
Subject: Federal Advocacy Update

Report to: Regional Council

Report date: Thursday, August 29, 2024

Recommendations

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

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to update Council on federal advocacy planned for October 28 – 29, which will build off of the success of Niagara Week 2024.
- A key outcome of Niagara Week was that the Honourable Premier Ford reaffirmed his commitment, in principle, that the province will provide one-third funding for the South Niagara Wastewater Treatment Solution (SNWTS) project predicated on matching federal support.
- As announced in the 2024 Federal Budget, a Canada Housing Infrastructure Fund (CHIF) is targeted to launch by January 2025. The October engagement will allow delegates to reiterate the importance of Regional wastewater infrastructure being eligible under the CHIF while highlighting the SNWTS project.
- The engagement will also allow the Region to advocate for other key infrastructure projects that will enable housing in industrial development.
- Additionally, in collaboration with the Chair's Office, staff are exploring opportunities to participate in joint delegations with neighbouring Region's to discuss how the federal government can enhance future policy and program decisions that impact upper-tier municipal service delivery and sustainability.
- Details on proposed advocacy topics are provided in the analysis section.

Financial Considerations

October's federal advocacy engagement will have a targeted scope with meeting participation limited to key officials and senior staff. Expenses will reflect the cost of travel and accommodation for the two-day period. There is sufficient funding in the 2024 operating budget for this expenditure.

Federal Advocacy Attendance

To remain cost effective and support productive meetings with federal officials, participation in the October event will be limited to the Regional Chair and select members of the Corporate Leadership Team. This aligns with approaches partnering Region's will be taking, should joint meetings be secured.

Analysis

Proposed delegation topics build upon 2024 advocacy efforts to support the advancement of Council's Strategic Priorities. Please note, requests may be refined and enhanced over the coming months as staff collaborate with Regional counterparts on best approaches. Additionally, requests may be subject to change based on provincial and/or federal announcements made prior to October.

South Niagara Wastewater Treatment Solution Project

In May 2023 and 2024, members of Regional Council secured a commitment, in principle, from the Honourable Premier Doug Ford for one-third project funding. This commitment was predicated on the Government of Canada introducing an infrastructure program that supports a cost sharing structure with provincial and local governments. In response, Niagara Region has engaged in the following federal advocacy initiatives:

- Sent a request to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities for a new federal infrastructure program, which was supported by eight FCM Ontario Caucus members.
- Met with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities in November 2023 to discuss the request.
- Requested funding through the 2024 federal pre-budget consultation process.

With the CHIF planned to launch in Q1 2025, proactively meeting with senior officials will allow the Region to highlight the SNWTS project and reemphasize that, in order to service future growth, Regional infrastructure projects must be eligible under the fund.

Request: that the CHIF support net-new wastewater infrastructure projects introduced by Regional municipalities, including the SNWTS project.

Supporting Enhanced Policy and Program Design

As two-tier governments, Regional municipalities are responsible for delivering essential programs and services that touch the lives of residents and businesses every day. From providing high-quality drinking water and maintaining regional roads, building housing-enabling infrastructure to unlock new development, delivering homelessness supports, building and managing social housing, administering public health and operating long-term care homes, Regional services support residents throughout every stage of life.

To meet increasing resident demand, the federal government must continue to work in partnership with Regional municipalities to ensure essential programs and services remain affordable while responding to changing community need and setting up the conditions for growth.

Request: that the federal government enhance existing or upcoming policy and programs to include support for Regional municipalities.

Municipal Growth Framework

As Canada continues to welcome new residents, municipalities must maintain and introduce new water and wastewater infrastructure, local roads, public transit and community amenities that residents and businesses depend on for a high quality of life. Additionally, in response to historic population growth all levels of government must work in partnership to build enough housing to restore affordability while ensuring local infrastructure is sufficient to support development.

While provincial and federal revenues increase with inflation, municipal revenues are not tied to economic activity. This has resulted in local governments contending with increased wages, construction costs and interest rates without corresponding growth in revenue. To ensure the financial sustainability of municipalities, a review of the federal municipal funding framework must be conducted.

Request: that the federal government collaborate with all orders of government to develop a Municipal Growth Framework that provides a predictable, equitable way to fund local governments as proposed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Engaging in federal advocacy supports Council's 2023-2026 Strategic Priority of creating a Prosperous Region. Further, delegation topics support Council's priorities of creating an Effective Region, a Green and Resilient Region and an Equitable Region.

Next Steps

Staff will continue to prepare for the October advocacy days and will provide Council with further updates closer to the event.

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