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Memorandum

CHR 5-

2024

TO: Regional Council

FROM: Daryl Barnhart, Chief of Staff
Office of the Regional Chair

DATE: June 27, 2024

SUBJECT: **Report on 2024 Niagara Week Activities**

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide Council with a summary of the outcomes of Niagara Week, an advocacy event that the Region hosted at Queen's Park from May 13 to 15, 2023. Niagara Week is an ad hoc advocacy initiative that provides members of Council a unique opportunity to meet one-on-one with provincial leaders to discuss core Regional priorities, as endorsed by Council through report CAO 2-2024.

In total, eight meetings were held with senior members of Cabinet, Parliamentary Assistants and senior staff within the provincial government. Given the targeted nature of the 30-minute meetings, discussions allowed for productive, meaningful conversations regarding how the Region and province can collaboratively move forward on large-scale initiatives that will ensure we are well positioned to best serve Niagara and Ontario's growing population.

The Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce (GNCC) supported the event by hosting meetings with ministerial representatives during the latter half of the week. Additionally, the GNCC worked with the Region's Economic Development team to showcase local businesses during the May 13 MPP reception.

Further information regarding the MPP reception and meeting outcomes are provided below.

Advocacy Requests

The advocacy requests presented to provincial leaders included the following:

- **South Niagara Falls Wastewater Solutions Project**

Request: that the province provide one-third funding for the SNWTS project irrespective of a matching federal commitment, and that the province continue to advocate for a national infrastructure program.

- **Consolidated Housing Master Plan Support**

Request: that the province co-invest in the 320 Geneva Street project to increase the supply of affordable, supportive, bridge and market-rate units.

- **Shared Services**

Request: that the province reintroduce the Municipal Modernization Program with a renewed focus on shared service implementation between two-tier municipalities.

- **GO Train Service**

Request: that all day, two-way GO train service be introduced between Union Station and Niagara.

Meeting Outcomes

Each meeting lasted approximately 30 minutes. To ensure advocacy requests received support from as many Cabinet members as possible, Ministry selection was based on the relevancy the 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.

A number of Ministers confirmed their support for the SNWTS project, including the Premier who reaffirmed his commitment of providing one-third funding predicated on the federal government matching the investment. In addition, a number of Ministers and senior provincial staff expressed interest in additional briefings, as well as organizing future site visits in Niagara.

Outcomes of the eight meetings held during Niagara Week are detailed below.

Ministry / Participant(s)	Topic	Key Outcomes
Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade Hon. Victor Fedeli, Minister	SNWTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minister Fedeli confirmed his endorsement of the SNWTS and shared his support in moving forward with federal advocacy
Ministry of Red Tape Reduction Maud Murray, Deputy Minister	Shared Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Deputy Minister expressed interest in learning about best practices associated with Niagara's shared services process Requested a second meeting to further discuss opportunities to support shared service implementation in Niagara
Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks Hon. Andrea Khanjin, Minister	SNWTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minister Khanjin was interested in learning about the environmental benefits of the SNWTS The Minister committed to providing a letter of endorsement to support federal advocacy efforts
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing Paul Calandra, Minister	320 Geneva St.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minister Calandra committed to continue working with Niagara Region to determine how to best support ongoing housing initiatives amid changing provincial and federal policy and funding directives Provided additional insight and perspectives regarding intergovernmental relations and the position of the provincial government
Office of the Premier and the Ministries of Municipal Affairs and	SNWTS GO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Premier reaffirmed his commitment of providing one-third

Ministry / Participant(s)	Topic	Key Outcomes
<p>Housing, Finance, Infrastructure and Transportation</p> <p>Hon. Doug Ford, Premier Hon. Paul Calandra, Minister (MMAH) Hon. Kinga Surma, Minister (MOI) Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister (MOF) Hon. Prabmeet Sarkaria, Minister (MTO)</p>		<p>funding for the SNWTS, predicated on federal partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Minister of Finance and Infrastructure shared they are engaging in ongoing discussions with federal counterparts to ensure funding for wastewater infrastructure is a priority in the forthcoming Canada Housing Infrastructure Fund • The Premier and Minister of Transportation confirmed that expanding GO train service in Niagara remains a top priority
<p>Treasury Board</p>	<p>GO</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior staff provided insight regarding key metrics that would support a successful treasury board submission requesting GO service expansion in Niagara
<p>Ministry of Transportation</p> <p>Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam, Associate Minister</p>	<p>GO</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Associate Minister shared that expanding the One Fare program remains a top priority for his office • Expressed an understanding that, in order to successfully expand the program in Niagara, additional GO service is needed • Committed to working with the Minister to expand GO service to Niagara
<p>Ministry of Infrastructure</p> <p>Amarjot Sandhu, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister</p>	<p>SNWTS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MOI indicated they are supportive of the SNWTS project • PA Sandhu committed to following up with the Minister to support further federal advocacy

MPP Reception

As has been customary of past Niagara Week events, the Region hosted a reception on Monday, May 13 from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. The event allowed for meaningful networking, highlighted ongoing partnership between the Region and the province and helped demonstrate opportunities for further collaboration.

Several senior members of government were in attendance, including Minister Lecce, Minister Calandra, Minister Lumsden, Minister Thompson, Minister Dunlop, Minister Cho, Minister Fedeli, Minister Pirie, Minister Smith, Minister Parsa, Associate Minister Williams and Associate Minister Flack. Other provincial attendees included senior minister office staff, Niagara's MPPs and party leaders.

News Coverage and Communications

Niagara Week was highly successful in moving Regional Council's advocacy priorities forward with the province. News coverage of the event was widespread and positive. The Standard, Thorold Today and 101 More FM promoted Niagara Region's advocacy requests while referencing the success of the event.

As part of Niagara Week, the Region's Government Relations and Advocacy webpage was updated to further promote how senior levels of government can co-invest and partner in large-scale Regional projects. The [Growing Better Together](https://www.niagararegion.ca/government/advocacy/priorities.aspx) webpage (<https://www.niagararegion.ca/government/advocacy/priorities.aspx>) provides additional details on the priorities brought forward and highlights the progress Regional Council and staff have made thus far to move each initiative forward. To promote the website, briefing notes and reception takeaways included the webpage's URL.

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.

Financial Considerations

The costs associated with Niagara Week totaled \$26,347. Final expenditures were \$13,652 below the \$40,000 budget approved for the event, with the most substantive

costs incurred through accommodations and the catering for the May 13 MPP reception.

Expenses related to Niagara Week are an investment in the Region and will serve to help move Niagara's priorities forward with the provincial government. The ability to network one-on-one with members of Cabinet and ministerial staff during the MPP reception, as well as the 30-minute Niagara specific Minister meetings were an invaluable investment in the Region's advocacy efforts.

Next Steps

To build off the success of Niagara Week, follow-up letters have been sent to each Ministry thanking them for their time and requesting next steps on meeting outcomes. 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. Staff will also continue to identify opportunities to further advance federal advocacy efforts.

As a next step, staff will be undertaking a holistic review of the Region's numerous advocacy strategies to assess that resources are being best used to accomplish the goals and objectives of the organization. To this end, the appropriate frequency of future Niagara Week events will be considered to ensure we are maximizing our government relations efforts.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Niagara Week supports Council's 2023-2026 Strategic Priority of creating a Prosperous Region. Further, the advocacy topics proposed support Council's remaining priorities of creating an Effective Region, a Green and Resilient Region and an Equitable Region.

Sincerely,

Daryl Barnhart, MA, APR
Chief of Staff
Office of the Regional Chair