



Office of the Regional Chair

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September 8, 2026

The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne
Minister of Finance and National Revenue
Department of Finance Canada
90 Elgin Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G5

Re: Niagara Region's 2026 Pre-Budget Submission

Dear Minister Champagne,

On behalf of Niagara Regional Council, thank you for the opportunity to participate in Canada's 2026 pre-budget consultation. As a border region on the front lines of the ongoing trade and tariff action from the United States, Niagara's key priorities, including robust and dependable public infrastructure, future-proofed public transit systems and a housing strategy built for long-term growth and economic prosperity are in lock-step with the Federal Government's plan to build an economically strong, resilient and self-sufficient Canada.

Niagara is on the verge of significant growth, with the region's population estimated to reach 696,752 people by 2051 (a 21 per cent increase). To ensure our governments capitalize on the significant social and economic opportunity this growth offers, Niagara's 2026 federal pre-budget submission advocates for investments that will leverage the region's full potential as a catalyst for growing Canada's economy.

Ask: That the Ministry of Housing, Infrastructure and Canadian Communities introduce a dedicated water and wastewater fund to support growth-related infrastructure as well as state-of-good-repair (SOGR) projects.

- Local communities cannot accommodate housing development unless safe and reliable infrastructure is in place to service it. The maintenance of existing assets is paramount to supporting housing intensification and maintaining health and safety standards, while net-new assets are needed to support growth. Municipalities own approximately 60 per cent of Canada's infrastructure; however, the money needed to complete SOGR projects while introducing growth enabling infrastructure is beyond reach for local governments.
- Niagara Region oversees more than \$12.13 billion in assets. Almost 30 per cent of the Region's total assets are in poor or very poor condition, requiring approximately \$3.3 billion to bring them to a SOGR. Additionally, the Region must build a new South Niagara Wastewater Treatment Plant and associated infrastructure to ensure growth in the south Niagara area is not stalled. With Phase One of the project estimated to be \$688 million, provincial and federal governments partnership is required.

- Niagara supports the housing-enabling focus of the Federal Government's Building Communities Strong fund, and will be submitting an expression of interest to address these challenges.
- Building safe, prosperous communities that can sustainably support growth is a priority for all levels of government. Communities of every size are struggling to provide clean water at rates that are affordable to taxpayers. Introducing a second intake of the BSCF or introducing a dedicated water and wastewater fund will ensure municipalities have the resources required to fulfill this shared priority.

Ask: That the Ministry of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities continue to work collaboratively with municipalities to build and fund reliable public transit systems through the Strong Transit Fund.

- Niagara's transit network relies on consistent, stable funding from the Canada Public Transit Fund to deliver high-quality, interconnected transit services and infrastructure projects that move people within Niagara and connect them to the GTA. With the recent replacement of the Metro-Region Agreement (MRA) stream of the fund with the new Strong Transit Fund, it is essential that the projects that were previously supported by the MRA continue to be supported by the Strong Transit Fund.
- Key among these are upgrades at the Niagara Falls Train Station that will encourage active transportation, increase access to the station, and create faster, more reliable and greener transit operations in the area.
- Committing to **funding these upgrades and other transportation initiatives through the Strong Transit Fund** will signal the federal government's long-term commitment to collaborating with municipalities on key transit projects that unlock tourism, job growth and housing starts across Niagara and beyond.

Ask: That the Ministry of Housing, Infrastructure and Canadian Communities introduce sustainable, predictable funding to support municipalities in increasing affordable and supportive housing supply, as well as preventing and reducing homelessness.

- Regional governments in Ontario play a vital role in supporting and caring for the unsheltered population. Ontario is also experiencing a mental health and addictions crisis that intersects with and contributes to homelessness. This adds complexity to how municipal programs and services must be delivered to best support Canada's most vulnerable residents.
- As of June 30, 2026, Niagara has 703 chronically homeless individuals, of which 200 are unsheltered. This represents a 5.7 per cent increase in chronically homeless individuals and a 33.3 per cent increase in those who are unsheltered since June 2024.
- Niagara Region allocates substantial funding to the homelessness portfolio as well as affordable and supportive housing development; however, community growth and changing complexity in client needs have driven service costs beyond what local taxpayers can sustain.

- The Region greatly appreciates the extension of the Unsheltered and Homelessness and Encampments Initiative (UHEI), which delivered \$2.2 million to help the Region and its partners deliver wraparound care and support to unsheltered residents, meaningfully addressing the homelessness crisis in Niagara. To continue this work, permanent, sustainable funding is needed.
- **Establishing long-term capital funding to increase Canada's community housing supply and making the Reaching Home and UHEI programs permanent** would enable Ontario's Regional governments in delivering wraparound services to Canada's most vulnerable. These investments would also increase the supply of non-profit housing, helping ensure that individuals exiting homelessness can access safe and affordable housing.

Ask: That the Ministry of Finance commit to working with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to modernize the municipal funding model.

- As Canada experiences historic population growth, the demand for local services continues to rise. For municipalities, revenue streams and the ability to take on debt are limited. Municipalities only collect 9 per cent of total tax revenue and the current funding model has not been updated since the 19th century.
- In 2026, to avoid service cuts, Niagara Region's local property taxes included \$136.4 million over and above what is required by funding agreements for federal and provincial services.
- **By working with all orders of government to establish a new and more effective funding model**, federal, provincial and local partners can realize modernized, sustainable and predictable funding to deliver the services and infrastructure Canadians rely on.

Niagara Regional Council is committed to working closely with our federal partners to create a stronger Canada and Niagara. We look forward to collaborating on the above-mentioned initiatives so that we can continue Growing Better Together.

Sincerely,



Laura Ip
Niagara Regional Chair (Acting)

Growing Destination Niagara Better Together

Provincial Pre-Budget Submission
2026





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Ask: that the province partner in Niagara's Consolidated Housing Master Plan (CHMP) by investing \$150,000 per unit to support capital costs and site remediation for the next shovel ready project.

Ask: help keep local communities and popular tourism destinations safe by partnering in Niagara's Highly Supportive Housing Initiative that will support re-housing high acuity individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.

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About Niagara Region

Endless Opportunity Ready to be Harnessed

Niagara is home to over 535,000 residents living in a mix of urban and rural communities, each with its own distinct and unique characteristics.

As a two-tier government, the Region is responsible for delivering essential programs and services that touch the lives of residents and businesses every day. From providing high-quality drinking water and maintaining Regional roads, building housing-enabling infrastructure to unlock new development, delivering homelessness supports, building and managing social housing, operating long term care homes and administering public health, Regional services support residents throughout every stage of life.

As a border region and Canada's first designated Foreign Trade Zone Point, Niagara plays a central role in the Premier's vision to protect Ontario from the ongoing geopolitical uncertainty with the United States.

Niagara is also on the verge of significant growth, with the Ministry of Finance projecting Niagara's population will reach 689,016 by 2051.

To capitalize on the significant economic and social potential this offers, the Government of Ontario has made several investments in tourism, transportation and healthcare in Niagara. This is in addition to the upcoming Destination Niagara Strategy, which aims to increase annual tourism visits to the region from 13 million to 20 million.

To successfully reach this goal, and make it sustainable, partnership and co-investment from upper levels of government is required for critical transportation and wastewater infrastructure and housing investments. Niagara Region's 2026 provincial pre-budget submission advocates for investments that will solidify the Province's forward-looking Destination Niagara Strategy and leverage its full potential in growing Ontario's economy using fundamental infrastructure as core pieces to success.



11 Wastewater Treatment Plants



129 Bridges



6 Water Treatment Plants



\$12.1 Billion
Replacement value of asset portfolio



3,051 Units
of community housing (Niagara Regional Housing)



4 400-Series Highways



5 International Border Crossings into the USA



2 Class 1 Railways





Foundational Infrastructure to Support Niagara's Growth

Ask: establish a multi-ministry working group, in collaboration with Niagara Region, to explore funding and financing options for the South Niagara Wastewater Treatment Solutions (SNWTS) project.

Wastewater servicing in the south Niagara area is at capacity. This is preventing the development of net-new housing units, the servicing of large-lot employment sites, and a campus of care model around the forthcoming South Niagara Hospital that could feature a collection of healthcare related services (see the Impact Map on **page 5** for details).

The SNWTS project is vital to the success of these developments and will serve as a catalyst for growth once complete. It will introduce a new wastewater treatment plant and truck sewer connection, as well as upgrades to existing infrastructure that will connect existing assets to the new plant. This will increase servicing capacity within Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Thorold and Niagara-on-the-Lake, and potentially Fort Erie.

Unlocking additional servicing capacity will also directly benefit the Destination Niagara Strategy. It is anticipated that existing assets will experience an increase in servicing capacity, which will support:

- 1,500 hotel rooms and suites
- 3,051 square meters of restaurant space
- Multiple retail/commercial opportunities

Niagara Region has exhausted all internal funding options to prioritize the SNWTS project. Without co-investment from upper orders of government this project cannot move forward, but there is no clear funding program that can support the scale of investment needed.

Establishing a multi-ministry staff working group with the Ministry of Infrastructure; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing; Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming; Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade and Ministry of Health will allow funding and finance recommendations to be brought back to decision makers for consideration.



\$400 Million

Estimated total cost of project (2021 estimates)

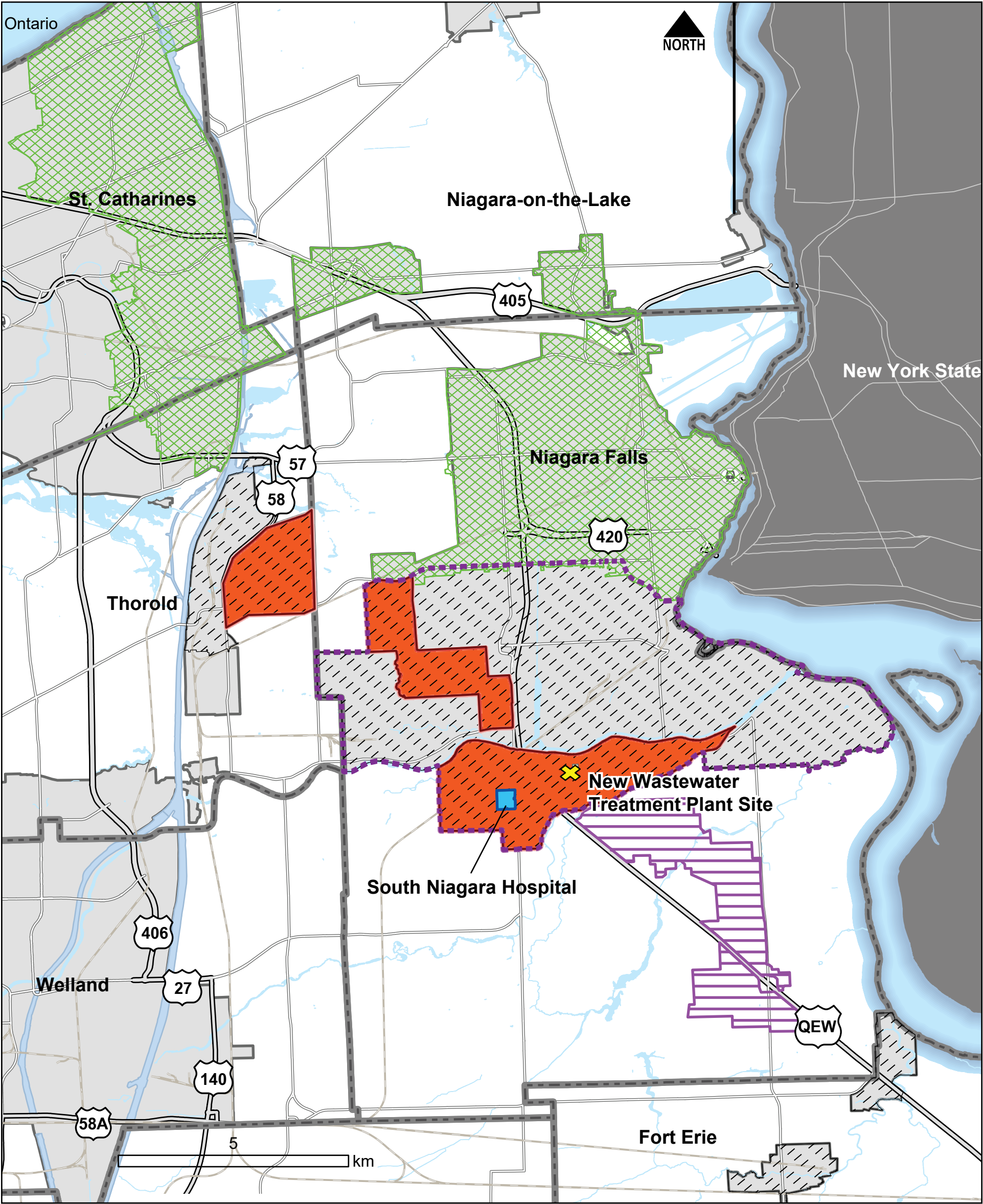


Investment partnerships required

- Regional investment - **\$184 million**
- Provincial investment - **\$108 million**
- Federal investment - **\$108 million**



Servicing and Development Impacts of South Niagara Wastewater Treatment Plant



Housing Impact	Employment Impact
 Areas of significant housing development • 19,200+ new units	 Employment impact area • 900+ Existing businesses will benefit from additional servicing capacity • 2,000+ New jobs forecasted in adjacent lands to the new plant
 New treatment plant catchment area • Infill and re-development potential - 21,400 units • Existing units redirected to new plant - 17,800 units	 QEW employment corridor • 750+ Hectares of large lot employment land that will require servicing to be realized • 11,000 -18,500 Estimated new job potential
 Areas where additional service capacity will be unlocked • Potential to service an additional 56,800 units in Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Thorold and St. Catharines	
Total = 115,000+ units • New housing units requiring servicing - 40,600 units	





Keeping Ontarians Moving to and from Niagara

Ask: purchase the CN Rail Corridor between Hamilton and Niagara Falls, in support of introducing two-way, all-day GO Service on the Niagara Line/Lakeshore West.

Niagara is one of Ontario's most iconic and sought-after destinations, attracting millions of visitors each year. Home to Niagara Falls, renowned gaming facilities, dynamic entertainment venues, scenic countryside views and award-winning wineries, Niagara offers a blend of adventure and relaxation.

Over 13 million visitors travel to Niagara annually, contributing \$3 billion to Ontario's Gross Domestic Product. As announced in the 2025 Budget, the Destination Niagara Strategy would like to support economic growth across the region by increasing annual tourism visits to 20 million. To reach this goal, a safe, accessible and integrated transportation network that provides seamless connectivity between road, rail and air is required.

Current State

- Niagara currently has the lowest frequency of round trips to Union Station within the Greater Golden Horseshoe
- Congestion on the QEW is worsening, resulting in overcrowding and lengthy travel times
- The Region and Metrolinx have undertaken significant work to make two-way, all-day GO service on the Niagara Line a reality

Proposed Investment

- Ownership of the CN Rail Corridor between Hamilton and Niagara Falls will enable

incremental increases to current service levels from three trips a day to 18 trips a day

Anticipated Outcomes

- **Short-term:** Support local economic stability by creating jobs, enhancing economic mobility and connecting more tourists to local, Ontario attractions
- **Long-term:** Connect the entire Greater Golden Horseshoe with frequent and fast GO transit. This will provide Ontarians with increased access to new homes, greater post-secondary opportunities, local job markets and support Niagara's growing economy.

Benefits to Government Corridor Ownership



More trains now with up to nine round trips/day possible immediately after purchase



Full control of future expansion as Metrolinx can determine what upgrades are needed and GO Train schedules can be based on what works for riders



Asset for the Province making purchase easier, with future upgrades improving provincial asset value



Continued freight access for CN's two daily trains supporting continued market access and industry in Niagara





Keeping Housing Affordable, Keeping Our Community Safe

Ask: that the province partner in Niagara's Consolidated Housing Master Plan (CHMP) by investing \$150,000 per unit to support capital costs and site remediation for the next shovel ready project.

To ensure long-term success and sustainability for the Destination Niagara Strategy there must be a reliable workforce in the hotel, restaurant and attractions sector, as well as support from local residents. Local housing affordability is a key driver influencing both of these factors.

In 2024 and 2025, popular European tourism destinations, such as Spain, Portugal and Italy, witnessed overtourism protests. This was in response to local sentiments that uncontrolled tourism was increasing housing prices and forcing people out of their neighbourhoods as development was focused on short-term rentals over long-term housing for residents.

Across Niagara, there are approximately 2,800 tourism businesses that employ over 40,000 people. When housing is unaffordable, employee retention within the accommodation, entertainment and food services sector becomes difficult.

Niagara's CHMP estimates that 20,700 community housing units will be needed by 2045 to meet resident need, with a supply gap of approximately 3,600 units. To bridge this gap, Niagara has developed an Implementation Plan that guides the (re)development of community housing units across the region to the year 2050.

The Plan requires an estimated capital and operating investment of \$2.185 billion over 25-years. Niagara Region is considering an investment contribution of \$546 million (25 per cent of total cost) over that same time horizon; however, support from senior levels of government is needed to complete all projects identified within the Plan.

Niagara has a bundle of six shovel-ready sites that, with co-investment from senior levels of government today, will result in the construction of affordable and supportive housing tomorrow.



The Consolidated Housing Master Plan will **result in the construction of 4,243 community housing units**

- **2,986** net new
- **1,257** redeveloped/replaced



The Consolidated Housing Master Plan will reduce wait times for individuals and households on Niagara Region's Centralized Waitlist. **Wait times range from 4 to 13 years**



Regional Council is considering a total contribution of **\$546 million** over 25-years to support CHMP implementation



Ask: help keep local communities and popular tourism destinations safe by partnering in Niagara's Highly Supportive Housing Initiative that will support re-housing high acuity individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.

Proposed program:

- **Target:** Reduce the number of high-acuity, chronically homeless individuals by at least 25 individuals
- **Budget:** \$12 million capital for 25 accessible units + \$3 million annual operating

Community safety is a key consideration when domestic and international travellers are selecting their next destination. There are many factors that impact community safety and well-being, including the prevalence of homelessness. While Niagara is recognized as a safe community, there has been a steady increase in the number of individuals who are chronically homeless as well as significant encampment growth.

Individuals who are homeless with very complex needs are difficult to re-house. In the event housing is identified, they are usually unable to sustain their housing and return to homelessness after a short period of being housed.

Highly supportive housing units are specially designed buildings of approximately 25 units with 24/7 on-site, team-based, health and social support to address the needs of individuals who are chronically homeless. This type of housing delivers better outcomes for individuals and represents a smarter, more responsible use of public dollars by making neighbourhoods safer and reducing the financial burden on health, emergency response, and justice systems.

People experiencing chronic homelessness with complex needs often cycle through emergency shelters, hospitals, police interactions and other crises-based services. Highly supportive housing stabilizes individuals, reduces public system costs and improves community well-being.

The time to invest in highly supportive housing is now. Chronic homelessness is on the rise. Costs to care for those experiencing homelessness are growing year over year, and there are growing public concerns about visible homelessness and community safety.

It costs less to house someone than to leave them homeless. Highly supportive housing reduces the burden on emergency responders, hospitals, and shelters, mitigates the economic cost of homelessness on local businesses, decreases visible homelessness, and increases community safety. Investment in supportive housing will help protect Ontarians who live in Niagara and tourists visiting Niagara by building safer and healthier communities for everyone.



1,218 people are on the Niagara's By-Name List.

684 (56%) are chronically homeless, of which 15% are seniors and 31% (210+) are unsheltered living in 130 active encampments



Every \$10 invested in supportive housing for high-needs individuals saves \$21 in health care, emergency services, and justice services costs (Mental Health Commission of Canada)



Conclusion

On behalf of Niagara Region, thank you for the opportunity to participate in Ontario's 2026 pre-budget consultation. Our community is on the verge of significant growth and the recommendations presented will support our governments in capitalizing on the immense social and economic opportunity this stands to offer.

Regional Council is committed to working closely with our provincial partners to create a stronger Niagara and a stronger Ontario. We look forward to collaborating on the above mentioned initiatives so that we can continue Growing Better Together.

Sincerely,



Bob Gale
Regional Chair



Ron Tripp
CAO Niagara Region

Growing Destination Niagara Better Together

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