

Re: Support of Traffic Conversion in Downtown St. Catharines

Good Evening,

Mayor McMullan, city councilors and citizens of St. Catharines, my name is Walter Sendzik, Executive Vice President and General Manager of the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce and resident of St. Catharines.

As you are aware, the Chamber of Commerce supports the conversion of traffic in the downtown as a necessary investment into the revitalization of the urban core of the city.

You have heard from many people tonight – and a strong case has been made for the conversion to take place as a part of a larger vision that will bring about investment and create new economic opportunities.

In an effort to not reiterate what has already been so well articulated by previous speakers, I would like to add the following four comments:

1. The conversion of traffic is not an expense – but an investment into a downtown core that has been neglected for years. Investing \$550,000 dollars to create a traffic pattern suitable for tourism travel and the realignment of the wine route through the downtown core is an investment that will yield a Return On Investment many times more than the initial investment.
2. The conversion of traffic is a first step towards a vibrant, revitalized downtown. The three year process of conversion allows the city to start putting into place the measures and mechanics of creating an urban core that is market ready for tourism, and its supporting business sectors.

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Councilors Gill and Elliot are already setting the stage with aggressive property standards management to rid the core of dangerous and unsightly code violations.

In addition, the city is currently reviewing its signs by-laws – and the Chamber has submitted recommendations to the by-law review committee to ensure that business signage in the downtown conforms to the by-laws – and that the by-laws be updated to reflect the vision for a vibrant, consumer-friendly downtown.

3. The conversion of traffic will not only impact the downtown core – but it will aid the transformation of West St. Paul – Western Hill as it will become the western gateway to the downtown via the wine route – making it a logical extension of the Community Improvement Program – a point that has been recently made by Councilor Gill.

The same holds true for the eastern part of the route running through the heart of the city – which will be an added boost to the Queenston St. part of the route – as it will increase the potential of the General Hospital location – and add value to Regional Councilor Bruce Timms' vision for a rehabilitated Canal Heritage Site in Centennial Park. This area has been identified by Councilors Stevens and Burch as one of redevelopment – and tonight's decision will go a long way in improving the opportunities in a section of the city that has often been overlooked.

4. Finally, change is about momentum. For too many years, status quo has been a result of inaction when it comes to the downtown.

What do we have to show for years of status quo?

- High vacancy rates, dilapidated buildings, struggling retail markets, lower commercial tax rates, high tax rebates due to vacancies, erosion of the city's identity, increase in crime and drugs... the list goes on.

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Yet, at no point in recent memory has so many opportunities been presented to rebuild the heart of the city. A School of Fine Arts, Performing Arts Centre, OHL hockey, the wine route – the city has momentum – we – the collective we – elected officials, businesses, and citizens - need to seize the momentum to generate the kind of economic prosperity that this city so richly deserves.

The seeds of change start tonight. It starts with your vote to support the conversion of traffic patterns in the downtown. Once this council signals its support for the conversion, the Chamber of Commerce is committed to working with council, the city's Economic Development and Tourism Services Department, the Downtown Association, the Wine Council of Ontario, Brock University and all other associations and groups who want to achieve the full potential of our downtown.

Tonight – we are asking that you take the first step towards rebuilding the heart of the city. The city can no longer afford status quo.

Thank you.