



Governance Models for Niagara

A Presentation to City Council

Prepared by the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce

June 13, 2011

Good evening Mayor McMullan, members of City Council and City staff, my name is Walter Sendzik, CEO of the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce and I am joined by Kithio Mwanzia, Director of Policy and Government Relations.

The Chamber of Commerce is a member-driven business organization that has been active in the community since 1867. With a current membership of more than 1,200 businesses, associations and organizations that collectively employ more than 27,000 people, we are the voice of business in our communities.

Tonight, we are here to provide comment on the Corporate Services Report regarding Governance Models for Niagara.

First, we would like to applaud Council – and more specifically Councillor Secord - for bringing forward a motion in January at the start of this term's Council session – to direct staff to report back on Niagara's governance model – including previous reports that studied the region's governance structure and potential options for changes to the system.

It's a good first step in finally addressing an outdated governance model – both at the regional level and here in St. Catharines. If any change is to happen – now is the time to review, discuss and set in motion the process so that in 2014 when people go to vote – they will hopefully be voting within a governance model that is reflective of a 21st century Niagara.

As a brief background - the Chamber released a report last summer called *Supporting Prosperity Through Effective Governance in Niagara*. The report examined areas in which Niagara's overall governance model could be modified to facilitate a more coordinated, efficient, representative public administration.

Surveys of businesses were conducted to form the basis of the report, in which the overwhelming opinion was that governance needs to be re-worked in Niagara. More than 70 per cent of businesses surveyed believe that there is a need to re-examine the size and complexity of municipal government and the administration of programs and services at both orders of local government.

***Supporting Prosperity Through Effective Governance in Niagara* was widely circulated in the last municipal election – both for regional and city councils. Councillors endorsed many of the recommendations – and the report was favourably received in the media and at public forums. Based on feedback, letters to the editor and communication with the Chamber – we believe that a large majority of people are hoping that leadership by Councils – both city and regional – will finally lead to a change in governance in Niagara.**

Now, based on the report by city staff that is before you for consideration – the Chamber would like to make the following recommendations to ensure that a Governance Committee is formed and guided by principles that will ensure concrete steps are taken to address Niagara's outdated governance model.

- 1. The report clearly demonstrates that the issue of governance reform in Niagara has been studied *ad nauseum*. People have become increasingly sceptical of reports – and rightly so. We don't need another consultant's report – we need leadership. The Governance Committee should be directed to review past reports – but NOT spend any further taxpayer dollars on consultants for this subject.**
- 2. In the report – staff have included a list of principles for consideration when forming the working group on governance. We recommend that the principles include wording that ensures the focus for the group will be to develop a concrete set of recommendations for council consideration with a fixed target date for completion.**
- 3. Related to the suggested principles – we recommend an amendment to the second bullet point which starts with “Reduce Overlap.” We would like Council to change this wording to “Eliminate Overlap and Duplication in Service Delivery.”**
- 4. We would also like Council to include a principle related to efficiency. This Council has taken steps towards streamlining city operations with the planned merging of Transportation and Environmental Services, the out-sourcing of services to the private sector where possible and it has directed staff to complete an extensive services review of all city departments. You clearly understand the importance of efficiency – this must be included in any governance discussion.**

As Council moves forward – be mindful that in the late 1950 and early 1960s – elected officials created one city by bringing together a patchwork of communities. It took courage, conviction and vision to do what many said at the time could never be done.

Our governance model today is a reflection of that bold move more than 50 years ago.

It's time for today's elected officials to again act with conviction, courage and leadership.

We are encouraged that this Council is willing to have a discussion – but we want to urge Council to follow the discussion through and take the steps that so many have failed to take in the past – and build a modern governance structure that puts St. Catharines first – and helps to create a Niagara that is well positioned for growth and prosperity.

Thank you.