Situation Table model across all of Niagara region. Table meetings meet regularly to identify community members who are at risk for crime or victimization and provide support before a crisis event occurs. The planning and implementation of the expansion plan includes 40 participating agencies across 12 sectors in a collective effort to use community resources more effectively. In October 2023, the first two Tables were launched, including Table 1: Port-Colborne, Wainfleet, Welland, Pelham, and Table 2: St. Catharines, Thorold. In January 2024, Table 3: Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-lake, Fort Erie, and Table 4: Grimsby, Lincoln, West Lincoln.</p> <p>CSWB drafted the Gun and Gang Prevention Strategy through the Building Safer Communities Fund. In September 2023, a call for grant applications was launched to mobilize the strategy and action the areas of focus identified by the community. This resulted in 9 agencies being supported in providing youth crime prevention and intervention programming throughout the Niagara Region.</p>

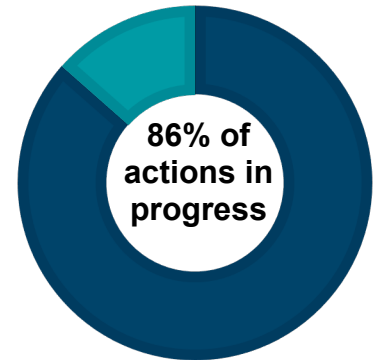
Prosperous Region

Action	Highlights
Economic Development Strategy	<p>The Economic Development Strategy outlines the goals and actions that will guide the Niagara Economic Development team to build a strong and sustainable economy for Niagara residents.</p> <p>A Customer Relationship Management system has been procured and implemented for Niagara Economic Development (NED). By leveraging the Microsoft Dynamics platform staff can document customer interactions, track progress on open files, respond efficiently, prioritize opportunities, and ensure succession. NED in partnership with the Workforce Collective, post-secondary institutions, Niagara Industrial Association, and local employment agencies created the ‘Workforce Coalition.’ This coalition has developed a pilot project to identify and recruit the necessary skills and attract the required labour force in core and emerging sectors.</p>
Government Relations Strategy	<p>Throughout 2023, considerable efforts were made to be proactive in Niagara’s Government Relations approach to ensure Regional priorities were showcased to upper levels of government.</p> <p>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 “Growing Better Together” branding for the Region’s core priorities and was proactive in hosting Niagara-specific advocacy events. These efforts helped bolster the Region’s reputation as a municipal leader while demonstrating how Niagara is working to advance areas of mutual interest with the provincial and federal governments.</p> <p>To build off 2023 successes, pre-budget submissions were completed during provincial and federal consultations to reaffirm advocacy priorities in Q1.</p> <p>Preparations for Niagara Week taking place in Q2 are underway and efforts to streamline external grant opportunities across the organization is targeted for late Q3 early Q4.</p>

Council Strategic Priorities Actions Initiated or In Progress

Effective Region

- Service, Effectiveness and Accountability Reviews
- Data Management Plan
- Water and Wastewater Asset Sustainability
- Shared Services Strategy
- Annual Budget and Long-term Forecast Planning
- Human Resource Plan



Green/Resilient Region

- Waste Management Plan
- Energy Conservation and Demand Management Plan
- Corporate Climate Change Action Plan
- Greening Strategy
- Water, Wastewater Master Servicing Plan Implementation
- South Niagara Wastewater Treatment Plant
- Water and Wastewater Biosolids Management Plan

Equitable Region

- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Action Plan
- Indigenous Relations Action Plan
- Health Equity Strategic Plan
- Community Safety and Well-being Plan
- Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Growth Management and Staging of Infrastructure Strategy
- Vision Zero Road Safety Implementation
- Attainable Housing Strategy
- Support for Affordable and Attainable Development
- Consolidate Housing Master Plan
- Housing and Homelessness Action Plan/Built for Zero Homelessness Plan

Prosperous Region

- Economic Development Strategy
- Core and Emerging Sector Focus
- Argi-business Strategy
- Labour Force Development Partnerships
- Signature Site Strategy
- Niagara Region Transit Service Support and Growth
- Expansion of GO Transit
- Government Relations Strategy