



2020 Provincial Pre-Budget Submission: City of St. Catharines

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Executive Summary

The City of St. Catharines appreciates the opportunity to participate in the 2020 Budget Consultation.

Our vision for the future is for St. Catharines to be the most dynamic, innovative, sustainable and livable city in North America.

The city is continually evolving and there is a sense of pride and momentum in the community: from the Canada Summer Games to the rebirth of the Port Weller dry docks, there is more economic activity taking place in our city than in previous decades. But like many municipalities in Ontario we have our challenges: affordable housing, mental health and addiction issues, and adapting to climate change.

We are a city that is open for business but also focused on ensuring the health and wellbeing of our most vulnerable to provide them with an opportunity to thrive. When people are given equal opportunity, we all benefit.

In order to achieve our goals, we must engage in strategic decision making that embraces innovation, ensures sustainability and improves livability for all residents. As the largest municipality in the Niagara region, St. Catharines city staff work hard to deliver a number of services to the greatest amount of residents in an urban environment. We value the opportunity to pursue partnerships with upper levels of government, ensuring our residents are provided with the best and most efficient levels of service they have come to expect.

We are seeking on-going support from the province in the following areas:

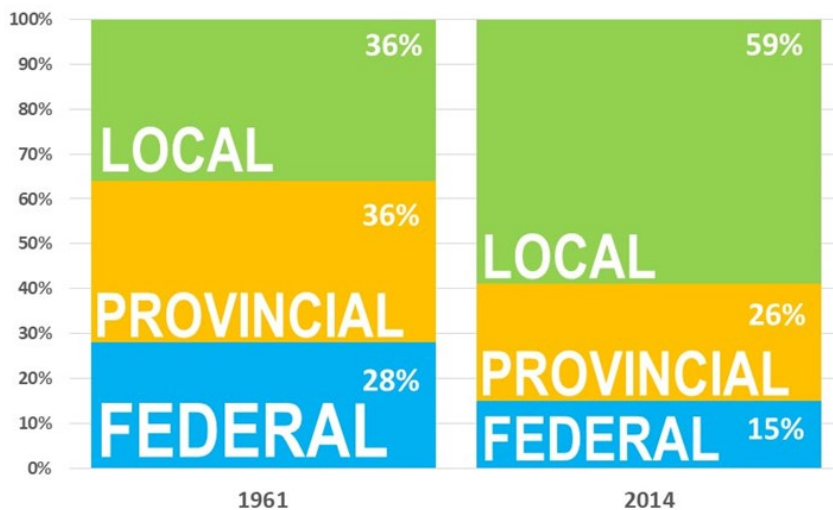
- Sustainable Infrastructure Funding
- Affordable Housing
- Mental Health and Addictions
- Climate Change
- Other Partnerships

Sustainable Infrastructure Funding

Stable, Reliable Funding

Many municipalities across the province face an infrastructure deficit compounded by rising construction costs and a growing infrastructure to-do list. Infrastructure is essential for the delivery of services to our citizens, and its condition impacts the levels of service municipalities can provide. The change in capital infrastructure ownership over the past fifty years means that local governments' share has significantly increased and the current funding system is unsustainable. Stable, reliable funding from the upper levels of government to better reflect the shift in ownership of municipal property assets would allow municipalities to plan and adequately staff for accelerated infrastructure improvements –sustainable, predictable increased funding levels would also encourage the construction industry to ramp up their capacity, which benefits employment and the economy while helping to keep the costs more in-line.

Responsibility Shift for Infrastructure



STATISTICS CANADA

Ask: We thankfully acknowledge contributions from the province. Provincial infrastructure programs, such as the Gas Tax, provides effective and predictable funding to help keep our services affordable.

The city seeks the provincial government's commitment to address the infrastructure pressures felt by many municipalities in the province through stable, ongoing support, and that municipalities be consulted as part of any funding model changes.

The City of St. Catharines remains committed to building a strong, diverse and affordable community, growing the Gas Tax funding has the ability to help us move that mandate forward. Services such as roads, bridges and transit help to increase environmental quality, economic productivity and social connectedness.

Predictable funding is crucial for long-term municipal planning. We ask that the province examine the mechanics of infrastructure funding and convert from an application-based system to an allocation-based system.

Affordable Housing: Healthier and Safer Communities

Communities across Canada are dealing with impacts from a variety of social challenges, including an increasing need for affordable housing and homelessness. St. Catharines is experiencing these issues at a community-wide level, which also impacts the day-to-day operations of staff in parks and City facilities.

As a lower-tier municipality in a regional system, the City of St. Catharines is not directly responsible for many of the front-line services that support the well-being of individuals in the community, including housing. However, this does not mean that City staff, facilities or programs are not impacted by the socio-economic issues in the community. The City works closely with partners at Niagara Region and public sector agencies to respond to the changing needs of residents in the areas that are outside of municipal jurisdiction

Development Charges Rebate Program

Niagara is similar to much of southern Ontario whereby our shelter system is operating at over 100 per cent capacity consistently. However, where Niagara differs is the significant change in our rental vacancy rates, putting increasing pressures on shelters, as individuals and families can not exit the system to affordable rental and housing options.

ASK: With over 5,000 households on the Niagara Regional Housing wait list, affordable housing is a serious and growing problem. We ask that the province reinstate the Development Charges Rebate program that would have allowed the City to provide rebates on development charges to eligible projects to stimulate the creation of more rental housing.





Mental Health and Addictions: Healthier and Safer Communities

Communities across Canada are dealing with impacts of a variety of social challenges, including the national opioid crisis and a lack of adequate mental health resources. Cities are increasingly becoming key stakeholders and leaders as they see first-hand the impact of these social issues in their downtowns, neighbourhoods, parks and public venues. As a lower-tier municipality, the City is challenged in what it can do to respond given that many of these issues are outside municipal jurisdiction; however, staff is committed to taking a leadership role where possible. St. Catharines is experiencing these issues at a community-wide level, which also impacts the day-to-day operations of staff in parks and City facilities.

Addressing these issues has had an impact on City operations particularly in areas of clean-up, needle pick-up and involving police and security when issues arise. Although, staff are supportive of these efforts as they assist in maintaining a clean and healthy city for all citizens, these tasks remove staff away from their core work function. Often, staff are unable to effectively complete work due to the volume of needles, waste, and other paraphernalia left on site. In some cases, staff have indicated a right to refuse work under the Ontario Health and Safety Act (OHSA) due to the unsafe working environment this waste causes.

The pressure placed on staff to deliver the same level of core service while having to navigate compromised workplaces has had a negative impact on morale. Over the past year, the City has seen an increase in employees leveraging the Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP) in addition to taking leaves of absence and seeking medical treatment to help treat symptoms of stress related to these circumstances.

In September 2019, as part of the Compassionate STC Speaker Series, Positive Living presented to City staff how substance abuse affects our entire community. They have identified through their Harm Reduction Program, from 2017 to 2018 there was a 15% increase in client contacts and that an upward trend is continuing in 2019. This increasing trend has implications on the City's workforce.

St. Catharines Council approved an expenditure of \$350,000 to develop a targeted team to help tackle the prevalence of needles in our parks and streets, clean up parks and public spaces, and perform outreach with those living rough in parks.

The pilot project includes tracking of the number of needles picked up, the cost of cleaning up spaces that have been subjected to abuse by people using needles and other drugs; and other issues around homelessness and addictions found in city parks and that the findings be reported back to Council.

In addition, the data is intended to be used to identify the financial impacts to be incorporated into future funding requests to Regional, provincial and federal governments to deal with this epidemic. Currently staff are developing the work program in conjunction with Niagara Region, Niagara Regional Police Services and the downtown business community.

ASK: We ask that the provincial government declare the opioid overdose crisis a national emergency and commit to working with all levels of government to find a solution.

ASK: We ask that the provincial government reverse the cuts made in May of 2019 that cut funding for mental health by close to two-thirds, from \$2.1B over four years to \$1.9B over 10 years and funnel that back to municipalities.



Climate Change: An Emerging Priority

The effects surrounding climate change has made this one of the most pressing issues faced today. Given the magnitude of these effects, it will take a global effort to mitigate and adapt to these changes. Climate change is a long-term shift in average weather conditions. There is near unanimous consensus that climate change is occurring and human activity is the main cause, due to the burning of fossil fuels and the conversion of forests to agriculture. In St. Catharines we will see an increase in temperature of 3°C by 2050 from our historic average (1976 - 2005) temperature.

St. Catharines understands the importance of climate change and declared a Climate Emergency as of April 29, 2019.

The effects of climate change pose challenges to municipalities as we deal with extreme weather events such as flooding, severe wind storms, drought and freezing rain, which are happening with more frequency every year. Municipalities also hold a responsibility in mitigating and adapting to Climate Change. The City of St. Catharines has pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030.

Our goal as a city is to adopt innovative approaches and continue responsible community planning and decision-making that balances growth, enhances quality of life, manages emergencies, and minimizes the environmental impacts of climate change.

The city is currently developing a Climate Change Action Plan that will address, at a minimum:

- climate change impacts and mitigation plans
- energy conservation and demand management
- waterfront/shoreline protection and water course erosion
- advocacy for updated floodplain mapping
- storm water management options (e.g. future rate system)
- identify capital investments to address climate change
- establish corporate waste reduction targets and sustainable building guidelines

ASK: We ask that the province assist in our Climate Change Action Plan by mandating updated floodplain mapping.

ASK: We ask that the province take a more proactive approach in mitigating climate change and introduce legislation to support innovative green technologies.

ASK: We ask that the government consider streamlining development burdens for businesses and innovative technologies that are environmentally sustainable.

Other Partnerships

GO: Connecting People to Places

As we celebrate the one-year anniversary of daily, year-round GO trains in Niagara, we can see momentum building and an increased demand for public transit. We are prepared to lead the partnership with Metrolinx to maximize our collective investment through our Niagara GO multi-station development strategy.

The summer seasonal GO train has seen explosive growth over the last few years as marketing and awareness increases – proof that riders will choose the GO Train option when travelling to Niagara. We are ready for more GO trains: Niagara has dedicated resources, leadership, partnerships, and policy to make these station sites bustling, seamless, truly multi-modal transit hubs.

Niagara strongly supports the ongoing positive relationship established with our partner Metrolinx and encourages the continuance of meaningful dialogue between Metrolinx, CN Rail and the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corp. to increase frequency and service levels of Niagara GO service.

ASK: We request the Government of Ontario capitalize on the opportunity to invest in required infrastructure for the long term viability of the corridor.





Conclusion

The city is dedicated to growth and sustainability, is open for business, and strives to provide excellent service to our citizens. There are many opportunities for the City of St. Catharines and the province of Ontario to work together towards our common goals by building positive relationships and successful partnerships.

Together we can make positive change for the individuals who live, work and play in this province and in our community. Together we can create healthy, safe and vibrant neighbourhoods.

The city appreciates consideration of these partnership opportunities and looks forward to working with the province in 2020 and well into the future.