

St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber Raises Concerns About City Spending

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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(*St. Catharines*) The St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce made a presentation to St. Catharines City Council last night urging council to re-examine its increases in expenditures. Although the overall tax increase is 2.7%, the actual increase in city expenditures from 2007 is 6.8%. After reviewing the budget in detail, the city is covering increased expenses through a surplus from 2007, and interest gains from the Community Development Fund.

“With the rate of inflation at 1.4% in the province, it is unacceptable that the city’s spending is increasing by five times the rate of inflation,” explained Stephen Cook, President of the Board of Directors for the Chamber to city councillors. “The city must be more fiscally responsible with its expenses. No business enterprise would approve a budget with a modest revenue increase of 1.5%, and expenses that are five times the revenue.”

At an earlier presentation in March to the Budget Committee of the City, the Chamber recommended a full services review of all city services as a means to seek efficiencies within the city; a re-focus of the Community Development Fund to become the Civic Project Fund; and an asset review of municipal land holdings. All three recommendations were accepted by City Council.

“We applaud the city council for taking the steps to create a Core Service Review Committee,” says Mr. Cook. “And are we looking forward to participating in the process.” In addition, the Chamber will be working with city council and staff to review the city’s municipal land assets in 2008.

The city council also agreed to change the focus and name of the Community Development Fund to become the Civic Project Fund. “With respect to the Civic Project Fund, the use of the those funds, including interest earned, should be invested in civic projects that enhance the quality of life for St. Catharines residents,” explained Cook.

The Chamber also urged city council to change its approach for public input on the final budget. “We were disappointed with the 266 page document that was released to the community,” said Walter Sendzik, Executive Vice President and General Manager. “The city is a corporation, and each taxpayer is a shareholder in the city, and as such, documents like the budget should be designed to be more user friendly – a line-by-line budget document is unacceptable.”

Present on behalf of the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce were Steve Cook, Walter Sendzik, Kithio Mwanzia Policy Coordinator and board member Nancy Diamond, Vice President St. Catharines.

The St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce is the largest chamber in Niagara with more than 1050 members representing over 27,000 employees. Founded in 1867, it’s the voice of business for a stronger Niagara.

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