

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF NIAGARA

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

REPORT 2-2006

The Municipal Council of the Regional Municipality of Niagara met in Committee of the Whole in the Council Chamber, Regional Municipal Building, Thorold, Ontario, on Thursday, March 2, 2006, commencing at 4:10 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Council: Regional Chair Partington; Councillors Almas, Angelone; Bailey; Baty; Bentley; Bodner; Burroughs; Casselman; Collins; Eke; Gabriel; Goulbourne; Harry; Heit, Hildreth, Hodgson; Leavens; Marshall; Martin; Redekop; Salci; Saracino; Smeaton; Timms, Zimmerman.

Staff: Messrs. Trojan, Chief Administrative Officer; Hutchings, Commissioner, Community Services; Diakow, Acting Commissioner, Corporate Services Department; Cambray, Commissioner of Planning Services; Cunnane, Director, Emergency Services Division; Neville, Commissioner, Public Works; Nicol, Commissioner, Human Resources; Ms. Gilroy, Regional Clerk; Ms. Pilon, Acting Deputy Clerk.

Staff:
(Part-Time): Messrs. Kyne, Director of Legal Services; Lockyer, Treasurer/Director, Financial Management and Planning; Bowles, Executive Assistant to the Regional Chair; McQueen, Director, Administration; Roberts, Associate Director, EMS, Paramedic Service; Jones, Director, Administration, Public Health; Cousins, Director, Transportation Services; Friesen, Director, Waste Management Services; Weaver, Manager, Special Initiatives; Brcic, Director, Water & Wastewater Services; D'Amario, Director, Water Management, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority; Ms. Murphy, Associate Director, Budgets and Reporting; Ms. Cousins, Business Partner; Ms. George, Niagara Regional Police Service; Ms. Staines, Legislative Assistant.

CALL TO ORDER

8. Regional Chair Partington called the meeting to order at 4:10 p.m.
RESOLVE INTO COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

9. Moved by Councillor Bodner
Seconded by Councillor Leavens

That this Council do now resolve into Committee of the Whole.

Carried.

2006 CURRENT BUDGET

10. **2006 Current Budget Presentation**

Mr. Lockyer provided the Committee of the Whole with a presentation on the 2006 Current Budget.

Mr. Lockyer recapped the key steps taken, the Multi-Year Financial Plan, the Capital Budget; the -3%, 0% and -3% Scenarios; consolidation with Police; further Standing Committee review and Budget Review Committee review and approval.

The Committee of the Whole was provided with the overall results of the 2006 Current Budget and a comparison to Niagara Region's peers. The comparison takes into consideration Niagara's need to have a lower gross spending in order to achieve a comparable net burden to taxpayers due to lower assessment growth and that Niagara has both the lowest assessment growth and lowest gross increase.

Mr. Lockyer recommended two final considerations for the 2006 Current Budget, the new ambulance funding – 50% by 2008 and Tax Account Surplus.

Mr. Lockyer noted that in consideration of the recent announcement of the new ambulance funding of 50% by 2008, the net budget could be further reduced by \$550,000, which will result in a reduction from 4.9 to 4.7% and 3.33 to 3.11% after assessment growth.

(Refer to Staff Directions)

11. Ambulance Funding

Moved by Councillor Timms
Seconded by Councillor Casselman

Whereas the Province recently announced a commitment to achieve a 50/50 ambulance funding formula by year 2008;

Therefore be it resolved that the ambulance revenue be adjusted to reflect an increase of \$550,000 in the 2006 Current Budget.

Carried.

12. Tax Account Surplus

Mr. Lockyer provided the Committee of the Whole with the details of the Tax Account Surplus that includes write-offs, supplements, PILs, etc., which are finalized at year end.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Councillor Zimmerman declared an indirect pecuniary interest with respect to any matters on property taxation, as she is Chair of the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation, she therefore vacated the Council Chambers and took no part in the discussion of, or voting, of these matters.

CLOSED COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

13. Moved by Councillor Eke
Seconded by Councillor Angelone

That this Committee of the Whole do now move into Closed Committee of the Whole for the purposes of receiving information of a confidential nature relating to legal and property matters.

Carried.

14. Tax Account Surplus (Continued)

Mr. Lockyer provided the Committee of the Whole with an overview of the Tax Account Surplus.

Moved by Councillor Angelone
Seconded by Councillor Harry

That no further adjustments be made to the 2006 Current Budget to address the Tax Account Surplus.

Carried.

(Refer to Staff Directions)

15. Moved by Councillor Collins
Seconded by Councillor Bailey

That this Committee of the Whole do now rise with report.

Carried.

2006 CURRENT BUDGET (Continued)

16. 2006 Current Budget (Continued)

Mr. Lockyer noted that the impact on a residential property assessed at \$190,000 would be in the range of \$44 to \$68, depending upon tax policy considerations.

Mr. Lockyer made note of the following 2006 Current Budget change highlights the Smart Growth funding for area municipalities - \$1 Million; tax policy funding for focused assistance to the industrial property class or otherwise assist taxpayers - \$1.5 Million; enhanced ambulance service levels to improve rural response times - \$1.2 Million; financing of capital program - \$2.4 Million; net impact 4.7% / 3.11% after real assessment growth and budget sustainability with minimal reliance on reserves.

Committee of the Whole noted their approval for the process that was followed during the preparation of the 2006 Current Budget. The process provided Regional Councillors with the -3%, 0% and 3% scenarios, which provided a valuable comparison of the impacts/risks of the various scenarios and provided the residents with information on what services Niagara Region performs.

Committee of the Whole was advised that the 2006 Current Budget should not affect Niagara Region's bond rating, as the increase is sustainable, that Niagara Region is not relying on reserves or one time fixes, and Niagara Region has set aside funds prudently, which places Niagara Region in good standing.

Committee of the Whole noted that the Niagara Region cannot control social services costs, which form the most significant component of the Community Services budget, and that Niagara Region should be requesting special consideration from the province in this case.

Moved by Councillor Martin
Seconded by Councillor Smeaton

That Committee of the Whole recommends the approval the 2006 Current Budget estimates and associated bylaw relating to the Regional Departments Boards & Agencies:

Net Expenditure	\$278,292,031
Net Revenues	(14,756,135)
Net Tax Levy	\$263,535,896
Tax Levy Change 2005/06	\$ 11,849,743

Carried.

Councillor Bailey requested that he be recorded as opposed to any increase.

(Refer to Staff Directions)

17. Staff Directions – Niagara Regional Police Service

Moved by Councillor Zimmerman
Seconded by Councillor Baty

That the memorandum dated February 22, 2006 from Ms. Monika George responding to the Staff Directions from the January 19, 2006 Budget Review Committee meeting, be received.

Carried.

18. 2006 Waste Management

Councillor Burroughs advised Committee of the Whole that the 2006 Waste Management Services Division Operating Budget, which was approved as noted in PWA 32-2006 at the February 9, 2006 Committee of the Whole meeting should be amended to address an error in the formula for self hauled tonnages, it was therefore;

Moved by Councillor Burroughs
Seconded by Councillor Harry

That for 2006 Waste Management budget, self hauled tonnages be charged at \$32.25 per tonne, and that the shortfall of \$488,706 be made up through charges to each municipality based on the number of households, rather than drawing from reserves.

Carried.

STAFF DIRECTIONS

Staff was requested to:

- use the term “debenture charges” rather than “debt charges” in future reports. (Refers to Minute Item # 10)
- meet with the respective individuals and prepare a report that includes historical information respecting the Tax Account Surplus. (Refers to Minute Item # 14)
- provide all Regional Councillors with a letter that summarizes in detail the information on slide 20 on March 3, 2006, as done in previous years. (Refer for Minute Item # 16)
- identify how a reduction will impact the lives of the residents during the 2007 budget process. (Refers to Minute Item # 16)
- continue with the process that was utilized for the 2006 Budget process in future years. (Refers to Minute Item # 16)

ADJOURNMENT

The Committee of the Whole adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

Peter Partington
Regional Chairman

Janet Pilon
Acting Deputy Clerk

Pam Gilroy
Regional Clerk