
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