



**THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF NIAGARA**

**REPORT TO:** Chair and Members of  
Corporate & Financial Services Committee  
Planning Services Committee

**SUBJECT:** Federation of Canadian Municipalities  
Quality of Life Reporting System

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**RECOMMENDATION**

That these Committees recommend to Regional Council:

1. That this report be received for information.
2. That this report and relevant data be shared with existing or potential "Quality of Life" partners in the community including but not limited to; area municipalities, school boards, Niagara Health System, Niagara Regional Police Service, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, Niagara Regional Housing, Niagara Economic and Tourism Corporation, and Opportunities Niagara.

**PURPOSE**

This report is divided into a number of sections to achieve the following purposes:

- To provide background on the Region's participation in Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Quality of Life Reporting System.
- To relate this initiative to relevant portions of Council's Business Plan.
- To present, in summary form, some of the highlights related to overall quality of life in Canadian municipalities identified by FCM.
- To present highlights related to quality of life in a Niagara context.
- To provide an assessment of Niagara's quality of life and provide some commentary on where efforts to improve quality of life have been and/or should be focused.

Council can expect additional, more detailed and localized, reporting on specific issues throughout the next year. As the extensive database available to us through this initiative is further explored, appropriate linkages to existing localized data sources will become more apparent.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The quality of life in Canada's urban centres is at risk, is the conclusion of the report on Quality of Life indicators produced by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM).

The report is the third in a series, and examines quality of life across six broad categories. Findings indicate that despite general improvements in rates of post-secondary education, employment growth and home-ownership, quality of life deteriorated for a growing number of people during the 1990s. In addition, improvements in income and poverty rates since 1996 have been offset by a growing income gap, housing affordability problems and changes to social programs.

Subsequent reports will be published later this year to provide in-depth analysis of many of the topics highlighted in the current report.

The study of a wide variety of local indicators collectively works to develop a picture of quality of life. Indicators cover a number of broad categories including community safety, clean environment, social welfare, and community health.

The participation in this study and collection and analysis of these indicators will not, in and of itself, improve the quality of life in Niagara. The Region, in partnership with Environment Canada, is currently seeking to enhance the level of community engagement in developing a vision of what Niagara should look like in generations to come. While the corporation, through limits on mandates, cannot directly control outcomes in every aspect of these five themes, it is important to know the current state and trends within these areas in order to identify where Niagara is or should be influencing quality of life. Our participation in this study complements our efforts to identify, act upon and measure progress towards achieving community priorities

Members of the FCM Quality of Life Technical Team developed a definition of Quality of Life in an effort to provide clarity and consistency in reporting.

"Quality of life is enhanced and reinforced in municipalities that:

1. Develop and maintain a vibrant local economy;
2. Protect and enhance the natural and built environment;
3. Offer opportunities for the attainment of personal goals, hopes and aspirations;
4. Promote a fair and equitable sharing of common resources;
5. Enable residents to meet their basic needs; and,
6. Support rich social interactions and the inclusion of all residents in community life."

Implicit in this definition is the fact that the quality of life in any given municipality is influenced by interrelated factors such as: affordable, appropriate housing; civic engagement; community and social infrastructure(e.g. arts, culture, recreation); education; employment; the local economy; the natural environment; personal and community health; personal financial security; and personal safety. The FCM Quality of Life Report is structured around this definition.

As we have learned through iterations of the Council Business Plan, and through CMT's work on integrated community planning, most recently demonstrated in Report CAO 7-2004 the goals in Council's Business Plan are not mutually exclusive. They are complementary with progress in one area often reinforcing or supporting progress on one or more others. As a result the linkages made to quality of life within each goal may appear to overlap.

In a number of cases Niagara is noteworthy for its relative placement (positive or negative) in the Quality of Life issues identified in the FCM report. Similarly, the Region of Niagara has not necessarily conformed to all of the national trends. More detailed review and analysis will be presented in subsequent issue specific reporting.

Demographically, Niagara's population growth over the past 10 years has been anywhere from ½ to 2/3 lower than both the QOLRS and National averages. In addition, Niagara has experienced a reduction in the youth population. Many other study participants have experienced growth in this category. Niagara's percentage of the total population over 65 remains significantly higher than all other QOLRS members.

Economically, the number of bankruptcies per 1,000 establishments remains above the national average despite the significant improvement over the past 5 years. Much of this improvement was in the significant increase in the number of establishments.

In environmental stewardship there is opportunity for improvement. Of the 20 municipalities in the study Niagara has the greatest reliance on the car as a mode of transportation. That reliance has increased marginally over the past 5 years. This differs from the trend experienced by many other study participants who realized some improvement. On a positive note Niagara's recycling rates are among the highest in the survey. This can be viewed as a testament to the investments and priority placed on diversion programs by the Region and community partners.

Niagara followed the 10 year trend in improving rates of post secondary education; however Niagara's rate is the lowest among the 20 municipalities in the study. Level of education is often viewed as one of the factors that influence long term ability to attain personal goals. However, in Niagara this result needs to be considered along with our demographic profile.

Growth in after tax incomes has not been spread equitably. Those at the highest levels of income have experienced the largest gains, while those at lower end of the spectrum have actually seen incomes decline. These declines have exceeded national and provincial declines.

Daily newspaper circulation has declined significantly over the past 10 years in all QoLRS communities. The decline in Niagara is particularly noteworthy as it is one of the largest declines among the 20 participants. It is also noteworthy that this measure does not include the significant network of weekly newspapers in Niagara. When viewed in combination with declining voter turnout in elections – where Niagara again shows one of the largest declines in federal voter turnout – and similar trends in municipal elections there is evidence, at least in traditional measures, of declining community involvement.

## **BACKGROUND**

### *Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Quality of Life Reporting System*

This initiative, presently engages 20 large Canadian municipalities representing municipalities from coast to coast and points in between. It involves studying a wide variety of local indicators that collectively develop a picture of quality of life. Indicators cover a number of broad categories including community safety, clean environment, social welfare, and community health. Appendix A to this report lists the categories and indicators for which data was gathered. The results provide trend and comparative information that leads to greater appreciation of where policy and resource attention needs to be placed. Discussion of the need for Niagara to participate and the approval to do so was contained in the adoption of Report CAO 8-2002. Niagara has been participating in the development of the current report since early in 2003.

Initially the study was conceived as a way to measure how changes to the funding structure of federal transfer payments would affect municipal governments. In recent years the mandate of the project has evolved to a broader framework for quality of life (environmental, social infrastructure, homelessness). The reports that have been produced to date seek to identify and promote awareness of issues affecting quality of life in Canadian communities. In this way the opportunity to better target policies and resources aimed at improving quality of life is enhanced.

Through the development of Council's Business Plan the Niagara Region has committed to the achievement of the following goals:

- ✓ *A healthy environment*
- ✓ *Planned land use that balances the need to stimulate economic development and growth with the need to protect our green space and our history*
- ✓ *Efficient access through environmentally friendly transit systems*
- ✓ *Affordable services fundamental to a thriving community*
- ✓ *Equal access to essential social and health services*

While the corporation, through limits on mandates, cannot directly control outcomes in every aspect of these five themes, it is important to know the current state and trends within these areas. Without some sense of how things are today and trends indicating changes over time it becomes very challenging to gauge the Region's impact in these key areas and to assess our success in achieving the desired outcomes. Alternatively, these trends can assist in identifying areas where partnerships within the community can and should be fostered.

## **REPORT**

### **Where Does FCM fit in the mix of Niagara Initiatives?**

The Region, in partnership with Environment Canada, is currently seeking to enhance the level of community engagement in developing a vision of what Niagara should look like in generations to come. The details of the development of a sustainability plan were contained in Report CAO 5-2004. From Niagara Region's perspective it is critical to first know where the community is with respect to economic issues, health issues, social issues, and environmental issues. In this regard the FCM Quality of Life Research Study is an ideal starting point. The recently launched community engagement effort is expected to yield information on public perceptions with respect to these issues. The FCM indicators provide one of several statistical components for staff and Council to consider in conjunction with the feelings and opinions provided by residents.

Not all of the categories measured are activities that fall within the sole mandate of the Region or area municipalities. Isolated sector or mandate based efforts can have the effect of negating against the true picture of quality of life that can emerge when proper linkages are made. Also, there may be evidence of quality of life measures in specific sectors, but coordination is lacking in terms of creating an overall picture of quality of life in Niagara.

The assessment of the quality of life in a community will almost certainly produce discussion among community stakeholders of where we want to be. The Quality of Life indicators will highlight areas of strength and weakness both over time and relative to other jurisdictions. The participation in this study and collection and analysis of these indicators will not, in and of itself, improve the quality of life in Niagara. These indicators will assist in developing targets with respect to priority areas for Niagara. They will permit Council and senior management, in consultation with community stakeholders, to evolve the strategic plan to include specific targets for the community to work towards achieving.

Beyond the assessment of where the community wants to be relative to the current state the organization needs to measure the success of its contribution to the achievement of community goals. In Niagara, efforts such as participation in the Ontario Municipal CIO's Benchmarking Initiative, Municipal Performance Measurement Program, Community Engagement, and the Quality of Work Life survey provide the information for senior management to make a balanced assessment of this contribution. Similarly, the FCM community indicators should provoke discussion of where the organization wants to improve the contribution it makes.

Once the community has set some priorities, and the organization has identified the contributions required of it to assist in achieving the objectives the focus can then turn to the more specific outcomes that need to be pursued within the limited resources of the organization. This is done through our internal processes of strategic planning, service planning, budgeting, and assessments of the services we provide.

### **How is Quality of Life Defined?**

Members of the FCM **Quality** of Life Technical Team developed a definition of Quality of Life in an effort to provide clarity and consistency in reporting.

“Quality of life is enhanced and reinforced in municipalities that:

1. Develop and maintain a vibrant local economy;
2. Protect and enhance the natural and built environment;
3. Offer opportunities for the attainment of personal goals, hopes and aspirations;
4. Promote a fair and equitable sharing of common resources;
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Implicit in this definition is the fact that the quality of life in any given municipality is influenced by interrelated factors such as: affordable, appropriate housing; civic engagement; community and social infrastructure(e.g. arts, culture, recreation); education; employment; the local economy; the natural environment; personal and community health; personal financial security; and personal safety.

The FCM Quality of Life Report is structured around this definition. A hard copy of the full report is available for viewing in both the Regional Chairman’s office and the Regional Clerk’s office. It can also be accessed electronically via the FCM web site at [www.fcm.ca](http://www.fcm.ca)

### **How are Quality of Life Issues linked to Council’s Business Plan?**

The FCM Quality of Life indicators are broken into six broad factors; Local Economy; Enhancement of the natural environment; Opportunity for attainment of personal goals and aspirations; Promotion of fairness and equity; Enabling the meeting of basic needs; Supporting social interactions and inclusion. Each factor produces a profile of one element of the Quality of Life definition described in the previous section. If viewed as a whole, an overall profile of Quality of Life in Canadian municipalities is developed.

The five goals in Council’s Business Plan are listed below with an indication of the link to one or more of the Quality of Life Factors. The linkages should not be considered exhaustive, but serve to provide an indication of the important linkages these indicators have to Council objectives. As we have learned through iterations of the Council Business Plan, and more recently through CMT’s work on integrated community planning the goals are not mutually exclusive. They are complementary with progress in one area often reinforcing or supporting progress on one or more others. As a result the linkages made to quality of life within each goal may appear to overlap.

The Corporation’s progress towards the achievement of these goals was recently reported to Council in Report CAO 7-2004. The FCM QoLRS indicators take a broader view of the community beyond the Regional organization.

### **Goal # 1 - Optimal access to the Niagara Region through sustainable physical and technical infrastructure**

Indicators of the strength of the local economy such as bankruptcies and building permits are influenced by optimization of the physical and technical infrastructure in a community. Similarly, measures of the natural environment such as transportation or wastewater

systems speak to the physical infrastructure in place. The fairness and equity indicators speak to the equality of access to this infrastructure.

**Goal # 2** – *Balanced planned land use*

The local economy is impacted by how well the community as a whole utilizes available land resources. In addition, the natural environment is significantly influenced by the way a community chooses to use land.

**Goal # 3** – *Sustainable healthy living environment through environmental stewardship*

Stewardship of the environment in order to ensure a healthy living environment can be measured through indicators of the quality of the environment (e.g. air quality, waste diversion). Sustainability can be seen in indicators of employment, education and income growth as well as in trends in the level of poverty in the community.

**Goal # 4** – *Affordable service excellence*

The levels of poverty, education, employment and income growth in a community directly impact both the level service needed in the community and the ability of those in the community to pay for such services. Immigration levels and the demographic make-up of a community influence the type of services required and method of delivery in order to ensure all members of the community are adequately included in service offerings.

**Goal # 5** – *Healthy, safe and productive communities*

Health, safety and productivity in a community are enhanced when members of that community have the means to actively pursue personal goals and aspirations. Safety and productivity, in particular, are influenced by the level of inclusion and involvement of all segments of the population. Where a large segment(s) of the population struggles to meet basic needs there will be greater health and safety challenges...

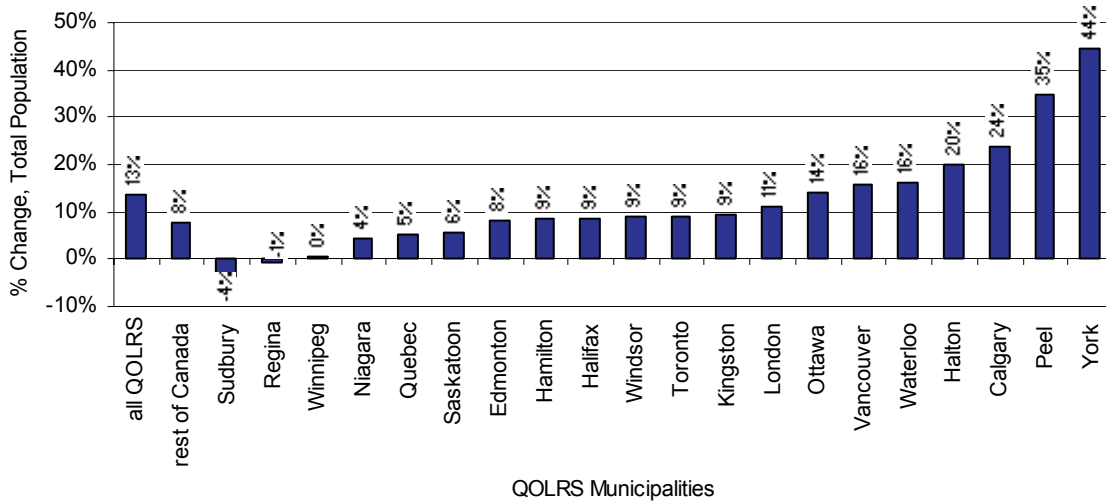
**Summary of FCM Quality of Life Trends**

This section of the report is drawn directly from the Summary section of the FCM QoLRS Highlights report

*Demographic Profile*

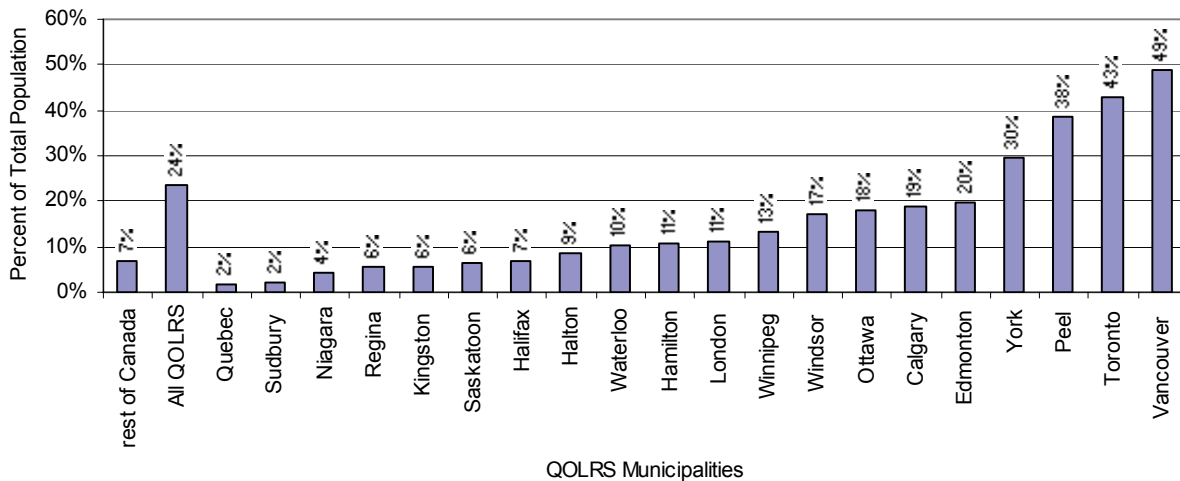
The 20 municipalities included in the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Quality of Life Reporting System account for 40 percent of Canada's total population. Population growth is most concentrated in the 8 largest municipalities and particularly within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) (Chart 1). GTA municipalities such as York, Peel and Halton grew about 4 times faster than the rest of Canada between 1991 and 2001.

**Chart 1 Total Population Growth**  
 Percent change in total population, all QOLRS Municipalities, 1991-2001



Population growth of new Canadians – immigrants arriving within the past 10 years – is a major demographic force within the QOLRS municipalities. Immigration is in the process of dramatically altering the ethnic, linguistic and cultural personality of larger Canadian cities and visible minority populations in several Canadian municipalities will soon be at or near the “majority” (Chart 2). (See also Implications Specific to Niagara, Demographic Profile section)

**Chart 2 Ethnic and Cultural Diversity**  
 Population of visible minorities as proportion of total population, all QOLRS Municipalities, 2001

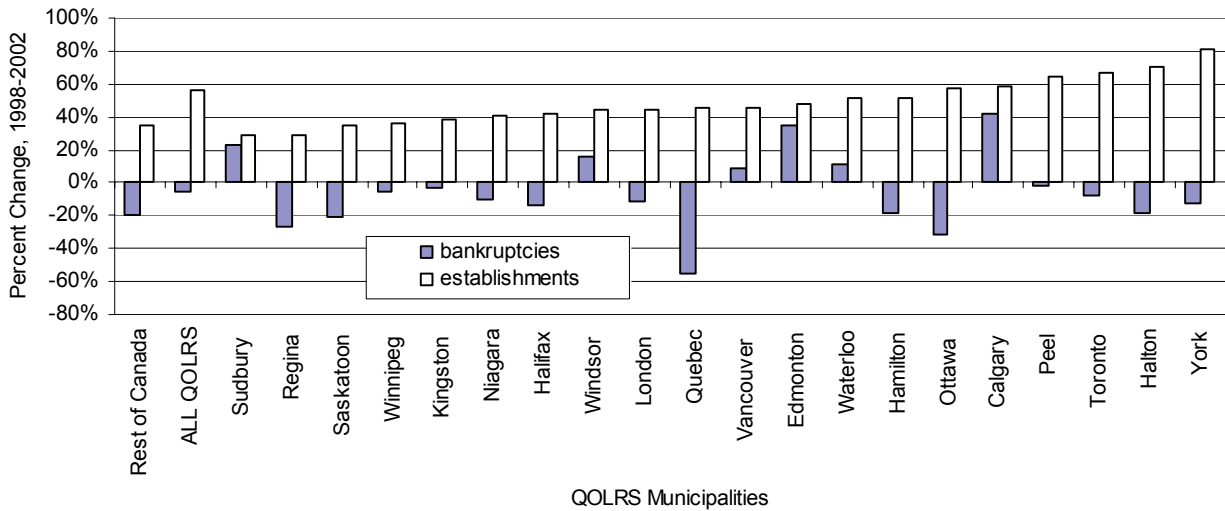


Communities are benefiting from the talents and cultural richness brought by newcomers. High rates of population growth are contributing to pressure on urban services to keep pace with the rapidly changing needs of the population, the stress on the natural environment, and the reliance on social support networks other than family.

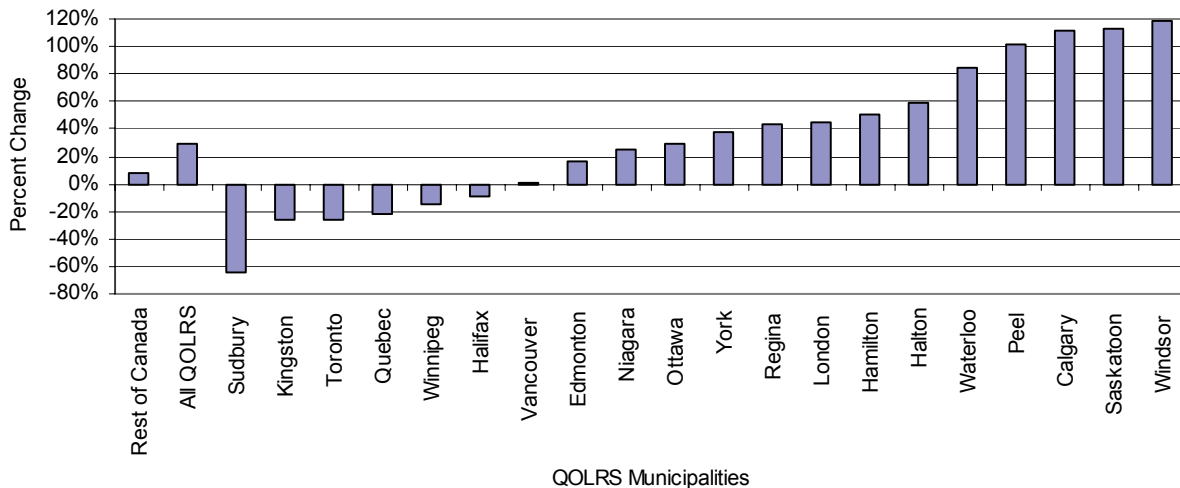
*Developing and Maintaining Vibrant Local Economies*

Overall, the QOLRS municipalities have seen improved economic performance, especially in the latter part 1990's. There has been strong growth in the number of new business establishments, decreased bankruptcies between 1998 and 2002 (Chart 3). In addition there has been significant growth in the real value of building permits, and a falling average unemployment rate (Chart 4).

**Chart 3 New Businesses and Bankruptcies**  
 Percent change in the number of bankruptcies and the number of business establishments, all QOLRS Municipalities - 1998-2002



**Chart 4 Building Permits**  
 % Growth in real value of building permits (1991\$), all QOLRS Municipalities - 1991-2001

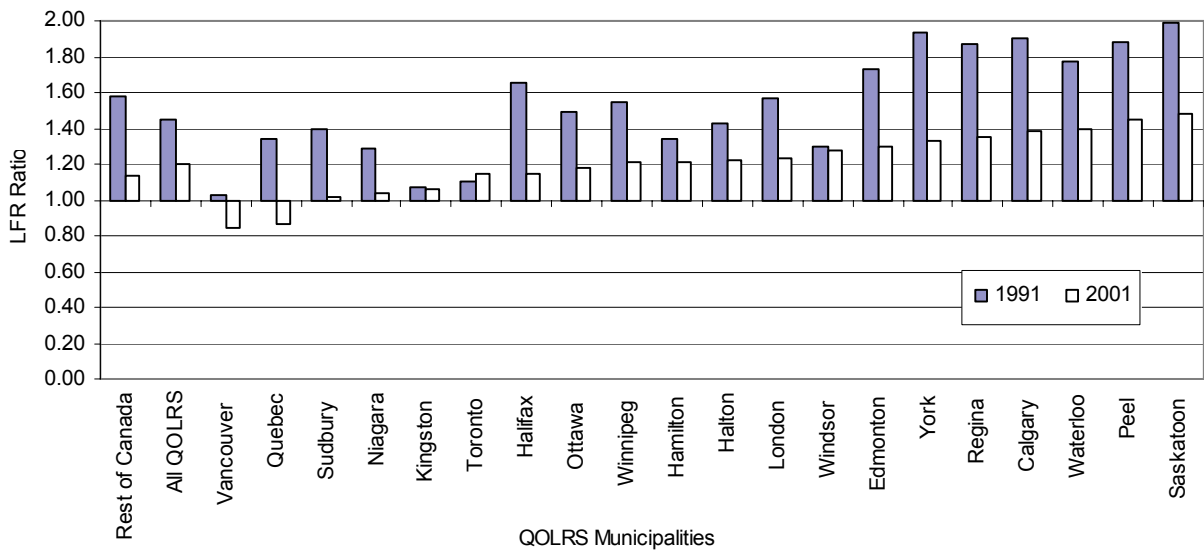


Source: Statistics Canada, Building & Demolitions Permits Monthly Survey, 1991, 1996-2002

A potential long-term threat to the vibrancy of local economies is the shrinking proportion of young people who will be entering the labour force, in comparison to those who will be

exiting over the next fifteen years (Chart 5). This will heighten the importance of immigration and internal migration.

**Chart 5 Labour Force Replacement (LFR) Ratio**  
 Ratio of population aged 0-14 to population aged 50-64, all QOLRS Municipalities, 1991 and 2001



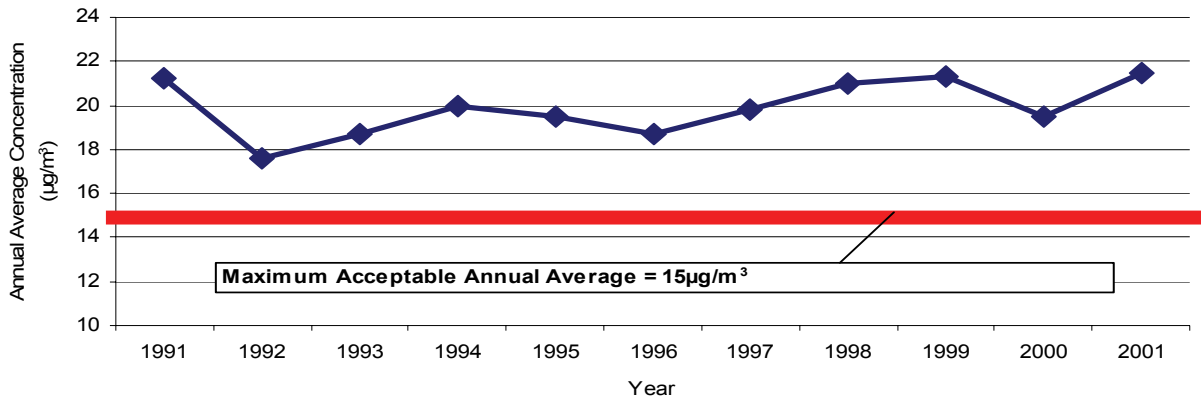
Source: Statistics Canada, 1991, 2001 Census

**Protecting and Enhancing the Natural and Built Environment**

Strong population and economic growth placed considerable pressure on air, water and soil quality in Canadian cities. Municipal governments responded to this pressure through a range of investments in public transit, wastewater treatment and solid waste management. Nevertheless, indications of progress are mixed.

While increased public transit is widely recognized as a crucial means to address air quality, the automobile remains the dominant mode of transport for commuters in all QOLRS municipalities. Air quality in QOLRS municipalities is generally within the acceptable range, with the important exception of ground-level ozone concentration (Chart 6). Ozone is a chief component of summertime smog and motor vehicle emissions are its single largest source.

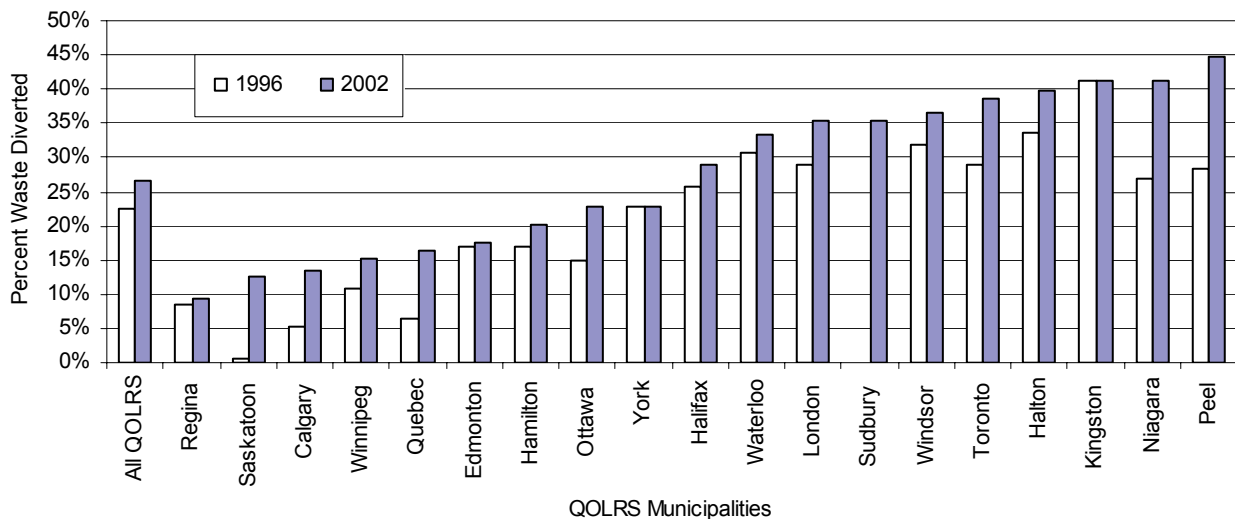
**Chart 6 Air Quality – Ozone (O<sub>3</sub>)**  
 Annual average ozone concentration, QOLRS Average (µg/m<sup>3</sup>), 1991-2001



Source: Environment Canada, National Indicators & Assessment Office, National Air Pollution Surveillance Network, 1991-2001

Rates of recycling have been rising since 1991 across municipalities and in many cases are achieving reductions in the absolute volumes of waste sent to landfill (Chart 7).

**Chart 7 Residential Recycling Rates<sup>1</sup>**  
 Residential recycled waste as a percentage of total residential waste collected, all QOLRS Municipalities, 1996, 2002



Source: Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Municipal Survey Database, 2003

**Offering Opportunities for the Attainment of Personal Goals, Hopes and Aspirations**

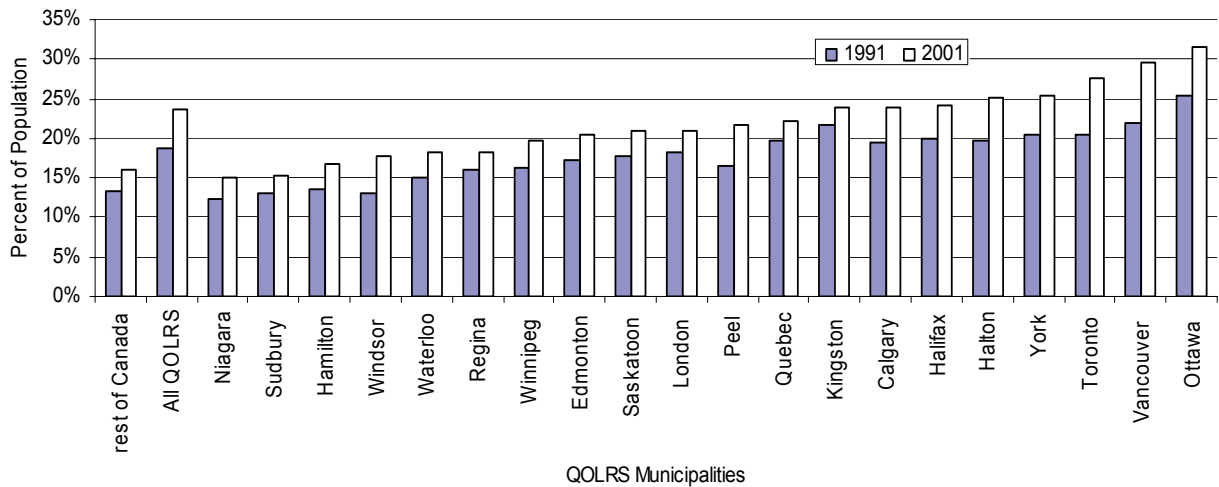
The trends for key aspirations such as higher education, better employment and incomes and homeownership are positive, although household income gains have been concentrated at the upper end of the scale.

Post-secondary attainment levels of residents of QOLRS municipalities improved consistently for the entire decade (Chart 8), employment growth expanded along with population growth, the rate of homeownership increased and average family and household real income growth during the second half of the decade reversed the significant declines that had taken place between 1991 and 1996 (Chart 9).



**Chart 8 Educational Attainment**

*Percent of population aged 15+ with post-secondary certificate/diploma/degree, all QOLRS Municipalities - 1991, 2001*

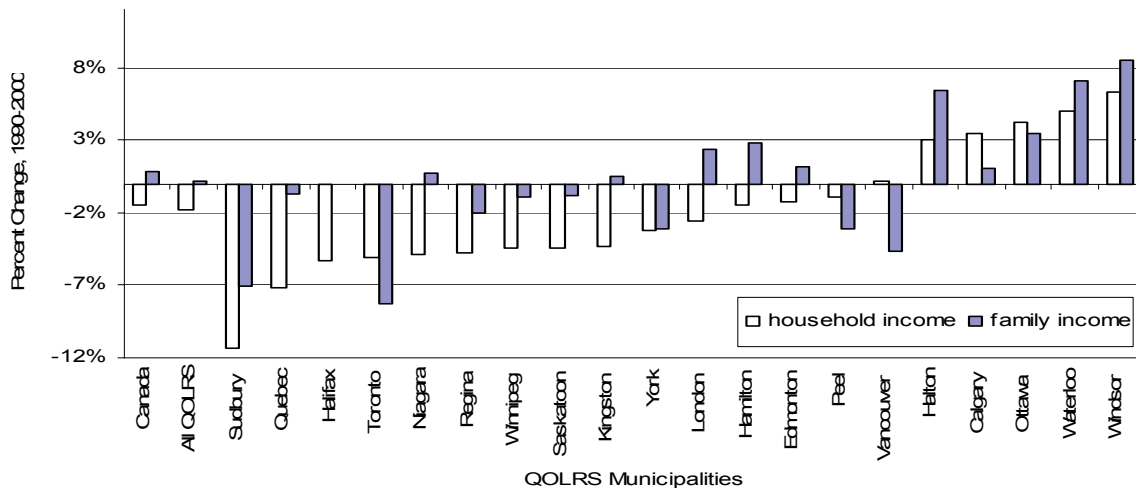


Source: Statistics Canada, 1991, 2001 Census

This is moderated by the fact that improvement in incomes was the result of rapid growth at the highest end of the income scale. Median, i.e. “typical”, family incomes grew significantly in only a limited number of medium-sized cities during this time, and declined in half of the 20 QOLRS municipalities. Median family income declined significantly in the two largest urban centres - Toronto and Vancouver.

**Chart 9 Change in Median Income**

*Change in median family and household income (1990\$), QOLRS Municipalities, 1990-2000*

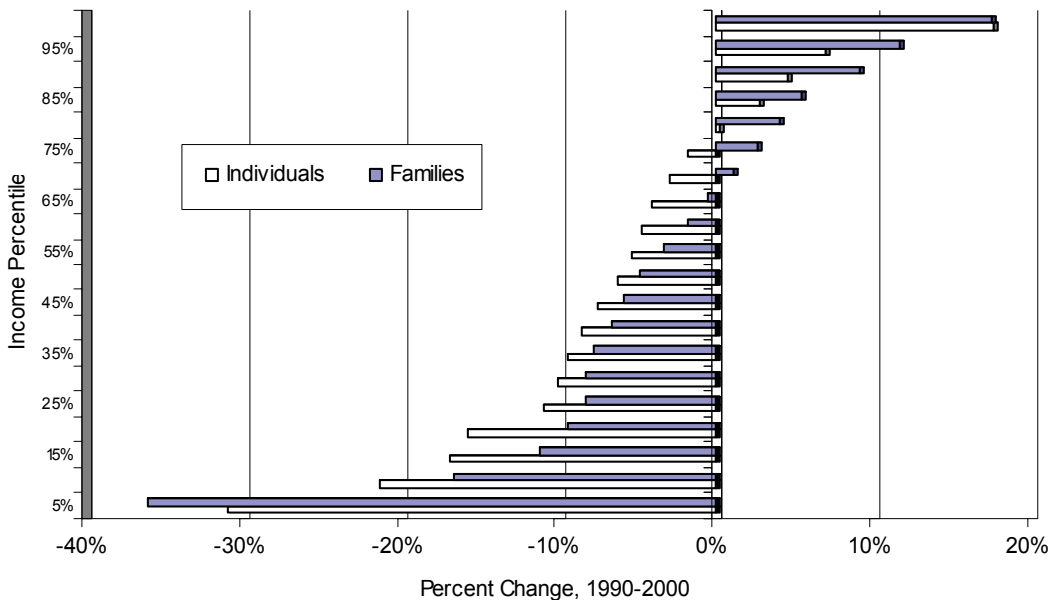


Source: Statistics Canada, 1991, 2001 Census

*Promoting a Fair and Equitable Sharing of Common Resources*

While average real incomes have grown in most QOLRS communities, a closer look confirms that middle and lower-income households have lost ground and that households from “minority” or “vulnerable” populations have not shared in the benefits of economic growth (Chart 10). Only the wealthiest 30 percent of families and 20 percent of individuals in the 20 QOLRS municipalities enjoyed any increase in before-tax real income between 1990 and 2000. In contrast, the before-tax incomes of low and modest income individuals - the bottom 30% of all unattached individuals – decreased by 10 percent or more during this time. Median income families saw their before-tax income decrease by 6.2 percent after adjusting for inflation.

**Chart 10 Income Inequality**  
 Change in real before-tax income by percentile, Individuals and families (1990\$), QOLRS Median, 1990-2000



Source: Statistics Canada, Small Area and Administrative Databank, 1990, 2000

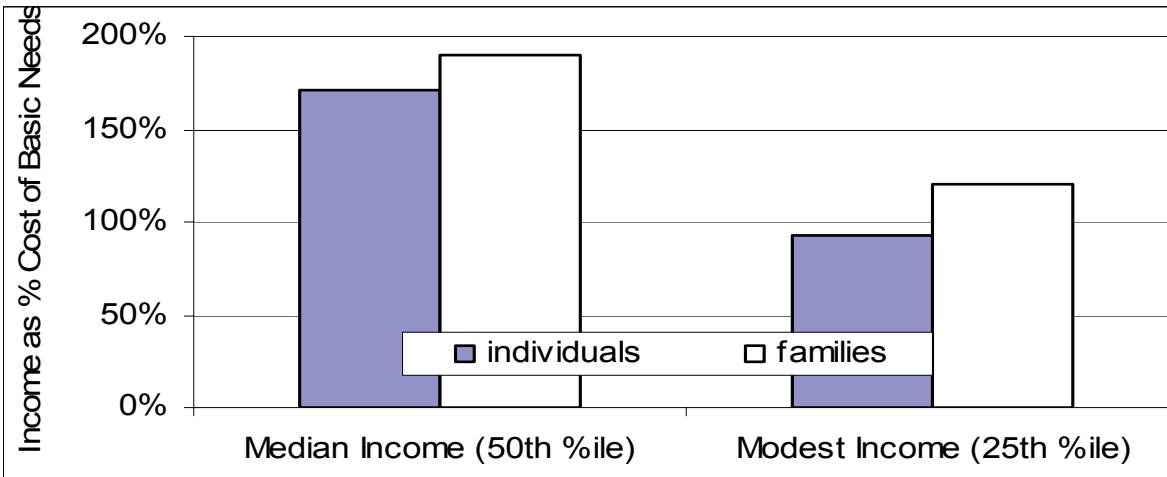
**Enabling Residents to Meet Their Basic Needs**

The majority of families and individuals living in the 20 municipalities have sufficient incomes to meet their basic needs, consisting of shelter, food and clothing. Improvements over the decade were seen for lone parent female-headed families with young children (Chart 11).

Many individuals and families are facing a combination of stagnant or declining incomes, rapidly growing costs for shelter, and reductions in social assistance. The result is pushing these individuals and families to the margins of society and to homelessness.

Chart 11 Income and Basic needs

*Income as a percentage of basic needs, as indicated by the Market Basket Measure, for median and modest income families and individuals, QOLRS Average - 2000*



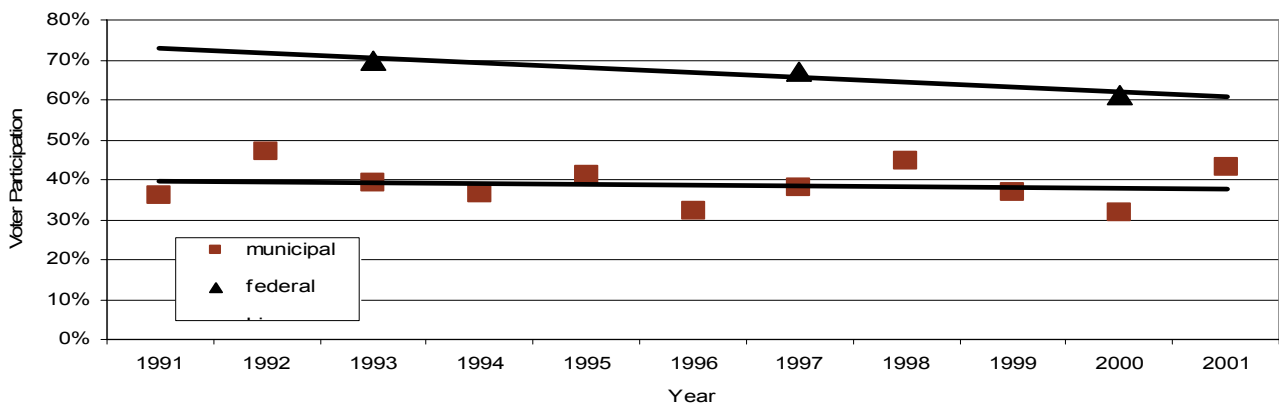
Sources: Statistics Canada, Small Area and Administrative Data, 2001; Human Resources Development Canada, Report of the Market Basket Measure, 2003

*Supporting Rich Social Interactions and the Inclusion of All Residents in Community Life*

This dimension of quality of life is in a state of flux. The loss of government-sponsored social safety nets and the decline of the two-parent family as the “social core” of society require a greater role for private citizens in contributing to social networks. In the QOLRS communities, trends show a move away from traditional means of social involvement, including rates of volunteerism and voter participation (Chart 12 and 13). New immigrants and Aboriginal people appear to face barriers to inclusion in the labour force, as evidenced by both employment and labour force participation rates (Chart 14).

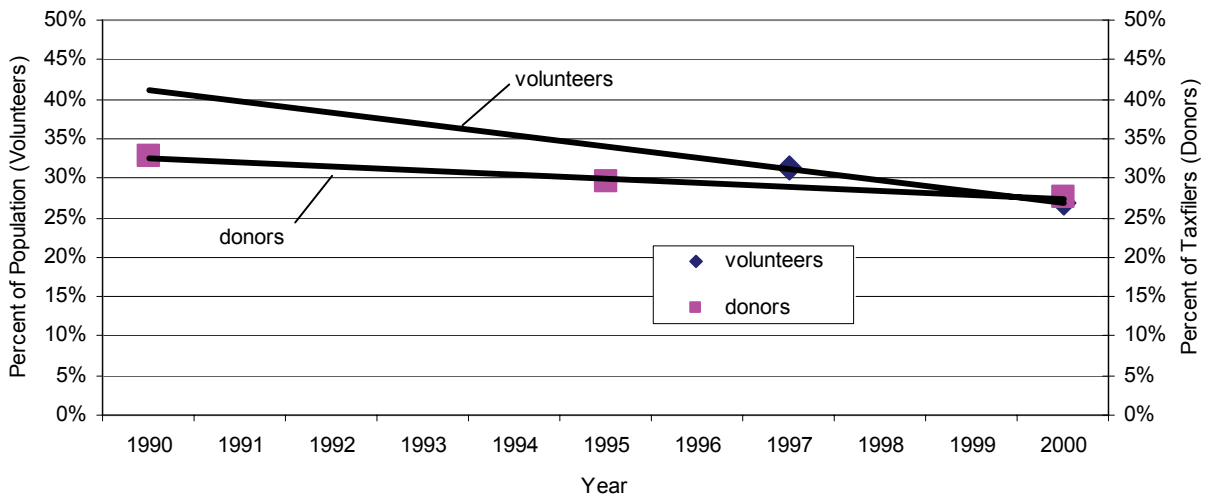
Chart 12 Civic Engagement - Elections

*Voter participation in federal and municipal elections, QOLRS Average - 1991-2001*



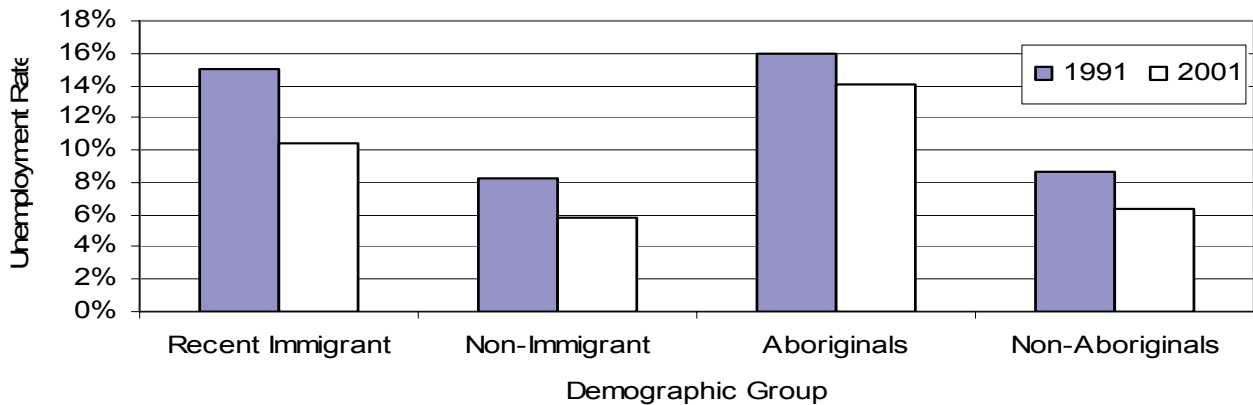
Sources: Elections Canada, 1993, 1997, and 2000; Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Municipal Survey Database, 2003

**Chart 13 Civic Engagement - Volunteerism and Charitable Donors**  
 Percentage of population volunteering, percentage of tax filers making charitable donations, QOLRS Average - 1990-2000



Sources: National Survey of Giving Volunteering and Participating, 1997, 2000; Statistics Canada, Small Area and Administrative Data - 1990, 1995, 2000

**Chart 14 Inclusion of New Immigrants and Aboriginals - Unemployment**  
 Unemployment rates for recent immigrants, non-immigrants, aboriginals and non-aboriginals, QOLRS Average - 1991, 2001



Source: Statistics Canada, 1991, 2001 Census - Custom Tabulation

### Implications Specific to Niagara

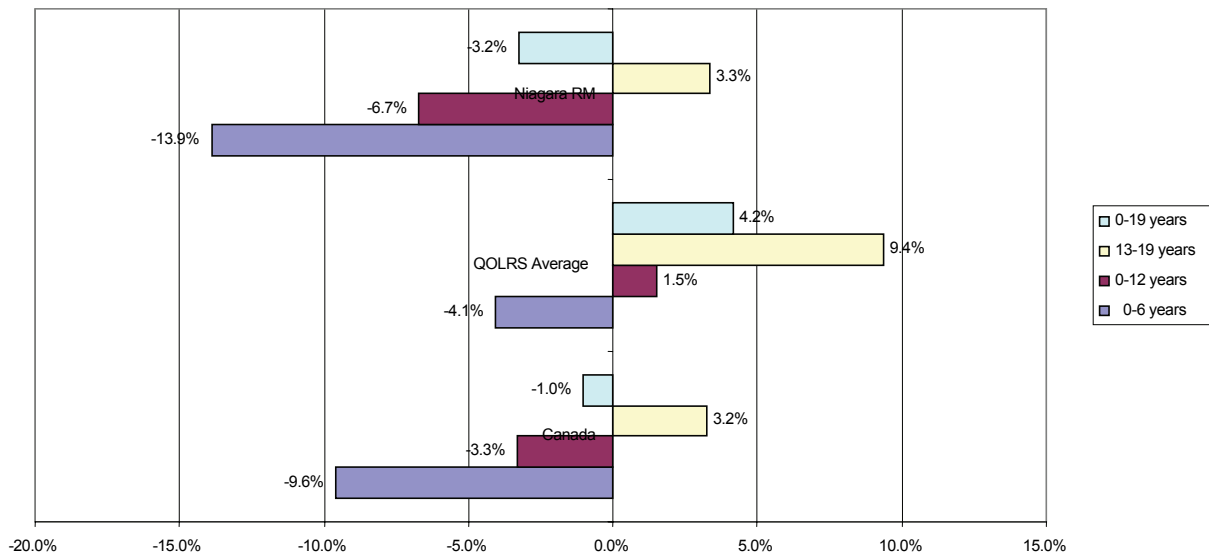
In a number of cases Niagara is noteworthy for its relative placement (positive or negative) in the Quality of Life issues identified in the FCM report. Similarly, the Region of Niagara has not necessarily conformed to all of the national trends noted in the section above. In addition, there are issues specific to Niagara that are highlighted in the FCM Quality of Life data that have not been flagged as national trends. This section provides a summary of these items. More detailed review and analysis will be presented in subsequent issue specific reporting.

*Demographic Profile*

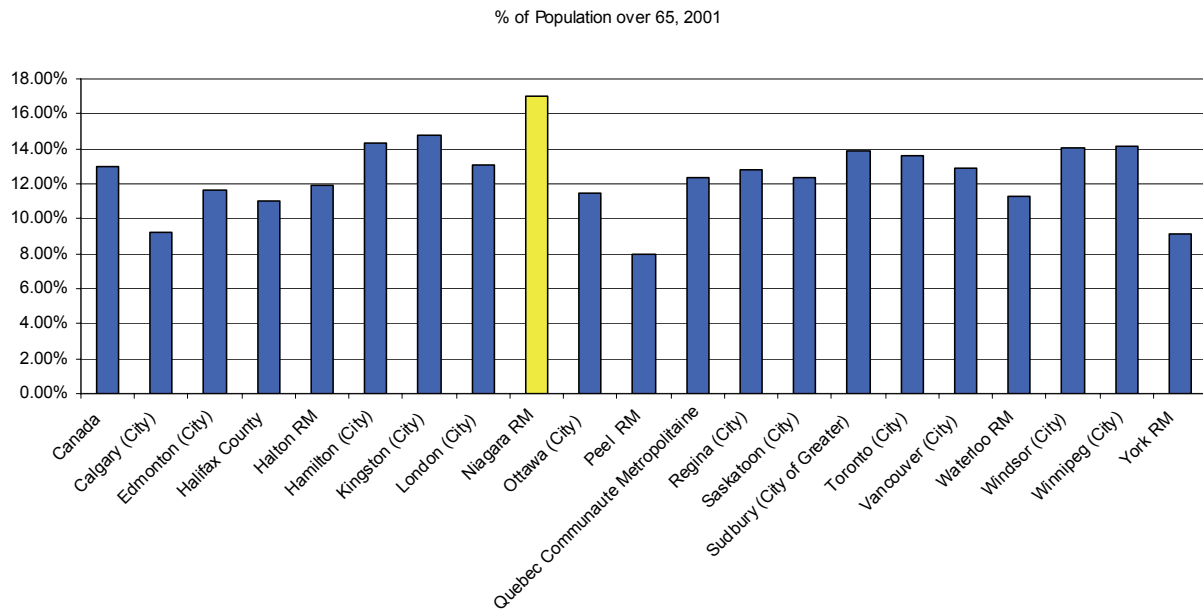
Overall, Niagara’s population growth over the past 10 years has been anywhere from ½ to 2/3 lower than both the QOLRS and National averages (See Chart 1). In addition, Niagara has experienced a reduction in the youth population. This reduction has occurred in every age category below 19 except for the 13-19 age group. Most other study participants have experienced growth in this category with the exception of the 0-6 age group (Chart 15). The most significant population growth in Niagara has taken place in the in the female population over age 75. Overall, the population growth of Niagara’s seniors population (over 65) has roughly matched overall national growth in this segment of the population. However, Niagara’s % of total population over 65 remains significantly higher than all other QOLRS members (Chart 16).

Chart 2 highlighted the percentage of visible minorities as a proportion of the total population within each of the communities. The chart showed Niagara to be one of the most homogeneous populations in the study. This may be a deceiving result worthy of further investigation. Niagara does have significant cultural diversity. There are significant populations of Italians, Greeks, Germans, Dutch, British, Armenian, Ukranian – to name only a few. This diversity is not captured in the visible minority statistics, but may be highlighted better by examining immigration trends. The contrast of Niagara’s immigration trends relative to the rest of Canada can be seen in summary form in Chart 27.

*Chart 15 – Change in Youth Population*



**Chart 16 Percentage of Population over Age 65**



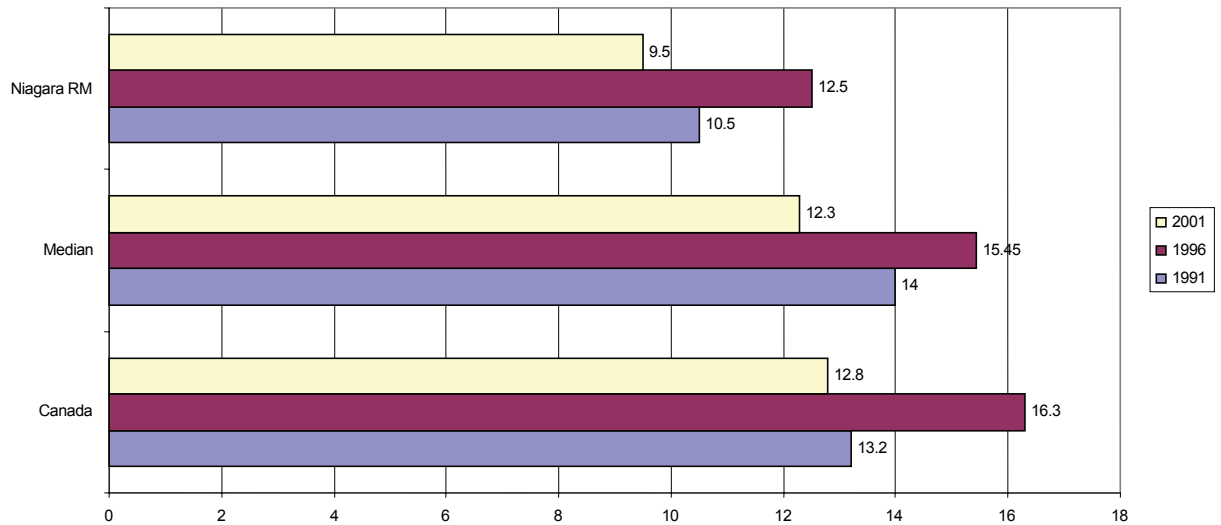
These population trends differ from the experiences identified in many of the participants in the study. It will be important to keep these differences in demographic trends in mind as potential municipal service implications of the remainder of the Quality of Life results are considered.

*Developing and Maintaining Vibrant Local Economies*

Overall, the percentage of Niagara families below Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) is lower than other QOLRS communities and nationally. This has been constant over the 10 year period examined in the study (Chart 17).

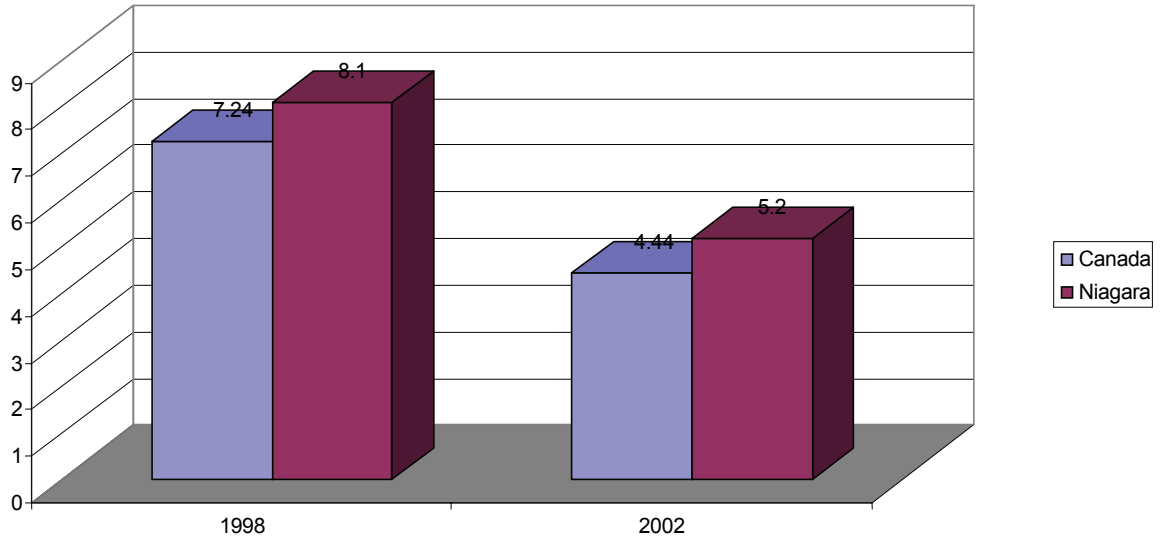
The gap between Niagara and others in the QOLRS shrinks significantly when examining the incidence of low income among single unattached individuals.

Chart 17 – Percentage of Families living below Low Income Cut-off (LICO)



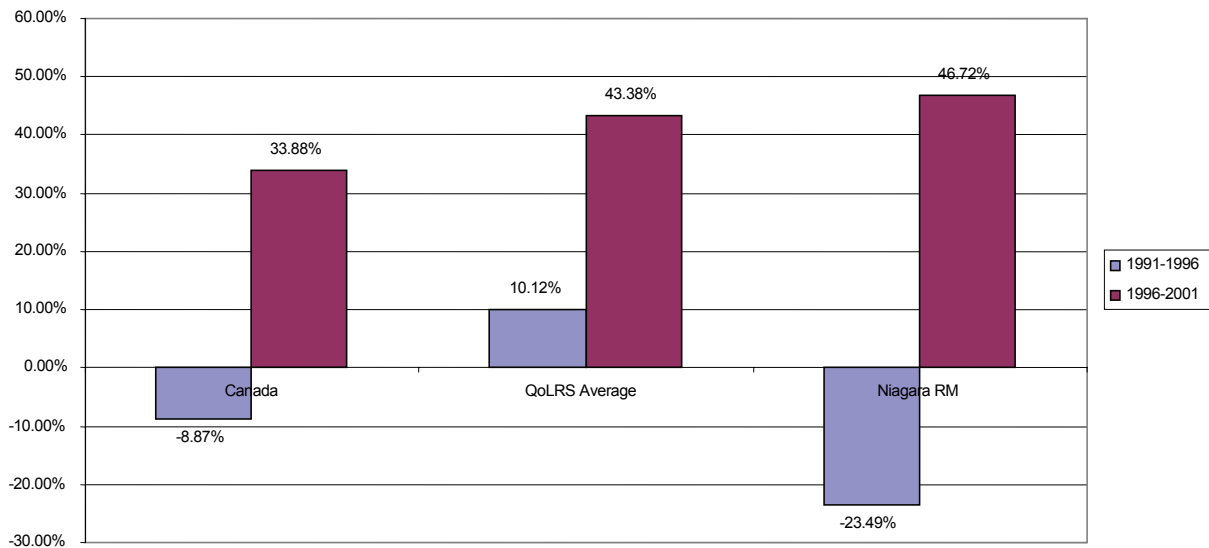
The number of bankruptcies per 1,000 establishments remains above the national average despite the significant improvement over the past 5 years (Chart 18). Chart 3 highlighted that much of this improvement was in significant increase in the number of establishments. It is also noteworthy that Niagara saw a decline in the number of bankruptcies while some areas typically viewed as being very strong economically such as Calgary and Edmonton saw increases in the number of bankruptcies. The reasons for this will require more detailed investigation, but on the surface provides a good indicator of a strengthening local economy.

*Chart 18 – Number of Bankruptcies per 1,000 Establishments 1998-2002*



The growth in building permit values over the past 5 years has exceeded the national growth rate. The percentage growth has also exceeded the average of the 20 QoLRS municipalities (Chart 19). This growth has somewhat offset the much more significant decline in building permit values experienced in Niagara during 1991-1996.

*Chart 19 – Percentage growth in building permit Values 1991-1996 and 1996-2001*

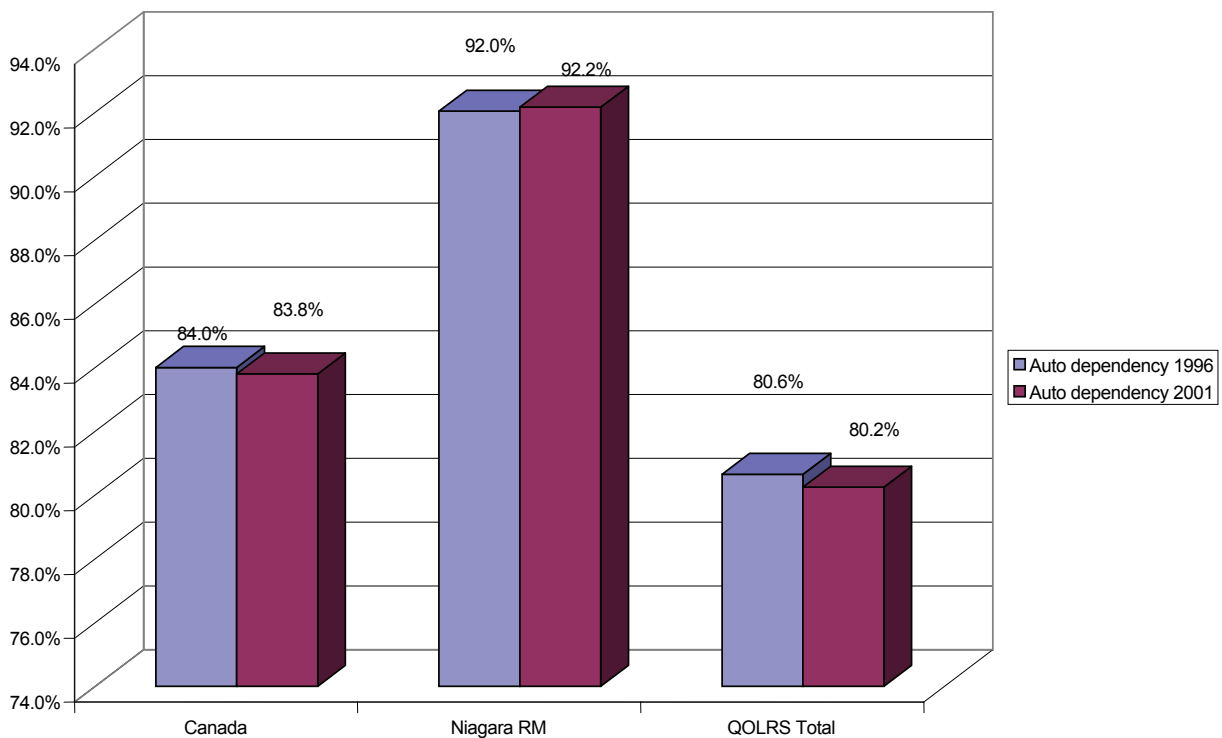


*Protecting and Enhancing the Natural and Built Environment*

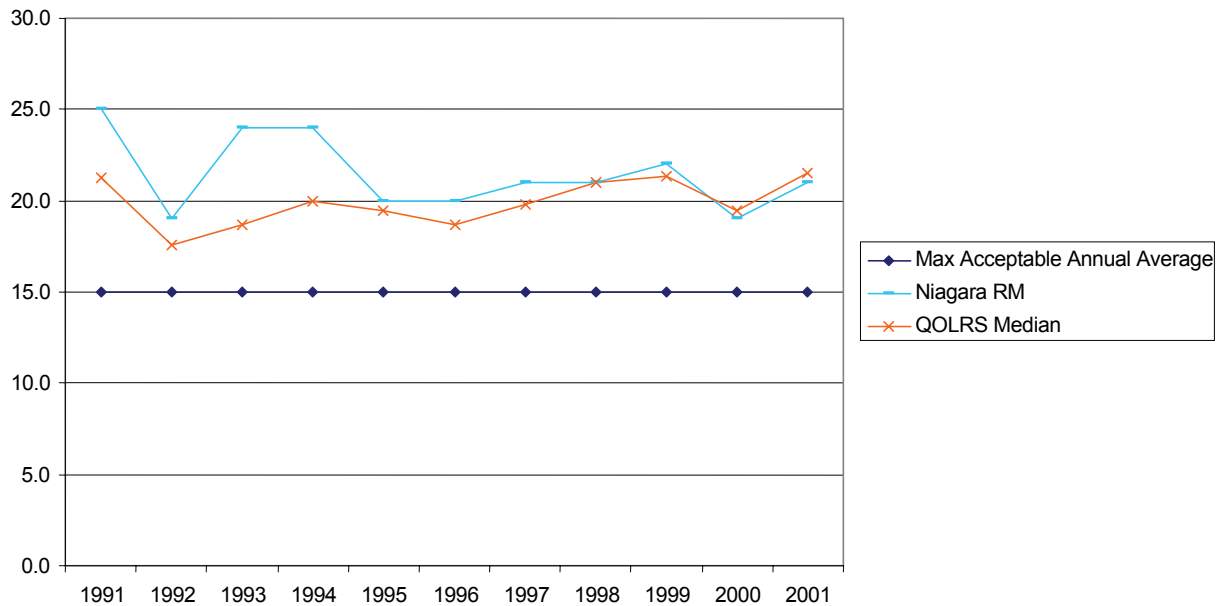
Of the 20 municipalities in the study Niagara has the greatest reliance on the car as a mode of transportation. That reliance has increased marginally over the past 5 years. This differs from the trend experienced by many other study participants who realized some improvement (Chart 20). The data also indicates that the proportion of the population who used public transportation or walking as a primary mode of transportation declined in Niagara over the past five years.

Automobile use is one factor that contributes to pollution levels – in particular levels of ozone concentration. Although the gap between Niagara’s concentration and that of other QoLRS municipalities has closed over the last decade, Ozone concentrations remain above the maximum acceptable annual average (Chart 21).

*Chart 20 – Percentage of commuters whose primary mode of transportation is Automobile 1996-2001*



*Chart 21 Air Quality – Ozone (O<sub>3</sub>)  
 Annual average ozone concentration, QOLRS Average (µg/m<sup>3</sup>), 1991-2001*

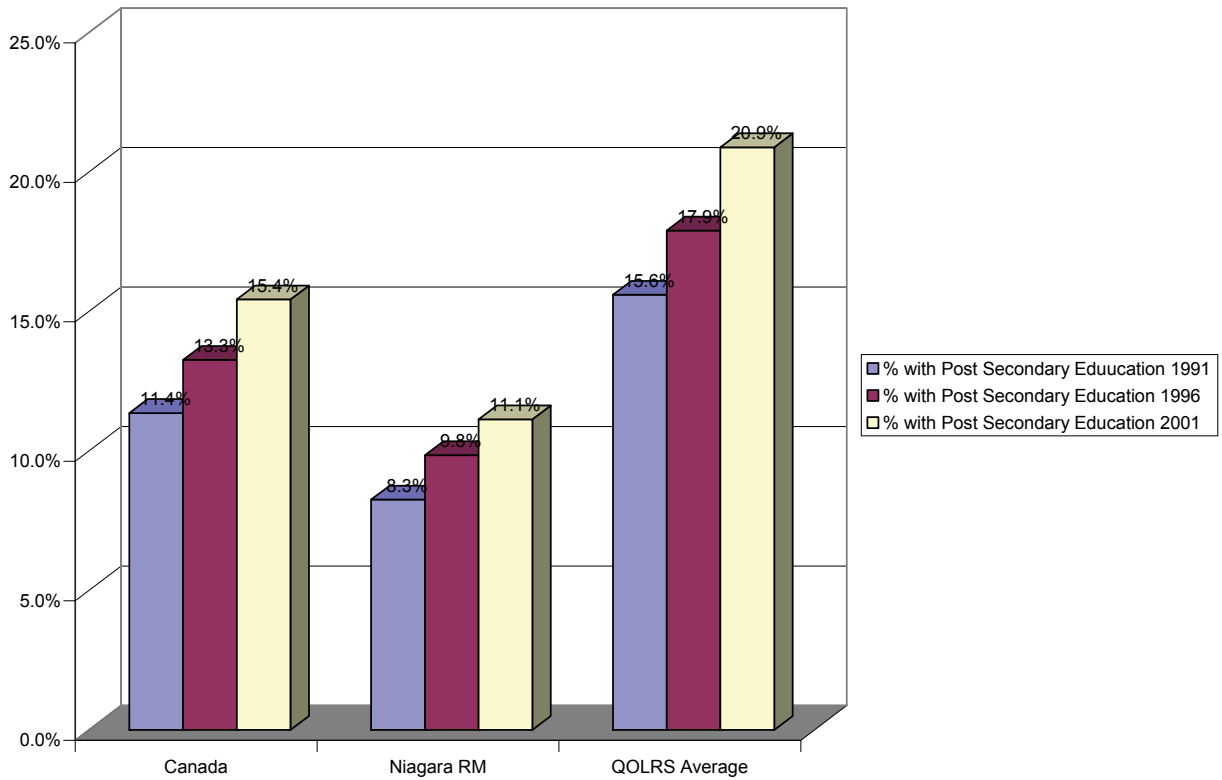


On a positive note Niagara’s recycling rates are among the highest in the survey. This can be viewed as a testament to the investments and priority placed on diversion programs by the Region and community partners (See Chart 7). It is noteworthy that the diversion rates included in Chart 7 do not reflect the impact of the Region’s organics program which should further increase diversion rates.

*Offering Opportunities for the Attainment of Personal Goals, Hopes and Aspirations*

Niagara followed the 10 year trend in improving rates of post secondary education; however Niagara’s rate is the lowest among the 20 municipalities in the study (Chart 22). Level of education is often viewed as one of the factors that influences long term ability to attain personal goals. However, in Niagara this result needs to be considered along with our demographic profile. It could be a reflection of the older population as well as immigration trends that indicate the greatest wave of immigration took place before 1961. Given these factors it may be appropriate to view the significant improvement in the percentage of the population with post secondary education over the 10 year period as a success – a testament to the range of educational programs and opportunities that have been developed by post secondary institutions in Niagara.

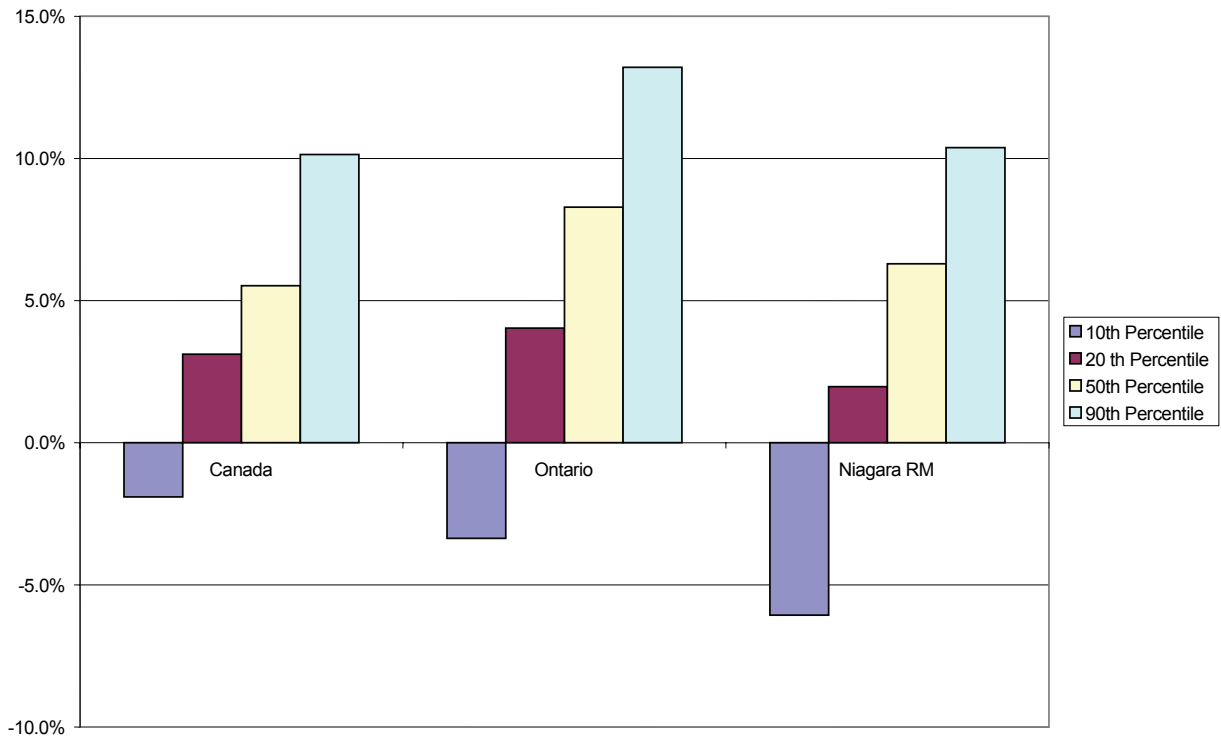
Chart 22- Percentage of Residents over 15 years of age with a Post Secondary Degree



*Promoting a Fair and Equitable Sharing of Common Resources*

Growth in after tax incomes has not been spread equitably. Those at the highest levels of income have experienced the largest gains, while those at lower end of the spectrum have actually seen incomes decline. These declines have exceeded national and provincial declines (Chart 23).

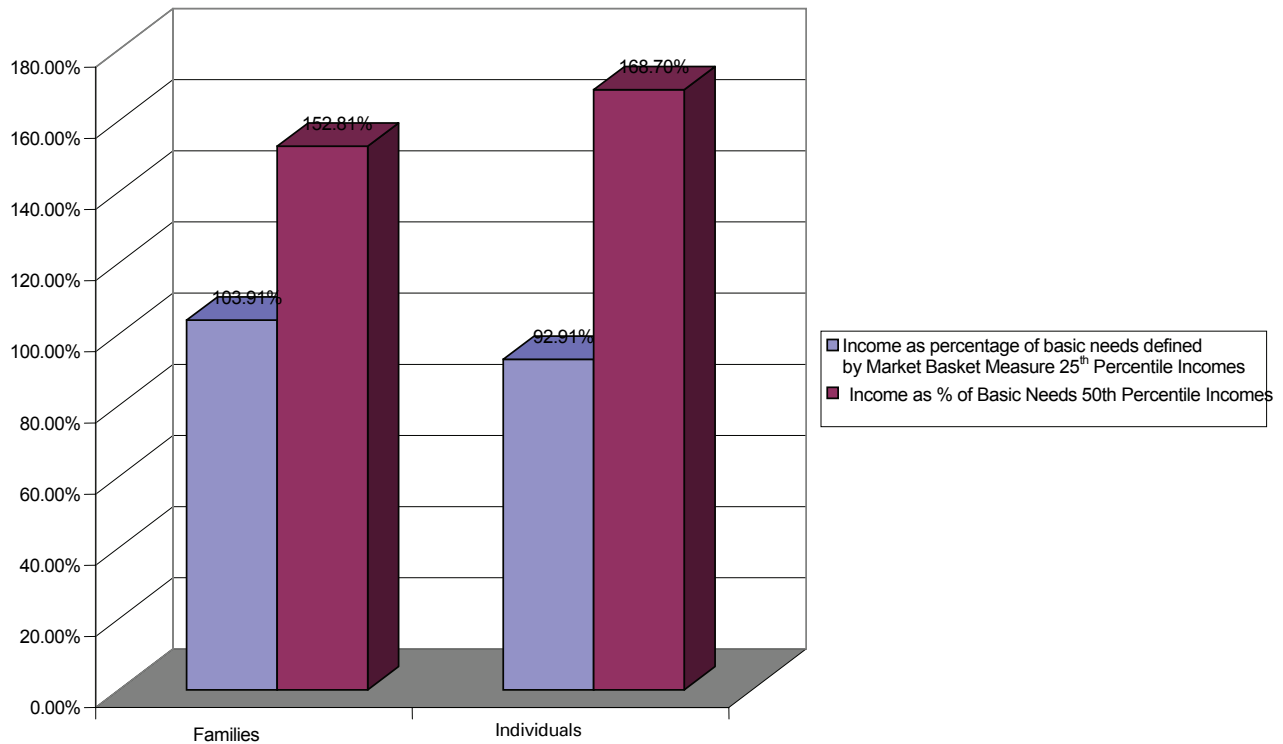
Chart 23 – Percentage Change in After-tax incomes by Income percentile



*Enabling Residents to Meet Their Basic Needs*

In Niagara residents in the lowest income quartile are barely able, or not able at all to meet basic needs (Chart 24). These basic needs are defined by the Market Basket Measure Report from Human Resources Development Canada. This result is consistent with the result for QoLRS municipalities as a whole noted in Chart 12. Not surprisingly individuals and families at the median income level are better able to afford basic needs. However, the percentage by which Niagara incomes exceed the basic needs threshold is typically lower than the average of QoLRS participants.

Chart 24 – Income as a Percentage of the Market Basket Measure for basic needs



### *Supporting Rich Social Interactions and the Inclusion of All Residents in Community Life*

Daily newspaper circulation has declined significantly over the past 10 years in all QoLRS communities (Chart 25). The decline in Niagara is particularly noteworthy as it is one of the largest declines among the 20 participants. It is also noteworthy that this measure does not include the significant network of weekly newspapers in Niagara so this may not be the best indicator of inclusion and community activism. However, when viewed in combination with declining voter turnout in elections – where Niagara again shows one of the largest declines in federal voter turnout (Chart 26) – and similar trends in municipal elections there is evidence, at least in traditional measures, of declining community involvement. Through development of community engagement initiatives currently being undertaken in partnership with Environment Canada, the Region may be able to identify more appropriate measures for the level of social interaction, or alternatively develop strategies to reverse the trend identified by the indicators used in this study.

Chart 25 - Daily Newspaper Circulation

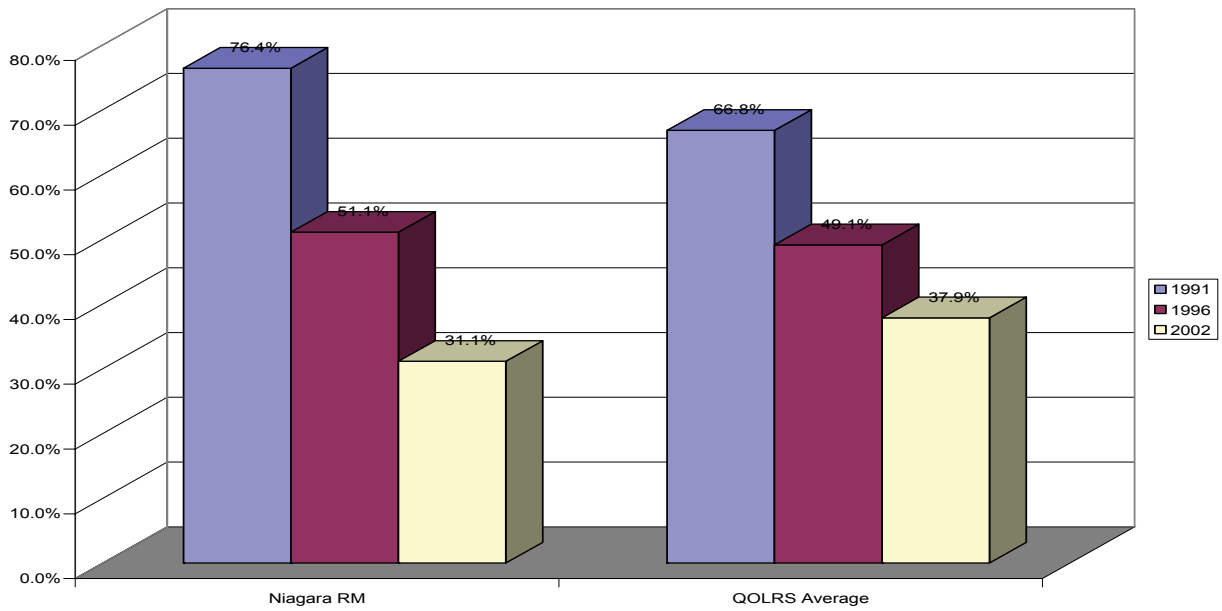


Chart 26 – Federal Election Voter turnout, 1993, 1997, 2000

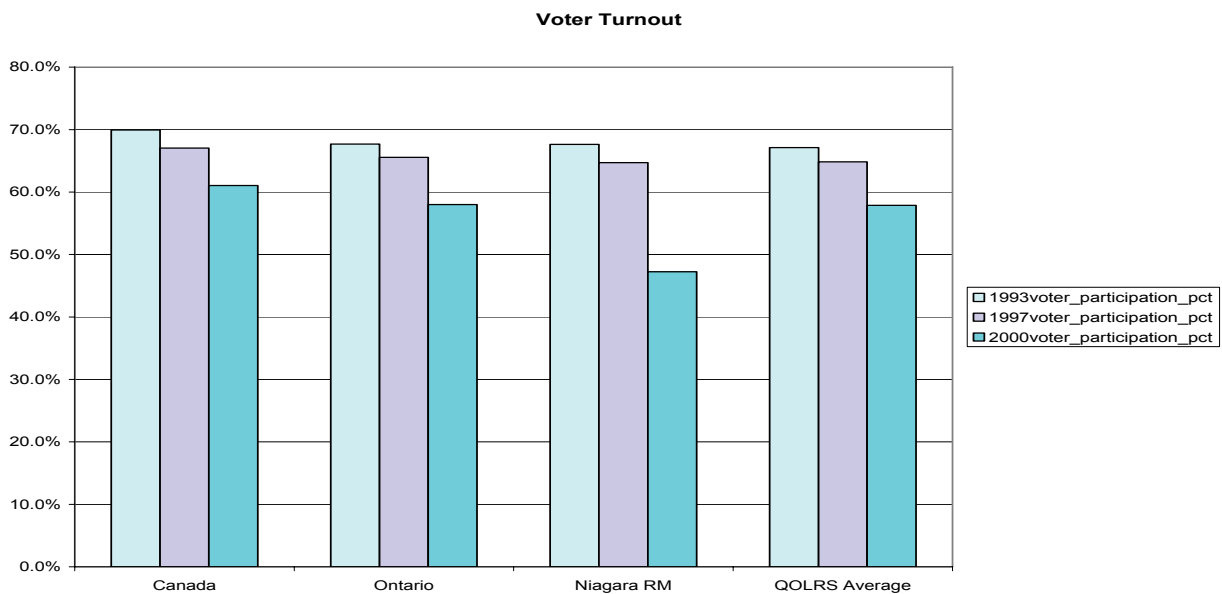
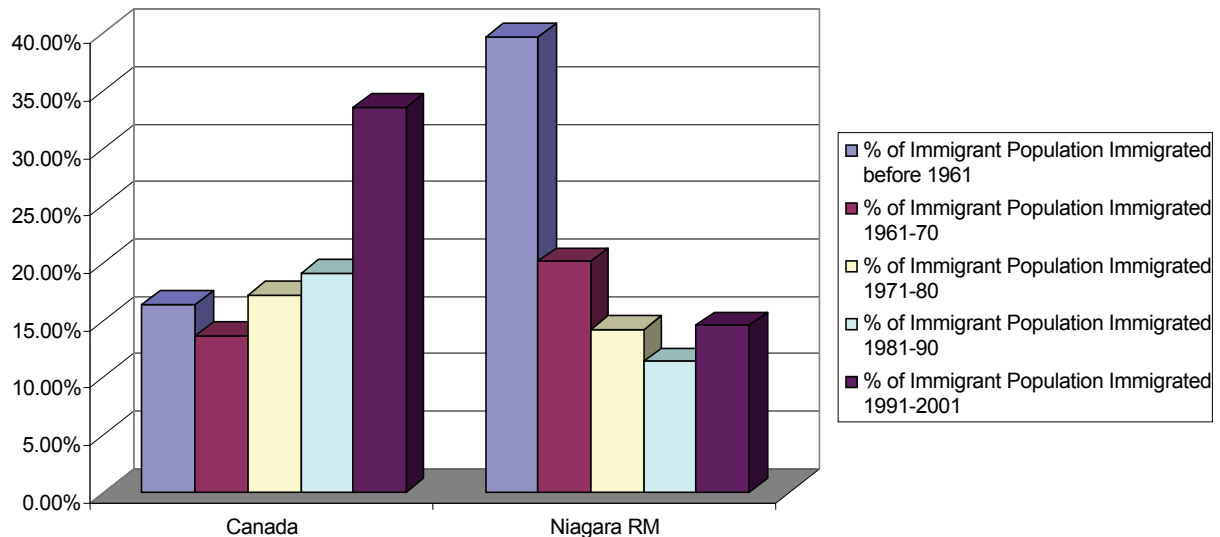


Chart 27 highlights the time frame in which immigrants came to Canada. The chart indicates that while the most significant proportion of Niagara's immigrant population came to Canada in the pre-1961 period, there is a significant proportion of immigrant who have come to Canada in the last 10 years.

Chart 27 – Immigrant Population by decade of Immigration



## Summary

Overall, the general conclusion of the broader FCM report that progress on Quality of Life has been mixed, is applicable to the Niagara situation as well. As this is the first time Niagara has participated in this study the results provide a good baseline from which to assess future progress. The results presented and the significant bank of data still to be analyzed and reported on can be used to both validate current efforts and identify direction for future efforts to improve the quality of life in Niagara.

There are many good things happening, internally and externally, and it is appropriate to draw attention to each as part of a comprehensive inventory – this is a key step in applying an integration standard on reporting. Each of them is important on its own – when viewed as part of a broader framework through the lens of integrated community development, however, the cumulative potential is much greater than the sum of the individual parts. The following list is not exhaustive, rather it provides a good sampling.

- i) Transportation Strategy
- ii) Regional Chairman’s Agricultural Task Force
- iii) Smarter Niagara
- iv) Opportunities Niagara
- v) Partnership with Environment Canada in Development of a Sustainability Plan
- vi) Early Years Initiative
- vii) Water Quality Protection Strategy
- viii) Workforce Study sponsored through NetCorp and the Business Education Council
- ix) Leadership Roundtable and Quality of Work Life
- x) Connecting Niagara
- xi) Water & Wastewater Master Plan
- xii) Sustainable Infrastructure
- xiii) Geographic Information Systems for integrated decision making
- xiv) Bi-national Forum

The success of any integrated community development effort is a direct reflection of the degree to which civic engagement is accommodated in the process – greater levels of civic engagement leads to greater likelihood of success. While the data collection and development of this report are the product of the efforts of a cross-functional team of Regional staff, the application and use of the information can and should extend beyond the Regional organization into community partnerships.

## **CONCLUSION**

This report presents in summary form results of the FCM Quality of Life Reporting System Highlights Report 2004. The report summarizes trends in 20 large Canadian municipalities across a broad spectrum of quality of life issues. This report also provides highlights of results specific to Niagara. The FCM report is third in a series produced since 1999. This is the first time Niagara has participated. FCM plans to release several issue specific reports in follow-up to this report over the next year. Council can expect further Niagara specific reporting on those issues in conjunction with the release of FCM reports. In addition, the data collected for this reporting system is available to staff and may be used by members of the study for their own needs in addressing quality of life issues specific to our municipality.

Submitted by:

Approved by:

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Director of Corporate Strategy

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Mike Trojan  
Chief Administrative Officer

*This report was prepared by Kirk Weaver, Corporate Effectiveness and Financial Performance Analyst, supported by input from the members of the Niagara Quality of Life Project Team.*

