



**Presentation to the Regional Budget Open House
2011 Regional Municipality of Niagara Operating Budget and
Capital Budget
Wednesday February 9, 2011**

CEO Remarks

Good Evening Chair of the Budget Review Committee of the Whole, Regional Councillors, and members of Regional staff. My name Walter Sendzik, CEO of the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce and joining me today is Kithio Mwanzia the Chamber’s Director of Policy and Government Relations and co-ordinator of the Regional Finance & Taxation Committee.

As the voice of business, the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce is committed to ensuring that there is a vibrant business and investment environment in Niagara. It is also our responsibility as a member driven organization representing over 1,200 businesses and 30,000 employees to provide input on the 2011 Regional Budget as a means to actively participate in creating a region that fosters businesses to grow and opportunity, and at the same time provides an affordable environment in which families can live, and enjoy a sustainable quality of life.

Like many regions across Ontario – and in fact across Canada, there are real challenges facing Niagara. A skills gap in the labour force is driving up unemployment which creates increases in poverty affecting children and adults alike. Combined with an aging population, a shrinking industrial tax base, fewer large scale industrial employers and fewer middle class jobs, more people in Niagara have less today than they did 10 years ago.

These are real challenges.

We applaud regional council and staff for bringing the budget process into the public realm as it is time to seriously look at budgets – municipal, regional, provincial and federal – and start asking – what can the taxpayer afford?

With in mind, the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce again this year through its Finance and Taxation committee established the Regional Budget Working Group. The Regional Budget Working Group (RBWG) is a committee comprising of representatives from various Chambers’ of Commerce across Niagara including:

- **The Greater Fort Erie Chamber of Commence**
- **The Grimsby Chamber of Commerce**
- **The Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce**
- **The Port Colborne – Wainfleet Chamber of Commerce**

The purpose of the committee is to build consensus on issues impacting businesses across the region that have implications in the Regional Operating and Capital Budgets. Thorough the work of the committee, there are six areas of interest that we will focus on for tonight’s presentation. And they are:

- 1. Use of realized revenue from uploading of services and benefits to the provincial government.**
- 2. Seeking efficiencies in government through services reviews and contracting out to the private sector for non-essential services.**
- 3. Investment income management strategies as a means to ensure investment funds are properly utilized.**
- 4. Financing for a regional economic development agency**

5. Development of a long term budget strategy

6. Development of a Business Plan that will guide Regional Council and staff over the next four years.

We have stated previously, the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce is a committed partner in the region that seeks to work towards creating an environment that is attractive for investment and business growth as well as a place in which families can live and prosper.

We are not a tax coalition group that conducts a line by line review of the budget.

We believe that the Region has capable senior management that should conduct such reviews, and we believe that council and the executive management of the Region is responsible for such detailed accounting for an \$800 million budget. The Chamber's role is to provide input and guidance at a more macro level.

I will now pass it over to Kithio who has been attending the budget committee meetings and taking input from the business community on the Regional budget through the Regional Budget Working Group to provide more detail in the areas that I highlighted.