
Subject: Government Relations Advocacy Priorities 2020-2022

Report to: Committee of the Whole

Report date: Thursday, February 27, 2020

Recommendations

1. That Regional Council **ENDORSE** the list of priority advocacy issues outlined in this report that incorporate the shared priorities of the local area municipalities
2. That Regional Council **ENDORSE** the list of priority advocacy issues outlined in this report that are specific to Regional operations or jurisdiction
3. That staff **BE DIRECTED** to plan and execute a “Niagara Week” event occurring May 25 - 27, 2020 in collaboration with the 12 local area municipalities and the local business community

Key Facts

- Actively advocating the region’s priorities to senior levels of government to influence policy and/or funding decisions is an integral component of our government relations strategy and helps ensure Niagara makes progress on several key items
- Niagara Region and the local area municipalities are in consensus that an overarching strategic approach to communicating consistent, united messaging to federal and provincial governments is critical to achieving effective policy changes and securing additional funding reflective of local need
- After extensive consultation, the key shared policy issues have been identified under six overarching themes: Housing and Homelessness, Transit, Transportation, Infrastructure, Environment, and Economic Development
- Niagara Region will also continue to advocate in areas that are specifically related to Regional business and priorities, including:
 - Needs-based funding for social assistance programs (including Ontario Works and supports for victims of Human Trafficking)
 - Provincial Partnership on a Province-wide Mobile Integrated Health Model
 - Public Health Funding
 - Investments in front-line care for seniors living in Long-Term Care
 - Continued support for Niagara Region’s two long-term care redevelopment projects

- Building on the demonstrated success of previous terms, a return to the “Niagara Week” advocacy strategy will allow the Region to have in-depth briefings with cabinet ministers and senior provincial staff in the interest of progressing Niagara’s priorities at Queen’s Park.

Financial Considerations

Dedicated funds for government relations activities have been allocated through the existing Strategic Communications and Public Affairs annual budget. The cost to execute on all elements of this plan will be covered within the currently approved corporate budget.

Analysis

Speaking with ‘One Voice’: why a united, consistent message is important to successful advocacy

The health and prosperity of the entire region depends on Niagara working together to achieve common goals. From a government relations lens, these goals are policy changes and the acquisition of funding to address the needs of its residents, support the region’s economic growth, ensure the preservation of our natural environment and help protect those most vulnerable. To this end, the Niagara Region is making strides to reposition the Regional brand at Queen’s Park and to reinforce a positive image among other levels of government.

Since the 2018 election, many councils across the region have identified their priorities for this term (often through the establishment of a strategy plan). Collaboration between the Region and the local area municipalities on these priorities is paramount to ensuring a united, consistent message is brought forward to senior levels of government. This collaborative approach will ensure the timely sharing of information and guarantee the local perspective is incorporated into advocacy discussions. Moreover, this collaborative approach will alleviate duplication and potential confusion when meeting with the federal and provincial government.

To achieve increased success with securing more frequent and larger funding grants as well as generating quicker returns on its advocacy efforts, the Region is approaching advocacy with greater organization, preparation, and engagement with the local area municipalities. By demonstrating to the other levels of government that the regional municipalities are working together, this united front will increase the likelihood of success through “power in numbers”. Therefore, extensive collaboration between the

Region and local area municipalities on common issues is essential to establishing a united and coordinated approach to advocacy that delivers a strong, consistent, and impactful message on regional issues.

Utilizing the expertise and influence of the municipal associations, our local federal and provincial representatives, community stakeholders as well as other municipal counterparts, these connections will complement the Region's and local area municipalities' internal staff resources.

Consultation Process and Selection Criteria

The recommended advocacy issues in this report were developed following interviews with the 12 area CAOs (and some Mayors). These 90-minute consultation interviews were conducted by the Government & Stakeholder Relations Specialist and the Executive Officer to the Regional Chair. The selection of issues was also informed by other key municipal documents such as the Region and local Councils' Strategic Plans, Annual Budgets, and the Region's Economic Development Strategy.

A balanced approach was taken to ensure the interests of all municipalities were considered in the selection of the issues the Region would include in its advocacy efforts. Advocacy issues that are unique to a particular municipality, albeit not included, can anticipate the Region's support when required.

Similar to the criteria used to develop the Region's AMO delegation priorities in Q3 2019, the following seven points were used to create the list of priorities:

1. Is the issue Niagara specific?
2. Are other organizations involved? Do we have partners?
3. Does it have a region-wide benefit?
4. Does it align with council's strategic goals and direction?
5. Has there been previous or current effort on this issue?
6. Does this issue have alignment with provincial policy or direction?
7. Does the Region stand to benefit financially or socially?

Opportunities for Advocacy and Enhanced Collaboration

Throughout the term, the Region and local area municipalities take advantage of numerous opportunities to advocate with senior levels of government for favourable policy changes and funding. It is recommended that Niagara's municipalities continue to seek out and leverage these opportunities to forward their concerns to the federal and provincial governments.

In addition to the issue-specific opportunities that arise from time-sensitive items that occur on an as-needed basis, Niagara also takes advantage of more scheduled opportunities such as the resurrection of Niagara Week at Queen's Park (and potentially in Ottawa), delegations at municipal conferences (FCM, AMO and ROMA) and regularly scheduled consultation with our local MPPs and MPs. Other government relations activities will be identified through a forthcoming comprehensive government relations strategy.

While the Region and local area municipalities will continue taking advantage of every opportunity that becomes available, there was unanimous agreement as part of the consultation phase that the Region and local area municipalities need to make a better effort to share information and coordinate delegations. Uncoordinated delegations and presentations to senior levels of government can be damaging to our brand, causes confusion and impacts our likelihood of achieving success.

Summary of Shared Advocacy Priorities

The recommended key priorities are grouped under six themes: Housing and Homelessness, Transit Services, Transportation Network, Infrastructure, Environment, and Economic Development. Embedded in many of these themes are micro issues that, if addressed, will influence the success of the macro issue. Many of these anticipated policy changes will have the opportunity to gain quick traction, whereas others will require greater investment of time and resources.

1. Housing and Homelessness

1.1) Providing More Housing Options for Local Residents

A collaboration with the federal and provincial governments is required to develop solutions, including capital investments and funding for incentives for proponents, for increasing the housing supply and making available more affordable housing in the region - particularly for seniors, low-income (those in core housing need), and the homeless. Increased funding for community housing from the Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative and the Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative, is essential to both support existing stock and address the immediate needs for new rental development – particularly for supportive housing for those most vulnerable.

1.2) Retention of Rental Accommodations

The supply of rental accommodations is experiencing greater pressure from a number of local changes including the rise in “**short term vacation**” rental units, which are also creating additional challenges for municipal by-law enforcement. Stricter regulations by the province related to short-term vacation rentals is necessary.

Compounded by this transition to a disruptive economy, the **influx of international post-secondary students** into the rental market is displacing low income residents as larger rental units are being converted into smaller student housing. In contrast to this exercise, other property owners are **converting rental units into condominium units** to take advantage of the profitable housing market attracting residents from around the Greater Toronto and Golden Horseshoe Area. Niagara has identified the immediate need for purpose built rental, supported by direct investment, incentives and expedited planning/approval processes.

2. Transit Services

- 2.1) Continue advocating for GO Transit rail service expansion to Niagara Falls
- 2.2.) Begin advocating for potential funding for the anticipated Regionalization of public transit services in Niagara

3. Transportation Network

- 3.1) Implementation of the 2017 Transportation Master Plan

Advocating on the implementation the 2017 Transportation Master Plan including provincial funding and policy support for the **Niagara-Hamilton Trade Corridor** and Connective Transportation Initiatives, such as the **East-West Corridor** and the **North-South Escarpment Crossing**

- 3.2) Enhancements to the QEW Transportation Corridor

Advocating in support of a north-south interchange at the **405/QEW juncture** to facilitate the commercial, tourist and local traffic as well as enabling emergency service access to Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niagara Falls, and the Queenston-Lewiston Border Crossing

Coordinating with the Ministry of Transportation on the planning and staging of traffic during the **twinning of the Garden Skyway**, to mitigate the traffic impact during this construction project.

4. Infrastructure

4.1) South Niagara Falls Wastewater Treatment Plant

Advocate for capital funding for the development of a new Waste Water Treatment Plan that will support the anticipated growth in South Niagara Falls as well as offload some of the strain on the existing Niagara Falls system and plant

4.2) Broadband Internet

Leveraging the federal and provincial government's priority to connect all rural and northern communities with reliable broadband internet, by advocating to bring the appropriate broadband infrastructure to the region's rural communities that will have significant economic benefits to its residents, local businesses and farming industry

5. Environment

5.1) Climate change

Additional financial support is required from other levels of government to compensate for the massive impact climate change, particularly on the subject of flood mitigation, shoreline erosion and the result on property assessments. Collaboration on climate change mitigation solutions is required to prevent further property damage and can be achieved, in part, through increased government investment in technical and material innovations. Redirecting the federal and provincial government's priority on climate change to research and development and subsequently the acceleration and commercialization of this climate change mitigating technology will provide the regional municipalities with the proactive measures to adapt its infrastructure to climate events instead of relying solely on disaster relief funding following a climate event.

5.2) Cannabis Production

Clear guidelines and additional regulations from Health Canada as well as increased compensation for enforcement is necessary to combat the environmental impact (light and air pollution emanating from both open-air and

greenhouse production) experienced by rural communities from cannabis production

5.3) Greenbelt Protection

Ensure the Greenbelt continues to support protection of Specialty Crop and Tender Fruit Lands while taking into consideration that mapping and guidelines adjustments are required and warranted to address the redevelopment of non-far properties such as brownfields and existing developed sites.

6. Economic Development

6.1) Reassess Current Tax Rates and Fees for the Agricultural Sector

Agricultural lands to reflect the lower commercial tax rate in contrast to the higher residential tax rate these lands are currently assessed. As most agricultural production more closely aligns with commercial activities. This will help alleviate some of the financial stress of the struggling agri-food sector.

6.2) Redevelopment of Canal Lands (particularly surplus lands)

In various communities around the region surplus land exists around the Welland Canal. These lands have the beneficial economic development opportunities that can stimulate the local economy. Support is required to negotiate the disposition of these lands from federal agencies.

Region-Specific Priorities

In addition to the region-wide advocacy issues, Niagara Region will continue to advocate on a number of key corporate priorities. Advocacy on these issues will alleviate legislative and regulatory challenges as well as fiscal constraints encountered by the municipality in the delivery of public services and capital projects.

These issues would include long-standing priorities such as:

- Needs-based/equitable funding for homelessness, human trafficking and social assistance programs (i.e. Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI), Ontario Works), Human Trafficking Safe House/Supportive Housing
- Mobile Integrated Health Model
- Public Health Funding
- Investments in front-line care for seniors living in long-term care and continued support for two significant redevelopment projects

Staff recognize that there may be occasions when advocacy priorities will need to be adjusted to immediately address new legislation or government policies announced during the remainder of the Regional Council term. When situations arise where new policy changes significantly affect the delivery of core services, regional planning and operations, or governance structure, staff will update Council on these policy changes, their impact, and recommended response or actions.

The Return of Niagara Week

Building on the highly successful Niagara Weeks from 2011-2014, Niagara Region will be making a return to Queen's Park from May 25-26. With the support of MPP Sam Oosterhoff, staff will be securing meetings with key ministers and senior public servants to advance the issues identified in this report. These delegations will be approximately one-hour in length to provide for fulsome discussions on a number of issues. To manage the number of representatives attending delegations, the selection of participant Councillors will be carefully considered on the basis of level of expertise and knowledge on the issue. Additionally, select regional stakeholders, including representatives from applicable area municipalities, will be invited to join the delegations as appropriate.

Niagara Region is partnering with the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) to capitalize on common advocacy issues. The Chamber will be utilizing the latter days of the week (May 27-28) for their advocacy, which will collectively re-establish the Niagara Week brand.

In conjunction with Niagara Week, the Region will be hosting a Niagara Reception in partnership with the Chamber and other regional stakeholders. This event will be held on the evening of Monday, May 25 at Queen's Park and will feature the best of what Niagara has to offer. As details are finalized, additional information will be shared with Regional Council.

Ultimately, these government relations activities will increase Niagara Region's visibility among high-profile provincial decision-makers to cultivate Niagara's position as a legitimate partner and advisor in municipal-provincial policy development.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The recommendations contained in this report support Council's 2019-2022 Strategic Priorities by supporting the following strategic objectives:

Supporting Business and Economic Growth

Objective 1.1: Economic Growth and Development

Objective 2.1: Enhance Community Wellbeing

Healthy and Vibrant Community

Objective 2.2: Mental Health and Wellbeing

Objective 2.3: Addressing Affordable Housing Needs

Responsible Growth and Infrastructure Planning

Objective 3.1: Advancing Regional Transit and GO Rail Services

Objective 3.2: Environmental Sustainability and Stewardship

Objective 3.3: Maintain Existing Infrastructure

Objective 3.4: Facilitating the Movement of People and Goods

Sustainable and Engaging Government

Objective 4.2: Enhanced Communication

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Appendices

Appendix A

Comprehensive List of Local Area Policy Issues

In addition to the high priority issues identified in Report CAO 1-2020, other region-wide issues currently impacting local area municipalities requiring advocacy support include:

Environmental Issues

- Eradication or control of invasive Phragmites species proliferating in wetlands and along transportation networks, which is causing significant damage to water and wastewater infrastructure, wildlife, and regional/ municipal resources
- Excess soil reallocation (contaminated soil)
 - Different from emerging provincial regulation on transfer of brownfield soils (not soils along ditches)
- Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (clarifying jurisdiction and oversight on planning matters)

Health Services

- South Niagara Hospital – Reinforce continued provincial support and approval for Phase 1 and 2, funding of the project, and advancing the project time-line (expected opening Q2 2022)
- West Lincoln Memorial Hospital - The Ontario government has given Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) the green light to proceed to the next step (Stage 2) toward building a new West Lincoln Memorial Hospital (WLMH).

The new hospital will include inpatient services, an emergency department, maternal and newborn services, day surgical services, endoscopy, diagnostic services and ambulatory services. Regional healthcare services such as cancer and cardiac care will continue to be provided at other hospital sites.

Provincial funding support in the construction of the hospital is essential to its completion.

Economic Development

- Streamlining Grant Applications to reduce the burden to apply (particularly on smaller or rural municipalities) Monitoring and applying for infrastructure funding requires considerable resources and by streamlining multiple funding streams into one application will reduce red-tape and municipal costs
- Municipal Irrigation Systems - Advocate for their eligibility for municipal infrastructure funding
- Supporting wineries and craft breweries in the elimination of import fees resulting from being categorized as international products