

SUPPORTING PROSPERITY THROUGH EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT IN NIAGARA



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



“(The) possibility of sudden change is at the center of the idea of the Tipping Point...the moment of critical mass, the threshold...a place where the unexpected becomes expected, where radical change is more than a possibility.”

Malcolm Gladwell,
The Tipping Point, 2000

Niagara is at a tipping point. With more than \$1.2 billion in public infrastructure investments to improve health care, tourism, post secondary education, transportation capacities and culture and civic amenities, this is one of the largest collective investment periods ever experienced in Niagara. Combined with a series of visionary economic development plans released over the past two years, Niagara is well positioned for a stronger, more prosperous 21st century. Yet, investment in infrastructure and economic development plans alone will not translate into sustainable economic growth. Niagara’s future prosperity will be closely linked to the growth of business and attraction of private investment. Private enterprise must be the driving force of job creation if Niagara is to become a region of long-term sustainable prosperity. This is the catalyst for **Supporting Prosperity Through Effective Government in Niagara.**

The interaction between business and government is an important relationship in creating an environment that encourages economic development. As Niagara undergoes a generational transformation of its infrastructure and economic composition, a corresponding review of the interaction between government and business is required to ensure that private enterprise has all the tools necessary to build a strong economic foundation within the new global economy.

Based on surveys and research conducted with members of the chamber network across Niagara, the report captures the experiences and perspectives of business with relation to four critical areas examining the connections between business and government in an effort to search for ways in which government can support the growth and sustainability of prosperity in Niagara. The four areas are:

1.0 Creating a More Effective Government

Examining the efficiencies and effectiveness of Niagara’s governance structure.

2.0 Streamlining Government Services

Reviews government services that directly interact with business, and examines the opportunity to consolidate services and agencies as a means to strengthen the relationship between business and government.

3.0 Creating A Competitive Niagara Through Taxation

Taxes and regulation are two key areas in which business directly connects with government, and this section explores that relationship in more detail.

4.0 Transportation

Transportation plays an important key role in building successful businesses.

This section explores two areas of transportation: inter-municipal transit and Niagara airports.

The objective of this report is to build a stronger Niagara. **Supporting Prosperity Through Effective Government in Niagara** includes a series of recommendations directed at building on the foundations of regional government. The concepts and opportunities presented are aimed at increasing the prospects of growing the private sector. The future of Niagara includes a healthy balance between private enterprise and government bodies that support effective and sustainable economic growth. Change is more than a possibility.

INTRODUCTION



“Niagara is on the leading edge of Ontario’s economic transition.”

Niagara is on the leading edge of Ontario’s economic transition. For more than a decade, Niagara has shed a large part of its manufacturing base as tens of thousands of jobs have been lost and factories have relocated to developing countries. Through the hardship of high unemployment and uncertain economic times, the region is emerging from the shadows of large scale manufacturing to a region that is on the cusp of a generational economic shift that has the potential to position Niagara as a model 21st century community.

Although the future looks bright for Niagara, its economic future will be rooted in its ability to retain and attract private enterprise. The loss of industry has eroded not only the job market, but also the tax base that once financed the growth of government.

Over the past 10 years, the largest growth of job creation has been driven by the public sector. While this has blunted the loss of industrial jobs, property class system imbalances have also increased the tax burden on businesses and residents alike. It’s simple math - Niagarans cannot afford the expansion of government without a robust private sector that now must outpace the growth of the public sector.

SNAPSHOT OF NIAGARA 2010

Niagara’s unemployment rate has climbed steadily since 2006 when it stood at 6.3 per cent. In 2010, it has peaked at close to nine per cent making it one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. Yet, during a decade of lost manufacturing jobs and a downturn in tourism visits, Niagara has been able to grow the number of businesses operating in the region. In 2007, there were more than 25,000 businesses in Niagara, which represents a 17% increase from 2001.¹ Aside from the growth of the public sector, job losses at large employers such as John Deere, Hayes Dana, TRW and GM are mitigated by a tremendous amount of activity within small and medium size businesses.

The worst is behind Niagara. In fact, the Conference Board of Canada has noted that Niagara’s growth projections are quite positive. In its 2009 Metropolitan Outlook, it estimated that St. Catharines – Niagara’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is projected to grow by 2 – 3% year over year between 2010-13, and this is projected to correspond with a reduction in unemployment rates. These projections place Niagara in the top percentile of regions across Canada in terms of economic growth. Although these numbers are only estimates, it underscores the need to foster an environment that encourages organic business growth and investment.

1 Calculations by Niagara College using data from Statistics Canada, Canadian Business Patterns, Summer 2007



“Economic diversification and organic business development will be key drivers in Niagara’s economic future.”

NIAGARA’S INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL

One of the most important developments in Niagara over the past 30 years is the current infrastructure renewal that is taking place. In total, more than \$1.2 billion is being invested to modernize Niagara’s aging infrastructure from roads and highways to health care and post secondary education. A highlight of investments include:

- \$150 million expansion of the QEW through St. Catharines
- \$100 million expansion of Highway 406
- \$700 million state-of-the-art health care complex
- \$100 million Niagara Convention and Civic Centre
- \$60 million expansion of Niagara College’s Welland and Niagara-on-the-Lake campuses
- \$100 million Niagara Health and Bioscience Research Complex at Brock University
- \$100 million Brock University Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts
- \$20 million aquatics centre in St. Catharines
- \$18 million new YMCA in West Niagara

The transformation of Niagara’s infrastructure is an important building block in creating avenues for new prosperity. Improved transportation routes, new civic institutions and centres of excellence in learning and culture and state of the art health care facilities will act as catalysts to attract people and businesses.

POINTING THE COMPASS TOWARDS PROSPERITY

Over the past few years, businesses, academia, NGOs and government have worked together to create action-oriented plans to reposition Niagara’s economy. Each plan has strived to represent the collective efforts of stakeholders finding a common voice and direction. It is through this type of planning that Niagara has secured the investments into the above mentioned infrastructure projects.

The following plans are a selection of economic development road maps for a 21st century Niagara:

- The St. Catharines – Thorold Prosperity Council **Paths to Prosperity** Report
- The Niagara Economic Development Corporation’s **Navigating our Future**
- The Niagara Workforce Planning Board’s **Niagara Local Labour Market Plan**

These plans are linked together through a focus on sector specific growth opportunities. As a community, it is important to understand that an economy that is largely dependent on a single sector is not sustainable within the global economy. Economic diversification and organic business development will be key drivers in Niagara’s economic future.



“...the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce has taken the initiative to gain a better understanding of the connection between business and government in Niagara.

CHARTING A COURSE WITH GOVERNMENT

With the economic future of Niagara dependent upon the strength of an expanding and diversified business community, the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce has taken the initiative to gain a better understanding of the connection between business and government in Niagara. Through the chamber network in Niagara, more than 3,000 businesses in Niagara were sent surveys pertaining to the connections between business and government. A response rate of 10 per cent was achieved based on electronic survey responses, committee input and focus group meetings.

Based on the data collected and additional research conducted by the Chamber, the report focuses on four key areas in which business and government intersect:

1.0 Creating a More Effective Government

2.0 Streamlining Government Services

3.0 Creating Competitive Niagara Through Taxation

4.0 Transportation

Through an examination of challenges facing business in each identified area, and the opportunities in which government can work to build a more supportive foundation for the expansion of private enterprise, **Supporting Prosperity Through Effective Government in Niagara** is a road map to a stronger Niagara.



“Niagara must take an active role in creating a made in Niagara solution to the governance issue.”

1.0 CREATING A MORE EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT

Niagara is over governed. Currently there are 125 positions that are held by elected officials between the municipal and regional tiers of government. This does not include the elected trustees of the two local school boards. Of the 125, three are full time officials - the mayors of St. Catharines and Niagara Falls, and the Regional Chair. A quick survey of the 2009 capital and operating budgets of the Region and its twelve municipalities reveals the importance of fiscal management. Collectively, the 125 politicians oversee more than \$1.6 billion in property tax and transfer expenditures per year. Reduced further, this equates to \$12.6 million per year for each elected municipal politician.

More than 80 per cent of respondents to the survey strongly believe that Niagara’s governance model needs to be reconstructed to create a more efficient and effective structure that is representative of its population. A scan of regional governance models across Ontario of similar size to Niagara demonstrates that there are options that can be developed that preserve the principles of representation by population within a more streamlined governance model leading to more effective government.

Three examples that strengthen the case are York Region, Durham Region and Halton Region. York Region has a 21-member council that sets policies, budgets and direction using a “double-direct” form of elected representation (an elected candidate from the nine lower tier municipalities holds a seat on both regional and local council). Compared to Niagara – with its 31 member council – York’s double direct approach allows for a reduction in seats at the regional level, and ensures a more integrated form of governance with full time councillors that represent constituents at the local and regional level.

Durham Region undertook a review of its governance model in 1996 that led to the reduction of overall seats from 32 to 28 members. Durham also allowed its candidates to run under a double direct form of elected representation or to run as a local councillor only.

The Region of Halton has a 21-member council with representatives that are elected as both a regional and local councillor with an additional option for candidates to run for local seats only. This system has proven to provide greater cross communication between regional and local councils. Interestingly, Thorold City Council attempted to adopt this model in 2009 for its 2010 election, but Regional Council rejected the idea.

It is important to note that in each case, the governance model was designed to improve efficiencies in government, address gaps in communication between levels and to provide constituencies with accountability in government representation. In fact, in the Halton model, full-time regional/municipal councillors have a budget that includes staffing and office space at city hall. The concept of saving money through streamlined representation was not a driving factor.

Although municipal re-alignment is a provincial responsibility, Niagara must take an active role in creating a made in Niagara solution to the governance issue. As Chair Peter Partington stated at his State of the Region Address to the Chambers of Commerce of Niagara in May 2010, “we cannot afford the status quo – we must create a governance model that reflects Niagara in the 21st century – and for that we will need strong leadership in the coming 2010 municipal election.”



“...the Region has the ability to take a progressive step towards creating more clarity in its operations by the creation of an Office of the Auditor General.”

1.1 PROVIDING CLARITY IN GOVERNMENT

Accountability and transparency are two words often used to describe areas in which government can improve its relationship with the public. The catchwords have become de rigeur when discussing government in Niagara, but it's often used within a vacuum and without substance. With a goal of building stronger partnerships between government and business, the Region has the ability to take a progressive step towards creating more clarity in its operations by creating an Office of the Auditor General.

The Municipal Act Amendments of January 1, 2007 conferred broader powers to municipalities that included the right to appoint accountability officers. According to the Act, an accountability officer reports to Council and is responsible for assisting Council in holding government accountable for the quality of stewardship over public funds and for achieving “value for money” in municipal operations. Regions and cities across Canada have created an Office of the Auditor General with some notable success rates. For example, in 2008 for every dollar invested by the City of Toronto into its Office of the Auditor General Office, the municipality obtained a return of \$5.60 or 560 per cent. In the City of Oshawa, the average return on investment for 2007, 2008 and 2009 was 331 per cent. Generally, the Auditor General conducts audits that focus on efficiency and effectiveness of municipal operations, program delivery, and compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

Although regional and local government are subject to annual external audits that examine financial statements with an emphasis on operations and the fiscal position of the municipality, there is no requirement for the audit findings to be made public. As well, internal audits are conducted within regional and local government, but these audits focus on financial controls, compliance, risk management and policy implementation. In addition, boards and agencies of municipalities are only responsible for financial audits with limited public reporting responsibilities.

The Auditor General model differs in that it has legislated powers, privileges and immunity that provide the necessary tools to conduct thorough audits with little or no external impediments. In this model, the primary focus is on value-for-money audits. As indicated by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants Handbook, this includes examining and reporting on the adequacy of management systems with respect to controls and practices to ensure due regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness; resource management with due regard to economy and efficiency; and effectiveness of programs, operations or activities.

As a means to add more clarity to government in Niagara, the Office of the Auditor General, with powers to audit local government, agencies and boards across the Region, should be immediately constituted.



“The relationship between government and business in Niagara is critical when it comes to building prosperity within our communities.”

2.0 STREAMLINING GOVERNMENT SERVICES

The relationship between government and business in Niagara is critical in building prosperity. In reviewing the infrastructure of regional government, there are numerous touch points that connect public and private interests including: water and waste water, transportation, economic development, zoning by-laws and development charges to name only a few.

The data collected indicates that there is an increasing level of frustration with duplication of services between the two tiers of government in Niagara. Over sixty per cent of businesses surveyed indicated that they are unable to understand and navigate the current decision making processes at the Region. The data also reveals that businesses are largely unaware of planning documents, strategic programs and plans, and the overall efforts by government to streamline its services. The Niagara 2031 Growth Strategy, the Niagara Economic Growth Strategy and the 2007 – 2011 Council Business Plan are important plans for Niagara, yet more than 75 per cent of the respondents indicated that they are unaware of these plans. As communication is key in creating awareness – clearly, in the short term, stronger communication between government and Niagara’s business community must be a priority.

Moving beyond the issues of communication, there are areas in which the Region has taken steps in coordinating its activities relating to planning and planning approvals for land development. The Planning System Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in Niagara is the first step towards a more cohesive planning process. The MOU between the Region, all lower-tier municipalities and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority is aimed at improving relationship management between government bodies charged with guiding land development in Niagara. This is a good first step, but in order to move forward and provide a system of seamless service, there is a need for standardized data sets when it comes to zoning bylaws, the administration of brownfield policies and incentives, and the interpretation of building codes. For example, the monitoring and inspection of buildings should be transferred from the lower tier municipalities to the Region. The consolidation of the process would create a more consistent and standardized interpretation of the Ontario Building Code.

With twelve lower tier municipalities and the regional municipality – the patchwork of by-laws, land use polices and building code interpretations is making it increasingly cumbersome for companies to navigate the system – costing time and resources. In an increasingly competitive environment, governments in Niagara need to create a more unified, seamless and efficient system that streamlines regulations and approvals that are consistent across the Region.



“Niagara can no longer afford a multi-tier approach to economic development..”

2.1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOR NIAGARA

When it comes to economic development, the Region is split into two areas of responsibility. At the municipal level, there are five economic development offices - Welland, St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, Port Colborne and Fort Erie. Economic development offices at the lower-tier level are responsible for economic development within the respective municipalities. Regional economic development is managed by the Niagara Economic Development Corporation (NEDC). NEDC also provides services for lower tier municipalities that do not have an economic development office. All external economic development marketing activities for Niagara are performed by NEDC.

It's time Niagara modernized its economic development infrastructure. Based on survey results, businesses are either unaware of the roles of economic development offices, or there is confusion by the perceived duplication. With more than \$5 million spent annually on economic development between the various agencies, the overall impact is likely hampered by the lack of a unified, focused approach. As businesses do not operate along municipal boundaries, Niagara should have an economic development infrastructure that reflects the dynamics of business in the region. If Niagara is going to compete on a global scale to attract and retain businesses, there must be one economic development agency that represents the interests of Niagara – including its 12 municipalities.

A newly designed regional economic development agency should be constituted to represent the various economic zones and sectors of the Region. The consolidation will provide for a more strategic, focused approach to providing services for existing businesses and for attracting new investments. For example, a single economic agency can provide a regionally coordinated ‘concierge’ service for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). As SMEs are the economic foundation in communities across Niagara, this consolidated service will provide the support that is required for businesses from Wainfleet to Fort Erie to Grimsby and all points in between. As well, when it comes to investment and business attraction strategies, a unified agency will be able to effectively leverage all of Niagara’s assets and allocate the time and resources in positioning Niagara in a global economy. Although there could be cost savings in the consolidation of economic agencies, the primary objective must be to create a single agency that provides assistance to business and concurrently attracting inward investment.

2.2 DEVELOP AN OPEN FOR BUSINESS INDEX

A large majority of respondents indicated that Niagara was ‘not open for business.’ Whether this is a perception, or based on real experiences with government, Niagara must work towards creating an environment that encourages the growth of business. An innovative way to create this is an ‘Open for Business Index’ modelled after the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business Index. In consultation with business, the Region has an opportunity to develop an annual metrics index that benchmarks the Region’s regulatory policies, tax rates, services, programs and initiatives that have an impact on business. This tool would go beyond the Municipal Performance Measurement Program (MPMP) that is often used a comparative benchmark.



“Attracting and retaining business involves a variety of factors including competitive rates of taxation and tax-related regulatory policy.”

3.0 FISCAL POLICIES FOR A COMPETITIVE NIAGARA

Attracting and retaining business involves a variety of factors. A competitive fiscal policy plays an important role in attracting and retaining business. Although local and regional governments are not in a position to save industries, they can play a role in creating an environment that maximizes competitive advantages for existing business.

3.1 COMPETITIVE TAX RATES BUILD A STRONGER NIAGARA

In terms of perspective, industrial, commercial and residential properties across the province are taxed at different municipal rates as a result of historical differences in tax burdens that were present prior to the province wide reassessment in 1998. For the most part, different relative tax burdens continue to exist after reassessment. Industrial and commercial properties pay higher property taxes than residential properties on a square foot percentage. Based on the current environment, taxing all properties at the same rate would result in massive tax shifts from business to residential properties. The province recognized that an immediate move to a position where all properties pay the same tax rate based on size, regardless of class, would be too difficult for residential property owners to absorb. As a result, municipalities were permitted to set different tax rates for each property class subject to provincially established “ranges of fairness.” Separate tax rates were established for the three property classes through the use of tax ratios. The ability to establish separate tax rates enabled the Region to prevent large tax shifts between property classes and maintain the overall tax burden for each property class.

In the same year as the province wide assessment, the Ontario government downloaded to municipalities the financial responsibility of paying 20 per cent of ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program) and ODB (Ontario Drug Benefit) benefit costs and 50 per cent of the ODSP administration costs.² These costs were largely transferred to the property owners through year-over-year significant increases in taxes. In 2008, the Ontario government announced that programs were going to be uploaded to the province beginning in 2009 resulting in a reduction of costs to municipalities of \$935 million once fully implemented by 2011. In Niagara, this translates into approximately \$350 million over 10 years. With \$350 million in realized revenue, the Region has an opportunity to create a highly competitive tax environment for business and at the same time provide relief for residential property owners.

Looking specifically at tax rates in Niagara, the Region is to be applauded for its efforts in lowering the industrial tax ratio from 3.11 to 2.63. This reduction was a significant move that signalled to industry that Niagara was serious about supporting this sector. For example, GM Canada stated that Niagara’s efforts to reduce industrial tax rates are one of the reasons that GM has continued to invest in its plants in St. Catharines. Currently, industrial tax ratios are just below the provincially mandated threshold, but still above the provincial average. Conversely, commercial tax ratios in Niagara are very competitive and are currently under the provincial average.

2 <http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/news/Product.asp?ProductID=1641>

SUPPORTING PROSPERITY THROUGH EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT IN NIAGARA



“Looking specifically at tax rates in Niagara, the Region is to be applauded for its efforts.”

On average, Niagara’s industrial and commercial rates are below those of Waterloo, Burlington, Oakville and Hamilton. However, compared to other municipalities such as Brampton, Caledon and Peterborough, Niagara still has a higher comparative commercial and industrial tax rate.

As a tool to retain and attract business, Niagara must aim to set its industrial and commercial tax ratios in the top tier of all regions in Southern Ontario. Granted any shifts in commercial and industry tax ratios affect residential tax rates, but the current uploading of social services by the Ontario government (ODSP and ODP) provides an opportunity to utilize the realized revenue gains to enhance Niagara’s competitive tax advantages while concurrently reducing the overall impact on the residential tax base.

3.2 COMPETITIVE DEVELOPMENT CHARGES CREATE GROWTH

In 2009, Regional Council passed a motion that raised development charge rates on all classes of property development. The St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber, along with a number of business associations across the region, opposed the increases citing the negative impact on future growth in the region and Niagara’s competitive position. NEDC cited competitive development charge rates in its *Top Ten Reasons to Invest in Niagara* as part of its promotional material to attract investment. Although regional reports on the issue of development charges highlighted that the increases in Niagara would still position its rates lower than Peel, Halton and Waterloo – it’s important to note that regions such as Windsor, Sarnia, London and Brant County did not increase development charges – and fundamentally detracts from Niagara’s ability to compete. As development charge policies are reviewed every five years as mandated by the province, the Region must re-examine the principles of development charges and move beyond the simple and narrow concept that “growth should pay for growth.”



“The movement of goods and people through road, rail, water and air is becoming increasingly important to the future of Niagara’s economy.”

4.0 TRANSPORTATION

The fourth area in which government and business intersect is in transportation. Niagara is a vital transportation corridor between the GTA and Eastern United States. The movement of goods and people through road, rail, water and air is vital to the future of Niagara’s economy. In terms of internal transportation modes, the foundations are in place for an efficient and effective regional inter-municipal public transit system, and important highway connections between Niagara’s three largest urban centres are in the process of being completed. In addition to these developments, Niagara is now on the GO Rail for seasonal scheduling, and on the Go Bus line throughout the year. However, there are important actions that must be taken by the Region to further strengthen Niagara’s transportation assets.

4.1 INTER-MUNICIPAL TRANSIT

Niagara needs an integrated public transit system that connects its three largest urban centres with opportunities to link with other communities within the Region. The current dynamic features three separate transit commissions (Niagara Falls, St. Catharines and Welland) providing localized services with limited connectivity. Successive reports have demonstrated that inter-municipal transit is required to allow more people to gain access to employment and to permit access to regional facilities by area residents. With an aging population and a projected labour shortage, Niagara’s transit system must become more integrated to meet the demand. In June 2010, Regional Government voted to develop a Triangle Service model, which facilitates the connectivity between the three separate transit organizations. Although this concept still features three separate operating transit systems, regional government will play a role in facilitating the connections between the municipalities within the existing transit operations.

Moving forward, a public transit system in Niagara must balance the affordability of a system with the needs of a community. Operating a system that depends on increasing funds and resources from various orders of government is not an effective means in which to provide a service. The municipalities of Niagara Falls, St. Catharines and Welland should work towards a single transit utility that operates in the best interest of its shareholders, and at the same time, provides services that better connects Niagarans.



“There is need for a central role for the management of airport facilities in order to better leverage opportunities to attract businesses, market the region and comply with land-use regulations.”

4.2 TAKING FLIGHT IN NIAGARA

Much like duplication in the public transit model, Niagara has two airports that offer both recreational and commercial services. The Niagara District Airport (NDA) and the Niagara Central Airport (NCA) are run by two separate commissions and have two separate funding models. As Niagara’s transportation system expands, there is a requirement to align one of the two airports with the Region’s Transportation Strategy. Based on the requirements of the Transportation Strategy, and investments required, the NDA should be the regional business airport.

This means that the NCA will continue with its focus on local recreational and flight training markets with the associated fuelling, maintenance and support services. The NDA should expand its services beyond recreational and flight training and focus more on tourism charter, medivac, and regional business aviation segments along with providing maintenance and support services to the aviation community. From a business competition stand point, both the NDA and NCA are faced with the fact that there are major airports within close proximity to Niagara, and this limits the overall potential for both airports. It is imperative that status quo for airport operations can no longer be an option. There is need for a central role for the management of airport facilities in order to better leverage opportunities to attract businesses, market the region and comply with land-use regulations. Similar to the public transit system, a regional airport commission should be implemented to replace the existing two separate entities – saving dollars, and providing a more focused and strategic direction for air transportation in Niagara.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce urges the following:

1.0 Creating a More Effective Government

- 1.1 That the Regional Municipality of Niagara undertake significant governance reform to address the size and role of Regional Council as a means to create a streamlined and more effective form of governance with an implementation date for the 2014 elections.
- 1.2 That the Regional Municipality of Niagara establish the Office of Municipal Auditor General for the 2012 fiscal year.

2.0 Streamlining Government Services

- 2.1 That the Regional Municipality of Niagara take the lead in working with the 12 lower tier municipalities to develop a single harmonized zoning by law for Niagara by 2012.
- 2.2 That the Regional Municipality of Niagara takes the leadership role to initiate a process that would see the rationalization of economic development services in Niagara. This should result in the establishment of a single economic development office for Niagara that would include private sector participation. This economic development office will focus on both business retention and expansion (BR&E) as well as business attraction and external marketing. A newly constituted regional economic development agency should be formed by 2012.
- 2.3 That the Office of a Regional Building Code Inspector be established to ensure uniform interpretation of the Ontario Building Code across the region.

3.0 Creating Competitive Niagara Through Taxation

- 3.1 That the Regional Municipality of Niagara work with the region's single economic development office to establish local based regulatory and tax policy benchmarks to guide decision making in these areas.
- 3.2 That a new development charges by-law should have innovative development policy solutions rather than a cumbersome list of restrictions and exemptions.
- 3.3 That the Regional Municipality of Niagara further reduce the industrial tax ratio to be at or below the provincial average by 2012.

4.0 Transportation

- 4.1 That the Regional Municipality of Niagara immediately implement the Triangle Service as the model for inter-municipal transit in Niagara. This should include:
 - Involvement of private sector carriers in future service concepts to address unmet need.
 - The existing St. Catharines – Thorold model be used as an effective case study for transit service contracts to under serviced communities.
 - That linkages with GO Transit and Via Rail are considered.
- 4.2 That the Regional Municipality of Niagara Immediately engage the commissions of the Niagara District Airport and Niagara Central Airport to merge and create the Niagara Region Airport Commission that will be responsible for managing operations at the two airport facilities. This commission would retain an arm's length relationship with the Regional Municipality and would enter into operational subsidy agreements with both the Region and relevant municipalities.



“...the Regional Municipality of Niagara take the lead in working with the 12 lower tier municipalities to develop a single harmonized zoning by law for Niagara by 2012.”



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