



# **Regional Municipality of Niagara**

## **Regional Growth Strategy 2031**

**A Presentation to Regional Council**

**Prepared by the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce**

**January 29, 2009**

**Good Morning Chair, members of Regional Council and Regional Staff, my name is Walter Sendzik and I am the Executive Vice President and General Manager of the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce and joining me today is the Chamber’s Policy Coordinator Kithio Mwanzia.**

**We are here today representing the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce. As you well know, the Chamber is a member-driven business organization. With a current membership of more than 1,100 members representing more than 26,000 employees, we are the voice of business for our communities.**

**Today, we stand before you to offer the Chamber’s input into the Niagara 2031 Growth Plan. We do so not from the perspective of the St. Catharines – Thorold business community – but from a regional perspective. As we have stated before – businesses in Niagara don’t operate along municipal boundaries – and as such – our policies as a Chamber are created within a context of that which is best for Niagara.**

**First, let me say that the Chamber has participated in the consultation process that has shaped the Niagara 2031 Plan. Our Government Affairs Committee, and the Board have been following the process through Kithio's participation in the public meetings. The development of the plan has been inclusive and informative – and as a Chamber - we now have a better understanding of how the Region views its growth opportunities moving forward for the next two decades.**

**Since the release of regional staff's report on Niagara 2031 in December, the Chamber has reviewed the document to ensure that it is a plan that will best position Niagara over the next 20 years.**

**We understand that Option D is the preferred choice.**

**We know that regional and municipal planners have provided their expertise to strengthen the direction of Option D. We know that economic development has provided their opinions that largely support Option D. And we know that elected officials have negotiated to have their municipalities included as growth areas, economic zones and gateways in Option D.**

**We get all that – and we understand the reasons for Option D.**

**BUT, as a business organization – we are left with a nagging sense that Niagara 2031 is missing key elements that will have an impact on Niagara’s abilities in the short and medium term.**

**From our perspective – Niagara 2031 is a planning document that sets the stage for Niagara’s growth opportunities AFTER 2031.**

**The Grow South concept – which largely drives the Plan – is predicated on massive infrastructure investments – including the building of major roads and highways, ports and railways. All of which are sound in their principles – but as we are all well aware – projects of the size to adequately create an Economic Gateway and Centre will be long term developments that will not fully materialize until after 2020 – and that’s being optimistic.**

**The expansion of the QEW and 406 took almost 15 years to finally get shovels in the ground.**

**By extension, population expansion and urban growth linked to the Economic Gateway and Centre will not occur in any substantial way until the Gateway and Centre is fully utilized – which means those targets are best gauged at 2025 and beyond.**

**Let me be clear – we are not saying that the Grow South model is incorrect or flawed – it just that it is a long-term development that will take many years to come to fruition.**

**It is our opinion that Niagara 2031 is too focused on building capacity for 2031 and beyond – it's not that this is wrong – but it's missing shorter term growth trends and opportunities. And from our perspective – and we are by no means experts – the plan needs to consider the immediate and transitional periods of Niagara's growth in order to have a fully developed plan for the region.**

**From a business perspective – the following should and/or must happen in Niagara over the next 10 years.**

**1. We must connect closer to the GTA (Burlington/Oakville/Mississauga).**

- Led by Grimsby/Lincoln/West Lincoln – attracting residents based on quality of life**
- Protect valuable commercial/corporate lands on QEW in Grimsby/Lincoln so that when CEOs living in Grimsby want to relocate to Niagara – the land will be available.**
- Ensure that these communities are designed as liveable, environmentally sustainable communities moving forward.**

**2. St. Catharines/Thorold/Welland/Port Colborne must establish itself as an economic corridor before it becomes an Economic Centre**

- Linked by the Welland Canal and 406 Highway System - the infrastructure exists to build up the links between the communities.**
- Servicing 406 between Welland and St. Catharines will open up lands for commercial and residential use along on a provincial highway.**
- Build the connectivity between the cities to encourage organic business and commercial development tapping into Brock University and Niagara College.**

**3. Population growth predictions must be balanced by labour market trends and business development prospects.**

**- SMEs will largely drive Niagara's future private sector economic growth – where will they grow and why?**

**– Knowledge based companies – who will they employ and where do they want to locate?**

**- How do we get corporations to move HQ to Niagara – and where will they want to be located?**

**We can say that we want to grow south – but when it comes to business and resident migrations – it's what they want – and where they will go that will matter the most.**

**In conclusion – we asked ourselves the following questions during our review of the document:**

- 1. What will Niagara look like in the next 10 years – not by community – but as a region?**
- 2. What will the business sector composition of the region look like in the next 10 years?**
- 3. Where will people want to live in Niagara in the next 10 years?**

**In each case, we felt the Niagara 2031 didn't adequately provide the vision for the next ten to 15 years. It's a gap that should be addressed to strengthen overall strategy.**

**And as a final request, the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce would like to have a seat on the Implementation Committee for Phase 5 of the Niagara 2031 process to provide access to the business community.**

**Thank you.**