



**A Presentation to St. Catharines City Council
Regarding Proposed Sign By-Law Amendments**

Prepared by the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce

August 18, 2008

Good Evening Mayor McMullan, City Councillors, and members of city staff. My name is Walter Sendzik and I am the Executive Vice President and General Manager of the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce and joining me tonight is the Chamber’s Policy Coordinator Kithio Mwanzia.

Tonight, we are here to provide comment on the Transportation & Environmental Services report on the city’s Sign By-law review, and its recommendations to Council.

There’s an old Chinese proverb that says – “IT IS BETTER TO TAKE MANY SMALL STEPS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION THAN TO MAKE A GREAT LEAP FORWARD ONLY TO STUMBLE BACKWARD.”

Much like the graffiti by-law that was recently introduced by the city, and the city’s efforts to enforce property standards in the downtown – it is these small steps that will become an important part in the revitalization of the heart of the city.

In early 2007, the Chamber identified signage in the downtown core as an area that the city should review as part of a revitalization process. With the Ontario government’s Places to Grow Plan, which identifies downtown St. Catharines as a centre of urban intensification, a possible partnership between Brock University and the city that will create a downtown campus for the School’s Fine and Performing Arts and a potential influx of tourists based on a proposed wine route on St. Paul St., it’s the Chamber’s opinion

that the city needs to take the proactive steps to ensure that it is prepared for the opportunities that can and will transform the city.

The report by TES is a good step in the right direction. After reviewing the report, the Chamber has the following comments for council consideration:

1. The Chamber agrees that a grandfather clause be included so that businesses are not unduly fined when the new regulations are adopted. And further to that point – the Chamber would recommend that if a grandfathered business would like to comply with the new standards, the city could set up a fund that businesses could access to convert their signs with the city covering 50 per cent of the cost – similar to the city’s façade improvement program.

2. The Chamber recommends that the city identify unique areas in the city for specific sign by-law standards that assist with fostering a distinct identity. For example – downtown St. Catharines has a tremendous opportunity to re-position itself as a tourism destination. With its rich history and unique urban landscape – a separate, more specific sign by-law that captures the spirit and vision for the downtown should be given serious consideration.

3. The Chamber agrees with the need for the city to enforce its by-laws. Investment in enforcement will lead to better compliance – and this applies not to just signs, but graffiti and property standards as well.

4. In discussions with chamber members in the sign business – it was noted that other municipalities issue sign licences to companies that provide signage services. It is our understanding that this facilitates the process, and ensures that sign services are provided by legitimate businesses reducing the amount of non-compliance. The Chamber recommends that the city explore this option as means to streamline the application process.

5. Finally, while the Chamber supports the TES report – we feel that a key element is missing from the discussion – and that is process predictability. As a Chamber – with over 1,100 businesses – we have heard far too often about the lack of predictable process at city hall. There is a palpable sense of frustration with processing at the city.

As you will hear in the report from the Mayor’s Development Review Committee tonight – there needs to be a change in how the city processes permits and applications – and in general interactions with business development. I’m not going to go into the details as I think the Development Review Committee’s report captures the essence of the Chamber’s concerns as well – but there is a perception that the city does not interact well with business. Whether this perception is true/ half true or false – it is harming the economic prosperity of the community – and it is council’s role to ensure that the city reverses this perception.

Whether it is a sign, building extension or new development – the city needs to ensure that the process is fluid, supportive and most importantly fair.

Although it is something that the city can't imbed in its by-laws – as new standards are introduced – the city should also introduce new measurement tools for processing applications, and like a well run corporation – communicate the city's successes in meeting its process targets, and make hard adjustments when processes are not being met.

Over the past two years, the city has taken both small steps, and some large ones in an effort to create a city that is a place to live, work and play. Many more steps need to taken – but we are all moving in the right direction. The Chamber is committed to continuing to work with City Council and Staff – and we appreciate the opportunity to provide input into an issue that might appear small in nature – but will have an enormous impact moving forward.

Thank you.