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**Subject:** Economic Development Offices Collaboration

**Report to:** Planning and Economic Development Committee

**Report date:** Wednesday, May 13, 2020

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## **Recommendations**

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information; and
2. That, in the current circumstances, staff **BE DIRECTED** to defer the development of a 10 year Regional Economic Development Strategy in collaboration with the Local Area Municipalities' economic development offices.

## **Key Facts**

- This report was prepared before COVID-19 started to have an impact. Staff are now focused on supporting businesses and developing an Economic Recovery Plan, in collaboration with all economic development offices.
- This report is in response to the motion passed at PEDC on January 15<sup>th</sup> which gave direction to staff to engage with the economic development offices in the local area municipalities to discuss collaboration, including funding and resource allocation, to develop a 10 year economic development strategy for the Niagara region.
- The municipalities that have economic development offices are the Town of Fort Erie, Town of Lincoln, City of Niagara Falls, City of Port Colborne, City of St. Catharines and the City of Welland. It is recognized that both the Town of Grimsby and the City of Thorold are currently in recruitment for economic development positions and will be included in this list when the positions are filled.
- Six meetings were held by the Acting Director, Economic Development, in February and March 2020. These meetings included attendance by the local Economic Development Officer/Director, the Mayor and in some cases the CAO and a Regional Councillor.
- As a result of these meetings, letters of commitment expressing support were received from five municipalities and are included in Appendix 1.

## **Financial Considerations**

The motion recommended that the economic development staff at the Region and in the Local Area Municipalities collaborate on the development of a 10 year strategy. There

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are no financial implications as the strategy will be developed in-house by economic development staff.

However, it may be necessary to bring in specialized skills from external resources for aspects of the strategy development. For example, a consultant to facilitate the discussion in the stakeholder consultations or an expert to discuss best practice scenarios in other municipalities may be necessary. These costs can be accommodated within the Economic Development 2020 Operating Budget.

## **Analysis**

The current Economic Development Strategic Plan is a five year Action Plan, covering 2019-2024 that was developed internally by Niagara Economic Development staff. It addresses topics and issues identified through extensive stakeholder consultations conducted in 2018. Regional economic development staff are currently working on the implementation of this Action Plan.

An update on the progress of this plan to date was presented in a report to PEDC on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The discussion which followed resulted in a motion being adopted to gauge the commitment level of the local area economic development offices to work in collaboration on a 10 year plan. The discussion suggested that this would replace the need to engage an economic development consultant, through a competitive RFP process to develop the strategy. In addition to the Regional Economic Development team there are six municipalities who have Economic Development staff.

The municipalities of Thorold and Grimsby have approval from their Councils to move forward with the appointment of an Economic Development Officer/Manager during 2020. When those positions are filled, they will be invited to collaborate on the Regional Economic Development Strategy.

The five municipalities who committed to participating in the strategy development are: Town of Fort Erie; City of Niagara Falls; City of Port Colborne; Town of Lincoln and the City of St. Catharines. Each municipality has signed a letter of commitment and those letters are attached to this report in Appendix 1. Each municipality has its own economic development strategy which is unique to its community. A region-wide strategy would identify common themes where a collaborative effort, would be needed to ensure that progress is achieved as well as identify where there is a Regional government level responsibility needed. This strategy would also look at longer term goals and objectives for Niagara, its economy and its business environment.

A number of comments and discussion points came out of the meetings and are captured below, in no order of priority.

- In a 10 year strategy we should consider the global economy, social disruption of artificial intelligence and automation, climate change, food security, irrigation, access to fresh water.
- The Memorandum of Understanding signed by the CAOs in 2012 should be revisited. (This was also brought forward in a motion by Councillor Huson at the March 11<sup>th</sup> PEDC meeting, which was approved.)
- The importance of the marine industry to Niagara and the potential opportunity around the seaway lands should be one of the considerations.
- There is a need to decide what the Region's involvement is in tourism.
- Integration of industrial development and natural heritage features should be considered.
- Regional assistance is needed for infrastructure to service industrial land.
- Municipalities have different perspectives on priorities depending on their needs and location.
- Engage a consultant to determine the Regional role in the economic development strategy, how it supports local economic development strategies, look at best practices and define the goal.

At a meeting with the Mayor of Welland and municipal economic development staff, it was communicated that the City would not participate or provide resources to the development of a Regional Economic Development Strategy. At the beginning of 2020, the City completed its own economic development strategy using the services of a consultant. They are confident that they are capable of implementing that strategy without collaboration with the Region.

The recommendation in this report is that staff now move forward with the strategy development process which will take place during 2020. As a first step, a meeting will be arranged with municipal economic development representatives to discuss the work plan and methodology. The second step will be to identify the members of the steering committee and the working group and host first meetings of both.

## **Alternatives Reviewed**

The alternative method to develop a 10 year Regional economic development strategy would be to contract with an economic development consultant through a competitive RFP process. The consultant would work under the guidance of Regional Economic

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Development and in collaboration with the Local Area Municipality Economic Development offices. It was expressed by the members of PEDC at the meeting on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 that this was not a preferred alternative.

## **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

The development of a long term economic development strategy is one of Regional Council's Strategic Plan Priorities for 2019-2022 under the theme of 'Supporting Businesses and Economic Growth'.

## **Other Pertinent Reports**

ED 1-2020 Q4 Economic Development Quarterly Update and Annual Strategic Action Plan Report Card.

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### **Prepared by:**

Valerie Kuhns  
Acting, Director  
Economic Development

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### **Submitted by:**

Ron Tripp, P. Eng.  
Acting, Chief Administrative Officer

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1	City of Niagara Falls Letter of Commitment
Appendix 2	City of Port Colborne Letter of Commitment
Appendix 3	City of St. Catharines Letter of Commitment
Appendix 4	Town of Fort Erie Letter of Commitment
Appendix 5	Town of Lincoln Letter of Commitment



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March 17, 2020

Valerie Kuhns, Acting Director  
Niagara Economic Development  
Niagara Region  
P.O. Box 1042  
1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way  
Thorold, ON L2V 4T7

Dear Valerie:

**Re: Niagara Economic Development Strategy**

Following our recent meeting, this letter confirms the commitment by the City of Niagara Falls, Business Development Department and the Mayor to be engaged in the development of a longer term economic development strategy for Niagara region.

Working together, the objective is to ensure that Niagara achieves strong and sustainable economic growth, across all municipalities, by building on its strengths, as well as anticipating and adapting to disruptive change.

Sincerely,

Serge Felicetti  
Director of Business Development  
City of Niagara Falls

Jim Diodati  
Mayor  
City of Niagara Falls



## CITY OF PORT COLBORNE

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Port Colborne, ON L3K 3C8  
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### MAYOR'S OFFICE

February 20, 2020

Ms. Valerie Kuhns  
Acting Director, Economic Development  
Niagara Region  
1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way  
Thorold L2V 4T7

Dear Valerie,

#### Long Term Regional Economic Development Strategy

On January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at the Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee, a motion was moved by Mayor Sendzik and seconded by Mayor Redekop regarding the creation of a long term economic development strategy for Niagara region. This is one of Regional Council's Strategic Priorities under the theme of "Supporting Businesses and Economic Growth". The motion, which passed, was worded as follows:

*"That the Director of Economic Development **BE DIRECTED** to engage the Lower Tier Municipal Economic Development offices respecting a ten year strategy including funding and resources allocation and provide a report back respecting these discussions".*

Following our meeting with you on Friday February 14<sup>th</sup>, this letter confirms the commitment by the City of Port Colborne Economic Development Department and the Mayor to be engaged in the development of a longer term economic development strategy for Niagara region. Working together the objective is to ensure that Niagara achieves strong and sustainable economic growth, across all municipalities, by building on its strengths, as well as anticipating and adapting to disruptive change.

Sincerely,

Julian Douglas-Kameka  
Economic Development Officer

William C. Steele  
Mayor

February 13, 2020

Ms. V. Kuhns  
Acting Director, Economic Development  
Niagara Region  
1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way  
Thorold L2V 4T7

**RE: Long Term Regional Economic Development Strategy**

Dear Valerie,

The strengths of our communities have always supported the strengths of the overall Niagara economy. We were encouraged by the approved motion of January 15, 2020 by Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee regarding the creation of a long term economic development strategy for Niagara and the direction to engage the lower-tier municipalities.

Together we are confident that through this internal-driven exercise, the efforts of Team Niagara will be reformed and refocused to support the natural strengths of our unique communities.

Mayor Sendzik and I are pleased to be involved and engaged in the development of a long-term economic development strategy for the Niagara Region. We believe that great things happen when municipalities and the region work together to achieve common goals. A strategy for a strong, sustainable economic growth across the entire region should be built on our respective strengths and should also anticipate and adapt to disruptive change.

The vision for the region should be bold and forward-looking and we look forward to participating in this endeavour.

Sincerely,



Brian York  
Director, Economic Development  
& Government Relations



Walter Sendzik  
Mayor, City of St. Catharines



January 15, 2020

Planning and Economic Development Committee Open Session PEDC 1-2020

**Item 6.2 ED 1-2020**

Q4 Economic Development Quarterly Update and Annual Strategic Action Plan Report Card

Val Kuhns, Acting Director, Economic Development, provided information respecting Q4 Economic Development Quarterly Update and Annual Strategic Action Plan Report Card.

Topics of the presentation included:

- o Economic Development Strategic Action Plan 2019-2024
- o Regional Council Strategic Priorities 2019-2022
- o Objective 1.1 Economic Growth and Development
- o Objective 1.2 Support Retention and Development of a Skilled Labour Force
- o Objective 1.3 Collaborative Approach to Business Growth and Retention
- o Objective 1.4 Strategically Target Industry Sectors
- o Economic Development Long Term Strategy

Moved by Councillor Ugulini Seconded by Councillor Witteveen

That Report ED 1-2020, dated January 15, 2020, respecting Q4 Economic Development Quarterly Update and Annual Strategic Action Plan Report Card, BE RECEIVED for information.

Moved by Councillor Sendzik Seconded by Councillor Redekop

That the motion **BE AMENDED** to add the following clause:

That the Director of Economic Development **BE DIRECTED** to engage the lower tier municipal Economic Development offices respecting a ten-year economic development strategy including funding opportunities and resource allocation and provide a report respecting the outcome of this engagement.

**Carried**

The Chair called the vote on the motion, as amended, as follows:

That Report ED 1-2020, dated January 15, 2020, respecting Q4 Economic Development Quarterly Update and Annual Strategic Action Plan Report Card, **BE RECEIVED** for information; and

That the Director of Economic Development **BE DIRECTED** to engage the Lower Tier Municipal Economic Development offices respecting a ten year strategy including funding and resources allocation and provide a report back respecting these discussions.

**Carried**





## Economic Development & Tourism Services

March 2, 2020

Sent Via Email:

[valerie.kuhns@niagararegion.ca](mailto:valerie.kuhns@niagararegion.ca)

Mrs. Valerie Kuhns  
Acting Director, Economic Development  
Niagara Region  
1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way  
Thorold L2V 4T7

Dear Mrs. Kuhns:

**Re: Long Term Regional Economic Development Strategy**

On January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at the Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee, a motion was moved by Mayor Sendzik and seconded by Mayor Redekop regarding the creation of a long term economic development strategy for Niagara region. This is one of Regional Council's Strategic Priorities under the theme of "Supporting Businesses and Economic Growth". The motion, which passed, was worded as follows:

*"That the Director of Economic Development **BE DIRECTED** to engage the Lower Tier Municipal Economic Development offices respecting a ten year strategy including funding and resources allocation and provide a report back respecting these discussions".*

Following our meeting with you on Thursday February 20<sup>th</sup>, this letter confirms the commitment by the Town of Fort Erie, Economic Development & Tourism Services and the Mayor to be engaged in the development of a longer term economic development strategy for Niagara region. In working together, the objective is to ensure that Niagara achieves strong and sustainable economic growth, across all municipalities, by building on its strengths, as well as anticipating and adapting to disruptive change.

Yours very truly,



Wayne H. Redekop  
Mayor



Caralee Grummett  
Manager, Economic Development & Tourism Services

Cc: Council  
T. Kuchyt, Chief Administrative Officer

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Ms. V. Kuhns  
Acting Director, Economic Development  
Niagara Region  
1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way  
Thorold L2V 4T7

March 19, 2020

Dear Valerie,  
Long Term Regional Economic Development Strategy

On January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at the Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee, a motion was moved by Mayor Sendzik and seconded by Mayor Redekop regarding the creation of a long-term economic development strategy for Niagara region. This is one of Regional Council's Strategic Priorities under the theme of "Supporting Businesses and Economic Growth". The motion, which passed, was worded as follows:

*"That the Director of Economic Development **BE DIRECTED** to engage the Lower Tier Municipal Economic Development offices respecting a ten-year strategy including funding and resources allocation and provide a report back respecting these discussions".*

Following our meeting on Tuesday March 3<sup>rd</sup>, this letter confirms the commitment by the Town of Lincoln, Economic Development Officer, Mayor, and CAO be engaged in the development of a longer-term economic development strategy for Niagara region. Working together the objective is to ensure that Niagara achieves strong and sustainable economic growth, across all municipalities, by building on its strengths, as well as anticipating and adapting to disruptive change.

Sincerely,

Paul Di Ianni  
Economic Development Officer  
Town of Lincoln

Sandra Easton  
Mayor, Town of Lincoln