



Presentation to

**Niagara Regional Police Services Board**

Monday, February 11, 2008

**Presented by Steve Cook**

**First Vice President**

**St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce**

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Chair Iggulden, members of the board, thank you for permitting the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce to present today regarding Chief Southall's Report on the Niagara Regional Police Service Facilities Accommodation Plan. My name is Steve Cook, and I am here today on behalf of the Chamber.

The purpose of today's presentation is to further address concerns that were brought before the Police Board in November – and that in our opinion - have not been properly addressed in the report released by Chief Southall.

As the Chamber stated in its first presentation – we applaud the efforts of the Police Services Board in seeking efficiencies throughout its operations. We can all agree the taxpayer in Niagara is feeling the burden of increasing costs of public services and the management and maintenance of public institutions at a time when population growth and economic development in Niagara is well below the provincial average. As we are sure the Board will acknowledge, due to provincial land use policies and an evolving more practical urban design philosophy – future large scale urban expansion will not occur in Niagara like in other communities in the GTA.

Before we present our concerns raised by a thorough reading of Chief Southall's report related to the construction of a new centralized headquarters on a greenfield site, we would like to make a point of clarification regarding the Chief's summation of the St. Catharines public presentation. The Chief noted that a "combined submission was made by the Chamber of Commerce, the City of St. Catharines and the Downtown Association." We would like to state that although points raised were similar in some areas – it was not a "combined presentation." The concerns raised by the Chamber should have been addressed as such, and not simply lumped into a collective group in which a number of different points were raised between each representative body.

As noted in the first presentation – of which copies of have been reprinted for the members of the board – the focus of the Chamber's concerns centred on building an \$80 - \$100 million new facility with a minimal savings of \$1.7 million per year and the

building of such facility in a greenfield area that contravenes provincial and regional planning legislation.

First, in the area of seeking efficiencies through centralization, the Chamber agrees that if significant savings can be found through centralization – that this should be a measurement of weight for making a case for a centralized headquarters.

In the Chief’s recommendation of a centralized headquarters at a greenfield site well beyond any densely populated urban core in Niagara, she sites a savings of \$34 million over 20 years on a \$80 - \$100 million facility.

After reading the report, we are still left with questions that the Board must seek answers to.

1. Is the \$8.4 million in land sales realistic – as this is used to defray the overall cost of a potential new building? She sites Colliers International Reality Advisors – but St. Catharines downtown real estate statistics demonstrate there is a disconnect between Colliers and the reality of downtown land assessment rates.

**The Board must get a second opinion.**

In addition – the Board must consider the fact that taxpayer’s dollars have already been spent to upgrade the James St. location to meet the needs of the Police – and now it is rendered insufficient. **Where is the accountability for ensuring fiscal responsibility moving forward?**

2. In model B-2 – **what are the costs associated with public infrastructure needed to service a greenfield site as suggested in the B-2?** Before making a decision, the Board must request from the region estimated costs as it will be another burden on the taxpayer if there are associated costs related to a greenfield build.
3. Chief Southall, in her response to the issue of saving \$1.7 million a year on a \$80 - \$100 million dollar project raised by both the Niagara Falls Chamber and St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber, she writes: “the savings will represent 17 new officers on the street...” This begs the questions – **Is the \$34 million in supposed**

- savings already spent?** The Chief has clearly demonstrated in the report that the citizens of Niagara are getting quality police services for their collective tax dollars – and yet the projected \$34 million will be used for new officers on the street at a time when crime rates and population figures are going down. **The Board must ask what are the real cost savings over 20 years, if any, to justify the construction?**
4. In addition, as we asked in our first presentation – **Is the \$1.7 million per year a gross estimate or net estimate after taking into consideration debt financing?** No business would move forward on a project without a full cost out – which includes financing and debt interest charges. Even if this is a regional council question – as a Board – you should know the real cost savings, if any. And lastly on the topic of the estimated savings. If the \$1.7 million dollars does represent the net amount and cost over-runs and inflation don't push that \$1.7 million dollars in supposed savings downward, that would only work out to an approximate 1.7% savings per year on a \$100 million dollar annual prorating budget. **Therefore the Board must ask, is there any other way of becoming efficient by a mere 1.7% other than spending \$100 Million dollars of taxpayers money?**
5. In the recommendation of Model B, there is a reference to a project that could “take advantage of approved funding.” The Board should ask – **What approved funding?** And, in the assessment of Model A (Status Quo) – Chief Southall does not reference possible funding – or even the option of funding. Before making a decision, the Board must request information regarding all possible funding sources including from the provincial government's Public Infrastructure Renewal Fund, which has \$1 billion in accessible grants and loans for municipalities and regions across Ontario. This is in addition to funding for the province's implementation of its Place to Growth Act – of which St. Catharines is specifically identified.
6. In her report, Chief Southall writes about “possible partnerships” as a means to seek savings in constructing a centralized facility. **Before making a decision, the Board must seek assurances that partnerships with the RCMP and Canadian Border Security organizations are a “real” opportunity and not simply a**

- hope.** For a project of this magnitude, assumptions are not a justification for spending \$80 - \$100 million dollars.
7. Finally, in an effort to be fiscally responsible. **The Board must ask why would a centralized facility include a gym, workout centre and day care centre?**
- Taxpayers should not be asked to pay for the construction of projects of this size that would include amenities such as those just mentioned. Are the YMCA, private fitness centres and day cares inadequate for our police?

In terms of current land use planning and policy, the Chamber presented questions related to smart growth planning, and each model's relation to current policies and legislation. Although Chief Southall didn't address the Chamber's concerns in her summation, she did mention smart growth when summarizing input obtained at a meeting of Regional Council. **She wrote, "finally, the Smart Growth issue was raised. Once again it was expressed that this would be taken into consideration."**

Yet, nowhere else in the document does she demonstrate where she took it into consideration. There are no references with relation to discussions and planning documents at a regional or provincial level.

In fact, on page 24 - Under Police Agency Facility Comparison – Chief Southall uses the moving of Halton Police Services from downtown Burlington as a means to strengthen her case by stating "there was no "political fallout" from the decision from the re-location as they – Halton - are seen to be moving to population growth areas."

But – this is not about political fallout. This is about following regional and provincial land use regulations. **The Board must seek input from provincial and regional authorities related to smart growth.** Although the Chief did not note it – the provincial Places to Grow Act has designated St. Catharines as a centre for intense urban growth by 2021.

In the report, she writes on page 63 “the facility will be located where it best reflects the population density of the Region and best serves the needs of the community.” Yet, there is no citation to support this claim. As stated in the Places to Growth Act – St. Catharines and South Niagara are targeted as areas of population growth and intensification. **The Board must research the most current planning reports and support material before making a decision.** This issue will be debated at the regional council level, so it is important that the Board fully understand the mandate of the province and the region when it comes to land planning.

In summation, there are far too many questions left unanswered in Chief Southall’s recommendations report for the Board to make a decision today. The Chamber supports the police of Niagara – and we agree that the service of policing is first and foremost at the heart of the policing mission – but the Chief also states that there is a “responsibility to be prudent with taxpayer money and find efficiencies.” And she has committed in writing, to take into consideration smart growth land use principles with respect to a new headquarters.

It is the Chamber’s opinion that are too many questions related to fiscal responsibility, sufficient efficiencies warranting a \$80 - \$100 million dollar facility and inadequate consideration for smart growth planning and possibilities that would make Model B-2 acceptable.

We ask that the board take into consideration our questions and concerns before making a decision that will have an enormous impact on taxpayers and communities across Niagara.

Thank you,