



**PORT COLBORNE**

**City of Port Colborne  
Council Meeting Addendum**

**Date:** Tuesday, April 28, 2026  
**Time:** 6:30 pm  
**Location:** Council Chambers, 3rd Floor, City Hall  
66 Charlotte Street, Port Colborne

**Pages**

**8. Proclamations**

\*8.1 May is Museum Month 2026 1

**14. Items Requiring Separate Discussion**

\*14.1 Community Health and Wellness Action Plan, 2026-65 2

\*14.2 Update on Niagara Governance Discussions and Municipal Service Corporations – Community Input and Next Steps, 2026-61 72



## PORT COLBORNE

April 28, 2026

Moved by Councillor  
Seconded by Councillor

**WHEREAS** the 700+ museums, art galleries, and heritage sites, and the over 9,000 museum workers and 35,000 volunteers contribute to Ontario's \$26 billion cultural sector; and

**WHEREAS** museums, as trusted local organizations, create healthy and connected communities, and by ensuring all Ontarions have access to culture and heritage, inspire lifelong learning; and

**WHEREAS** museums promote growth and build local economies by welcoming tourists in every community across the province; and

**WHEREAS** this month provides an opportunity to raise awareness for the vital role museums, museum workers and volunteers have in their communities and celebrate their contributions to community wellbeing, tourism, education, and learning; and

**WHEREAS** May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2026 is International Museum Day to highlight museums as centres of education, innovation and cultural understanding in our communities.

**NOW THEREFORE** I, Mayor William C. Steele do hereby proclaim May 2026 as "**May is Museum Month**" in Port Colborne, and encourage all residents and tourists to visit our local museums in May.

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William C. Steele  
Mayor



**Subject: Community Health and Wellness Action Plan**

**To: Council**

**From: Office of the Chief Administrative Officer**

Report Number: 2026-65

Meeting Date: April 28, 2026

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**Recommendation:**

That the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer Report 2026-65 be received; and

That Council endorse the Community Health and Wellness Action Plan (Appendix A), as the City's draft of the guiding framework for advancing local health and wellness priorities; and

That Council endorse the Community Engagement Plan (Appendix B), to support the next phase of public consultation from May to July 2026; and

That the Senior Health Advisor be directed to return to Council with a final Community Health and Wellness Action Plan on July 14, 2026.

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**Purpose:**

To present the Community Health and Wellness Action Plan and the accompanying Community Engagement Plan for Council endorsement.

Council endorsement of the draft Action Plan will allow City staff to move into the next phase of community engagement from May 1 to July 1, 2026, with the goal of refining the Action Plan based on community input and returning to Council with a final on July 14, 2026.

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**Background:**

Over the past 20 plus years, healthcare in Port Colborne has changed greatly. Governance was centralized through the Niagara Health system in the early 2000's and in 2010 the Port Colborne hospital site transitioned from a full-service hospital to a 24/7 Urgent Care Centre. Since that time, hours of service have been reduced.

A full summary of the history of healthcare in Port Colborne is included [in CAO 2026-40](#), presented to Council in March 2026.

In response to these changes and closures, Port Colborne City Council has taken action including:

- In December 2024, hearing from the community in response to Niagara Health’s request for local share contribution to the new South Niagara Hospital (refer to [report CAO 2024-255, Port Colborne Hospital Update](#)).
- Conducting comprehensive community engagement from January to April 2025 on the future of healthcare in Port Colborne (refer to [report CAO 2025-148 Future of Healthcare in Port Colborne: Complete Public Engagement Results](#)).
- In March 2025, forming the Healthcare Advisory Committee to guide future healthcare planning and the development of a local strategy. An update on the Committee’s work was presented in [CAO 2025-179 Healthcare Update](#), August 2025.
- Conducting research, gathering data and engaging with local and provincial healthcare experts
- Working with KPMG to develop an independent health services analysis as reported to Council in March 2024 report [CAO-2026-40 Healthcare Analysis Report](#)

*Summary of recent public engagement and Healthcare Advisory Committee work:*



This report seeks Council approval of the resulting Action Plan to improve healthcare access in Port Colborne. The City does not deliver healthcare services, but it has an important role to play in planning, advocacy and bringing partners together to find solutions. The Action Plan is designed to reflect that role by focusing on actions the City can lead, support and influence, while also clearly identifying where provincial and regional decisions are required.

## **Discussion:**

### **Action Plan Development**

The Community Health and Wellness Action Plan has been developed through a combination of community input, partner insights, technical analysis and ongoing leadership from City Council and the Healthcare Advisory Committee as noted above.

This work reflects a clear and consistent message: access to healthcare in Port Colborne is becoming more difficult, and the community is approaching a critical turning point. Residents are already facing limited primary care access, do not have access to a local walk-in clinic, and have a growing reliance on urgent and emergency services. At the same time, the planned closure of the local urgent care centre in 2028 and continued regionalization of hospital-based services introduces significant uncertainty about how residents will access care in the future.

Local data reinforces these concerns. According to the historical [Primary Care Data Reports for Ontario Health Teams from 2022](#), approximately 2,700 residents in Port Colborne do not have a family doctor, and the community continues to have a physician shortage and limited after-hours options. The urgent care centre currently sees approximately 17,000 visits annually, of which 45% are from Port Colborne, highlighting the level of reliance on this local service.

There is also a strong emphasis on timing. The transition to a new hospital model across Niagara will not be fully realized until 2028, but the impacts on residents are already being felt. The Action Plan is intended to help bridge that gap by supporting local solutions, strengthening partnerships and advocating for the resources needed to ensure residents are not left behind.

At its core, the Action Plan is about ensuring that residents can continue to access care close to home, in a way that is fair, practical and responsive to community needs.

### **Partnership with Esri Canada**

In addition to the data and key learnings from the report prepared by KPMG, the City is also working with Esri Canada to leverage GIS and spatial analytics information to support the City's healthcare decisions with additional health and socio-economic data. Staff are working with Esri to develop a dashboard that will support the implementation of the City's Action Plan and advocacy on healthcare with local data. The dashboard will also help track service gaps and monitor progress and outcomes from the Action Plan with local data.

### **The Community Health and Wellness Action Plan**

The Action Plan is guided by a vision statement: "Connected care, close to Home, for every stage of life." The purpose of the plan is to improve access to timely and barrier free healthcare services for all residents of Port Colborne.

## **Areas of Focus**

The Plan focuses on eight areas where residents are experiencing the greatest challenges and where the City can play a meaningful role in improving outcomes. The steps in our action plan are outlined in detail in the Health and Wellness Action Plan, attached as Appendix A.

### **1. Better Access through Advanced Primary Care**

Primary care is the front door to the healthcare system, but access in Port Colborne remains limited. Many residents do not have a family doctor, and those who do often face long wait times and limited after-hours care, with no local walk-in clinics available outside of the urgent care centre. These challenges are felt most by seniors, low income residents, families with young children and those without reliable transportation.

### **2. Medical Imaging and Laboratory Services**

Healthcare does not stop at a doctor's visit. People also need timely access to tests, medical imaging, lab work, and specialist care to diagnose issues early and guide treatment. In Port Colborne, many of these services are limited or require travel outside the community. Residents often leave the city for scans, fracture care, and specialist visits, and for those with lower incomes, limited mobility, caregiving responsibilities, or no access to a vehicle, even routine care can be difficult to access. Strengthening local access will make care faster, more equitable, and easier to navigate.

### **3. Community-Based Care**

Most healthcare should not happen in a hospital. Many residents need support closer to home, including services that help them stay safe, healthy, and independent. This is especially important in Port Colborne, where the population is older and demand for care is growing. Residents also face overlapping barriers such as chronic illness, mobility challenges, mental health needs, and social isolation. Strengthening community-based care will help people stay well at home, support families and caregivers, and reduce avoidable hospital visits.

### **4. Mental Health and Well-Being**

Mental health is a key part of overall health. People need timely, compassionate support for mental health and substance use, just as they do for physical health. Early support can prevent crisis, reduce hospital use, and improve quality of life. In Port Colborne, these needs are often linked to broader challenges such as housing instability, isolation, trauma, and barriers to care. Addressing mental health requires more than treatment alone. It requires better connections between services, stronger community supports, and easier pathways for people to get help early, before issues become more serious.

### **5. Transportation and Access to Care**

Access to healthcare is not just about whether services exist. People also need to

be able to reach them and understand how to use them when they need care. Long travel times, limited transit options, cost, and confusion about where to go can all delay care or prevent people from accessing it altogether. These challenges are not experienced equally. They are often hardest on seniors, people with disabilities, low-income households, caregivers, and residents without access to a vehicle. As more healthcare services are delivered outside the community, transportation and system navigation must be treated as a core part of healthcare access.

## **6. Healthy and Resilient Communities**

Health is shaped by more than healthcare. Housing, food, recreation, social connection, and safe, walkable communities all influence whether people can stay healthy and independent. This matters because many residents face daily barriers that impact their health long before they enter a clinic or hospital. Building a healthier community means reducing those barriers and making it easier for people to live well where they are.

## **7. Equity, Inclusion and Access**

A strong health system should work for everyone. People should be able to get care and information in ways that are fair, respectful, understandable, and welcoming, regardless of age, income, language, ability, culture, identity, or background. This includes making sure healthcare planning reflects the needs of residents who may face barriers or be underserved. It also means recognizing that trust matters. People are more likely to seek care, ask questions, and stay connected to services when they feel respected, understood, and included.

## **8. Community Voice, Advocacy and Accountability**

Healthcare planning is strongest when it is guided by local experience, good information, and clear follow-through. While the City does not deliver healthcare, it plays an important role in listening to residents, bringing partners together, advocating for local needs, and tracking progress. This work must be carried out in an open, practical, and accountable way, with clear communication on how input is used, what actions are being taken, and how progress is measured to build trust and keep the strategy grounded in community needs.

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## **Internal Consultations:**

In addition to external community engagement detailed in this report and in Appendix B, various Committees of Council were engaged and will continue to be engaged as the Action Plan is finalized and implemented.

City staff from Corporate Communications, Corporate Services, Development and Government Relations, and the Office of the Mayor and CAO have been working collaboratively with external partners to gather feedback from the community regarding

the future of healthcare, and have worked diligently advocating for funding at all levels of government. Finance staff were consulted during procurement and budget approval processes.

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### **Financial Implications:**

There are no financial implications associated with receiving this report. The Esri Canada agreement is funded through the approved 2026 Budget. Expenses for community engagement activities are funded by the 2026 Budget.

Future initiatives directly related to this Action Plan, including development of clinic space, diagnostic expansion, transportation alignment, partnership models, or capital grant applications, will be brought forward to Council as business plans in subsequent reports.

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### **Public Engagement:**

At the heart of this Action Plan are the voices of Port Colborne residents. Through a multi-phase engagement process, community members, partners, and healthcare experts shared their experiences, ideas, and priorities for the future of care. This work has been guided by a commitment to clear information, inclusive participation, and transparent decision-making.

Community input will continue to be an important part of how this plan is carried out. Ongoing engagement will take place through the work of the [Healthcare Advisory Committee](#) over its four-year term. The Committee continues to meet every two weeks to review data and bring together community members and healthcare professionals to identify practical solutions. To date, the committee has heard from more than 25 presenters, including providers, community organizations and regional partners, and has visited hospitals, urgent care centres and other clinical spaces to better understand local challenges and opportunities. This important work will continue, as well as through touchpoints with Committees of Council, focus groups, surveys, and continued conversations with residents, partners, providers and organizations. This will help track progress, respond to change, and make sure the plan remains grounded in real community needs over time.

From May to June 2026, the City will host another round of engagement to gather feedback on this draft Action Plan. This will include an online and paper survey, in-person open houses, a virtual information session, interviews with priority populations and community focus groups. The goal is to make sure residents have another opportunity to review the plan, share their thoughts, and help refine the actions before it is finalized and presented to City Council in July 2026. (see Appendix B Community Engagement Plan May-July 2026.)



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**Strategic Plan Alignment:**

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillars of the strategic plan:

- Environment and Climate Change
- Welcoming, Livable, Healthy Community
- Economic Prosperity
- Increased Housing Options
- Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure

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**Conclusion:**

Port Colborne’s healthcare challenges are not new, but they are becoming more urgent. The Community Health and Wellness Action Plan provides a clear, practical and community-driven path forward. It reflects local needs, is grounded in evidence and recognizes both the opportunities and limitations of the municipal role.

Approval of the Action Plan and Community Engagement Plan will allow the City to move forward with meaningful community consultation and return to Council with a final strategy that is informed, supported and ready for implementation.

Municipalities do not deliver healthcare services, but they play an important role in supporting healthy communities.

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**Appendices:**

- a. Community Health & Wellness Action Plan: Connected Care, Close to Home, At Every Stage of Life
- b. Community Engagement Plan-Phase Four (May-July 2026)
- c. Community Health & Wellness Action Plan Presentation

Respectfully submitted,

Geneviève-Renée Bisson

Senior Health Advisor

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### **Report Approval:**

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.



**PORT COLBORNE**

**2026-65  
APPENDIX A**



COMMUNITY

# HEALTH & WELLNESS

ACTION PLAN

**CONNECTED CARE. CLOSE TO HOME.  
FOR EVERY STAGE OF LIFE.**



[www.portcolborne.ca](http://www.portcolborne.ca)



905-835-2900

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

## Niagara Region is situated on treaty land.

This land is steeped in the rich history of the First Nations such as the Hattiwendaronk, the Haudenosaunee, and the Anishinaabe, including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

There are many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people from across Turtle Island that live and work in Niagara today.

The City of Port Colborne stands with all Indigenous people, past and present, in promoting the wise stewardship of the lands on which we live.

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# MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCILLORS

Access to healthcare is one of the most important issues facing our community. Across Port Colborne, we have heard clearly from residents that timely, reliable, and local care matters – and that gaps in the system are having a real impact on people’s lives.

This conversation is not only about the loss of services. It is also about the future of healthcare in our community. Residents deserve access to modern facilities, a full range of services, and a strong team of healthcare professionals who can deliver high-quality care close to home. As our community grows and evolves, so too must the healthcare system that supports it.

As your Mayor and Council, we are committed to being part of the solution, and we have taken important steps to better understand these challenges and begin identifying meaningful, long-term solutions. In early 2025, we established a citizen-led Healthcare Advisory Committee to bring forward local insight and lived experience, and we extend our sincere thanks to its members for their dedication and contributions to our community.

We also made a significant commitment by approving a \$1 million investment over three years to support healthcare advocacy, planning, and the development of sustainable solutions. This Action Plan represents the beginning of that work.

Throughout 2025, we led a community-wide engagement process to hear directly from residents about their experiences, priorities, and ideas for improving healthcare in Port Colborne. What we heard has helped shape this plan and will continue to guide our actions moving forward.

To further support informed decision-making, Council directed an independent health services analysis, led by KPMG, to assess healthcare system planning and service delivery needs over the next 20 years. This work provided critical data and a clearer picture of current gaps, future demand, and opportunities for improvement. It will help ensure that the actions we take are grounded in evidence, responsive to growth, and focused on building a system that can meet the needs of our community now and into the future.

This Action Plan is a starting point. It brings together what we have heard from residents, what we have learned through engagement, and what we know about the challenges and opportunities ahead. It is designed to guide immediate actions while also laying the foundation for longer-term solutions – including advocating for the kind of modern, accessible healthcare infrastructure our community needs and deserves.

To everyone who shared their experiences, ideas, and time, thank you. Your input has been essential in shaping this plan and highlighting what matters most to our community. Your voices will continue to guide this work as we move forward, and we remain committed to listening, learning, and working together to build a healthier Port Colborne where care is connected, accessible, and close to home for every stage of life.

Thank you!  
Mayor Steele & Port Colborne City Council



## CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS 2022-2026

**Mayor**  
William Steele

**Ward 1**  
Councillor Mark Bagu  
Councillor Dave Elliott

**Ward 2**  
Councillor Eric Beauregard  
Councillor Tim Hoyle

**Ward 3**  
Councillor Gary Bruno  
Councillor Frank Danch

**Ward 4**  
Councillor Monique Aquilina  
Councillor Ron Bodner



# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR HEALTHCARE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Healthcare Advisory Committee was created by City Council to help guide Port Colborne's response to one of the most important issues facing our community, access to healthcare close to home. As a citizen-led committee, our role has been to listen, to learn, and to help shape a path forward that reflects both the realities of the healthcare system and the lived experiences of our residents.

As healthcare professionals ourselves, we bring both personal and professional experience to this work. We have seen first hand how difficult it can be for residents and their families to navigate the system, especially when care is not available close to home.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to our colleagues on the Healthcare Advisory Committee for their dedication, and to the many individuals and organizations who contributed their time and insight to this draft Action Plan. In particular, we are very grateful to the Port Colborne Health Coalition for their ongoing participation, and to the Niagara Ontario Health Team – Équipe Santé, Bridges Community Health Centre, Port Cares, and our local physicians, who generously shared their expertise and continue to support this community every day. We also want to thank the 25 presenters who brought forward frontline perspectives. Your insights have grounded this work in real experience and helped ensure this Action Plan is practical, informed, and focused on what matters most to the people of Port Colborne.

Over the past year, the Committee has heard from healthcare providers, community organizations, regional partners, and subject matter experts. These conversations, along with multiple points of community engagement, have helped us better understand key challenges, our local system pressures and provincial healthcare trends.

Through surveys, conversations, and outreach, residents have clearly told us that healthcare access is becoming more difficult, it's about more than just the closure of our Urgent Care Centre, and that timely, local care matters deeply. Many shared personal stories about the challenges they face. Those voices have stayed with us and continue to guide this work.

It is important to recognize that municipalities do not deliver healthcare services. However, they do have a role to play in advocating for our residents, planning for the future, and bringing partners together. This Committee has worked to do exactly that, helping ensure Port Colborne's voice is heard in regional and provincial conversations, while identifying practical steps that can make a difference locally. We are grateful for the trust and support of City Council, including the critical resources provided to better understand our community's needs through data and external guidance from KPMG and Esri Canada.

This draft Community Health & Wellness Action Plan represents the next step in that work. It reflects what we have heard, what the data tells us, and what we believe is achievable through collaboration and sustained effort. But it is not final.

We are now bringing this draft to the community for input. Your feedback will help guide and refine priorities, strengthen actions, and ensure this Action Plan truly reflects the needs and values of Port Colborne residents.

On behalf of the Healthcare Advisory Committee, thank you to everyone who has contributed so far. We look forward to continuing this work together as we move toward a healthier future for our community.



**Sydney McDowell, NP  
(Chair)**



**Dr. Philip McGarry, MD  
(Vice Chair)**



## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**Sydney McDowell, NP  
(Chair)**

**Dr. Philip McGarry, MD  
(Vice Chair)**

**Carmen Tamas**

**Matt Lallouet**

**Tina Triano**

**Councillor Monique Aquilina  
(Non-voting member)**

**Councillor Ron Bodner  
(Non-voting member)**

**Mayor William C. Steele  
(Ex-officio member)**



22,000

Community Population\*



\$70,000

Median Household Income\*

Provincial Average: \$91,000



54.2%

Labour force participation\*

Provincial Average: 67.9%



54%

High school diploma or less\*

Provincial Average: 32%



2.2

Average household size\*

Provincial average 2.6

# COMMUNITY PROFILE

Port Colborne is a close-knit, resilient community with a strong sense of identity, connection, and pride. Located along the shores of Lake Erie and the Welland Canal, the city offers a high quality of life, growing economic opportunities, and a supportive network of community organizations that work every day to help residents stay healthy and well. The community is experiencing steady growth and new investment, positioning Port Colborne as an increasingly attractive place to live, work, and raise a family. At the same time, residents value the small-town feel, where people know each other, support one another, and expect care to be close to home.

Like many communities across Ontario, Port Colborne is also facing real and growing pressures that affect health and access to care. The population is older than the provincial average, with a higher proportion of seniors, many of whom live alone and may face mobility and transportation challenges. Income and education levels are lower than average, which can make it harder for residents to get information, navigate the healthcare system, access support, and maintain overall health and well-being. Many residents are living with chronic conditions and require ongoing care and support.

Access to healthcare remains one of the most significant challenges. Approximately 2,700 residents do not have a family doctor, and local primary care and after-hours care options are limited. As a result, many people rely on urgent care or emergency services for needs that could be addressed earlier and closer to home. Transportation barriers resulting from limited public transit to hospitals, corresponding lengthy travel times, and specialists outside the community add to these challenges, particularly for seniors and those with limited mobility.

These strengths and pressures exist at the same time. Port Colborne is a community that cares deeply about its residents and is committed to building a healthier future. This Action Plan is grounded in that reality, recognizing both what is working well and where change is needed so that practical, community-driven solutions can be developed to improve access, support well-being, and ensure residents can get the care they need, close to home.

\* From Statistics Canada.

\*\* From Primary Care Data Reports for Ontario Health Teams from 2022. From Inspire-PHC.

\*\*\* From Port Colborne Healthcare Analysis Report by KPMG (Feb 2026).

## OUR VISION:

A healthy and vibrant community embracing growth for future generations.

## OUR MISSION:

To provide an exceptional small-town experience in a big way.

## OUR VALUES:

**Integrity** - We interact with others ethically and honourably.

**Respect** - We treat each other with empathy and understanding.

**Inclusion** - We welcome everyone.

**Responsibility** - We make tomorrow better.

**Collaboration** - We are better together.



9.4%

Population growth since last census\*

Provincial Average: 5.8%



27%

Residents over the age of 65\*

Provincial average: 18%



2,700

Residents without a family doctor\*\*



33%

Seniors in Port Colborne live alone\*

Niagara average: 29%  
Provincial average: 27%



20%

Households live below the poverty line\*

Niagara average: 16.7%  
Provincial average: 14.5%



102%

Projected increase of residents age 75+ by 2050\*\*\*

Under moderate growth scenario



# HEALTHCARE IN PORT COLBORNE

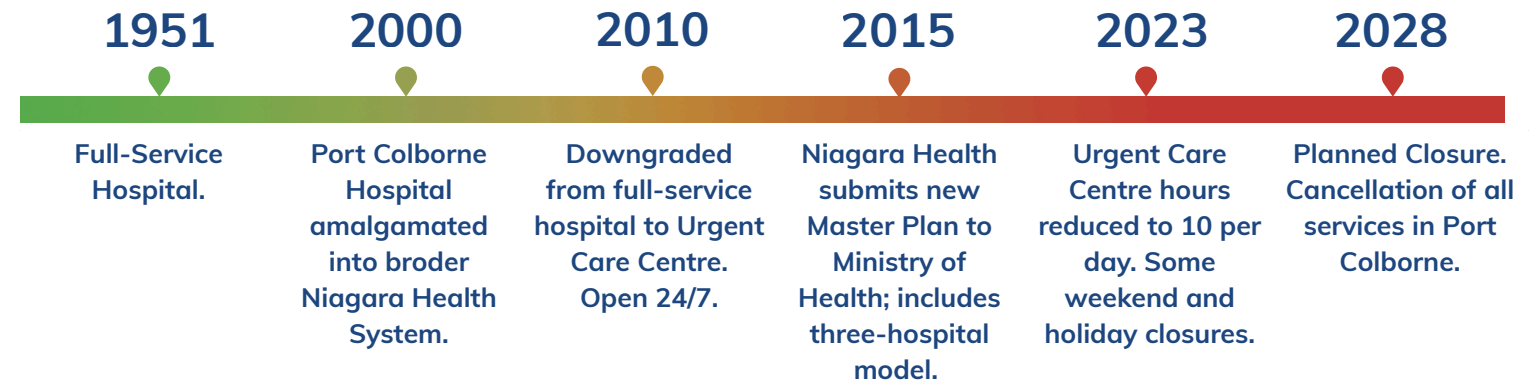
For generations, healthcare has been an important part of life in Port Colborne, shaped by community leadership, local pride, and a shared belief that care should be close to home. This Action Plan is rooted in that same belief. It is hopeful about the future and grounded in a simple idea, every resident should be able to get the care, support, and information they need in a way that is fair, respectful, and easy to access.

This Plan has been shaped by many people. It reflects the voices of residents, caregivers, healthcare workers, community organizations, local leaders, and system partners who shared their time, ideas, and lived experience. It also reflects the commitment of City Council, the Healthcare Advisory Committee, City staff, and many others who helped guide this work to build a stronger foundation for community health and wellness planning.

## HISTORY OF THE PORT COLBORNE HOSPITAL SITE

Healthcare in Port Colborne has changed greatly over time. When the local hospital first opened its doors in 1951, it was made possible through community fundraising and local support. For many years, it served as a full-service hospital and an important part of life in the city. Over time, healthcare services across Niagara, as well as Ontario, became more regionalized. Governance was centralized through the Niagara Health System amalgamation in the early 2000's,

services were reorganized, and more care began to move to other communities. In Port Colborne, that meant a gradual reduction in local hospital services and a shift to an Urgent and Complex Care Centre (UCC) in 2010. Over time, primary care in the community did not develop at the same pace as in other municipalities, and residents came to rely heavily on the UCC for access to urgent and primary care.



## RECENT PROGRESS AND CHANGES

We reached another turning point in December 2024, when Niagara Health announced that the Port Colborne UCC would close in 2028 as part of the new regional hospital model. This raised serious concerns in the community about access, travel, fairness, and the future of healthcare in Port Colborne. In response, City Council approved a broad community engagement process to hear directly from residents and better understand local needs and priorities. Thousands of people took part through surveys, public meetings, open houses, and other engagement opportunities. The message was consistent, local healthcare matters, and the community wants to be part of shaping its future.

Council also established the Healthcare Advisory Committee to help guide this work and keep local voices at the centre of planning. The committee began its work in June 2025 and has played an important role by bringing lived experience, community insight, and practical advice to the table. At the same time, Council committed funding in support of healthcare planning, advocacy, and long-term local solutions, recognizing that while the City traditionally does not have jurisdiction in healthcare service planning and delivery, it does have an important role in bringing people together, planning ahead, speaking up for the community to help support better health outcomes.

## MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

To build a strong evidence base for this Action Plan, an independent healthcare analysis was completed by KPMG to better understand local needs, service use, access barriers, as well as future pressures. Work with Esri Canada, the world leader in mapping, is also helping to support a more data-informed picture of the community, including visual tools that strengthen planning, advocacy, and long-term decision-making. Together, this work has helped to create a clearer understanding of both the risks facing Port Colborne and the opportunities to build a sustainable and healthier future.

This draft Action Plan is the result of that journey so far. It brings together community input, local knowledge, research, and a shared commitment to care close to home. It is built around eight areas of focus that reflect what matters most to residents and where action is needed most. The goal is not only to respond to change, but to work together toward something better, a future where healthcare in Port Colborne is more connected, more inclusive, and easier to access at every stage of life.



# THE CITY'S ROLE IN STRENGTHENING LOCAL HEALTHCARE

Improving healthcare requires shared responsibility. The City plays a different role than healthcare providers and the Province, but that role is still important. While the City does not deliver healthcare services directly, it has a meaningful role in shaping the conditions that support health and well-being in the community. This includes listening to residents, identifying local needs and gaps, and working with partners across the healthcare system to help improve access and coordination. By bringing people together and keeping a strong focus on local priorities, the City can help ensure that decisions are informed by real experiences and reflect what matters most to residents.

This section outlines how the City can take action across four key areas: leading, supporting, influencing, and advocating. Each role reflects a different way the City can contribute to improving healthcare outcomes, from driving community engagement and supporting local initiatives to influencing broader planning decisions and advocating for needed investments. Together, these actions help create a more connected and responsive system, strengthen access to care close to home, and ensure that the needs of Port Colborne residents are clearly represented at every level.



## THE CITY WILL LEAD

- Community engagement and listening to residents.
- Bringing partners together to support local solutions.
- Sharing information and improving awareness of available services.
- Tracking progress and reporting back to the community.
- Investments that create real progress.

## THE CITY WILL SUPPORT

- Local physician and healthcare provider recruitment efforts.
- Community-based programs and partnerships that improve health and well-being.
- Coordination between organizations working in health, housing, and social services.

## THE CITY WILL INFLUENCE

- Regional healthcare planning through participation and collaboration with partners.
- How healthcare needs are considered in local planning decisions (e.g., growth, transit, accessibility).

## THE CITY WILL ADVOCATE FOR

- Increased provincial funding and resources for primary care and local services.
- Timely access to care close to home.
- Solutions that address transportation and access barriers.
- A healthcare system that reflects the needs of Port Colborne residents.

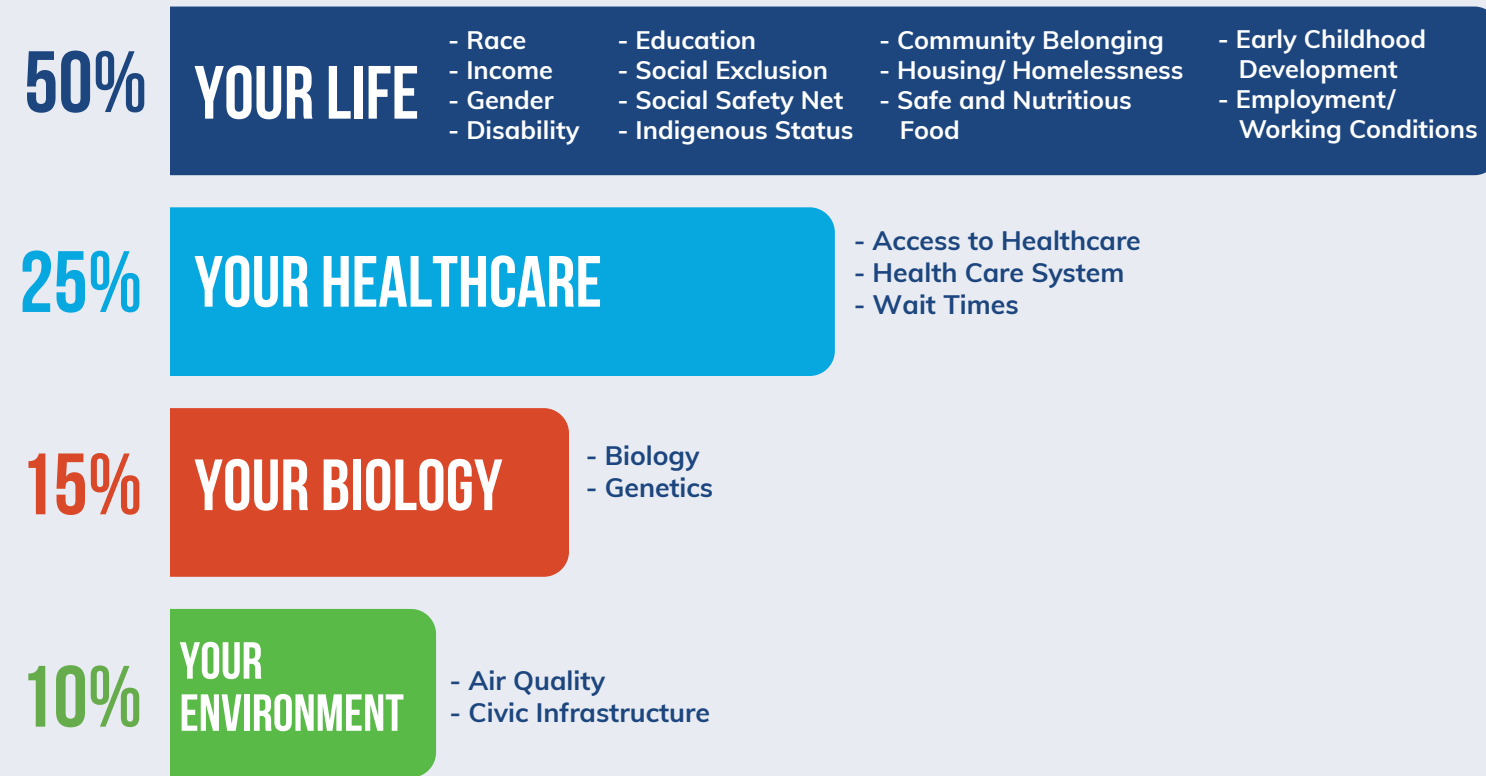
## COUNCIL ACTIONS TO DATE

- Committed a \$1-million Council investment over three years to support healthcare advocacy, planning, and long-term solutions, helping advance local priorities and strengthen the community's voice in broader healthcare discussions.
- Conducted community-wide engagement throughout 2025 to better understand local needs, challenges, and priorities, ensuring the Action Plan is grounded in real experiences and reflects what matters most to residents.
- Established a citizen-led Healthcare Advisory Committee to provide local insight and lived experience, bringing community voices directly into the planning process and helping guide meaningful, practical solutions.
- Commissioned an independent health services analysis with KPMG to assess system planning and service delivery over the next 20 years, providing clear data and evidence to inform long-term decision-making.
- Developing data-driven planning tools with Esri Canada, including an interactive health dashboard to support physician recruitment, health neighbourhood planning, and the coordination of future community-based services.

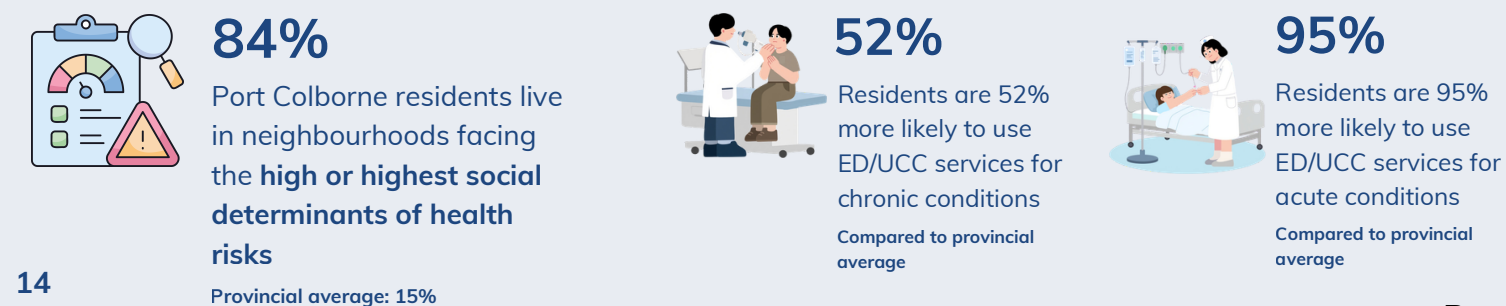
# WHAT ARE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH?

Social determinants of health are the everyday conditions that influence a person's ability to stay healthy, beyond just medical care. They include factors like income, housing, education, employment, social supports, and access to healthy food and safe environments. These conditions shape health outcomes over time, often having a greater impact than healthcare itself, by either creating opportunities for good health or contributing to barriers and inequities within a community.

## What makes Canadians sick?



## What does it mean for Port Colborne?



# HOW THE HEALTH SYSTEM WORKS



# COMMUNITY INSIGHTS & ENGAGEMENT

At the heart of this Action Plan are the voices of Port Colborne residents. Through a multi-phase engagement process, community members, partners, and healthcare experts shared their experiences, ideas, and priorities for the future of care. This work has been guided by a commitment to clear information, inclusive participation, and transparent decision-making.



## PHASE ONE: January to April 2025

The first phase of community engagement was approved by Council in late January 2025 and brought together more than 2,000 completed surveys and over 10,000 comments. Residents shared their input through open houses, town halls, virtual sessions, pop-ups, and conversations with working groups and Council committees. The message was clear. Access to healthcare is becoming more difficult, and residents want care that is closer to home, easier to navigate, and available when they need it.



## PHASE TWO: April 2025 - ongoing

What we heard in Phase One helped shape the work of the Healthcare Advisory Committee. The Committee meets bi-weekly to review research and data, and to bring together community members and healthcare professionals to share ideas and practical solutions. So far, the Committee has heard from 25+ presenters, including healthcare providers, community organizations, and regional partners. Members have also visited hospitals, urgent care centres, and other clinical settings. The goal is to better understand the challenges people are facing and the opportunities ahead.



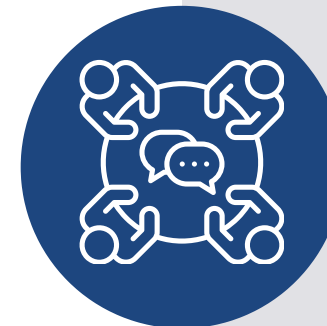
## PHASE THREE: December 2025 to February 2026

To support its work and ensure decisions are grounded in evidence and practical solutions, the Committee engaged KPMG to complete a healthcare analysis. KPMG worked closely with the Committee and local partners to better understand service gaps, barriers to access, and future needs. This work confirmed what residents shared in Phase One and added clear data to guide next steps. This draft Action Plan brings everything together and reflects community input, partner insights, and the data on current and future healthcare needs.



## PHASE FOUR: May to July 2026

From May to June 2026, the City will host another round of engagement to gather feedback on this draft Action Plan. This will include another online and paper survey, in-person open houses, a virtual information session, interviews with priority populations and community focus groups. The goal is to make sure residents have another opportunity to review the plan, share their thoughts, and help refine the actions before it is finalized and presented to City Council in July 2026.



## PHASE FIVE: July 2026 to 2030

Community input will continue to be an important part of how this plan proceeds and engagement with the healthcare system continues to grow. Ongoing engagement will take place through the work of the Healthcare Advisory Committee over its four-year term, as well as through touchpoints with Committees of Council, focus groups, surveys, and continued conversations with residents, partners, providers and organizations. This will help track progress, respond to change, and make sure the plan remains grounded in real community needs over time.

January  
2025

June  
2025

August  
2025

November  
2025

December  
2025

January  
2026

April  
2026

May  
2026

July  
2026

September  
2026

Council launches first phase of healthcare engagement.

Port Colborne Healthcare Advisory Committee work begins.

Public delegations invited to speak at the Healthcare Advisory Committee.

Primary Care Funding Requested by Niagara Ontario Health Team.

KPMG Commissioned to complete study on Port Colborne.

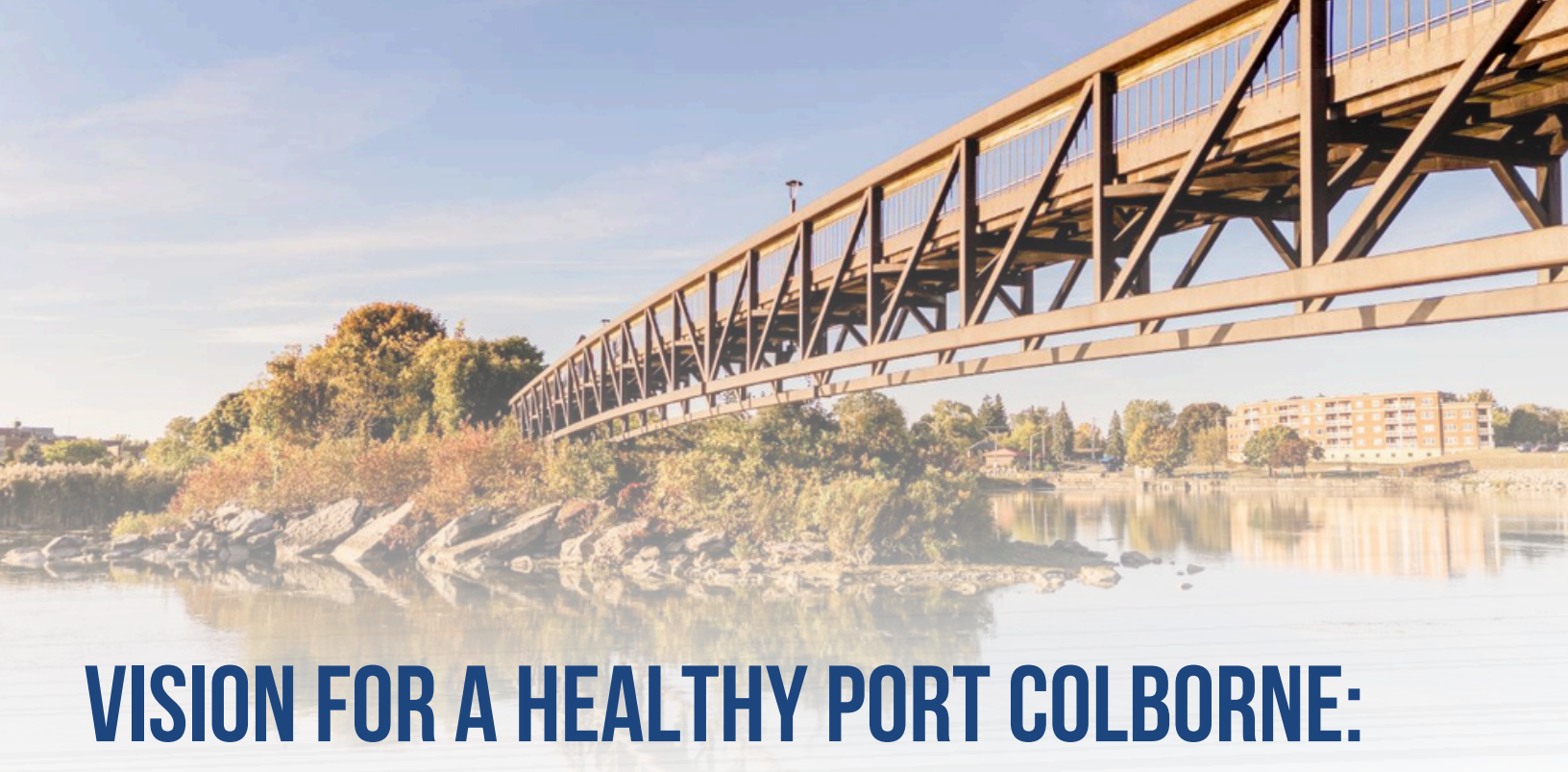
Esri Canada healthcare dashboard project begins.

Draft Community Health & Wellness Action Plan published.

Community Engagement on draft Community Health & Wellness Action Plan begins.

Final Community Health & Wellness Action Plan to be considered for approval by City Council.

Business Case development begins.



# VISION FOR A HEALTHY PORT COLBORNE:

*Connected Care, Close to Home for Every Stage of Life.*

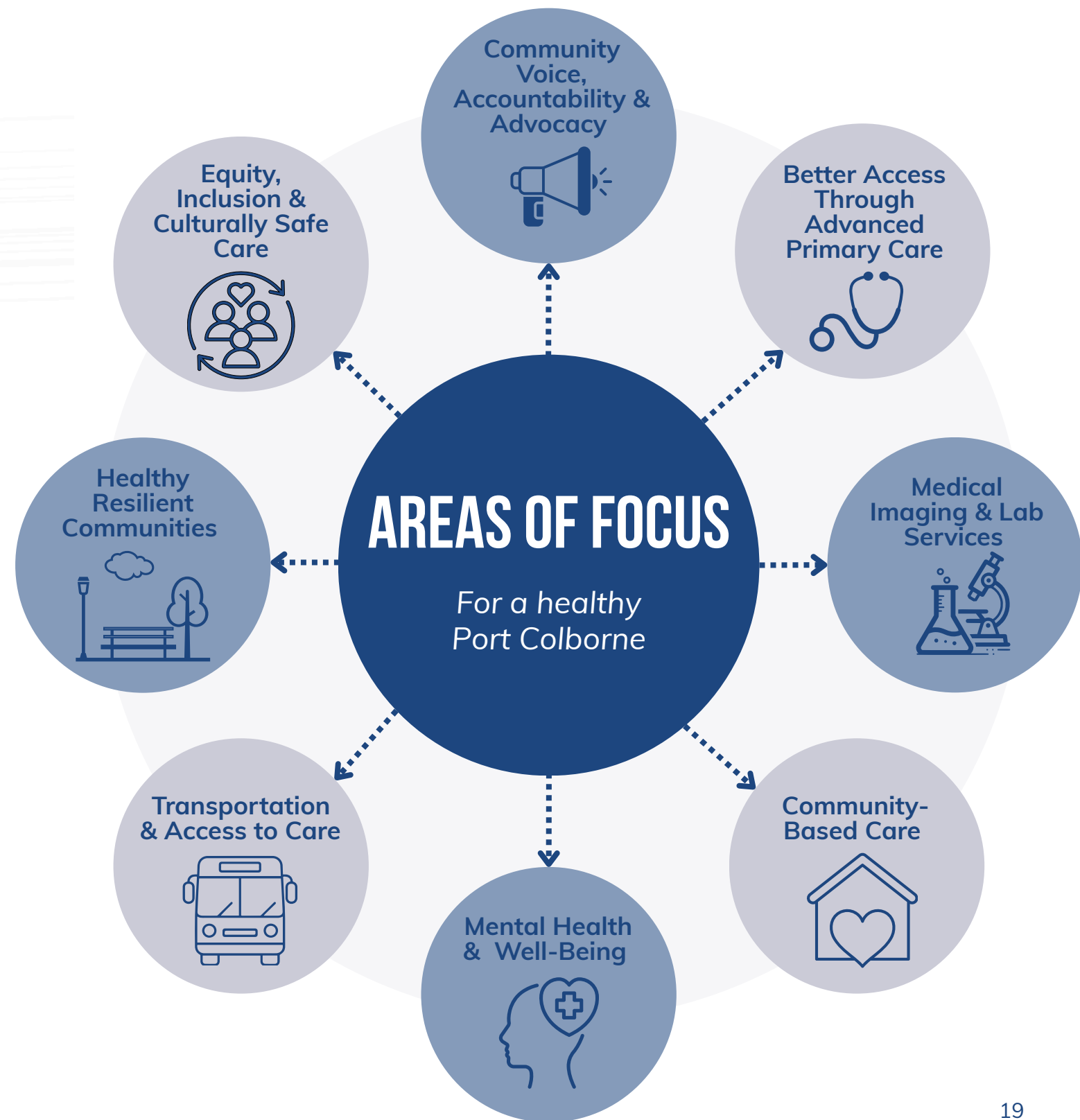
**PURPOSE:** To improve access to timely and barrier-free healthcare services for all residents of Port Colborne.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- 
**Quality Care We Can Trust:**  
 Everyone in Port Colborne deserves safe, reliable healthcare delivered by professionals who put patients first.
- 
**Care When We Need It:**  
 Residents should be able to get help quickly and close to home, without long waits or travel.
- 
**People at the Centre:**  
 Healthcare should reflect real lives, listen to residents, and respond to the needs of families and caregivers.

- 
**Fair Access for All:**  
 Everyone should be able to get the care they need, regardless of income, where they live, their abilities, or the barriers they face.
- 
**A System That Lasts:**  
 We need smart, local solutions that work today and support a healthy community for generations to come.

The Action Plan is organized into eight key areas of focus. For each area, we've brought together what the community shared through public engagement, what the data and research show about local needs, and a clear set of actions to guide our response. This approach ensures each priority is grounded in both lived experience and evidence, with practical steps to move forward.



## AREA OF FOCUS

# BETTER ACCESS THROUGH ADVANCED PRIMARY CARE

Primary care is the front door to the healthcare system. It is where people go for check-ups, ongoing care, early diagnosis, and help navigating services. When access to primary care is strong, people stay healthier and fewer residents need to rely on hospitals or emergency care.

In Port Colborne, access to primary care is already limited. Many residents do not have a family doctor or cannot get timely appointments. These challenges are felt most by seniors, low-income residents, and those without reliable transportation. As a result, more people are turning to urgent care for needs that should be addressed earlier.

## THE COMMUNITY SAID

What we heard through surveys, open houses, and conversations with residents:



### Hard to find a family doctor or same-day care

Many Port Colborne residents do not have a family doctor or cannot access same-day care.



### Using urgent care for everyday health needs

The Port Colborne UCC is often used for care that should happen in a primary care setting.



### Wanting more local care options

Residents want more local options, including after-hours care, walk-in clinics, and team-based care.



### Worried about losing after-hours care

There is concern about losing after-hours access and related services when the Port Colborne UCC closes in 2028.



### Challenges getting care outside the city

Travelling outside the city for care creates barriers, especially for seniors and those without a vehicle.

## THE RESEARCH SHOWED

What the data tells us about access to care in our community:

- Limited access to primary care is driving higher use of urgent and emergency care (2,700 residents without a family doctor and a shortage of at least five physicians).
- Evidence across Ontario shows that strong primary care improves access and reduces pressure on hospitals.
- Demand for care will continue to grow as the population increases and ages Port Colborne residents visit emergency departments more often than the provincial average.
- Gaps in primary care access disproportionately affect residents already facing the greatest barriers.

## STEPS IN OUR ACTION PLAN

What we're doing to address these needs and strengthen access to care in Port Colborne:



### Attract More Primary Care Providers

Advocate for more primary care providers by working with regional and provincial partners to bring stable, long-term funding and recruitment support to Port Colborne.



### Expand Team-Based Care

Support team-based care models that include nurse practitioners, allied health professionals, paramedicine, and wrap-around services.



### Create Modern Spaces for Care

Support the development of modern spaces for care, including new or expanded clinic locations and leverage virtual care technology.



### Improve After-Hours Access

Advocate for improved after-hours access and explore pathways for 24/7 on-call coverage similar to models in other municipalities.



### Urgent Care Coverage

Work with the province and local providers to secure sustainable funding to fill service gaps for urgent and time-sensitive injuries and illnesses (e.g. cuts, minor burns, eye injuries, sprains, fevers, and ENT issues).



### Measure Progress and Impact

Track and report on progress, including attachment rates, service use, and community feedback, to support ongoing planning and advocacy.

## AREA OF FOCUS

# MEDICAL IMAGING AND LAB SERVICES

Healthcare does not stop at a doctor's visit. People also need timely access to tests, medical imaging, lab work, and specialist care. These services help diagnose issues early, guide treatment, and prevent more serious health problems. That need is especially clear in Port Colborne, where many of these services are already limited or require travel outside the community.

Residents often leave the city for scans, fracture care, and specialist visits. For those with lower incomes, limited mobility, caregiving responsibilities, or no access to a vehicle, even routine care can become difficult to access. Strengthening local access to these services will make care faster, more equitable, and easier to navigate.

## THE COMMUNITY SAID

What we heard through surveys, open houses, and conversations with residents:



### Medical imaging and diagnostics are important

Residents want to keep the local X-ray, ultrasound, and lab services that are currently associated with the UCC.



### Worried about losing more services over time

There is concern about losing even more healthcare services over time due to centralization of hospital-based services.



### Travel for care is difficult and costly

Travelling for tests and appointments is stressful, costly, and time-consuming, and can be a barrier to diagnosis and treatment.



### Support for MRI and specialized care closer to home

Strong support exists for a South Niagara MRI and more specialized care to better serve Port Colborne, Wainfleet and Fort Erie.



### Conveniently located care

Co-locating services is preferred and seen as more convenient. Healthcare services should be available on both sides of the Welland Canal.

## THE RESEARCH SHOWED

What the data tells us about access to care in our community:

- Local access to testing and same-day clinical services is essential to timely care.
- When residents must travel farther for basic services, delays increase and some people choose not to seek care.
- Limited access to medical imaging and diagnostics can lead to later diagnoses and increased pressure on urgent and emergency care.
- Maintaining local services is especially important for residents facing transportation, financial, or mobility barriers.

## STEPS IN OUR ACTION PLAN

What we're doing to address these needs and strengthen access to care in Port Colborne:



### Protect Local Medical Imaging and Diagnostic Services

Advocate to maintain local diagnostic services, including X-ray, ultrasound, and lab services, as essential components of care close to home.



### Expand Access to Medical Imaging and Diagnostics

Support opportunities to expand services in South Niagara, including access to MRI and other diagnostics, to reduce wait times and travel.



### Bring Specialists Closer to Home

Enable local access to visiting specialists and outpatient services by supporting clinic space and community partnerships, with healthcare services being available on both sides of the Welland Canal.



### Support One-Stop Care Models

Promote co-located care models that bring multiple services together to improve access and patient experience.



### Reduce the Need to Travel for Care

Work with partners to reduce unnecessary travel for routine and non-emergency care through better coordination and planning.

## AREA OF FOCUS

# COMMUNITY-BASED CARE

Most healthcare should not happen in a hospital. Many residents need support closer to home, including home care, chronic disease management, rehabilitation, caregiver support, palliative care, and services that help people stay safe, healthy, and independent. This is especially important in Port Colborne, where the population is older than average and demand for care is growing.

At the same time, residents of all ages face barriers to accessing the support they need. Aging, chronic illness, disability, mobility challenges, mental health needs, and social isolation often overlap. Without the right supports in place, it becomes harder for people to stay well at home. Strengthening community-based care will help residents maintain independence, support families and caregivers, and reduce avoidable hospital visits.

## THE COMMUNITY SAID

What we heard through surveys, open houses, and conversations with residents:



### Need for More Local Support for Seniors and Families

Seniors, families and caregivers need more support close to home.



### Demand for Preventative Care and Reduced Hospital Visits

People want more services that help prevent illness and reduce hospital visits.



### Strong Support for Connected, Community-Based Care

There is strong support for more connected, local care and wellness services for all ages.



### Challenges Navigating a Fragmented Care System

Navigating between primary care, specialists, and hospital services is difficult and often fragmented.



### Long Wait Times for Community Services

Wait time for some community-based services, such as long term care beds, or physiotherapy can take months.

## THE RESEARCH SHOWED

What the data tells us about access to care in our community:

- There are gaps in care between home, primary care, and hospital services, especially during transitions.
- Supporting seniors, families, and caregivers is central to future health and wellness planning.
- Strong community-based care improves quality of life and reduces pressure on hospitals.
- Residents with complex needs, limited mobility, lower incomes, or limited social support are most affected by these gaps.

## STEPS IN OUR ACTION PLAN

What we're doing to address these needs and strengthen access to care in Port Colborne:



### Expand Local Home and Community Care Services

Work with healthcare and community partners to support the expansion of local home and community-based care services.



### Advocate for More Long-Term and Transitional Care Capacity

Advocate for increased capacity in long-term care, hospice, and transitional care, recognizing growing demand in the community.



### Support Aging in Place for Residents

Support aging in place by advocating for services and programs that help residents remain safely at home.



### Strengthen Support for Caregivers and Families

Strengthen support for caregivers and families through partnerships, awareness, and local resources.



### Improve Care Coordination and Transitions

Promote better care coordination and transitions, including discharge, recovery, and follow-up supports.



### Plan for Future Community Care Needs

Align health planning with future growth to anticipate care needs and ensure sustainable access to food, housing, social services, and community development.

## AREA OF FOCUS

# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Mental health is a key part of overall health. People need timely, compassionate support for mental health and substance use, just as they do for physical health. Early support can prevent crisis, reduce hospital use, and improve quality of life.

In Port Colborne, these needs are often linked to broader challenges such as housing instability, isolation, trauma, and barriers to care. Addressing mental health requires more than treatment alone. It requires better connections between services, stronger community supports, and easier pathways for people to get help early, before issues become more serious.

## THE COMMUNITY SAID

What we heard through surveys, open houses, and conversations with residents:



### Expand Local Mental Health and Addictions Support

Mental health and addictions support should continue to be available locally.



### Improve Connections Between Healthcare, Social, and Community Services

Residents want better connections between healthcare, social services, and community supports to improve health outcomes.



### Focus on Early Support to Prevent Crises

Residents want timely support to help prevent issues from escalating.



### Recognize Mental Health as a Growing Community Priority

Mental health has emerged as a clear and urgent priority for residents.

## THE RESEARCH SHOWED

What the data tells us about access to care in our community:

- Mental health and addictions support must be part of the core strategy, not an add-on.
- Earlier access and stronger local coordination can improve outcomes and reduce crisis-driven care.
- Well-being depends on connecting healthcare with social and community supports.
- People facing social and economic barriers may be at greater risk and need more flexible, local, and welcoming pathways to access support.

## STEPS IN OUR ACTION PLAN

What we're doing to address these needs and strengthen access to care in Port Colborne:



### Strengthen Coordination and Accountability Across Health, Community and Social Services.

Support stronger coordination between healthcare providers, community organizations, and social services, while tracking outcomes to measure impact.



### Advocate for Greater Access to Local Mental Health and Addictions Services

Advocate for increased access to local mental health and addictions services, including sustainable funding and programs for youth.



### Make Services Easier to Find Through Awareness and Navigation

Improve awareness and navigation of services so residents can easily find the help they need.



### Promote Prevention and Early Intervention

Promote prevention and early intervention through partnerships, education, and community-based initiatives.



### Integrate Mental Well-Being Into Community Planning

Embed mental well-being across all areas of planning, recognizing its connection to housing, social supports, and overall community health.

## AREA OF FOCUS

# TRANSPORTATION AND ACCESS TO CARE

Access to healthcare is not just about whether services exist. People also need to be able to reach them and understand how to use them when they need care. Long travel times, limited transit options, cost, and confusion about where to go can all delay care or prevent people from accessing it altogether.

These challenges are not experienced equally. They are often hardest on seniors, people with disabilities, low-income households, caregivers, and residents without access to a vehicle. As more healthcare services are delivered outside the community, transportation and system navigation must be treated as a core part of healthcare access.

## THE COMMUNITY SAID

What we heard through surveys, open houses, and conversations with residents:



### Transportation is a Major Barrier

Transportation challenges were consistently identified as the leading barrier to accessing care.



### Travel Challenges for Seniors and Those Without Vehicles

Travel outside Port Colborne to see specialists or to access after-hours emergency care is especially hard for seniors who live alone and people without a vehicle.



### Need for Clearer Information on Where to Access Care

Residents want clearer information about where to go for different types of care.



### Concerns About Growing Travel Barriers as Services Change

There is concern that travel challenges will increase as local services change.

## THE RESEARCH SHOWED

What the data tells us about access to care in our community:

- Transportation is a healthcare access issue, not just a transit issue.
- Travel time, cost, and system complexity create real barriers and inequities.
- Without proactive planning, access challenges will continue to grow over time.
- Clear information and practical supports are essential, especially for residents facing multiple barriers.

## STEPS IN OUR ACTION PLAN

What we're doing to address these needs and strengthen access to care in Port Colborne:



### Enhance Transportation Options for Medical Appointments

Work with partners to improve transportation options for medical appointments, including flexible and community-based solutions.



### Prioritize Support for Residents Facing the Greatest Barriers

Prioritize support for residents facing the greatest barriers, including seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income households.



### Improve Access to Information

Centralize and improve access to clear, simple information so residents know where to go and how to access care.



### Increase Awareness of Available Transportation Supports

Increase awareness of existing transportation supports, including medical travel and assistance programs.



### Integrate Healthcare Access into Transit and Mobility Planning

Integrate healthcare access into local transit and mobility planning to better reflect current and future needs.



### Bring Care Closer to Home Through Local Services

Support opportunities to bring services closer to home, such as mobile clinics and visiting specialists, to reduce the need for travel.

## AREA OF FOCUS

# HEALTHY RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Health is shaped by more than healthcare. It is also shaped by housing, food, recreation, social connection, safe streets, walkable neighbourhoods, and access to community spaces. These everyday conditions affect whether people can stay healthy and independent over time.

This broader view matters because some residents face barriers in their daily lives that impact their health long before they enter a clinic or hospital. Building a healthier community means reducing those barriers, supporting healthy aging, and making it easier for people to live well where they are.

## THE COMMUNITY SAID

What we heard through surveys, open houses, and conversations with residents:



### Desire for a Healthier Community Beyond Healthcare Services

Residents want a healthier community, not just more healthcare services.



### Value Placed on Recreation, Green Space, and Social Connection

Residents view access to natural areas, walkability, and community as key contributors to overall quality of life.



### Seniors Want to Stay Active, Included, and Independent

Health and well-being are shaped by opportunities to stay engaged, supported, and age safely at home.



### Recognition of Social Factors That Impact Health

Residents recognize that housing, food, transportation, and neighbourhood design affect health.



### Growing Concern Around Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is a growing concern, with more individuals and families relying on local supports.

## THE RESEARCH SHOWED

What the data tells us about access to care in our community:

- Health outcomes are shaped by both healthcare services and everyday living conditions.
- Prevention and wellness improve quality of life and reduce long-term pressure on the healthcare system.
- Municipal planning and programs play an important role in supporting the social determinants of health.
- A stronger focus on prevention must prioritize residents and neighbourhoods facing the greatest barriers.

## STEPS IN OUR ACTION PLAN

What we're doing to address these needs and strengthen access to care in Port Colborne:



### Embed Health in Municipal Planning and Decision-Making

Integrate health considerations into municipal planning and decision-making, including housing, parks, recreation, and community design.



### Prioritize Equity for Underserved Residents and Neighbourhoods

Focus on equity by prioritizing underserved residents and neighbourhoods facing the greatest barriers.



### Support Walkable, Age-Friendly, Complete Communities

Support the development of complete, walkable, and age-friendly communities through planning and policy.



### Align Health and Wellness Goals Across City Services

Align health and wellness goals across City services, including recreation, housing, and community programming.



### Strengthen Community Food Security Initiatives

Work with community partners to support food security initiatives, such as community gardens and local nutrition programs.

## AREA OF FOCUS

# EQUITY, INCLUSION AND CULTURALLY SAFE CARE

A strong health system should work for everyone. People should be able to get care and information in ways that are fair, respectful, understandable, and welcoming, regardless of age, income, language, ability, culture, identity, or background.

This includes making sure healthcare planning reflects the needs of residents who may face barriers or be underserved. It also means recognizing that trust matters. People are more likely to seek care, ask questions, and stay connected to services when they feel respected, understood, and included.

## THE COMMUNITY SAID

What we heard through surveys, open houses, and conversations with residents:



### Desire for Inclusive Healthcare Planning for All Residents

Healthcare planning should include everyone living in the community.



### Support for Respectful and Culturally Aware Care

People support respectful, culturally aware, and inclusive care.



### Need for Clearer, More Accessible Information

Residents want information that is easier to understand and easier to access.



### Importance of Access to French-Language Services

Access to French-language services remains important in the community.

## THE RESEARCH SHOWED

What the data tells us about access to care in our community:

- Equity must be built into planning from the beginning.
- Language, culture, trust, and lived experience all shape access to care.
- Inclusive planning leads to stronger services and better outcomes.
- Equity should guide how all priorities are planned and delivered.

## STEPS IN OUR ACTION PLAN

What we're doing to address these needs and strengthen access to care in Port Colborne:



### Consider Health Equity in Municipal Planning and Decision-Making

Embed equity and inclusion across all planning, engagement, and communication.



### Ensure Diverse Voices Are Included in Decision-Making

Work with community partners to ensure diverse voices are included, especially Ontario priority populations and those facing barriers to care.



### Strengthen Relationships with Indigenous Communities

Strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations, and support culturally safe approaches to care.



### Build Capacity for Inclusion, Accessibility, and Cultural Safety

Build internal and external awareness and capacity around inclusion, accessibility, and cultural safety throughout city programs, policies and practices.



### Collaborate on Inclusive Healthcare Planning

Collaborate with regional partners, including the Niagara Ontario Health Team- Équipe Santé Ontario Niagara, to support inclusive healthcare planning and engagement.



### Enhance Access to Francophone Services and Bilingual Information

Services in French support equitable access and better health outcomes for Francophone residents.

## AREA OF FOCUS

# COMMUNITY VOICE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND ADVOCACY

Healthcare planning is strongest when it is guided by local experience, good information, and clear follow-through. It is also important to understand how the system works (see page 36).

While the City does not deliver or fund healthcare, it plays an important role in listening to residents, bringing partners together, advocating for local needs, and tracking progress over time.

This role should be carried out in a way that is open, practical, and accountable. Residents need to see how their input has shaped the strategy, what actions are being taken, and how progress will be measured and shared. Ongoing involvement and clear communication will help build trust between the community and Council, and keep the Action Plan grounded in community needs.

## THE COMMUNITY SAID

What we heard through surveys, open houses, and conversations with residents:



### Desire for Council Advocacy on Local Healthcare Needs

Residents want City Council to keep speaking up for local access to healthcare services.



### Need for Clear Updates on Changes and Reasons

People want clear updates about what is changing and why.



### Value of Community Input in Planning

Community members value having a voice in planning.



### Importance of Evidence-Based, Locally Relevant Decisions

Residents want decisions based on evidence and real local realities.

## THE RESEARCH SHOWED

What the data tells us about access to care in our community:

- Progress must be tracked and reported in a clear and accessible way.
- Public trust grows when people see action and regular follow-up.
- Strong local coordination helps the community respond to change more effectively.
- Accountability includes understanding whether improvements are reaching residents facing the greatest barriers.

## STEPS IN OUR ACTION PLAN

What we're doing to address these needs and strengthen access to care in Port Colborne:



### Engage the Community Through Ongoing Advisory Groups

Keep community voices involved through ongoing engagement, meetings with committees of Council, and community advisory groups.



### Provide Regular Updates to Council and the Community

Report regularly to Council and the community on progress and outcomes.



### Use Clear Data and Indicators for Transparent Decision-Making

Share data openly and use clear, simple indicators to support transparent decision-making.



### Strengthen Partnerships Across Health and Community Organizations

Strengthen partnerships across healthcare, community organizations, and all levels of government.



### Maintain Consistent Advocacy on Local Healthcare Priorities

Maintain focused and consistent advocacy on Port Colborne's healthcare priorities.



### Coordinate Partners to Align Priorities and Monitor Progress

Bring partners together through a local coordination or steering group to align priorities and monitor progress.

# WHO DOES WHAT IN HEALTHCARE?



## MUNICIPALITIES (i.e. The City of Port Colborne)

In Ontario, municipalities do not provide healthcare services, but they still play an important role in supporting community health. Some municipalities, including the City of Port Colborne, advocate for local healthcare needs, bring partners together to support solutions, share information with residents, plan for current and future community health needs, make investments, and track progress over time. This means the City helps ensure residents' voices are heard and works to improve access to care locally, even though healthcare delivery itself is the responsibility of the Province and healthcare providers.



## PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS (Doctors & Nurse Practitioners)

Primary care providers, including doctors and nurse practitioners, are your main point of contact for everyday healthcare. They provide regular check-ups, diagnose and treat common health issues, refer you to specialists or tests when needed, and help manage long-term health conditions. Their role is to support your overall health and help you stay well through ongoing, consistent care.



## COMMUNITY-BASED CARE PROVIDERS

(Home Care, Community Health Centres, Support Services)

Community-based care providers, including home care, community health centres, and support services, deliver care outside of hospitals, often in your home or community. They provide nursing, rehabilitation, and personal support, while supporting seniors, caregivers, and people with ongoing health needs. These providers offer mental health, addiction, and social supports, help coordinate care after hospital stays, and help people recover, stay independent, and avoid unnecessary hospital visits.



## NIAGARA HEALTH

Niagara Health operates hospitals and urgent care services, providing emergency, inpatient, and surgical care, along with diagnostics such as imaging and lab services. This is where you go for hospital-based care, including urgent and emergency services.



## NIAGARA REGION PUBLIC HEALTH

Niagara Region Public Health promotes health and prevents illness through programs like vaccinations, inspections, and education, while monitoring community health trends and risks. It provides supports for families, seniors, and vulnerable populations, and responds to public health issues and emergencies. Public Health works behind the scenes to keep the community healthy and support overall well-being.



## ONTARIO HEALTH TEAMS (OHTS)

Ontario Health Teams plan and coordinate care across the region by connecting hospitals, doctors, and community services. They work to improve access and reduce gaps in care, helping make the system more connected and easier to navigate.



## PROVINCE OF ONTARIO

The Province of Ontario funds healthcare services, sets policy and priorities, decides where services and funding are allocated, and approves major infrastructure projects such as new or redeveloped hospitals. The province makes the key decisions about how the healthcare system operates and where resources are invested.



## GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

The Government of Canada provides funding to provinces for healthcare, such as through the Canada Health Transfer, and sets national standards and legislation, including the Canada Health Act. It also supports public health, research, and data collection, and funds programs for Indigenous health and priority populations. The federal government helps fund healthcare and set national standards, while provinces decide how care is delivered.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to everyone who has contributed their time, ideas, questions, and lived experience to this draft to date. The Healthcare Advisory Committee is especially grateful to residents, caregivers, healthcare workers, community organizations, and partner agencies who have come together to work toward practical solutions to improve healthcare access in Port Colborne. A special thank you to the Port Colborne Health Coalition for its ongoing participation, advocacy, research, and deep commitment to the community.

We also extend our sincere appreciation to key partners who have consistently helped inform this work, including the Niagara Ontario Health Team – Équipe Santé Ontario Niagara, Bridges Community Health Centre, Port Cares, Community Living Port Colborne-Wainfleet, Niagara Health, Niagara Region Public Health, Niagara Emergency Medical Services, Niagara Economic Development, Ontario Health atHome, the Ontario Long-Term Care Association, Centre de Santé Communautaire, Hamilton-Niagara, Boggios Family of Pharmacies, our local physician groups, allied health professionals, frontline experts, and many others across the health system. Their willingness to share knowledge, challenge assumptions, and work collaboratively has strengthened this process and helped shape a more informed path forward for our community.



# WHAT COMES NEXT

Port Colborne's approach to healthcare planning has always been grounded in community, and that continues with this Community Health & Wellness Action Plan.

The challenges facing our residents today are not new. For decades, local reports have identified the same core issues, difficulty accessing primary care, transportation barriers, an aging population, and the need for stronger coordination across services. Today, City Council and the Healthcare Advisory Committee are committed and investing in the future of healthcare in our community. Healthcare in Port Colborne is at a turning point. With planned system changes, growing demand, and increasing pressure on residents to travel outside the community for care, there is a clear need to act in a coordinated and practical way.

This Action Plan brings together what we heard from the community, what the data shows, and what we know about how the healthcare system is evolving. It reflects both long-standing needs and current realities. At the same time, it recognizes an important truth, the City does not deliver healthcare. Decisions about funding, services, and system design are made at the provincial and regional levels. But municipalities still have a critical role to play. By listening to residents, bringing partners together, advocating clearly and consistently, and tracking progress over time, the City can help ensure that local needs are understood and addressed.

## This Action Plan is not the end point — it is where we begin.

It outlines practical, achievable steps that can be taken locally, while also identifying where advocacy and partnership are needed to create real change. It is designed to be flexible, to grow with new information, and to respond to what we continue to hear from residents and providers. The next phase of this work is just as important as the planning that has come before it.

Through upcoming community engagement, residents, healthcare partners, and organizations will have the opportunity to review this draft, share their experiences, and help refine the priorities and actions moving forward. This process is intended to be open, inclusive, and transparent, with multiple ways for people to participate and see how their input shapes the final strategy.

Strong healthcare systems are built over time through collaboration, trust, and shared responsibility. This Action Plan reflects that approach. It is rooted in local experience, supported by data, and focused on practical next steps that will make a difference in people's daily lives.

Together, this work will help position Port Colborne as a strong, informed voice in the healthcare system, and support a future where residents can access the care they need, close to home, with confidence.

# GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

This glossary is included to help make healthcare terms easier to understand. Our goal is to ensure that everyone in the community can follow the plan, take part in conversations, and feel confident navigating the healthcare system.

## ACCESS TO CARE

The ability for a person to get the healthcare services they need, when and where they need them, without barriers like long wait times, travel, or cost.

## AFTER-HOURS CARE

Healthcare services available outside of regular daytime hours, such as evenings, weekends, or holidays.

## ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Healthcare workers who are not doctors or nurses but provide important services, such as physiotherapists, social workers, dietitians, and pharmacists.

## ALTERNATE LEVEL OF CARE (ALC)

Patients who no longer need hospital care but are waiting for another type of care, such as long-term care or home care.

## COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE (CHC)

PA local clinic that provides team-based care, often including doctors, nurse practitioners, and social supports, especially for people facing barriers to care.

## CONTINUITY OF CARE

Receiving consistent care over time, often from the same provider or team, who understands your health history.

## DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH (SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH)

Factors that affect a person's health, such as income, housing, education, transportation, and social support.

## DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

Tests used to find or confirm a health issue, such as X-rays, ultrasounds, bloodwork, or MRIs.

## EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT (ED)

A hospital unit that provides emergency care for serious or life-threatening conditions.

## FAMILY DOCTOR / PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER

A healthcare professional (doctor or nurse practitioner) who provides regular check-ups, manages ongoing health needs, and coordinates care.

## HEALTH EQUITY

The idea that everyone should have a fair opportunity to be as healthy as possible, regardless of income, age, location, or personal circumstances.

## HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE

Healthcare and support services provided outside of hospitals, such as home nursing, personal support, and rehabilitation services.

## INTERPROFESSIONAL TEAM (TEAM-BASED CARE)

A group of healthcare providers from different backgrounds working together to care for patients (e.g., doctors, nurses, social workers).

## MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS SERVICES

Support and treatment for mental health challenges and substance use, including counselling, crisis support, and recovery programs.

## NIAGARA HEALTH

The organization that operates hospitals in the Niagara region.

## NIAGARA ONTARIO HEALTH TEAM (OHT)

A group of healthcare providers and organizations working together to plan and deliver coordinated care in the region.

## PRIMARY CARE

The first point of contact in the healthcare system, such as family doctors or nurse practitioners, who provide general care and referrals.

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The process of involving residents and community members in planning and decision-making by gathering their input and feedback.

## RURAL AND SMALL COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

Healthcare delivered in smaller or more spread-out communities, where access may be affected by distance, transportation, and provider shortages.

## SYSTEM NAVIGATION

Helping people understand where to go for care and how to access the right services.

## URGENT CARE CENTRE (UCC)

A healthcare facility that treats non-life-threatening conditions that still require prompt attention.

## WAIT TIMES

The amount of time a person waits to receive care, whether for an appointment, test, or treatment.

# RESEARCH & SOURCES

The following sources reflect the data, research, and partnerships that have guided the development of the City of Port Colborne Community Health and Wellness Action Plan. All listed information can be found online or on the City of Port Colborne website at:

[www.portcolborne.ca/healthcare](http://www.portcolborne.ca/healthcare)

## Legislation and Government Frameworks

- Canada Health Act — Government of Canada, (1985)
- Connected Care for Canadians Act — Government of Canada, (2024)
- Health Protection and Promotion Act — Government of Ontario, (1990)
- Excellent Care for All Act — Government of Ontario, (2010)
- French Language Services Act — Government of Ontario, (1986)
- Connecting Care Act — Government of Ontario, (2019)
- Bill 15: Connecting Care Amendment Act (Patient Bill of Rights) — Government of Ontario, (2021)
- Primary Care Action Plan — Government of Ontario, (2024)
- Primary Care Act — Government of Ontario, (2024)
- Community Surgical and Diagnostic Centres Act — Government of Ontario, (2023)
- Ontario Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism Framework — Government of Ontario, (2017)

## Provincial Government Reports and Oversight

- Auditor General of Ontario. (2023). Emergency Department Visits and Wait Times in Ontario
- Auditor General of Ontario. (2022). Community Health Centres in Ontario
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## Health System Planning and Organizational Strategies

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- Wellesley Institute. (2023). Barriers and Enablers to Primary Care Access for Equity-Deserving Populations in Ontario: A Scoping Review

## Regional Planning and Niagara-Based Sources

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- Niagara Region. (2022). Transportation Master Plan
- Niagara Region Public Health. (2024). Population Health Data and Reports
- Niagara Region. (2024). Demographic and Socioeconomic Data

## Community-Based Research and Social Data

- Wiley, M. (Community Potential). (2023). Living in Niagara Report
- Leclair, Brent. Port Colborne Health Coalition. (2025). Report to the Healthcare Advisory Committee.

## Statistics and Population Data

- Statistics Canada. (2021). Census of Population
- Ontario Ministry of Finance. (2025). Population Projections for Ontario
- Ontario Marginalization Index (ON-Marg) Public Health Ontario. (2023). Ontario Marginalization Index: User Guide and Data Dictionary

## City of Port Colborne Reports and Documentation

- City of Port Colborne. (2026). Healthcare Analysis Report (Staff Report 2026-40)
- City of Port Colborne. (2025). Future of Healthcare in Port Colborne: Public Engagement Results
- City of Port Colborne. (2023). Strategic Plan

## Municipal Case Studies and Comparative Research

- Case Studies – Municipal Healthcare and Community-Based Care Models:
  - Town of Wasaga Beach
  - City of Brantford
  - Municipality of Chatham-Kent
  - County of Brant (Paris)
  - City of Orillia
  - Town of Collingwood
  - Municipality of Central Elgin (Port Stanley/Cowanville context)
  - Town of Essex
  - Town of Greater Napanee
  - Municipality of Saugeen Shores (Port Elgin)

## Municipal Reports and Historical Context

- City of Port Colborne & Township of Wainfleet. (2008). Community Response to the Niagara Health System Hospital Improvement Plan
- Niagara Health System. (2006). Hospital Improvement Plan
- Smith, K. P. D., Niagara Health System. (2012). Report on Restructuring of the Niagara Health System

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# COMMUNITY HEALTH & WELLNESS


## ACTION PLAN

CONNECTED CARE. CLOSE TO HOME. FOR EVERY STAGE OF LIFE.


### GUIDING PRINCIPLES:




**Quality Care We Can Trust:**  
Everyone in Port Colborne deserves safe, reliable healthcare delivered by professionals who put patients first.




**Care When We Need It:**  
Residents should be able to get help quickly and close to home, without long waits or travel.



**People at the Centre:**  
Healthcare should reflect real lives, listen to residents, and respond to the needs of families and caregivers.



**Fair Access for All:**  
Everyone should be able to get the care they need, regardless of income, where they live, their abilities, or the barriers they face.



**A System That Lasts:**  
We need smart, local solutions that work today and support a healthy community for generations to come.



### AREAS OF FOCUS:

-  Better Access Through Advanced Primary Care
-  Medical Imaging and Lab Services
-  Community-Based Care
-  Mental Health and Well-Being
-  Transportation and Access to Care
-  Healthy Resilient Communities
-  Equity, Inclusion and Culturally Safe Care
-  Community Voice, Accountability and Advocacy



## Community Engagement Plan for Healthcare (May-July)

**Purpose:** Provide an overview of upcoming engagement activities that will support the development of the City's Community Health & Wellness Action Plan from May 1 to July 1, 2026.

High-level engagement objectives:

- **Inform the community:** Ensure the community has clear, transparent, and accessible information on healthcare.
- **Gather feedback:** Provide residents with a wide range of in-person and virtual channels so they can freely share their feedback.
- **Promote inclusion:** Actively involve diverse community voices to facilitate conversations and representation.
- **Identify concerns and opportunities:** Review feedback to highlight areas of alignment and identify potential improvements.
- **Ensure transparency:** Provide the community with access to the feedback collected to help inform Council's decision-making.

The proposed engagement plan includes a variety of channels and mediums to ensure all key audiences are aware of the opportunity to provide feedback and can do so in a way that works best for them. This plan includes:

- **Online survey:** An online survey would launch on Friday May 1, 2026, and close on July 1, 2026, and would ask community members to offer their thoughts on the proposed plan.
- **Paper-based survey:** To accommodate community members who prefer an online survey, an identical paper-version would be available at various city facilities (i.e. City Hall, Vale Health & Wellness Centre, Port Colborne Public Library), local healthcare facilities, and other key locations throughout the community. The surveys would be collected for analysis after the last Open House on June 25, 2026.

- **In-person open houses / drop-in sessions:** City staff, City Council, members of the Healthcare Advisory Committee would host a series of in-person drop-in style open houses on May 20 and 21, and June 24 and 25.
- **Online Information Session(s):** A virtual option will be available for those who can't attend the in-person open houses. Date and time to be confirmed.
- **Focus group session and/or interviews:** Will be scheduled with specific provincial priority populations (Seniors, youth, Indigenous people, Francophones etc), as well as committees of council, local community organizations, groups and healthcare providers/agencies throughout both months.

### **Communications Plan and Promotion**

Successfully communicating about the engagement opportunities on healthcare will be a vital part of gathering meaningful feedback. The Corporate Communications team would launch a comprehensive communications campaign to help promote, which would include:

- Sharing information on the City's website on these pages:  
[The Future of Healthcare in Port Colborne - City of Port Colborne](#)  
[Healthcare Advisory Committee - City of Port Colborne](#)
- Radio interviews as part of the CKTB Round Table Road Trip on May 5.
- Posting social media content and the open house events on City channels
- Digital advertising opportunities
- Outreach to local media outlets to encourage coverage of the engagement opportunities
- Article in the May and June editions of City Hall News
- Postcards with a QR code delivered to each household
- Hard-copy posters with QR codes directed to the online survey shared in key community locations and with community special interest groups

# Community Health & Wellness Action Plan

*Connected Care, Close To Home.  
For Every Stage of Life.*

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**Council Meeting**  
April 28, 2026





PORT COLBORNE



COMMUNITY

# HEALTH & WELLNESS

ACTION PLAN

CONNECTED CARE. CLOSE TO HOME.  
FOR EVERY STAGE OF LIFE.



[www.portcolborne.ca](http://www.portcolborne.ca)



905-835-2900

# Presentation Overview

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- Objectives
- The Case for Action
- Our Journey to Date
- Vision & Approach
- Community Insights
- Action Plan: Areas of Focus
- Next Steps



# Presentation Objectives

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1. Present draft Action Plan for Council endorsement
2. Seek endorsement to proceed with community engagement (May–July 2026)
3. Final Action Plan to return to Council July 2026



# The Case for Action



PORT COLBORNE

# Our Healthcare Challenge

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- Access to care is becoming more difficult
- 2,700+ residents without a family doctor
- Short at least five family doctors
- Heavy reliance on urgent/emergency care
- Closure of local UCC in 2028 creates urgency



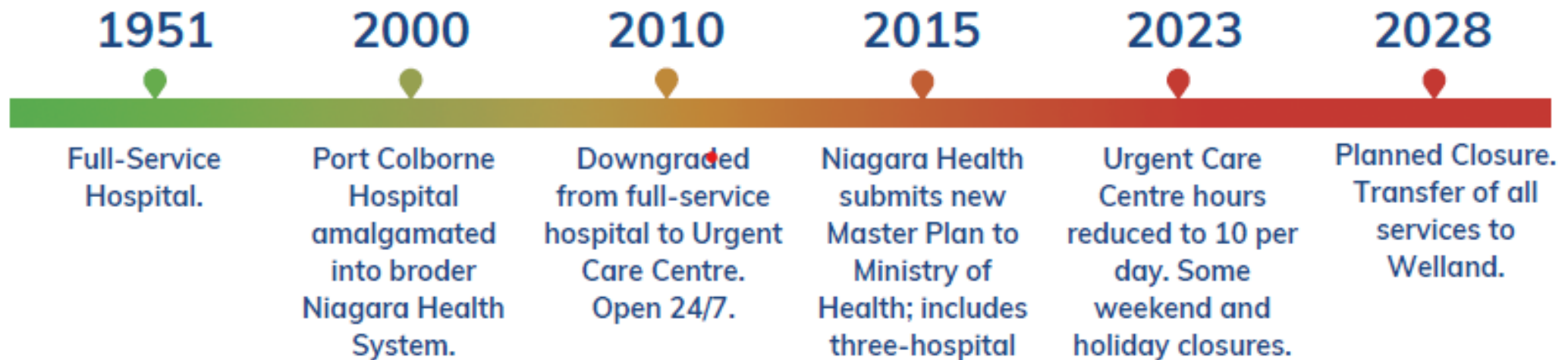
# Our Journey to Date



PORT COLBORNE

# Healthcare in Port Colborne

- Shift from local hospital → regional system
- Reduced local services over time
- Urgent Care Centre becomes key access point
- System change accelerating toward 2028



# Council Actions

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In response to these changes and closures, Port Colborne City Council has:

- Responded to community after Niagara Health requested local share contribution (Dec 2024) and conducted comprehensive community engagement from Jan-April 2025 on the future of healthcare in Port Colborne.
- Formed the citizen-led Healthcare Advisory Committee to guide healthcare planning and develop a local strategy that is both evidence-based and attainable.
- Committed a 1\$-million investment over three years to support work on advancing healthcare priorities.
- Commissioned an independent health services analysis by KPMG.
- New! Esri Canada Partnership to develop a healthcare data dashboard.



# Healthcare Advisory Committee



Sydney McDowell, NP  
(Chair)



Dr. Philip McGarry, MD  
(Vice Chair)

- 18 committee meetings
- 25+ guest presentations
- 3 facility tours



## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Sydney McDowell, NP  
(Chair)

Dr. Philip McGarry, MD  
(Vice Chair)

Carmen Tamas

Matt Lallouet

Tina Triano

Councillor Monique Aquilina  
(Non-voting member)

Councillor Ron Bodner  
(Non-voting member)

Mayor William C. Steele  
(Ex-officio member)

# Healthcare Advisory Committee Mandate

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- Work to ensure the residents of Port Colborne have access to healthcare and associated community and healthcare services that are required within the community.
- Develop a comprehensive, evidence-based, and attainable healthcare service strategy that includes core key performance indicators to measure success.
- Obtain information, as required, to support evidence-based decision making.
- Monitor, assess, and recommend to Council progress towards achieving a Council approved healthcare service strategy, including key performance indicators.

# Community Voice and Engagement

- Over 2,000 completed surveys
- 10,000 open comments
- Open houses, Town Halls, Virtual Town Hall, focus groups, interviews and pop-ups
- 84% of respondents reported they thought Port Colborne required access to care 24 hours per day



# Vision & Approach



PORT COLBORNE



# VISION FOR A HEALTHY PORT COLBORNE:

*Connected Care, Close to Home for Every Stage of Life.*

**PURPOSE:** To improve access to timely and barrier-free healthcare services for all residents of Port Colborne.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES:



**Quality Care We Can Trust:**  
Everyone in Port Colborne deserves safe, reliable healthcare delivered by professionals who put patients first.



**Care When We Need It:**  
Residents should be able to get help quickly and close to home, without long waits or travel.



**People at the Centre:**  
Healthcare should reflect real lives, listen to residents, and respond to the needs of families and caregivers.



**Fair Access for All:**  
Everyone should be able to get the care they need, regardless of income, where they live, their abilities, or the barriers they face.



**A System That Lasts:**  
We need smart, local solutions that work today and support a healthy community for generations to come.

# Community Profile

## OUR VISION:

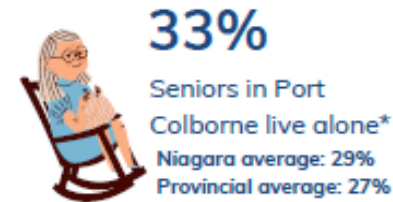
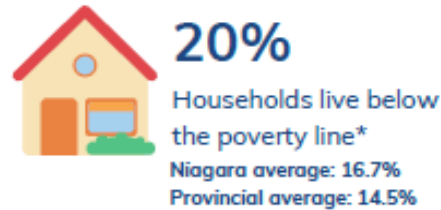
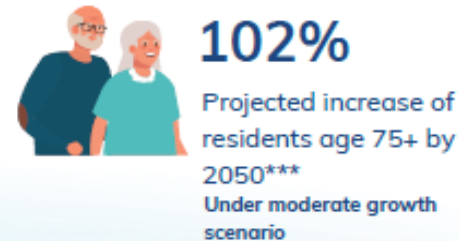
A healthy and vibrant community embracing growth for future generations.

## OUR MISSION:

To provide an exceptional small-town experience in a big way.

## OUR VALUES:

- Integrity** - We interact with others ethically and honourably.
- Respect** - We treat each other with empathy and understanding.
- Inclusion** - We welcome everyone.
- Responsibility** - We make tomorrow better.
- Collaboration** - We are better together.



**\$70,000**

Median Household Income\*

Provincial Average: \$91,000



**54.2%**

Labour force participation\*

Provincial Average: 67.9%



**54%**

High school diploma or less\*

Provincial Average: 32%



**2.2**

Average household size\*

Provincial average 2.6

# Municipal Role in Healthcare Today

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While the City does not deliver healthcare services directly, it has a meaningful role in shaping the conditions that support health and well-being in the community.

## **The City contributes through:**

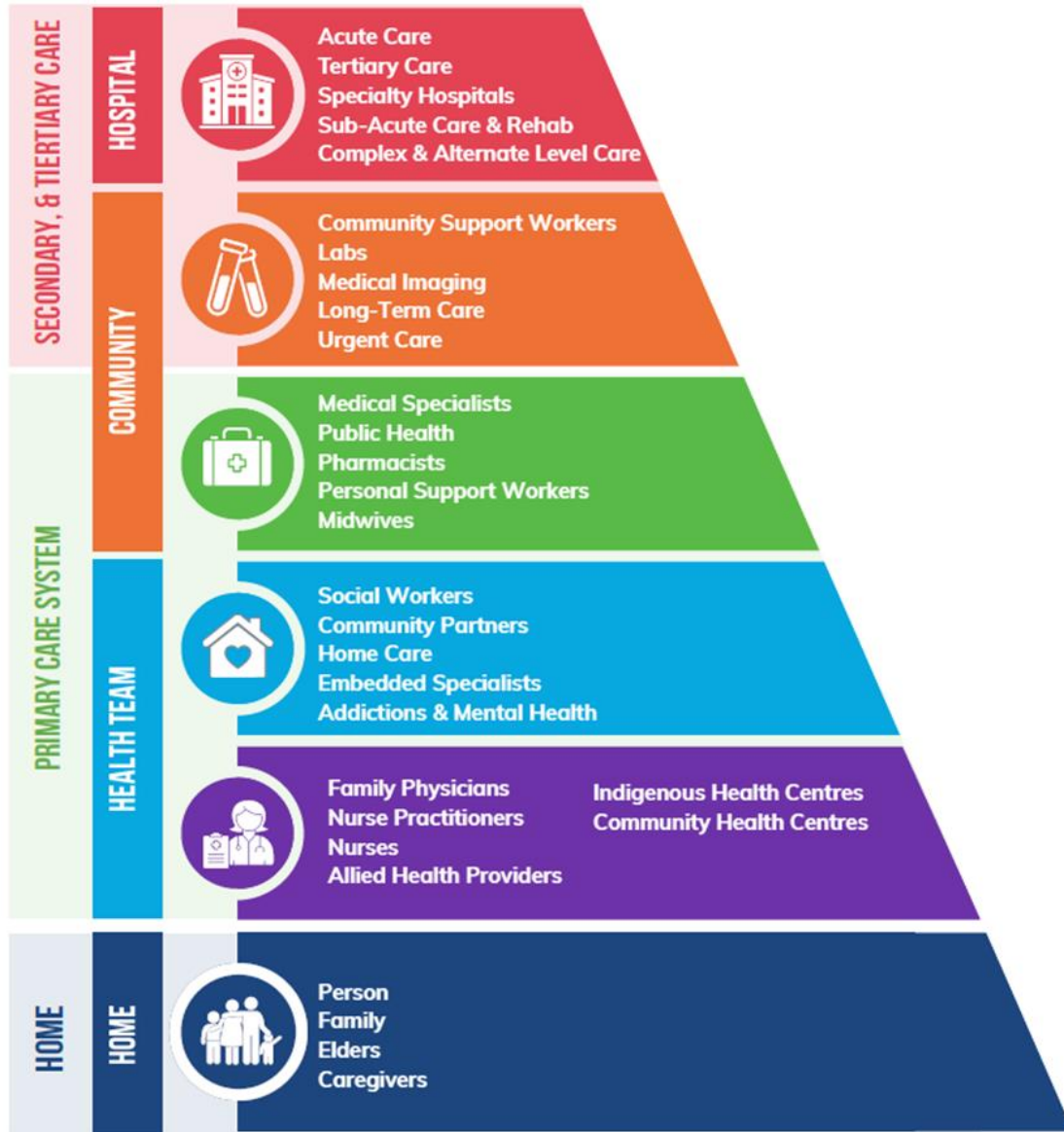
- **Leading** engagement, coordination
- **Supporting** providers, programs
- **Influencing** planning decisions
- **Advocating** for grant funding and services
- **Investing** where others won't (i.e. To support infrastructure, clinic space, health hubs etc.)

**Traditional Role: In this current role, the City influences conversations but it can sometimes be difficult to shape outcomes.**



# Municipal Role with Action Plan

## Health System Pyramid



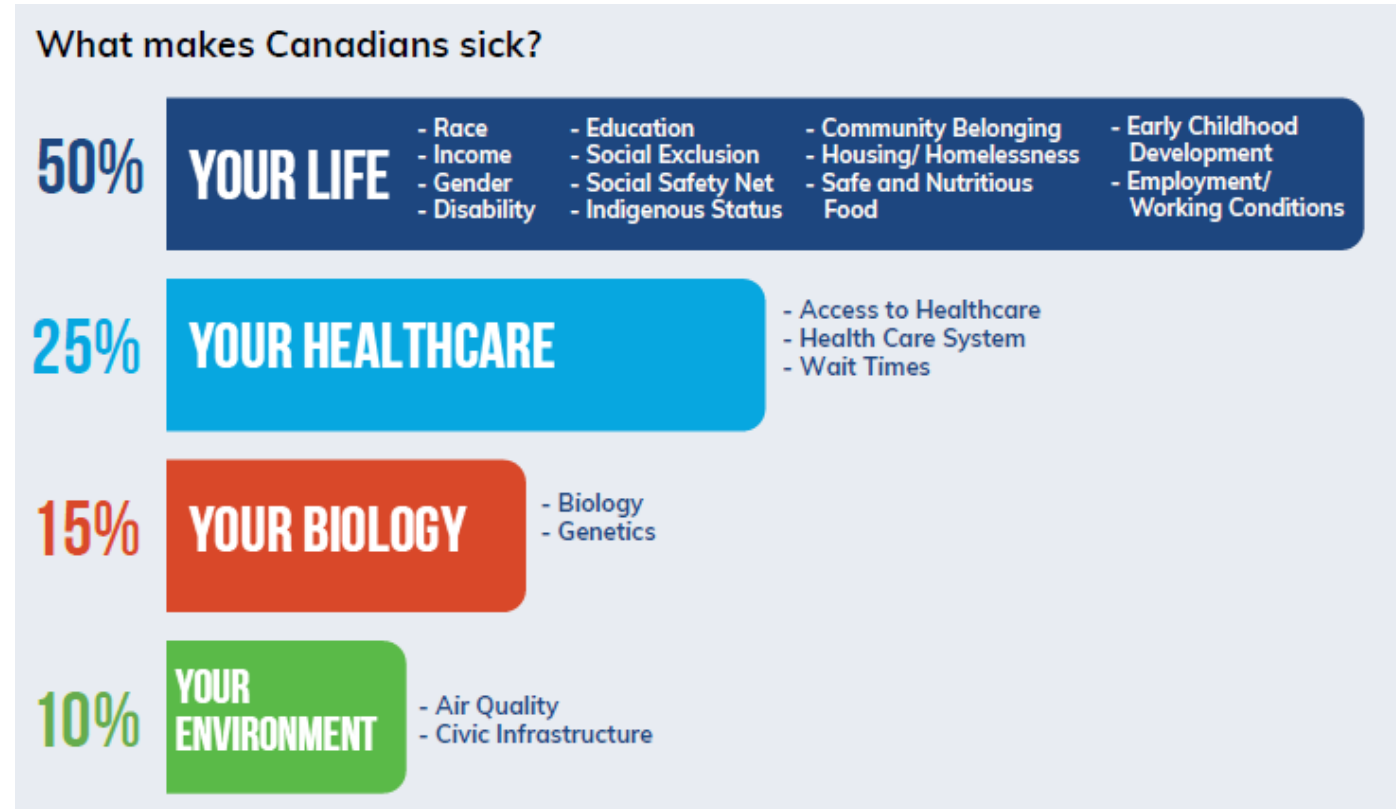
## City of Port Colborne can:

- Use data and tools to guide system planning and decisions
- Align growth, infrastructure, and health planning
- Support health human resources recruitment with targeted, coordinated strategies
- Lead consistent, evidence-based advocacy
- Actively coordinate partners around shared priorities
- Negotiate and support local service agreements
- Advance community-based and locally integrated care models by creating new modern clinic space

**Stronger Collaborative Role: The City becomes an active partner helping shape local solutions.**

# Social Determinants of Health

- Social determinants of health are the everyday conditions that influence a person's ability to stay healthy, beyond just medical care.
- These conditions shape health outcomes over time, by either creating opportunities for good health or contributing to barriers and inequities within a community.
- 84% of residents in Port Colborne live in high or highest SDH risk neighbourhoods, compared to 15% provincially.



**Municipalities can help shape health and wellness conditions through planning, housing, transit, and community services.**

# Community Insights



PORT COLBORNE

# Key Community Priorities

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- Hard to find primary care and after-hours care
- Travel is a barrier
- Services are fragmented across the system
- Mental health needs are growing
- Concern about future access to 24/7 care, lab and diagnostics services





# Areas of Focus



PORT COLBORNE

# Areas of Focus

- The Action Plan is organized into **eight** key areas of focus.
- Each area includes a summary of community insight, what the data and research reflect about local needs, and a clear set of actions to guide our response.
- This approach ensures each priority is grounded in both lived experience and evidence, with practical steps to move forward.



# 1. Better Access Through Advanced Primary Care

Attract more  
primary care  
providers

Expand Team-  
Based Care

Create Modern  
Spaces for  
Care

Improve After-  
Hours Access

Urgent Care  
Coverage

Measure  
Progress and  
Impact

## 2. Medical Imaging and Lab Services

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Protect Local  
Medical Imaging  
and Diagnostic  
Services

Expand Access  
to Medical  
Imaging and  
Diagnostics

Bring Specialists  
Closer to Home

Support One-  
Stop Care  
Models

Reduce the  
Need to Travel  
for Care



# 3. Community-Based Care

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Expand Local Home and Community Care Services

Advocate for More Long-Term and Transitional Care Capacity

Support Aging in Place for Residents

Strengthen Support for Caregivers and Families

Improve Care Coordination and Transitions

Plan for Future Community Care Needs

# 4. Mental Health and Well-Being

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Strengthen  
Coordination and  
Accountability Across  
Health, and Community  
and Social Services

Advocate for Greater  
Access to Local Mental  
Health and Addictions  
Services

Make Services Easier  
to Find Through  
Awareness and  
Navigation

Promote Prevention  
and Early Intervention

Integrate Mental Well-  
Being Into Community  
Planning



# 5. Transportation and Access to Care

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Enhance  
Transportation  
Options for Medical  
Appointments

Prioritize Support for  
Residents Facing  
the Greatest Barriers

Improve Access to  
Information

Increase Awareness  
of Available  
Transportation  
Supports

Integrate Healthcare  
Access into Transit  
and Mobility  
Planning

Bring Care Closer to  
Home Through Local  
Services

# 6. Healthy Resilient Communities

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Embed Health in  
Municipal  
Planning and  
Decision-Making

Prioritize Equity  
for Underserved  
Residents and  
Neighbourhoods

Support Walkable,  
Age-Friendly,  
Complete  
Communities

Align Health and  
Wellness Goals  
Across City  
Services

Strengthen  
Community Food  
Security Initiatives

# 7. Equity, Inclusion and Culturally Safe Care

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Consider Health Equity in Municipal Planning and Decision-Making

Ensure Diverse Voices Are Included in Decision-Making

Strengthen Relationships with Indigenous Communities

Build Capacity for Inclusion, Accessibility, and Cultural Safety

Collaborate on Inclusive Healthcare Planning

Enhance Access to Francophone Services and Bilingual Information

# 8. Community Voice, Accountability and Advocacy

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Engage the  
Community Through  
Ongoing Advisory  
Groups

Provide Regular  
Updates to Council  
and the Community

Use Clear Data and  
Indicators for  
Transparent  
Decision-Making

Strengthen  
Partnerships Across  
Health and  
Community  
Organizations

Maintain Consistent  
Advocacy on Local  
Healthcare Priorities

Coordinate Partners  
to Align Priorities  
and Monitor  
Progress

# Next Steps



**PORT COLBORNE**

# Action Plan: Phases of Community Engagement

## Building the Plan

- **Phase 1:** Community Engagement (*Jan–Apr 2025*)
- **Phase 2:** Healthcare Advisory Committee (*Apr 2025–Ongoing*)
- **Phase 3:** KPMG Analysis (*Dec 2025–Feb 2026*)

## Refining with the Community

- **Phase 4:** Community Engagement on draft Action Plan (*May–Jul 2026*)

## Moving to Action

- **Phase 5:** Monitoring & Implementation (*Sept 2026–2030*)



# Phase Four: Community Engagement on Draft Action Plan

## Ways to get informed and give feedback:

- Online and Paper-based Survey May 1-July 1
- Online Information Session: Recording available on City website
- Focus Group Sessions in May and June

## Upcoming Open Houses

- Open House May 20, 2-6 p.m. City Hall, Council Chambers
- Open House May 21, 3-7 p.m. Vale Health and Wellness Centre
- Open House June 24, 2-6 p.m. City Hall, Council Chambers
- Open House June 25, 3-7 p.m. Vale Health and Wellness Centre



# Contributor Acknowledgements

- Residents of Port Colborne
- Port Colborne Health Coalition
- Healthcare Advisory Committee
- Committees of Council
- Local Physician Groups (Niagara South, Lockview Medical, Mapleview Medical)
- Niagara Ontario Health Team-Equipe Sante Niagara
- Bridges Community Health Centre
- Port Cares
- Community Living-Port Colborne Wainfleet
- Boggio's Family of Pharmacies
- Dr. David Salanki
- Niagara Region Public Health
- Niagara Emergency Medical Services
- Niagara Economic Development-Physician Recruitment Program
- Centre de Santé Communautaire, Hamilton-Niagara
- Niagara Health
- Ontario Health atHome
- Ontario Long-Term Care Association
- City of Orillia
- Town of Wasaga Beach
- County of Brant

**CONNECTED CARE. CLOSE TO HOME.  
FOR EVERY STAGE OF LIFE.**



Research, Sources and Action  
Plans available at:  
[www.portcolborne.ca/healthcare](http://www.portcolborne.ca/healthcare)



**PORT COLBORNE**



**Thank you**  
**Merci**  
**Miigwetch**  
**Maarsii**

**Subject: Update on Niagara Governance Discussions and Municipal Service Corporations – Community Input and Next Steps**

**To: Council**

**From: Office of the Chief Administrative Officer**

Report Number: 2026-61

Meeting Date: April 28, 2026

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**Recommendation:**

That Chief Administrative Officer Report 2026-61 be received for information; and

That the Mayor and Chief Administrative Officer be directed to formally engage with provincial and regulatory bodies to advance the development of a City-owned Municipal Service Corporation (MSC) that would assume ownership and operation of all water and wastewater infrastructure in Port Colborne, which may include assets currently operated by Niagara Region located within the Port Colborne boundary; and

That the Mayor and Chief Administrative Officer be directed to submit a formal Expression of Interest to the Province of Ontario, confirming the City's interest in exploring and potentially pursuing the establishment of a City-owned MSC as outlined in the *Water and Wastewater Public Corporations Act, 2025*; and

That the Chief Administrative Officer be directed to prepare a comprehensive business case, including financial analysis, governance structure, legal and regulatory considerations, human resources and labour relations impacts, service delivery models, risk assessment, and implementation requirements, for the establishment of a City-owned MSC, to be presented to Council; and

That the Mayor and Chief Administrative Officer be directed to explore the potential transfer of ownership of roadway and related infrastructure currently owned by Niagara Region within the Port Colborne boundary to the City, in the event that a City-owned MSC including Regional water and wastewater infrastructure proceeds; and

That, in the event the potential transfer of ownership of water and wastewater infrastructure from Niagara Region to the City proceeds, the Chief Administrative Officer be directed to prepare a comprehensive business case outlining the integration of these assets into ongoing City operations, to be presented to Council; and

That the Mayor and Chief Administrative Officer be directed to coordinate with the Acting Chair and Chief Administrative Officer of Niagara Region to request the Region's support of the City's efforts to determine the feasibility of establishing a City-owned MSC, including, but not limited to, providing City of Port Colborne staff and its consultants with access to information related to the water and wastewater system, such as asset management reports, relevant data, historical operating and maintenance records, and facility access to undertake inspections of the infrastructure; and

That Council direct the Mayor to bring forward the following motion at Niagara Region Council, as soon as possible:

That Regional Council direct its Chief Administrative Officer to support the City of Port Colborne's efforts to determine the feasibility of establishing a City-owned MSC, including, but not limited to, providing the City of Port Colborne and its consultants with access to information related to the water and wastewater system, such as asset management reports, relevant data, historical operating and maintenance records, and access to facilities to enable the City to undertake inspections of the infrastructure; and

That Council direct the Manager of Corporate Communications to develop and implement a communications and engagement plan to support resident understanding of a City-owned MSC, including its purpose, potential benefits, and implications for local service delivery, as well as the potential transfer of Regional roadway infrastructure to the City of Port Colborne, and to report back to Council; and

That Council direct the Mayor to submit comments to the Province on behalf of the City of Port Colborne regarding the proposed amendments to the *Municipal Act, 2001* and the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* (Proposal #53593), which, if approved, would result in changes to upper-tier council composition, the appointment of a strong chair for Niagara Region, and the implementation of weighted voting, with such comments to be consistent with shared messaging from local area municipalities and previous joint correspondence, prior to the close of the consultation period on May 2, 2026.

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## **Purpose:**

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on recent Niagara governance discussions, including emerging provincial direction, and to summarize the input received through the City of Port Colborne's recent community engagement process.

This report also seeks Council direction to advance the City's exploration of a City-owned MSC as a locally driven approach to improving service delivery, reducing duplication, and supporting long-term financial sustainability – particularly in relation to water and wastewater services.

In addition, the report recommends next steps, including formal engagement with the Province, the submission of an Expression of Interest under the *Water and Wastewater Public Corporations Act, 2025*, and the development of a comprehensive business case to evaluate the feasibility, impacts, and implementation considerations of a City-owned MSC model.

Finally, this report seeks Council direction on key actions required to move this work forward, including initiating discussions with provincial and regional partners, advancing the development of a comprehensive business case, and ensuring that future decisions are informed by community input, aligned with regional collaboration efforts, and supported by clear, evidence-based analysis.

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## Background:

Since mid-February 2026, governance discussions in Niagara have evolved rapidly and generated significant public interest following a proposal brought forward by the former Regional Chair.

This report provides a high-level summary of recent events, community input, and emerging provincial direction, while also outlining how these discussions align with the City of Port Colborne's ongoing work to explore the establishment of a City-owned MSC as a locally driven approach to improving service delivery and long-term financial sustainability. To support transparency and keep residents informed, the City has also launched and continues to maintain a [dedicated webpage](#) that tracks key milestones, timelines, and updates related to the governance review.

On February 19, 2026, former Niagara Regional Chair Bob Gale [wrote to the Mayors of Niagara](#) and to the [Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing](#) outlining what he described as an urgent need to review municipal governance in the region. His letters raised the possibility of reviewing governance at the regional level and examining options such as amalgamating into one or four cities.

On February 26, 2026, [Niagara Regional Council discussed former Chair Gale's letter](#), and directed the launch of an evidence-based governance review of the upper tier. Regional Council asked that the review be conducted through a structured process informed by data, financial analysis, and public consultation, emphasizing the importance of a locally informed approach to any potential changes. Regional Council also directed former Regional Chair Gale to hold back from "any further action" concerning amalgamation.

On March 4, 2026, Mayor Steele, along with Mayors from seven other lower-tier municipalities (Fort Erie, Grimsby, West Lincoln, Pelham, Thorold, Wainfleet and Niagara-on-the-Lake) [wrote to Premier Doug Ford](#) with a unified voice to present ideas for how governance could be modernized in Niagara. The letter noted the lower tiers

would take decisive action to address the number of politicians, strengthen efficiency, and eliminate duplication to enable economic growth and long-term sustainability for the municipalities and the taxpayers they serve. Part of the March 4, 2026, letter included a commitment to responsible municipal reform, including the consideration of the establishment of one or more publicly owned Water and Wastewater Public Corporation(s) under the *Water and Wastewater Public Corporations Act, 2025*.

On March 5, 2026, [Mayor Steele sent a letter to Premier Doug Ford](#) outlining that, while the City of Port Colborne does not support amalgamation, it recognizes there are legitimate challenges that deserve a thoughtful review. Mayor Steele's letter noted that pressures related to infrastructure funding, water and wastewater costs, and regional roads remain significant and require innovative solutions. The letter also highlighted recent successes in Port Colborne, including ongoing collaboration with the Province to establish an MSC for water and wastewater servicing on the East Side Employment Lands (ESEL). Mayor Steele's letter noted that if expanded under the *Water and Wastewater Public Corporations Act, 2025*, this approach could provide a path to stabilizing and reducing water and wastewater rates for Port Colborne residents.

On March 6, 2026, the City of Port Colborne launched a community engagement initiative to gather input on potential governance changes in Niagara. Residents were invited to share their feedback through both online and paper surveys, as well as at open houses held on March 12 at City Hall and March 14 at the Vale Health & Wellness Centre. Feedback collected through these engagement opportunities is summarized in the Discussion section of this report.

On March 11, 2026, Bob Gale resigned from his appointed position as Niagara Regional Chair, creating uncertainty around the future of the governance changes he had proposed.

On March 12, 2026, Port Colborne City Council voted to support a reduction in the size of City Council and updating the City's ward boundaries ahead of the 2026 municipal election, based on the [2025 Ward Boundary and Council Composition Review](#). If authorized by the Province, Port Colborne voters would elect six City Councillors and a Mayor, instead of the current eight councillors and a mayor. Under the proposed structure, the City would be divided into three wards, each represented by two councillors. Because the deadline under the *Municipal Act* for municipalities to make these changes independently before the 2026 municipal election has passed, any change to Council composition must be authorized by the Province of Ontario. At the time of writing this report, the City is awaiting authorization from the Province to move forward with these council and ward boundary changes.

On March 26, 2026, [Niagara Regional Council directed the CAO of Niagara Region](#) to work with the local area municipalities to move forward with a comprehensive service delivery and governance review. This vote, which included amendments from the original motion on February 26, 2026, aimed to initiate a "made-in-Niagara" reform

focusing on reviewing regional services (roads, EMS, water) and reducing the number of local politicians.

On March 31, 2026, Mayor Steele, along with Mayors from eight other lower-tier municipalities (Grimsby, West Lincoln, Pelham, Thorold, Wainfleet, St. Catharines, Lincoln and Niagara-on-the-Lake) [wrote to Premier Doug Ford](#) to update him on the concrete, made-in-Niagara solutions that the municipalities have advanced since the first letter on March 4, 2026. The letter reaffirmed a shared regional commitment to governance reform focused on reducing duplication, improving service delivery, and providing better value for taxpayers. It highlighted actions already taken by several municipalities (including Port Colborne) to reduce council size, as well as broader support for reforms such as a weighted voting model at Regional Council and the potential transition of select regional services to locally governed boards and MSCs. The letter also sought provincial action to provide the legislative authority necessary for municipalities to implement changes to council composition in time for the 2026 municipal election.

On April 2, 2026, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Rob Flack, held a media conference announcing the Province's intent to introduce legislation to change the composition of Niagara Regional Council. The proposed legislation in Bill 100, the *Better Regional Governance Act, 2026* would establish a Regional Council made up of 12 mayors, supported by a provincially appointed Regional Chair with "Strong Chair" powers and a weighted voting system, effective for the 2026–2030 term of Council. The Province is currently seeking public input on these proposed changes through the [Ontario Regulatory Registry](#), with the consultation period open until May 2, 2026.

On April 15, 2026 the provincial Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing invited municipalities to register interest in implementing a water and wastewater public corporation model through an open [Expression of Interest](#) process, by August 13, 2026.

As governance discussions across Niagara continue to evolve, the Mayors and CAOs of communities in Niagara continue to work collaboratively to align on shared priorities, explore opportunities to improve efficiency and reduce duplication, and support a coordinated approach to governance in Niagara on behalf of their municipalities. This collective work continues to reflect a shared commitment to responsible municipal reform, including consideration of the establishment of one or more publicly owned Water and Wastewater Public Corporation(s) under the *Water and Wastewater Public Corporations Act, 2025*.

It is important to note that Port Colborne has been formally exploring the establishment of a City-owned MSC since February 2025 as an alternative way to deliver services and manage community assets more effectively. Originally, establishing a City-owned MSC was considered a way to fund, construct, maintain and maintain public ownership over the water, wastewater and potentially other infrastructure serving the ESEL district,

which includes both current and future industrial developments including the Asahi Kasei Battery Separator Canada site and several proposed residential developments in the East Side of the city.

In light of the broader governance discussions in 2026 and the provincial government's actions through the *Water and Wastewater Public Corporations Act*, this position has evolved. Expanding the scope to explore whether a larger, city-wide MSC model could help stabilize and even reduce water and wastewater rates for Port Colborne residents and rate payers and eliminate duplication between the upper- and lower-tiers in managing water and wastewater is warranted.

Given the alignment and timing of these two streams of work, this report seeks Council direction to advance the exploration of a City-owned MSC by initiating formal engagement with provincial and regulatory bodies and submitting an Expression of Interest to the Province. The report also asks for direction to develop a comprehensive business case to assess the feasibility, impacts, and implementation of a City-owned MSC model for water and wastewater services. In addition, the recommendations include exploring the potential transfer of regional roadway infrastructure to the City, and, if pursued, preparing a corresponding business case to evaluate the integration of these assets into municipal operations.

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## Discussion:

### Governance in Niagara Public Engagement Summary

On March 6, 2026, the City of Port Colborne formally launched a community engagement plan aimed at gathering feedback from the community regarding possible governance changes in Niagara.

The engagement campaign included a variety of channels and mediums to ensure all key audiences are aware of the opportunity to provide feedback and could provide their comments in a way that worked best for them.

The plan included:

1. Online Survey
2. Paper Survey
3. In-Person Open Houses
4. Community Feedback via Comment Cards and Sticky Notes
5. Meetings with various City committees and working groups
6. Community Feedback via Email to [mayor@portcolborne.ca](mailto:mayor@portcolborne.ca)

Overall, feedback received through the public engagement process suggests that residents strongly support maintaining Port Colborne's independence and local

decision-making authority, while remaining open to practical, efficiency-focused governance improvements that do not compromise local representation.

A total of 405 people responded to the survey (347 online and 59 on paper) as of March 31, 2026. 49 participants came to the open house at City Hall, and 34 participants attended the open house at the Vale Health & Wellness Centre.

Key findings from survey, open houses, comment cards and meetings include:

- Strong support for independence and local control
  - 92% say it is important to remain an independent municipality
  - 89% say decisions should be made by local representatives
- Local representation is the top priority
  - Protecting local voice, identity, and accountability consistently ranked highest across all engagement methods
- Openness to efficiency improvements (without structural overhaul)
  - Support for reducing duplication, shared services, and smaller councils
  - Limited support for amalgamation
- Concerns about amalgamation and structural change
  - Risks identified: loss of identity, reduced representation, increased costs, and dominance by larger municipalities
  - Skepticism that amalgamation would deliver cost savings
- Key priorities identified by residents:
  - Reducing costs for taxpayers
  - Improving service efficiency
  - Maintaining strong representation
  - Protecting local identity
- Broader themes from engagement
  - Desire for transparency, evidence-based decisions, and meaningful consultation
  - Frustration with current regional governance and affordability especially water costs
  - Strong community pride and attachment to Port Colborne's identity and waterfront character

A detailed summary of the survey results, comments and findings from the open houses and other engagement opportunities are provided in Appendix A of this report. In the interest of transparency, a full list of open-ended responses received in both the online and paper surveys has been posted to the City's website at [www.portcolborne.ca/governance](http://www.portcolborne.ca/governance)

Email submissions received by the Mayor's office show a similar consistent and widespread opposition to amalgamation, alongside clear support for governance reform that improves efficiency, accountability, and cost control without eliminating local municipalities.

Key findings from the email submissions to [mayor@portcolborne.ca](mailto:mayor@portcolborne.ca) include:

- Overwhelming opposition to amalgamation
  - Particularly opposed to forced or expedited approaches
  - Strong consensus: reform is needed, but amalgamation is not the solution
- Democratic representation is a central concern
  - Fear that amalgamation would dilute local voice and reduce accountability
  - Residents value access to local elected officials and community-level decision-making
- No demonstrated business case for amalgamation
  - Repeated concerns about lack of financial analysis, cost-benefit data, and service impact assessments
  - References to past Ontario amalgamations where costs increased and efficiencies were not realized
- Concerns with process and legitimacy of former Chair Gale's proposal
  - Perception of a rushed, top-down approach
  - Calls for public consultation, transparency, and evidence before decisions are made
- Cost pressures seen as regional – not municipal
  - Key drivers identified: policing, regional administration, water/wastewater, transit
  - Belief that amalgamation would not address these underlying issues
- Strong preference for alternative solutions
  - Shared services and targeted efficiency improvements
  - Service-level or structural reforms without eliminating municipalities
  - Greater accountability and clearer roles between governments
- Equity and community identity concerns
  - Fear that smaller municipalities would be marginalized in larger governance models
  - Concern about loss of identity, investment, and local priorities

Appendix B includes a summary of all email correspondence received by the Mayor's Office related to this matter as of March 31, 2026.

At a high level, the public engagement results present a clear and consistent message. Across all engagement streams, residents support governance reform that focuses on improving efficiency, strengthening accountability, and better controlling costs, while strongly opposing amalgamation – particularly in the absence of clear evidence, meaningful consultation, or demonstrated benefit. Local representation, identity, and decision-making authority remain non-negotiable priorities for the community, alongside a strong expectation for transparent, evidence-based, and locally informed decisions.

### **Municipal Service Corporations**

In this context of the public engagement feedback and results, the potential establishment of a City-owned MSC for water and wastewater service is well aligned with the direction and priorities articulated by residents and the provincial government.

Implementing a City-owned MSC model would allow the City to maintain local control and ownership, while directly addressing key concerns raised through engagement, including:

- Reducing duplication
- Stabilizing and potentially lowering water and wastewater rates for Port Colborne residents and ratepayers
- Improving service coordination by centralizing under one organization
- Enhancing overall efficiency

Advancing this work through a comprehensive business case enables the City to explore a locally driven solution that responds to community priorities while supporting long-term financial sustainability and service delivery improvements.

That said, additional information is required to ensure that both Council and the community are sufficiently informed to consider and determine appropriate next steps and make decisions. With Council's direction, staff will work with industry experts to prepare a comprehensive business case, including financial analysis, governance structure, legal and regulatory considerations, human resources and labour relations impacts, service delivery models, risk assessment, and implementation requirements, for the establishment of a City-owned MSC.

### **Business Case Development for a City-owned Municipal Service Corporation**

A comprehensive business case is required to determine the feasibility, impacts, and overall viability of proceeding with the proposed City-owned MSC model.

Port Colborne is uniquely positioned to explore this opportunity. Our water and wastewater infrastructure operates as a self-contained system, meaning it is not physically connected to neighbouring municipal systems. This creates a rare opportunity for the City to potentially take over full responsibility for these services without affecting surrounding communities.

This business case would provide Council with a detailed and evidence-based assessment of the feasibility and potential impacts of this approach, including a thorough review of financial implications, funding strategies, and long-term cost considerations. It would also examine appropriate governance and accountability frameworks to ensure transparency and public oversight of a City-owned MSC as well as the legal and regulatory pathways required to establish and operate a City-owned MSC.

In addition, the analysis would consider human resources and labour relations implications, including workforce transition, organizational structure, and operational capacity, alongside a review of service delivery models to ensure continuity and efficiency for both residents and employees. A comprehensive risk assessment would identify potential challenges and mitigation strategies, while the implementation framework would outline key steps, timelines, and resource requirements.

Together, this work will equip Council with the information needed to make an informed decision on whether to proceed with the establishment of a City-owned MSC.

Undertaking this work will not only inform the City's decision-making, but may also help pave the way for broader opportunities to examine governance structures, reduce duplication, and improve service delivery across Niagara – creating potential benefits for all municipalities and, ultimately, better value for taxpayers.

### **Business Case Development for the Potential Transfer of Ownership of Roadway and Related Infrastructure from Niagara Region**

Should the transfer of water and wastewater infrastructure from Niagara Region to the City proceed through the establishment of a City-owned MSC, there may be an operational rationale to also consider the realignment of roadway and related infrastructure.

Water, wastewater, and storm systems are largely located within the municipal right-of-way and are planned, constructed, and maintained in coordination with road infrastructure. Separating ownership of these assets can create challenges related to coordination, cost efficiency, and long-term asset management.

A comprehensive business case is therefore necessary to evaluate the implications of integrating these services under City responsibility, including financial impacts, service delivery considerations, and opportunities to reduce duplication. This analysis will ensure that Council has a complete and evidence-based understanding of how a more integrated, City-led approach to infrastructure ownership and management could be implemented effectively.

### **Past Public Engagement on Municipal Service Corporations**

As mentioned, the City has been formally exploring the potential of establishing a City-owned MSC since the February 2025 and has already completed [public engagement on this topic](#).

In October 2025, as part of due diligence and before establishing an MSC in Port Colborne to service the ESEL, City Council directed staff to implement a public engagement process to gather input from the public and share more information about what establishing MSC(s) in Port Colborne would mean for residents. It is important to

note that, at the time of this engagement, the City referred to this model as a Government Business Enterprise (GBE); however, this term is generally used interchangeably with an MSC, and both acronyms are used to describe the same type of service delivery model as outlined in the *Municipal Act*.

While overall participation levels were modest, the engagement plan was designed to both inform and gather input from the community through a dedicated webpage with a frequently asked questions section, a short online and paper-based survey, and a drop-in style open house.

A total of 36 people responded to the survey (24 online and 12 on paper) as of March 31, 2026. Just one participant came to the open house at City Hall.

Key findings from survey, open houses, comment cards and meetings include:

- General support for a City-owned MSC
  - 61% of respondents expressed support for the City establishing MSCs
  - 25% indicated they were unsure and would like more information
  - 94% of respondents were Port Colborne residents
- Awareness and familiarity with City-owned MSCs remain limited
  - Many respondents reported low familiarity with the MSC model prior to the survey
  - Engagement activities reached residents who were new to the concept
- Comfort with alternative delivery and financing models
  - 68% of respondents felt comfortable or very comfortable with the City using a separate legal entity to finance and manage infrastructure
  - Indicates openness to innovative approaches to infrastructure delivery
- Perceived economic and community benefits
  - 71% of respondents identified potential economic benefits, including job creation and attracting investment
  - Support for leveraging infrastructure to enable economic growth
- Key priorities identified by respondents
  - Minimizing impacts on taxes and user rates
  - Maintaining public ownership of infrastructure
  - Ensuring transparency and accountability
  - Supporting investment and job creation
- Themes from open-ended feedback
  - Importance of strong oversight, governance, and financial transparency
  - Ensuring infrastructure remains publicly controlled and not privatized
  - Maintaining quality and reliability of water and wastewater services
  - Concerns related to financial risk, startup costs, and long-term accountability
  - Desire for responsible growth and improved municipal operations
  - Expectation that large industrial users contribute fairly to infrastructure costs

- Optimism about potential economic growth, job creation, and long-term community benefit

The survey results from the October 2025 are provided in Appendix C of this report. One respondent provided a hand-written submission regarding their thoughts on the survey, which is also included in Appendix C.

### **Next steps on Public Engagement on Municipal Service Corporations**

Although the fall 2025 public engagement saw low participation, the recent governance discussions in Niagara have increased public interest in other ways to deliver local services. Port Colborne residents have generally responded with openness to other ways of delivering local services if there is the potential to reduce costs for rate-payers - so long as local autonomy is preserved, public ownership is maintained.

The potential establishment of a City-owned MSC represents one such approach, offering a locally driven solution that maintains local control while addressing key concerns raised through engagement, including reducing duplication, stabilizing and potentially lowering water and wastewater rates, improving service coordination through a more centralized model, and enhancing overall efficiency.

An important component of this work will be expanded community engagement. If approved, staff would develop and implement a communications and engagement plan to support resident understanding of a City-owned MSC, including its purpose, potential benefits, and implications for local service delivery. This approach will help ensure residents are informed, educated, and meaningfully engaged as the Council continues to explore this opportunity alongside the development of a comprehensive business case. Together, this work will enable Council to fully evaluate the opportunity in a manner that reflects community priorities while supporting long-term financial sustainability and improved service delivery.

### **Responding to Amendments to the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Municipal Elections Act, 1996**

As the Province considers proposed amendments to the *Municipal Act, 2001* and the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* through Proposal #53593, this report requests direction for the Mayor and CAO to provide input through the formal public consultation process on the [Ontario Regulatory Registry](#). The proposed changes, including adjustments to upper-tier council composition, the appointment of a strong Regional Chair, and the implementation of weighted voting, have the potential to significantly impact governance structures and local representation in Niagara. Submitting comments to the Province ensures that the City's perspectives, informed by Council direction and recent community engagement, are clearly articulated. Aligning these comments with shared messaging from local area municipalities and previous joint correspondence will help

reinforce a consistent, collaborative regional voice and strengthen advocacy efforts prior to the close of the consultation period.

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### **Internal Consultations:**

City staff including the CAO, Director of Development and Government Relations, Director of Public Works, Manager of Special Projects, Manager of Corporate Communications, Corporate Affairs Manager, and Senior Project Manager have been working with the City Solicitors on this initiative.

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### **Financial Implications:**

Costs to develop the business case will be accommodated through the approved 2026 budget and related rate reserves.

Any costs of transition and future ownership of the Niagara Region water, wastewater assets or infrastructure to a City-owned MSC will be presented as part of the business case for Council's consideration.

At the time of writing this report, certain information is not yet available to the City to complete a business case, however based on information currently available it appears probable that a City-owned MSC will create efficiencies, stabilize rates and potentially lower rates for residents and rate payers and reduce development charges and duplication in the development process.

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### **Public Engagement:**

This report provides a detailed summary of the ongoing public engagement campaign about governance discussions in Niagara. It also provides a brief summary of comments received during the October 2025 community engagement campaign regarding City-owned MSCs.

It also recommends that staff prepare a communications and engagement plan to support resident understanding of a City-owned MSC, including its purpose, potential benefits, and implications for local service delivery, as well as the potential transfer of Regional roadway infrastructure to the City of Port Colborne. Results from this engagement plan would be presented to Council.

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## **Strategic Plan Alignment:**

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillars of the strategic plan:

- Welcoming, Livable, Healthy Community
  - Economic Prosperity
  - Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure
- 

## **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, the findings from recent public engagement clearly demonstrate that Port Colborne residents value local decision-making, accountability, and community identity, while also supporting practical, evidence-based approaches to improving efficiency and managing costs.

As governance discussions across Niagara and with the provincial government continue to evolve, there is a clear opportunity for the City to explore locally driven solutions that respond directly to these priorities. The potential establishment of a City-owned MSC represents one such opportunity, offering a model that maintains local control while addressing key concerns related to duplication, service coordination, and rising water and wastewater costs.

Advancing this work through formal discussions with the Province, the development of a comprehensive business case, and continued community engagement will ensure that Council is equipped with the information needed to make informed decisions that reflect both community priorities and the City's long-term financial and service delivery objectives.

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## **Appendices:**

- a. Summary of Governance Discussions Public Engagement Results (as of March 31, 2026)
- b. Summary of Correspondence and Email Submissions (as of March 31, 2026)
- c. Summary of Municipal Service Corporation Public Engagement Results (as of January (as of November 12, 2025)
- d. Presentation on Update on Niagara Governance Discussions and Municipal Service Corporations – Community Input and Next Steps

Respectfully submitted,

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### **Report Approval:**

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.



**PORT COLBORNE**

# **Community Engagement Regarding Governance Discussions in Niagara Results & Feedback as of March 31, 2026**

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## Introduction

On March 6, 2026, the City of Port Colborne launched a comprehensive public engagement campaign to collect public feedback related to the ongoing discussions about potential governance change in Niagara.

The campaign included:

1. Online Survey
2. Paper Survey
3. In-Person Open Houses
4. Community Feedback via Comment Cards and Sticky Notes
5. Community Feedback via Email
6. Meetings with various City committees and working groups

This report provides a check-in on the results of the public engagement campaign as of March 31, 2026. The online and paper surveys remain open at this time, and while the Open Houses have already taken place, additional opportunities for engagement may arise in the coming months.

This document provides a summary of the engagement activities and feedback received as of March 31, 2026.

Please note that personal information collected during this public engagement project was collected under the authority of the Municipal Act, 2001 and will be used to help Council make decisions related to potential governance changes in Niagara. The disclosure of this information is governed by the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Questions related to the collection of this information may be directed to the Deputy City Clerk at 905-228-8118 or [deputyclerk@portcolborne.ca](mailto:deputyclerk@portcolborne.ca)

## Survey

### Overview

The survey was designed to gather input from residents on governance discussions in Niagara, including perspectives on the current two-tier system, the importance of local decision-making, and priorities for potential governance reform.

The survey was distributed online and in paper format to maximize accessibility and participation. It was promoted through the City's website, social media channels, and in-person engagement opportunities.

As of March 31, 2026, a total of 405 responses were received.

### **Quick Facts (as of March 31, 2026)**

- 405 total survey responses
  - 347 online responses
  - 59 paper responses
- 403 respondents (99%) indicated some level of familiarity with Niagara's current two-tier municipal system
- 92% of respondents indicated it is important that Port Colborne maintains its status as an independent municipality
- 89% of respondents indicated it is important that decisions affecting Port Colborne residents are made by local municipal representatives
- 269 open-ended responses were received outlining concerns and perspectives on governance changes

## **Overall Survey Observations**

### **Strong support for maintaining Port Colborne's independence**

- 77% of respondents reported it is *very important* that Port Colborne maintains its status as an independent municipality
- An additional 9% reported it is *somewhat important*
- Feedback suggests that maintaining local identity, history, and community character is a key priority for residents

### **Strong preference for local decision-making**

- 81% of respondents reported it is *very important* that decisions affecting Port Colborne residents are made by local municipal representatives
- Residents expressed a clear desire for governance models that preserve local control and accountability

### **Openness to improving efficiency without major structural change**

- Respondents showed support for exploring opportunities to improve how municipalities work together, particularly:
  - Reducing duplication between the Region and local municipalities
  - Increasing shared services to improve efficiency
  - Reducing the size of municipal and/or Regional Council
- These responses suggest residents are open to practical improvements that enhance efficiency, provided they do not compromise local representation

### **Mixed and often polarized views on structural changes such as amalgamation**

- While some respondents expressed support for amalgamation or a reduced number of municipalities, a significant portion voiced strong opposition
- Concerns raised include:
  - Loss of local identity and community voice
  - Reduced representation for smaller municipalities
  - Perception that larger municipalities would dominate decision-making
  - Skepticism that amalgamation would result in cost savings
- Several respondents referenced past experiences or examples where amalgamation did not lead to improved outcomes

### **Key priorities: balancing cost, efficiency, and representation**

When asked about priorities for governance discussions, respondents most frequently identified:

- Protecting local identity and independence
- Reducing costs for taxpayers
- Improving service efficiency
- Ensuring strong representation for Port Colborne
- These responses highlight a central theme: residents are seeking a balance between affordability, effective service delivery, and maintaining a strong local voice

### **Recurring concerns about potential governance changes**

Open-ended responses identified several consistent concerns, including:

- Potential loss of local voice and influence in decision-making
- Risk of smaller municipalities being disadvantaged in a larger governance model
- Increased costs or taxes without clear service improvements
- Lack of trust that structural changes would deliver promised efficiencies
- Concerns about representation, including elected versus appointed roles
- Many respondents emphasized the importance of transparency, clear communication, and evidence-based decision-making as discussions continue

## **In-Person Open Houses**

### **Overview**

Two in-person open houses were held at City Hall and the Vale Health & Wellness Centre.

1. Thursday, March 12 from 3-7 p.m. at City Hall
2. Saturday, March 14 from 12-4 p.m. at the Vale Health & Wellness Centre

49 participants came to the open house at City Hall and 34 participants attended the open house at the Vale Health & Wellness Centre.

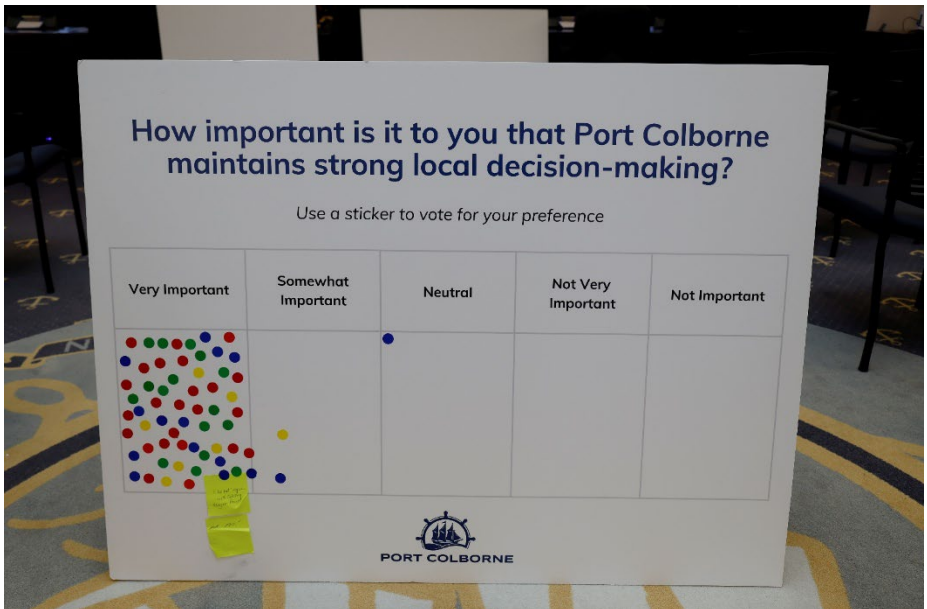
A variety of information boards with text and question prompts were displayed around the room, encouraging conversation and discussion with attendees.

Several of the information boards were interactive and asked residents to vote for their favourite option with sticky dots. Photos of these stations are below, with commentary to follow each.

Station one asked participants **“How important is it to you that Port Colborne maintains strong local decision-making?”**

Most residents voted for the “very important” option, with a few casting their vote for “somewhat important” or “neutral”.

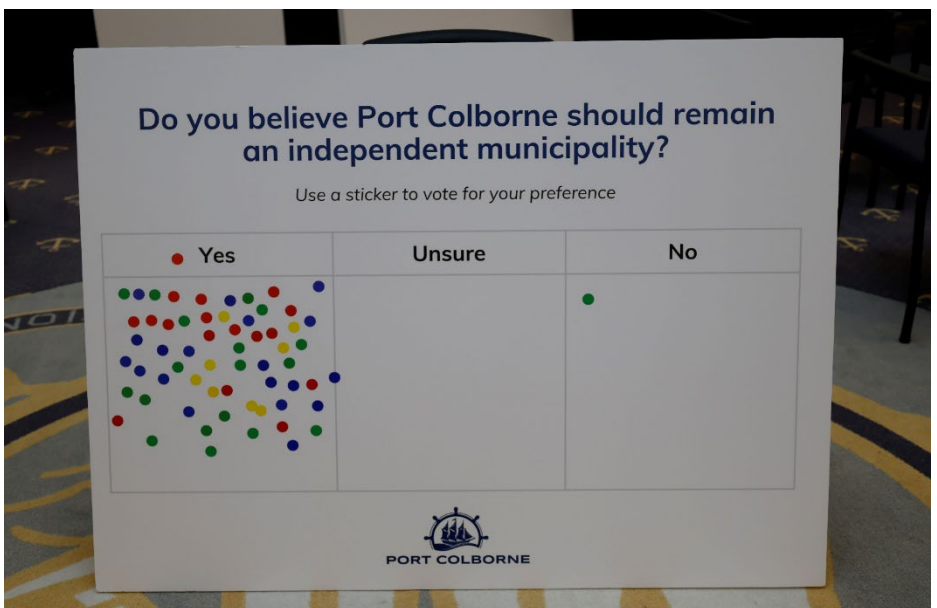
Sticky notes on this board note that while residents think local decision making should remain local, they do not agree with the Province’s strong mayor powers.



Station One: How important is it to you that Port Colborne maintains strong local decision-making?”

Station two asked participants **“Do you believe Port Colborne should remain an independent municipality?”**

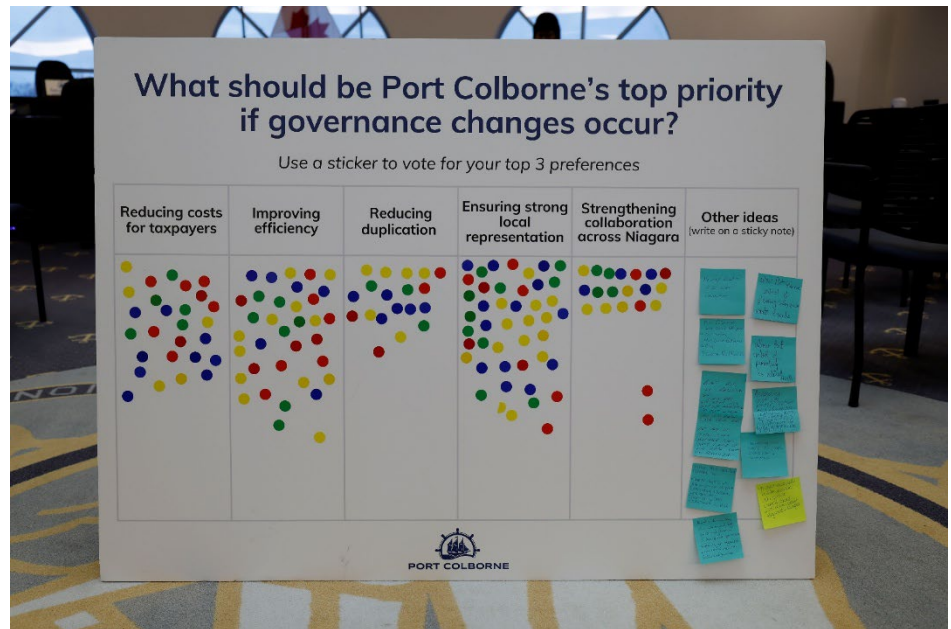
Almost all respondents voted “yes”.



Station Two: “Do you believe Port Colborne should remain an independent municipality?”

Station three asked **“What should be Port Colborne’s top priority if governance changes occur?”**

The distribution of responses shows some trends in community priorities. “Ensuring strong local representation” received the highest level of support, with the greatest concentration of stickers, indicating it is the top concern for participants if governance changes occur. “Improving efficiency” also received strong support, with a high number of votes across the column. “Reducing costs for taxpayers” showed moderate support, with a steady but less concentrated distribution of stickers. In comparison,



Station three: “What should be Port Colborne’s top priority if governance changes occur?”

“Reducing duplication” received fewer votes, suggesting it is a lower relative priority, while “Strengthening collaboration across Niagara” had the least support among the five options. Overall, the results highlight a strong emphasis on maintaining local voice and improving how services are delivered, with less focus on regional collaboration or structural efficiencies alone.

This board also accepted written comments in an “other ideas” category.

The written comments reinforce the voting results, with a strong emphasis on protecting local voice and autonomy. Many participants expressed concern about the marginalization of smaller communities and the importance of maintaining Port Colborne’s identity and decision-making authority. There is also a clear desire for greater local control over planning, infrastructure, and community assets, alongside concerns about affordability—particularly water and wastewater costs. Several comments reflect frustration with existing regional governance structures and interest in reform or alternative models, as well as a need for greater transparency and access to information.

Key themes include:

- Protecting local representation and avoiding marginalization
- Increasing local control over planning and infrastructure
- Concerns about affordability, especially water costs
- Frustration with regional governance and interest in change
- The importance of transparency and access to information

Station four asked “**What makes Port Colborne special to you?**”

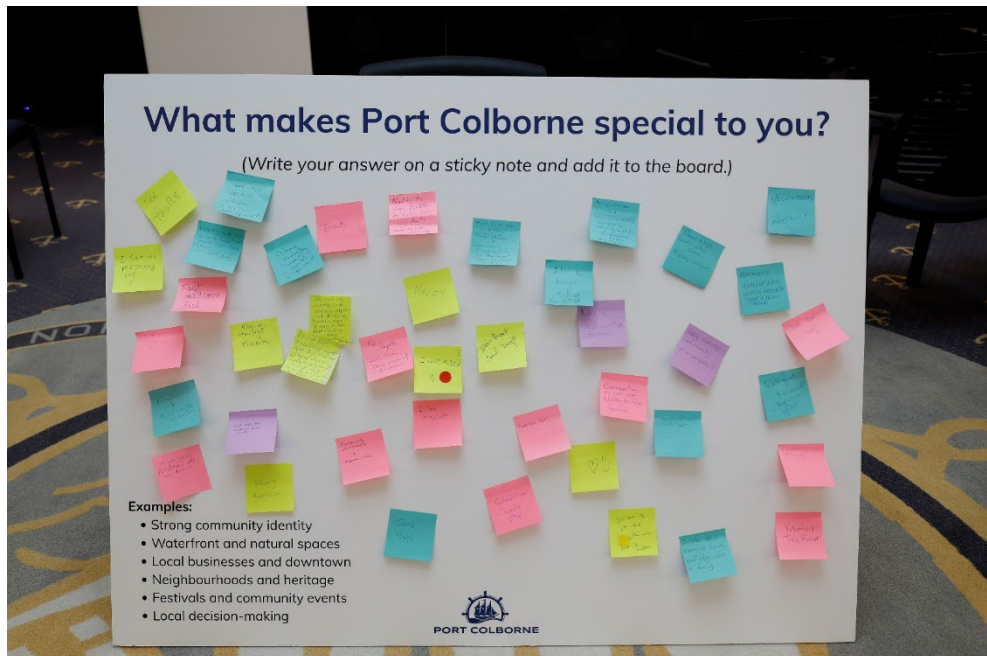
The written comments highlight a strong sense of community pride and identity, with participants consistently pointing to the people, small-town feel, and waterfront setting as what makes Port Colborne special. Many responses emphasize the close-knit nature of the community, describing it as caring, welcoming, and a place where people feel connected and heard. The waterfront, including Lake Erie and the Welland Canal, is frequently mentioned as a defining feature, alongside well-loved spaces such as H.H. Knoll Lakeview Park and local amenities. Community events—particularly Canal Days, concerts, and other festivals—also stand out as key contributors to the city’s character and vibrancy.

There are also reflections of personal connection and everyday experiences, from family and friendships to local places and activities, reinforcing a strong emotional tie to the community. A few comments point to

opportunities for growth, including improving diversity and expanding supports for youth, but overall the feedback reflects a deep appreciation for Port Colborne’s unique identity and strong sense of belonging.

Key themes include:

- Strong sense of community, belonging, and local pride
- Small-town feel and close-knit relationships
- Waterfront identity tied to Lake Erie and the Welland Canal
- Importance of festivals, events, and shared experiences
- Value of local amenities, services, and natural spaces
- Opportunities to strengthen diversity and youth supports



Station four: “What makes Port Colborne special to you?”

## Overall Open House Observations

### Overall Open House Observations

Feedback from the in-person open houses demonstrates a strong and consistent desire to maintain local identity, decision-making authority, and community voice in any future governance discussions.

### Strong Support for Local Decision-Making

- Most participants indicated that maintaining strong local decision-making is very important
- There was overwhelming support for Port Colborne remaining an independent municipality
- Residents emphasized that decisions should continue to reflect local needs and priorities

### Protecting Local Representation

- “Ensuring strong local representation” emerged as the top priority if governance changes occur
- Participants expressed concern about the marginalization of smaller communities
- Maintaining Port Colborne’s identity, history, and voice was a consistent theme

### Interest in Efficiency, Not at the Expense of Local Voice

- Improving efficiency and reducing costs were supported, but secondary to local representation
- Less emphasis was placed on reducing duplication or strengthening regional collaboration alone
- Residents expect improvements to enhance—not replace—local governance

### Concerns with Current Systems and Affordability

- Written comments reflected frustration with existing regional governance structures
- Some participants expressed interest in alternative governance models or reforms
- Affordability concerns were raised, particularly related to water and wastewater costs

### Desire for Transparency and Accountability

- Participants highlighted the importance of access to information and past studies
- There is an expectation for clear communication and transparency in decision-making processes

### Strong Sense of Community Identity

- Participants described Port Colborne as a close-knit, caring, and welcoming community
- The small-town feel and ability to feel heard were frequently noted as key strengths
- A strong sense of pride and belonging was evident throughout the feedback

### Value of Waterfront, Events, and Amenities

- The waterfront, including Lake Erie and the Welland Canal, was identified as a defining feature
- Community events such as Canal Days, concerts, and festivals were highly valued

- Local amenities, natural spaces, and community services contribute to quality of life

### **Opportunities for Growth**

- Some participants noted opportunities to strengthen diversity and inclusion
- There were suggestions to enhance supports for youth and future generations

## **Meetings with Various City Committees and Working Groups**

City staff are still planning more in-depth engagement sessions with a select group of City committees and working groups, all scheduled for March and April (Seniors Advisory Committee, Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee, etc.)

## **Summary of Survey Results by Question**

Responses to each of the survey questions are outlined below.

Open-ended questions include a summary of responses received. A full list of open-ended responses received has been posted on [www.portcolborne.ca/governance](http://www.portcolborne.ca/governance) (as of March 31, 2026). Please note, staff used Microsoft CoPilot to help provide summaries and detect trends in the open-ended comments.

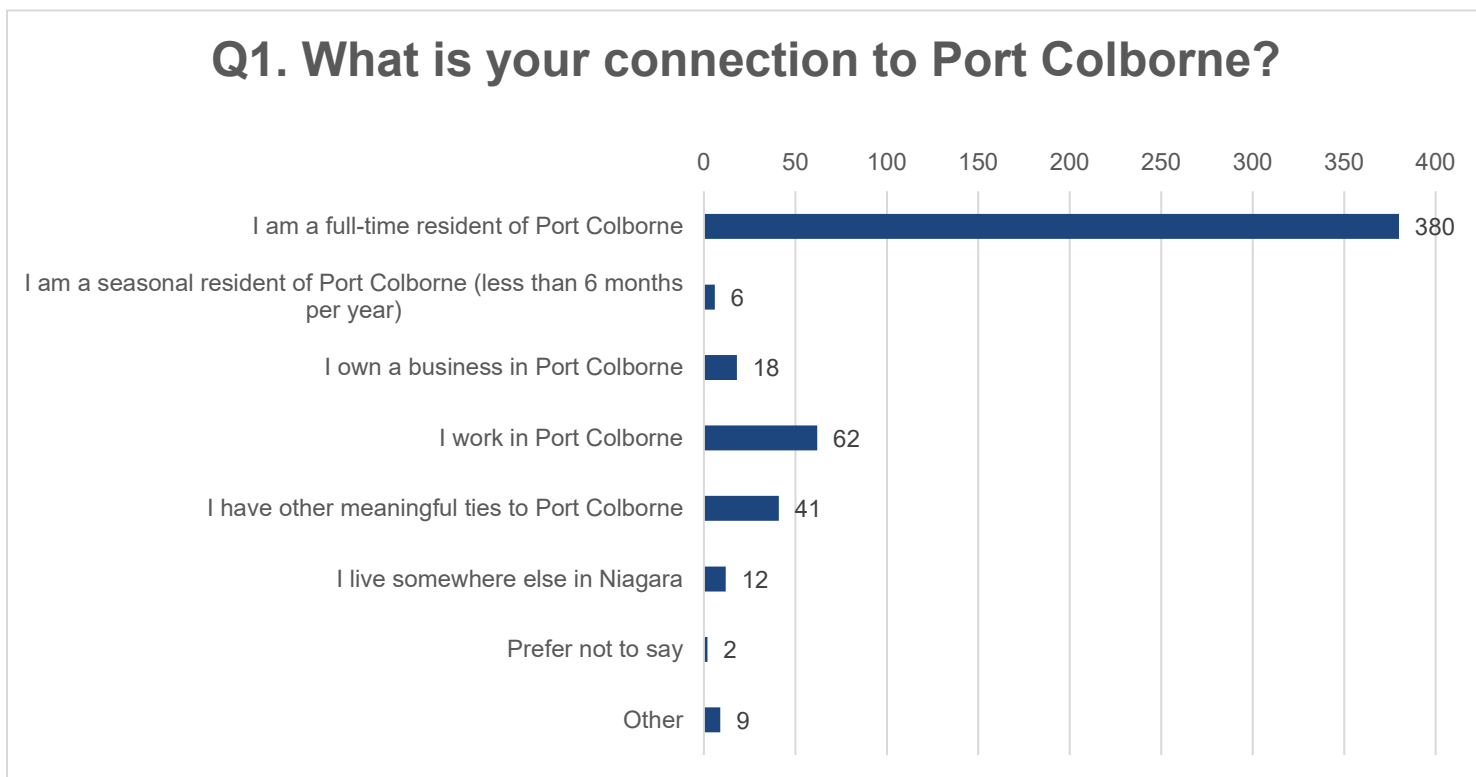
## Q1. What is your connection to Port Colborne? (select all that apply)

### Answer Choices

### Responses

I am a full-time resident of Port Colborne	380
I am a seasonal resident of Port Colborne (less than 6 months per year)	6
I own a business in Port Colborne	18
I work in Port Colborne	62
I have other meaningful ties to Port Colborne	41
I live somewhere else in Niagara	12
Prefer not to say	2
Other	9
<b>Answered</b>	<b>405</b>
<b>Skipped</b>	<b>1</b>

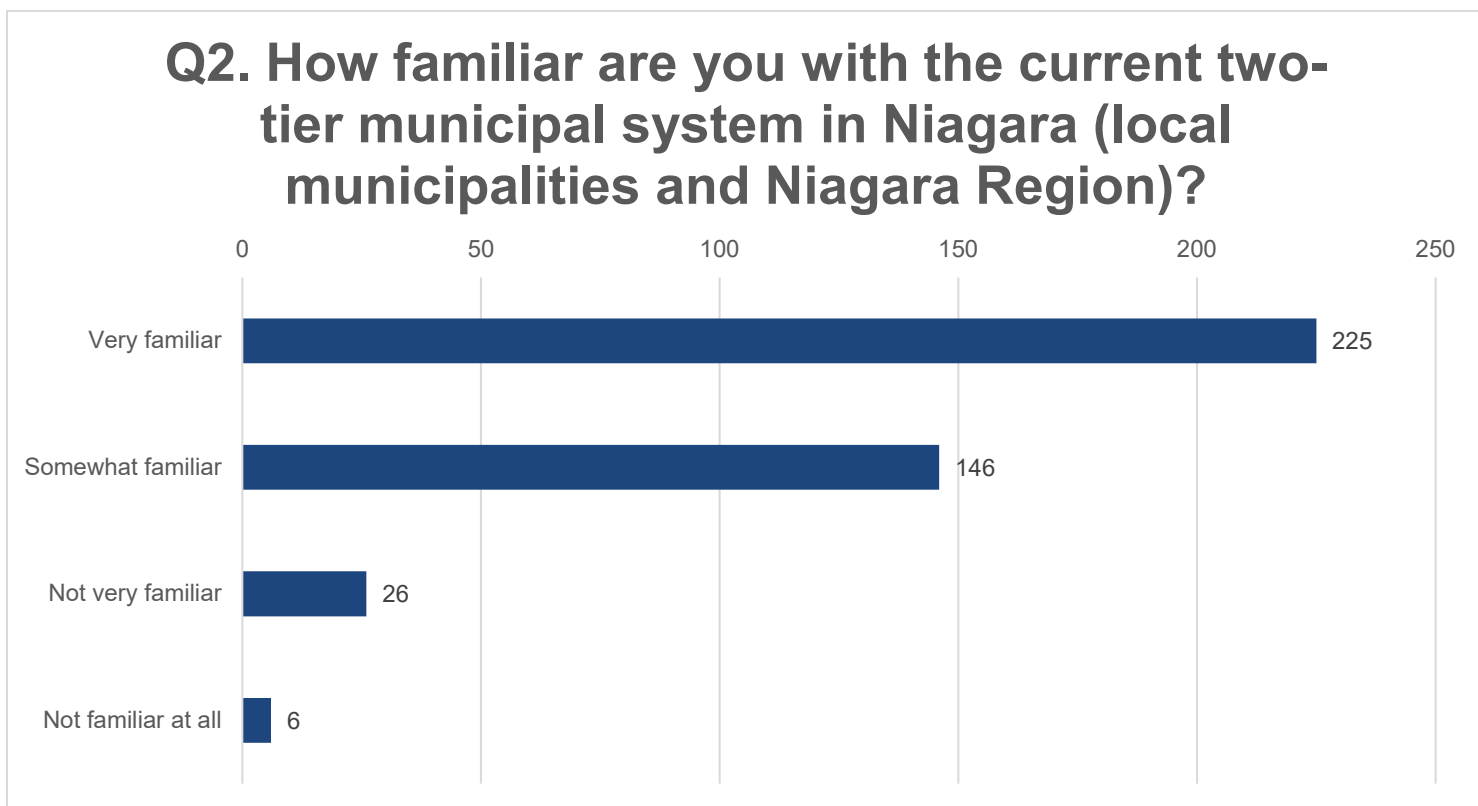
**94% of respondents reported they are full-time residents of Port Colborne.**



## Q2. How familiar are you with the current two-tier municipal system in Niagara (local municipalities and Niagara Region)? (select one)

Answer Choices	Responses
Very familiar	225
Somewhat familiar	146
Not very familiar	26
Not familiar at all	6
<b>Answered</b>	<b>403</b>
<b>Skipped</b>	<b>3</b>

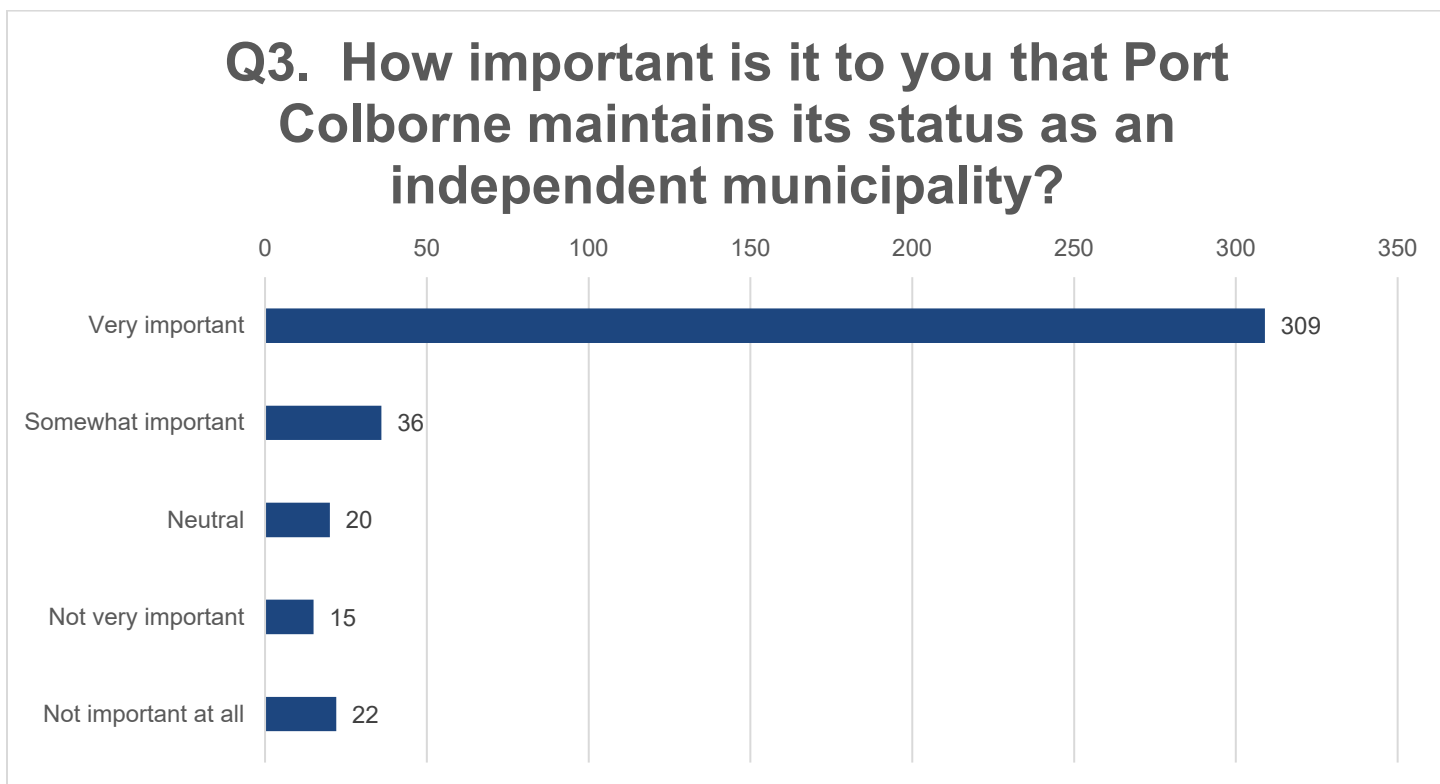
**92% of respondents said they were either very or somewhat familiar with the current two-tier municipal system.**



### Q3. How important is it to you that Port Colborne maintains its status as an independent municipality? (select one)

Answer Choices	Responses
Very important	309
Somewhat important	36
Neutral	20
Not very important	15
Not important at all	22
<b>Answered</b>	<b>402</b>
<b>Skipped</b>	<b>4</b>

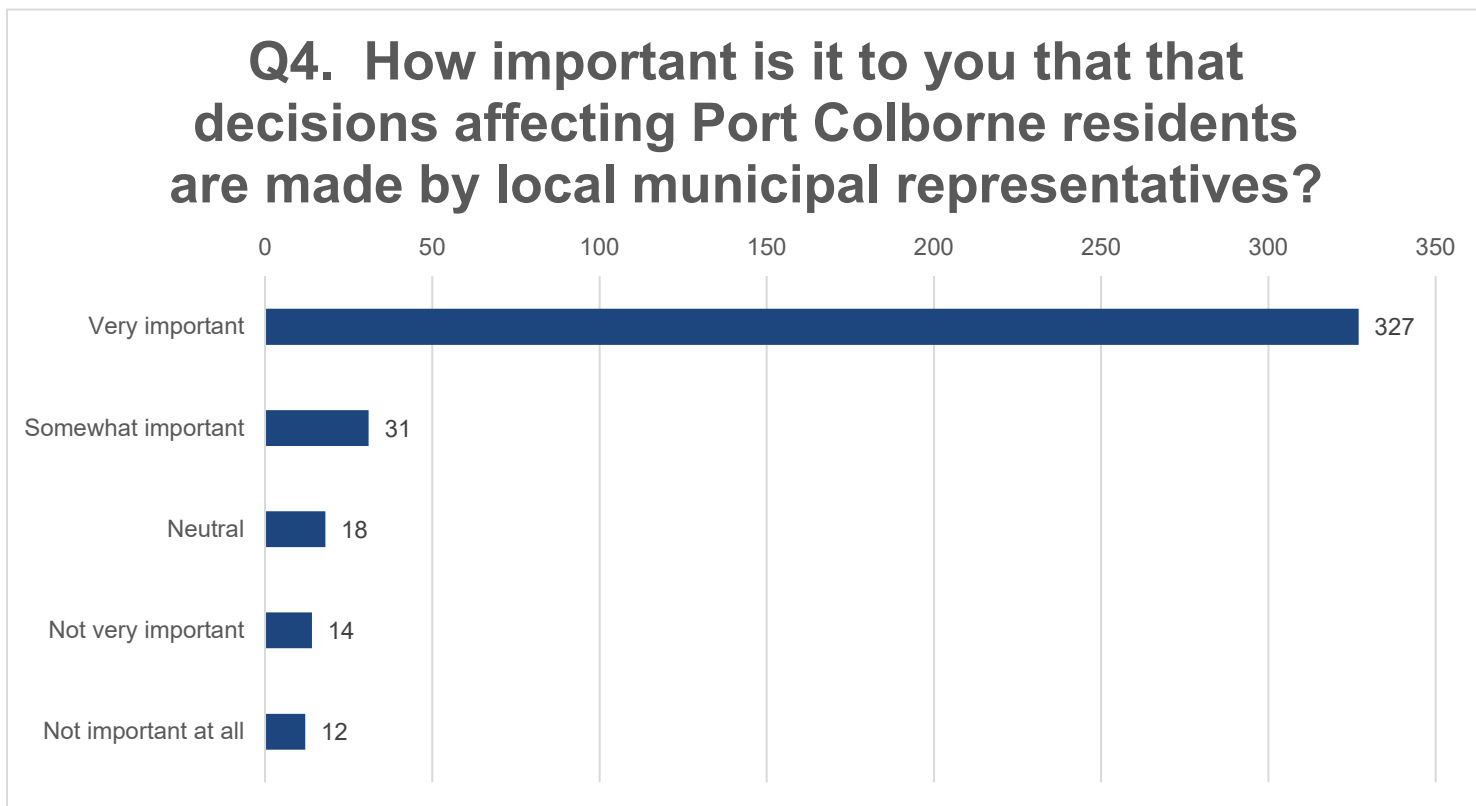
**85% of respondents said they felt it was either very or somewhat important for Port Colborne to maintain its independence.**



## Q4. How important is it that decisions affecting Port Colborne residents are made by local municipal representatives? (select one)

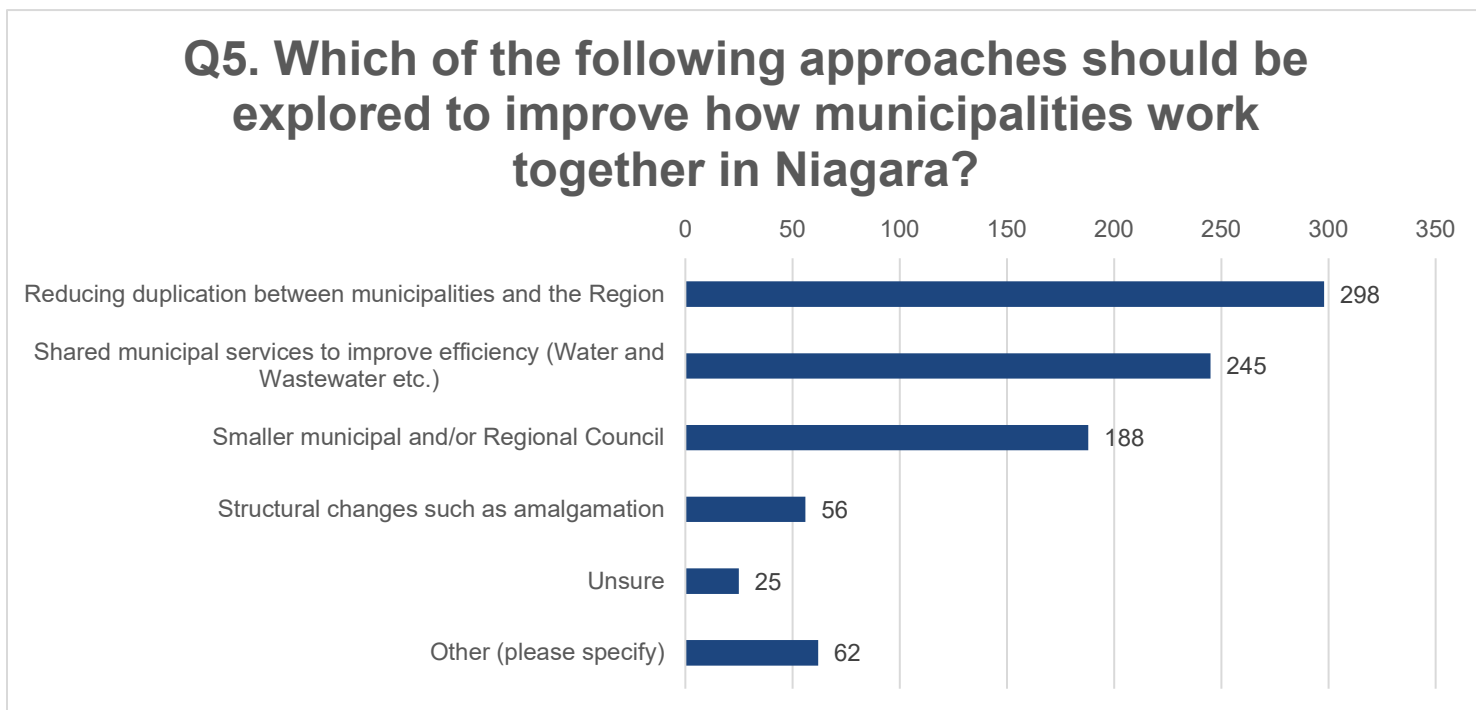
Answer Choices	Responses
Very important	327
Somewhat important	31
Neutral	18
Not very important	14
Not important at all	12
<b>Answered</b>	<b>402</b>
<b>Skipped</b>	<b>4</b>

**89% of respondents said they felt it was either very or somewhat important that decisions be made by local representatives.**



## Q5. Which of the following approaches should be explored to improve how municipalities work together in Niagara? (select all that apply)

Answer Choices	Responses	75% of respondents were supportive of reducing duplication between municipalities and Niagara Region.
Reducing duplication between municipalities and the Region	298	
Shared municipal services to improve efficiency (Water and Wastewater etc.)	245	
Smaller municipal and/or Regional Council	188	
Structural changes such as amalgamation	56	
Unsure	25	
Other (please specify)	62	
<b>Answered</b>	<b>399</b>	
<b>Skipped</b>	<b>7</b>	



Question five allowed respondents to offer “other” answers. 62 suggestions were provided. A

summary of these responses is below:

<b>Q5. Open-Ended Response Summary</b>	
<b>Opposition to Regional Government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong sentiment that the current regional model is inefficient, does not provide value, and should be reduced or eliminated.</li> </ul>
<b>Local Independence and Decision-Making</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear preference for maintaining Port Colborne's autonomy, with decisions made locally to preserve community identity and voice.</li> </ul>
<b>Concerns About Amalgamation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mixed views, but more opposition overall due to concerns about loss of identity, reduced representation, and uncertain cost savings.</li> </ul>
<b>Cost and Affordability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frequent concerns about high taxes and water costs, with calls to reduce spending and improve value for money.</li> </ul>
<b>Efficiency and Shared Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support for reducing duplication and exploring shared services to improve efficiency without major structural change.</li> </ul>
<b>Governance Clarity and Roles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Desire for clearer roles and responsibilities between municipal, regional, and provincial governments, and better coordination.</li> </ul>
<b>Representation and Accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasis on elected representation, transparency, and fair decision-making, including interest in electing the Regional Chair.</li> </ul>
<b>Reducing Size of Government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support for fewer politicians and streamlined administration to reduce costs and improve efficiency.</li> </ul>
<b>Other Perspectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional comments included environmental considerations, maintaining public services, and interest in alternative governance models.</li> </ul>

A full list of open-ended responses received as of March 31, 2026 has been posted on [www.portcolborne.ca/governance](http://www.portcolborne.ca/governance)

## Q6. What should be Port Colborne’s top priority in discussions about governance reform? (select all that apply)

### Answer Choices

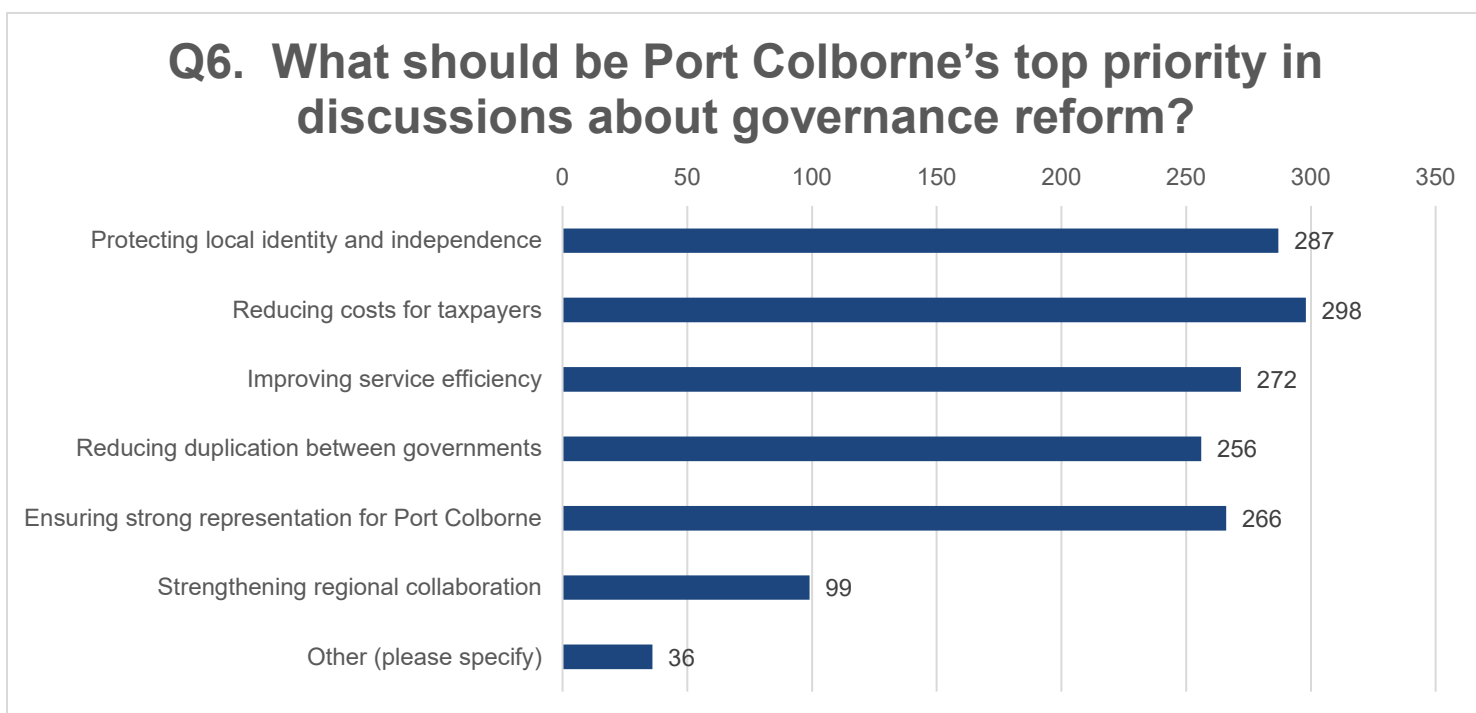
### Responses

Protecting local identity and independence	287
Reducing costs for taxpayers	298
Improving service efficiency	272
Reducing duplication between governments	256
Ensuring strong representation for Port Colborne	266
Strengthening regional collaboration	99
Other (please specify)	36

**74% of respondents were in favour of reducing costs for taxpayers, as a top priority.**

**71% were in favour of protecting local identity and independence, as a top priority.**

<b>Answered</b>	<b>403</b>
<b>Skipped</b>	<b>3</b>



Question six allowed respondents to offer “other” answers. As of March 31, 2026, 36 suggestions were provided. A summary of these responses is below:

<b>Q6. Open-Ended Response Summary</b>	
<b>Cost Reduction and Affordability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong focus on lowering taxes, water costs, and overall cost of living, with expectations for more efficient use of public funds.</li> </ul>
<b>Efficiency and Streamlined Government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire to reduce duplication, streamline services, and improve efficiency across municipal and regional operations.</li> </ul>
<b>Reducing Size of Government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for fewer politicians, reduced management layers, and leaner municipal and regional structures.</li> </ul>
<b>Local Representation and Voice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong emphasis on maintaining a strong voice for Port Colborne in decision-making and avoiding marginalization of smaller communities.</li> </ul>
<b>Opposition to Regional Control</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some respondents expressed frustration with the Region and a desire for greater municipal autonomy or reduced regional influence.</li> </ul>
<b>Governance Reform and Accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calls for more democratic processes, including elected roles, fair representation, and improved accountability.</li> </ul>
<b>Shared Services and Service Delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for shared or regionalized services in specific areas (e.g., fire, policing) to improve efficiency.</li> </ul>
<b>Fairness and Equity Across the Region</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire for more equitable treatment of municipalities and residents, including fair access to services and representation.</li> </ul>
<b>Improved Collaboration and Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for better coordination and communication between municipal, regional, and provincial governments.</li> </ul>
<b>Healthcare and Essential Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest in maintaining or improving access to healthcare and other essential services within the community.</li> </ul>
<b>Growth and Infrastructure Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns about managing growth responsibly, ensuring infrastructure can support development, and promoting balanced economic growth.</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental Protection and Public Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for maintaining safe water systems, environmental protection, and publicly delivered services.</li> </ul>

A full list of open-ended responses received as of March 31, 2026 has been posted on [www.portcolborne.ca/governance](http://www.portcolborne.ca/governance)

## Q7. What concerns, if any, do you have about potential changes to municipal governance?

Question seven asked respondents to write an answer into an open text field. 269 responses were received. A summary of these responses is below:

<b>Q7. Open-Ended Response Summary</b>	
<b>Loss of Local Voice and Representation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong concern that Port Colborne will have less influence in decision-making, particularly within larger or centralized models.</li> </ul>
<b>Loss of Local Identity and Community Character</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fear that amalgamation or restructuring would erode Port Colborne’s unique identity, history, and small-town feel.</li> </ul>
<b>Increased Costs and Taxes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Widespread concern that governance changes—especially amalgamation—would lead to higher taxes, water rates, and overall costs.</li> </ul>
<b>No Proven Cost Savings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skepticism that proposed changes would deliver financial benefits, with many citing past examples where costs increased.</li> </ul>
<b>Marginalization of Smaller Municipalities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concern that larger cities (e.g., St. Catharines, Niagara Falls) would dominate decisions and resources.</li> </ul>
<b>Loss or Reduction of Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fear that local services (especially healthcare, transit, and community services) would be reduced or relocated.</li> </ul>
<b>Healthcare Access and Service Loss</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant concern about continued loss of local healthcare services and longer travel times for care.</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of Trust in Regional or Provincial Decision-Making</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distrust in how decisions are being made, including concerns about political influence, top-down approaches, and lack of accountability.</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of Transparency and Public Consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerns that decisions are being made without clear plans, sufficient data, or meaningful public input.</li> </ul>
<b>Governance and Democratic Concerns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issues raised about unelected positions, weighted voting, and reduced democratic representation.</li> </ul>
<b>Centralization of Power</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concern that power will shift away from local communities toward larger municipalities or higher levels of government.</li> </ul>
<b>Loss of Local Control Over Finances and Assets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fear that Port Colborne’s tax dollars, reserves, and assets would be redistributed to other municipalities.</li> </ul>
<b>Downloaded Costs and Responsibilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concern that municipalities will continue to bear costs that should be covered by the Province.</li> </ul>

<b>Q7. Open-Ended Response Summary</b>	
<b>Service Inefficiencies and Bureaucracy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Frustration with existing duplication and inefficiencies, with concern that changes may not resolve these issues.</li></ul>
<b>Growth and Infrastructure Pressures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Concerns about unmanaged growth, development pressures, and insufficient infrastructure to support expansion.</li></ul>

A full list of open-ended responses received as of March 31, 2026 has been posted on [www.portcolborne.ca/governance](http://www.portcolborne.ca/governance)

## Q8. What’s a story, place, or experience that captures what makes Port Colborne special to you?

Question eight asked respondents to write an answer into an open text field. 221 responses were received. A summary of these responses is below:

<b>Q8. Open-Ended Response Summary</b>	
<b>Small-Town Feel and Sense of Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A strong sense of belonging, where people know each other, feel safe, and look out for one another.</li> </ul>
<b>Waterfront, Canal, and Natural Setting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Welland Canal, Lake Erie, beaches, marina, and waterfront views are defining features of the community.</li> </ul>
<b>Community Events and Festivals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Events like Canal Days, concerts, and local festivals bring residents together and create shared experiences.</li> </ul>
<b>Parks, Public Spaces, and Amenities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spaces like H.H. Knoll Lakeview Park, trails, and recreation facilities are central to daily life and community connection.</li> </ul>
<b>Friendly, Welcoming People</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents consistently described Port Colborne as warm, welcoming, and supportive.</li> </ul>
<b>Family, Roots, and Lifelong Connections</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep personal ties, multigenerational families, and stories of growing up and raising children in the community.</li> </ul>
<b>Local Identity and Pride</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A strong sense of pride in Port Colborne’s uniqueness, history, and independence.</li> </ul>
<b>Walkability and Quality of Life</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ease of getting around, slower pace of life, and a balance between small-town living and access to amenities.</li> </ul>
<b>Local Businesses and Downtown</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent shops, restaurants, and West Street contribute to the town’s character and vibrancy.</li> </ul>
<b>History and Marine Heritage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connections to the canal, shipping industry, and industrial roots are an important part of the city’s identity.</li> </ul>
<b>Volunteerism and Community Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong culture of volunteering and organizations that support residents and bring people together.</li> </ul>
<b>Place-Based Experiences and Everyday Moments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple, meaningful experiences—watching ships, walking the canal, time at the beach—that define life in Port Colborne.</li> </ul>

A full list of open-ended responses received as of March 31, 2026 has been posted on [www.portcolborne.ca/governance](http://www.portcolborne.ca/governance)



**PORT COLBORNE**

# **What We Heard: Governance Review and Amalgamation Discussions**

## **Summary of Correspondence and Email Submissions as of March 31, 2026**

This document summarizes, consolidates and synthesizes public correspondence, submissions, reports, presentations, and supporting materials received by Mayor Steele's office in relation to discussions about potential municipal and/or regional amalgamation in Niagara.

The intent is to identify common themes, concerns, and suggestions, without duplication, advocacy, or endorsement of specific positions.

Please note, staff used Microsoft CoPilot to help provide summaries and detect trends in the open-ended comments.

### **Overall Sentiment**

The overwhelming weight of submissions expresses opposition to municipal amalgamation, particularly forced or expedited models. While contributors consistently acknowledge that governance reform, cost control, and efficiency improvements are necessary, amalgamation is widely viewed as the wrong solution to the perceived problems.

A strong, recurring message is that reform is supported; amalgamation is not—especially in the absence of clear data, public consultation, or demonstrated public support.

# Key Themes and Findings

## 1. Democratic Representation and Local Voice

**Core concern:** Amalgamation is perceived as significantly weakening democratic representation and residents' access to decision-makers.

- Contributors emphasize that local councils and councillors are the primary mechanism through which residents influence decisions affecting services, budgets, and development.
- Reducing the number of elected officials through amalgamation is widely viewed as:
  - Diluting local voice
  - Increasing constituent-to-councillor ratios
  - Weakening accountability
- Several submissions argue that local politicians provide value at relatively low cost by functioning as the democratic bridge between residents and administrative staff.
- Visual and map-based materials reinforce concern that smaller or less populous municipalities would be absorbed into larger blocs, becoming marginal participants in decision-making rather than equal partners.

**Recurring sentiment:** Residents value proximity, accessibility, and accountability over scale.

## 2. Lack of Demonstrated Business Case

**Core concern:** Contributors repeatedly note the absence of evidence supporting amalgamation as a cost-saving or efficiency-improving measure.

Submissions consistently reference:

- No publicly available:
  - Cost-benefit analysis
  - Transition cost estimates
  - Service-level impact assessments
  - Comparative tax projections
- Concerns about high transition costs, including:
  - Wage and service harmonization
  - Union and contract integration
  - IT and systems consolidation
  - Governance restructuring expenses
- Repeated citation of Ontario precedents (e.g., Toronto, Hamilton, Haldimand County) where:
  - Taxes increased post-amalgamation
  - Expected savings did not materialize
  - Bureaucratic complexity grew rather than diminished

**Recurring sentiment:** Amalgamation is presented without sufficient financial justification to warrant

the risks involved.

### 3. Process, Consultation, and Legitimacy

**Core concern:** The process is perceived as rushed, top-down, and lacking democratic legitimacy.

Key points raised include:

- No referendum or clear expression of public mandate
- Limited or no structured public consultation prior to advancing proposals
- Perception that decisions are being advanced before defining the problem to be solved
- Calls for:
  - Transparent disclosure of objectives
  - Independent financial and governance analysis
  - Meaningful public engagement prior to decisions of permanence

**Recurring sentiment:** Several submissions emphasize that legal authority does not substitute for democratic legitimacy, and that structural decisions affecting hundreds of thousands of residents should be grounded in demonstrated public will.

### 4. Cost Drivers Identified as Regional, Not Municipal

**Core concern:** Rising taxes and budget pressures are attributed primarily to regional cost drivers, not local municipal governance.

Frequently cited drivers include:

- Policing expenditures
- Regional administration growth
- Water and wastewater systems
- Transit and regional infrastructure
- Long-term capital planning

Many contributors argue:

- Amalgamation would not meaningfully alter these cost pressures
- Structural consolidation does not address the underlying drivers of expenditure growth
- Accountability for regional budgets would become less transparent, not more

### 5. Preference for Alternatives to Amalgamation

**Core message:** There is strong support for governance reform without eliminating municipalities.

Common alternatives proposed:

- Line-by-line public review of regional budgets

- Expanded shared services where demonstrably beneficial
- Service-specific boards or restructuring
- Rebalancing responsibilities between regional and municipal governments
- Reducing duplication through cooperation rather than consolidation
- Reviewing council sizes at municipal and regional levels independently

These suggestions reflect a recurring belief that incremental, evidence-based reform is preferable to irreversible structural change.

## 6. Equity and Community Identity

**Core concern:** Smaller, rural, and edge municipalities fear loss of influence.

Submissions express concern that:

- Investment and services would concentrate in dominant population centres
- Smaller communities would lose identity, advocacy, and priority
- Geographic and community-specific needs would be harder to address within larger administrative units

Historical examples from other jurisdictions are frequently cited to support these fears.

## 7. Intensity and Breadth of Opposition

**Observation:** Opposition comes from a broad demographic and geographic cross-section, including:

- Long-time residents
- New residents who moved specifically for small-community governance
- Retired professionals
- Former municipal candidates and community volunteers
- Residents with experience in other amalgamated Ontario municipalities

Tone varies from formal and analytical to deeply personal, but the core position remains remarkably consistent across submissions.

## Summary Assessment

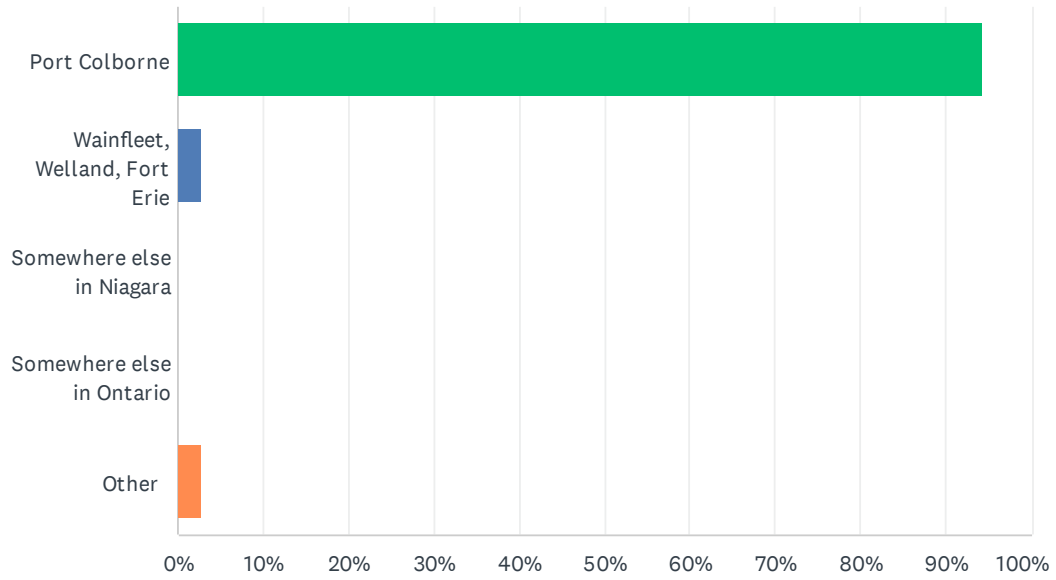
Across all materials reviewed, the dominant public perspective can be summarized as follows:

- There is no demonstrated consensus in favour of amalgamation.
- There is strong and consistent opposition to forced or expedited amalgamation.
- There is clear support for governance reform, fiscal responsibility, and efficiency, but not through amalgamation without evidence and consent.
- Residents place high value on local democracy, representation, and accountability.

This summary reflects what was heard, not an evaluation or recommendation. The consistency, volume, and depth of concern expressed indicate that amalgamation is widely understood by contributors as a last-resort measure, not a preferred or proven solution.

## Q1 Where do you live?

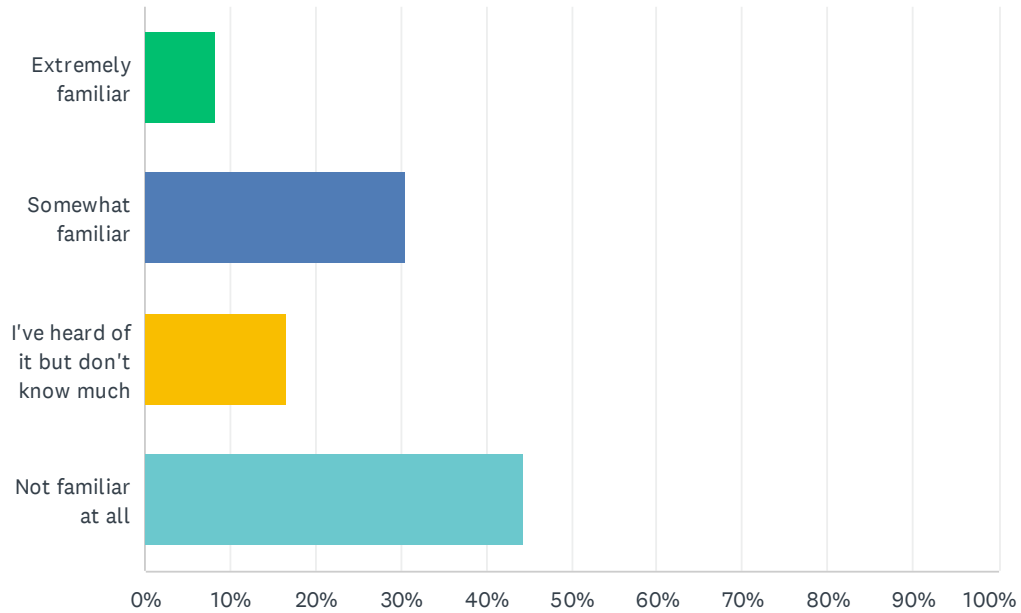
Answered: 35 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Port Colborne	94.29%	33
Wainfleet, Welland, Fort Erie	2.86%	1
Somewhere else in Niagara	0.00%	0
Somewhere else in Ontario	0.00%	0
Other	2.86%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>35</b>

## Q2 Before today, how familiar were you with the concept of a Government Business Enterprise?

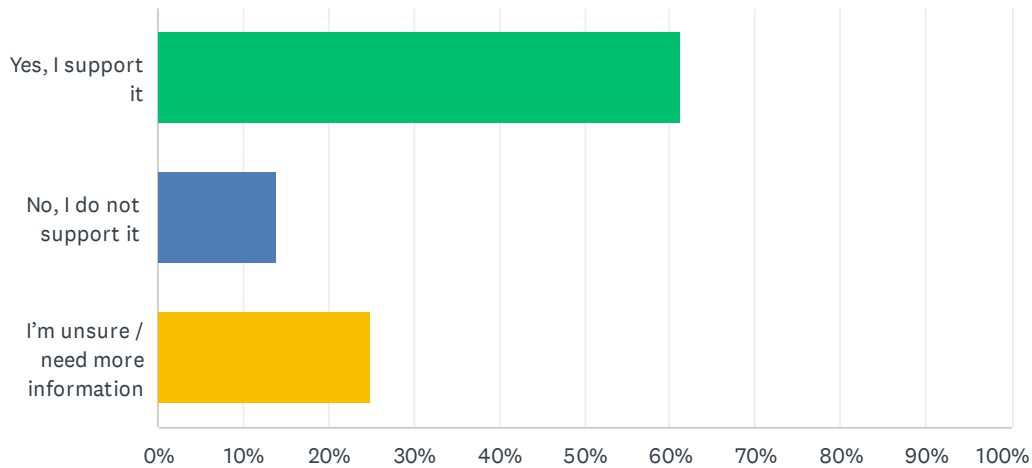
Answered: 36 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Extremely familiar	8.33%	3
Somewhat familiar	30.56%	11
I've heard of it but don't know much	16.67%	6
Not familiar at all	44.44%	16
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>36</b>

**Q3 Using the Government Business Enterprise structure would allow the City to secure financing separate from its core finances, helping to deliver infrastructure projects without direct impacts on the municipal tax base or water/wastewater rates. Do you support the idea of the City establishing Government Business Enterprises to help fund and deliver major infrastructure projects (such as water and wastewater servicing for the East Side Employment Lands)?**

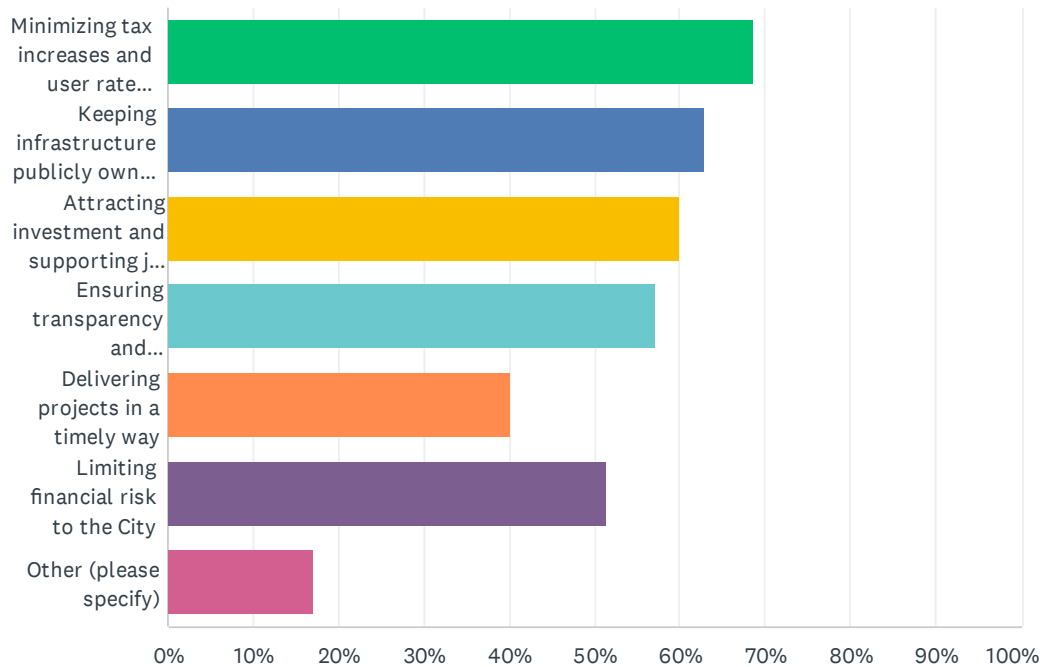
Answered: 36 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, I support it	61.11%	22
No, I do not support it	13.89%	5
I'm unsure / need more information	25.00%	9
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>36</b>

### Q4 Which of the following factors are most important to you when the City makes decisions about how to fund and deliver infrastructure? (select all that apply)

Answered: 35 Skipped: 1



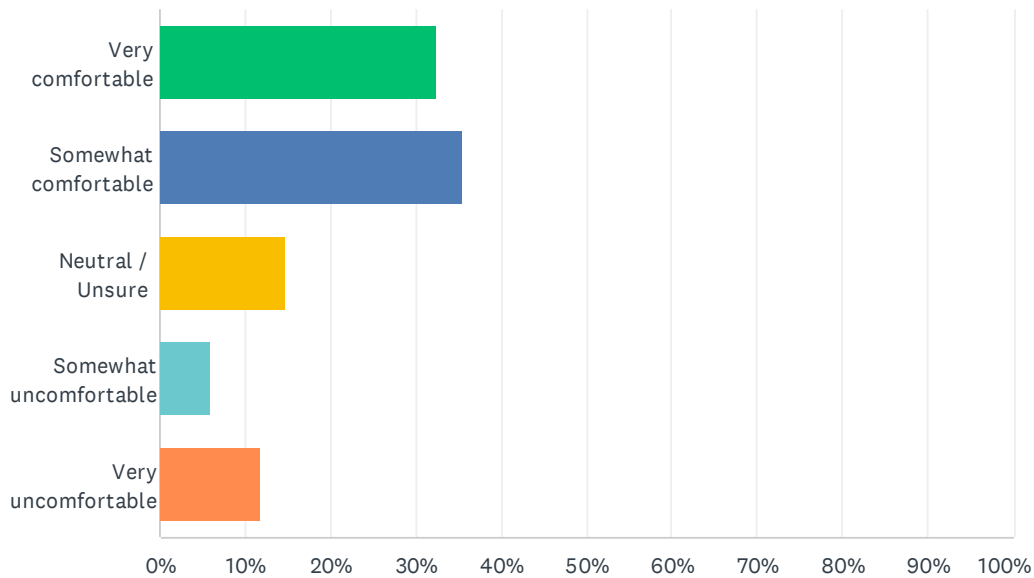
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Minimizing tax increases and user rate impacts	68.57%	24
Keeping infrastructure publicly owned and controlled	62.86%	22
Attracting investment and supporting job creation	60.00%	21
Ensuring transparency and accountability	57.14%	20
Delivering projects in a timely way	40.00%	14
Limiting financial risk to the City	51.43%	18
Other (please specify)	17.14%	6
Total Respondents: 35		

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	safety + quality	11/17/2025 3:53 PM
2	build new parks	11/17/2025 3:21 PM
3	honesty	11/17/2025 3:12 PM
4	avoid future ease and potential to privatize infrastructure	11/17/2025 2:46 PM
5	give the people what they want	11/17/2025 2:41 PM



**Q5** If approved, the Government Business Enterprises would be responsible for constructing, maintaining and owning the water, wastewater and potentially other infrastructure serving the East Side Employment Lands district, which includes both current and future industrial developments as well as the Asahi Kasei Battery Separator Canada site. The Government Business Enterprises will help ensure the infrastructure needed to support economic growth is managed effectively and sustainably. How comfortable are you with the City using a separate legal entity (the Government Business Enterprise) to deliver and finance major infrastructure projects?

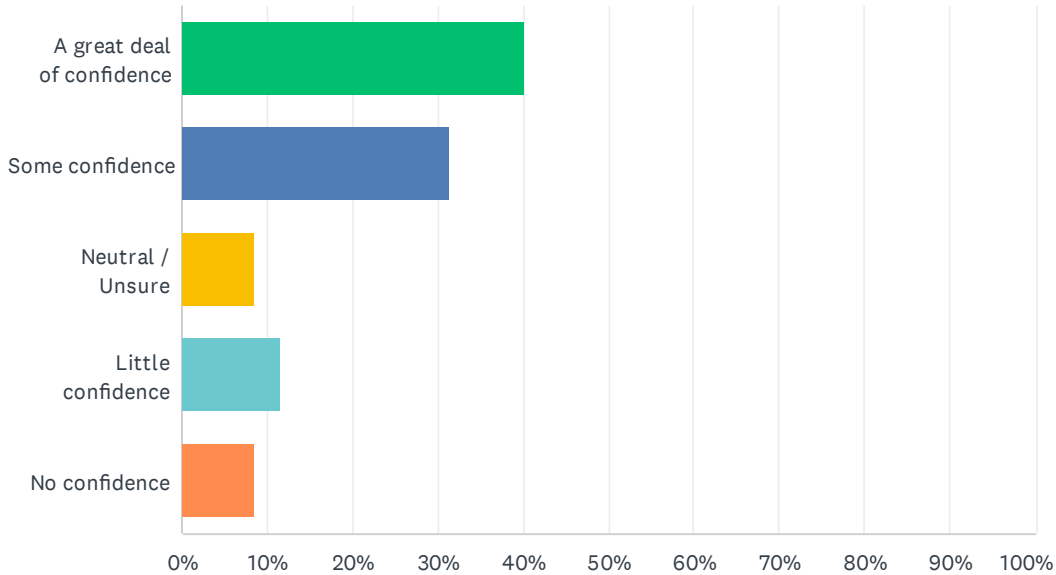
Answered: 34 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very comfortable	32.35%	11
Somewhat comfortable	35.29%	12
Neutral / Unsure	14.71%	5
Somewhat uncomfortable	5.88%	2
Very uncomfortable	11.76%	4
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>34</b>

**Q6 If strong oversight measures are in place (e.g., Council-appointed board, annual reporting, financial transparency), how much confidence would you have in the City’s ability to maintain public control of the Government Business Enterprise?**

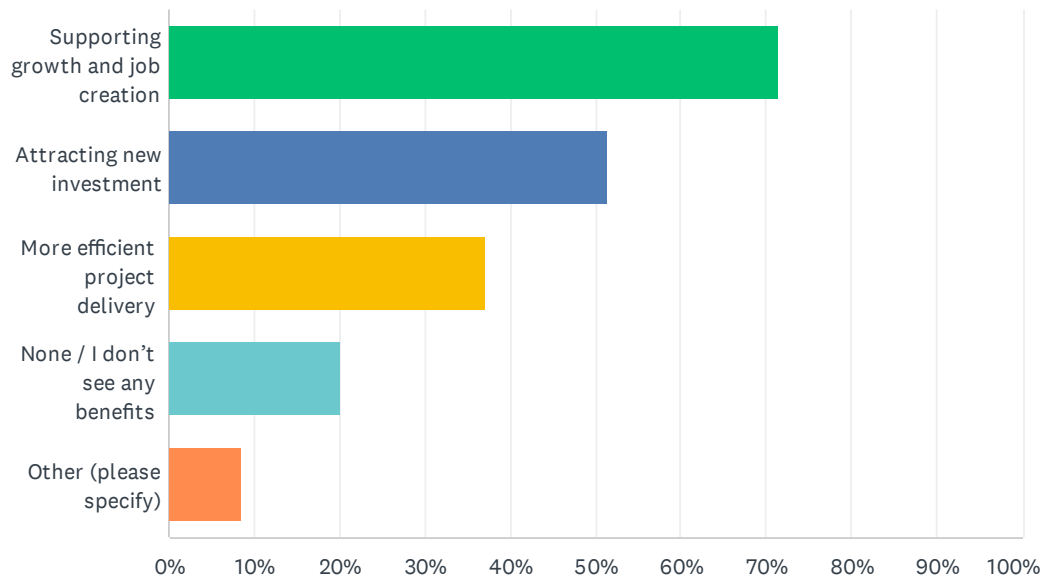
Answered: 35 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
A great deal of confidence	40.00%	14
Some confidence	31.43%	11
Neutral / Unsure	8.57%	3
Little confidence	11.43%	4
No confidence	8.57%	3
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>35</b>

**Q7 The Government Business Enterprise structure would enable the City to secure financing separate from its core finances, and it will allow the City to deliver infrastructure projects without direct impacts on the municipal tax base or water/wastewater rates. What other potential benefits do you see from creating Government Business Enterprise in Port Colborne? (select all that apply)**

Answered: 35 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Supporting growth and job creation	71.43% 25
Attracting new investment	51.43% 18
More efficient project delivery	37.14% 13
None / I don't see any benefits	20.00% 7
Other (please specify)	8.57% 3
Total Respondents: 35	

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	you are long on rhetoric and short on reason	11/17/2025 3:12 PM
2	but zero confidence that corporate greed won't find a way to own our water infrastructure e.g. data centres	11/17/2025 2:46 PM
3	If this venture is run as a business and not a free spending entity we could see positive financial impacts.	10/23/2025 9:19 PM

## Q8 Do you have any concerns, questions, or issues you would like Council to consider before making a decision about establishing Government Business Enterprise?

Answered: 21 Skipped: 15

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	when profit becomes an incentive in regards to public services such as water I become concerned that the same quality and environmental factors will be considered. If a profit is turned how will I know the money is going towards the community and not salaries of business people.	11/17/2025 3:53 PM
2	city needs top qualified finance expertise on this board to ensure compliance to reach objectives	11/17/2025 3:42 PM
3	1. how does GBE maintain fiscal responsibility? 2. does it put in infrastructure first and then hope to cover costs for the industries it supports? 3. can city back out of deal and if so, what are the ramifications?	11/17/2025 3:38 PM
4	all details should be easily accessible i.e. local newspaper, at city hall, before formal approval. input from taxpayers is a must	11/17/2025 3:35 PM
5	ensuring that water/wastewater is maintained accurately and efficiently should be high priority	11/17/2025 3:26 PM
6	what is the mandate of a government business enterprise - is it a for-profit entity? where will funds come from to get this new entity off the ground?	11/17/2025 3:23 PM
7	yes, build new parks and playgrounds in Brampton	11/17/2025 3:21 PM
8	what other municipalities have successful programs, why haven't I heard of them? do you intend an alliance or agreement with any of them? I remember that Charles Steele garnered a significant portion of the vote in the last election. Do you think he and his supporters would favour a GBE(s)? From where will the finances come? money talks. so talk.	11/17/2025 3:12 PM
9	what legal structures would prevent privatization	11/17/2025 2:46 PM
10	no	11/17/2025 2:41 PM
11	better stores, dog park downtown, low tax	11/17/2025 2:38 PM
12	Ya for the politicians to not misuse the monies.	10/27/2025 9:09 AM
13	Full disclosure of other municipalities effects of said plan negative and positive results Show actual examples in full	10/27/2025 8:51 AM
14	No	10/26/2025 3:35 PM
15	I would like assurances built into the contract with AK ensuring the upfront costs of this project are covered. I don't want too see the city incurring debt , that taxpayers will be called upon to pay.	10/25/2025 9:20 PM
16	With the growing population in PC this city needs more diversity in the the development of new business. I've heard it said that all we have in Port are weed stores and pizza shops. Utilize empty buildings or tear the eyesore down. Let's get moving!	10/25/2025 7:47 AM
17	I am wondering where the initial funding for equipment, staff and offices will come from. If the municipality has to provide these start up costs (combined with funding from private sector). Once the startup is established the risk is the GBE will be spun off at a loss once the business is viable as we have had these types of entities prior (for example port colborne hydro, hospital etc) and short sold them to private sector What guard rails will be in place to protect the investment that we would most likely need to make.	10/23/2025 9:19 PM
18	None	10/23/2025 8:41 PM

## Creating Government Business Enterprises in Port Colborne

19	<p>Yes, I am extremely concerned. Before even considering the establishment of a Government Business Enterprise (GBE), Council should first focus on addressing the inefficiencies and financial challenges that already exist within the City's operations. Instead of creating another layer of bureaucracy, Council should prioritize improving the systems and structures already in place. It currently takes far too long sometimes upwards of two months for basic permits and approvals with 0 accountability. This kind of red tape discourages growth, investment, and progress in Port Colborne. The focus should be on streamlining processes, modernizing operations, and holding departments accountable for timely and efficient service delivery. Additionally, Council should be concentrating on balancing the City's finances through responsible tax management and fiscal restraint, not by creating new administrative entities. Year-over-year high-percentage salary increases for City employees are unsustainable and unfair to taxpayers, especially when service levels and efficiency are not improving at the same rate. Before taking on a complex and potentially costly new structure like a GBE, Council needs to demonstrate it can effectively manage the City's existing finances and operations. Port Colborne needs an approach that reflects its unique size, needs, and community priorities, not a one-size-fits-all bureaucratic model borrowed from larger municipalities. The priority should be transparency, accountability, and a commitment to fixing what we already have before expanding government further.</p>	10/22/2025 7:50 PM
20	<p>In the event of GBE failure or collapse are the taxpayers liable for costs?</p>	10/22/2025 6:23 PM
21	<p>AK should pay for infrastructure its needs to do its business. Why is this being considered? Who is on the hook for the costs should this fall through? I don't believe the City tax payers will not have to oh for this development. This is a huge distance to fund services.</p>	10/22/2025 4:10 PM

## Q9 Is there anything else you'd like to share about your thoughts related to establishing Government Business Enterprises in Port Colborne?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 21

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	keep all services city ran and maintained, keep worker wages high and let people take pride in working for their city.	11/17/2025 3:53 PM
2	age range: 50-69, 70+ (for transparency purposes and combined) in most municipal or policy surveys your age is generally not required to evaluate the substance of your opinion. experience, knowledge of the topic, or interest in the issue is often more directly relevant.	11/17/2025 3:50 PM
3	invite top accounting finance auditing experts to join GBE board	11/17/2025 3:42 PM
4	on the surface, this seems like a win-win research online said "disadvantaged are political red tape, inefficient management, underutilization of capacity" is there a plan in place to address these issues?	11/17/2025 3:38 PM
5	for too long, Port Colborne has ignored invigorating growth of industry here. Hopefully this is the first step to growth + advancement with job opportunities for local workers	11/17/2025 3:35 PM
6	we cannot rely on big business to ensure residents health comes before profits	11/17/2025 3:26 PM
7	will the entity go on in perpetuity, or is it meant to shoulder some burdens until new infrastructure is in place?	11/17/2025 3:23 PM
8	no!	11/17/2025 3:21 PM
9	Gentlemen. Am I wrong to consider this plan to extend "strong mayor powers" to government business enterprises without establishing accountability through a rubber stamp process at city council? it kind of reminds me of Disneyland where they have their own kingdom. However, they had Disney. We have Mickey Mouse. The asahi plant has delayed implementation of EV. why are you talking about a water and wastewater issue now? shouldn't you have dealt with this issue before the plant was built? by the way, didn't the Linamar plant in Welland write-off everything? am I missing something? it seems to me (unpolitical as I am) that Strong Mayor Powers were given to municipalities to accelerate housing development rather than industrial development as you imply. Do you intend to put more high density sixplexes on the brownlands of the East Side? You also need to define East Side Employment Lands. Does it mean that local employment will be created if housing construction begins on the east side. I haven't seen this so far with the Linamar and Asahi plants. If so then show me the statistics. And those plants did not employ the number of people which was projected. Linamar = zero. Let's get back to definitions. I assume Port Colborne is a bedroom community, I don't know anyone else who thinks differently. I don't see jobs here except at pizza places and mcdonalds. But it doesn't sound like you have the same definition or vision of a definition. Oh, you want to build infrastructure. I don't define it that way regarding water and wastewater. it's more like maintenance and repair. we have telephone lines - not fibre optic. we are talking about brown lands now, aren't we. who knows because you haven't mentioned them. is it what one might cal an "open" secret? how are you going to find buyers for units in a sixplex unless you pay \$500,000+ for the land or exercise eminent domain through the province and seize it? in my opinion, there must be a balance between housing infrastructure, employment and lifestyle. construction jobs can only provide temporary employment for outside skilled workers. the current infrastructure in the community is as old as the living retirees and in bad shape as the dead ones. finally, you cannot provide the lifestyle people want mainly because of aging infrastructure. who wants to go to a Niagara Falls hospital when they can simply move to Niagara Falls? basically, you have a similar problem that Carney faces except his is on a macro scale while yours is on a micro scale. his problem is an aging pop. and yours is an aging pop. in a retirement community. he might interest H-1B visa holders. he might offer high-paying jobs in the service industry. he and you cannot match lifestyle. government cannot envigorate the economy on a macro or micro-scale. only small business private sector on a	11/17/2025 3:12 PM

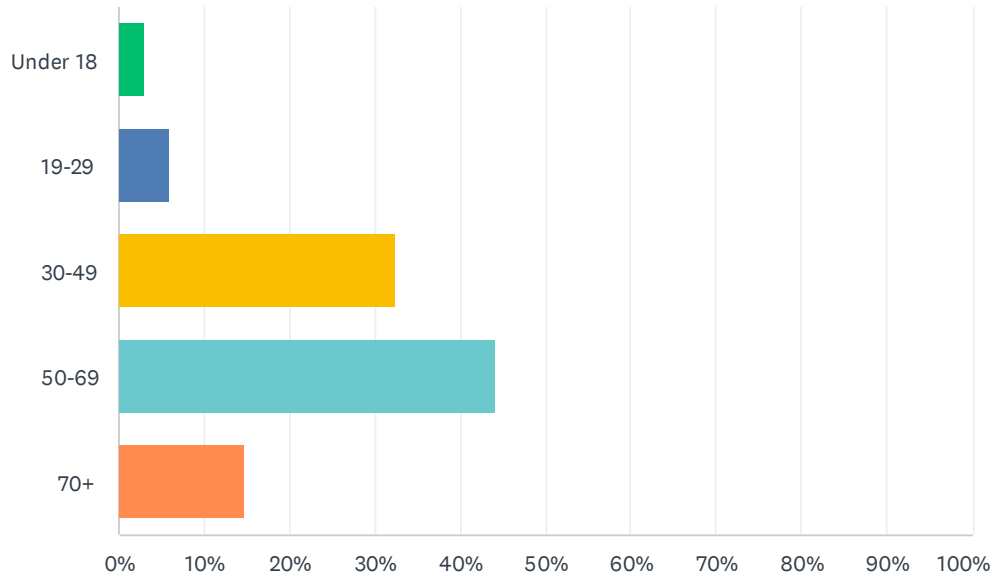
## Creating Government Business Enterprises in Port Colborne

macro or micro-scale. only small business private sector can. government contributes to the problem.

10	more information would be good	11/17/2025 2:41 PM
11	No	10/26/2025 3:35 PM
12	N/a	10/25/2025 9:20 PM
13	No	10/23/2025 8:41 PM
14	<p>Instead of forming a GBE, we should be looking inward and creating our own Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), a task force dedicated to slashing wasteful spending, eliminating redundancies, and making every dollar count. The City should take a hard look at overlapping roles, unnecessary administrative costs, and outdated procedures that drive up expenses without improving service. Hiring practices should prioritize residents who live in Port Colborne, ensuring local accountability, community pride, and a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities unique to our city. This approach would create a more efficient, locally driven government that works for the people who actually live here. Port Colborne doesn't need more bureaucracy, it needs smarter management, local leadership, and a serious commitment to financial responsibility and operational efficiency.</p>	10/22/2025 7:50 PM
15	Get it done!	10/22/2025 6:23 PM

## Q10 Please select your age range

Answered: 34 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Under 18	2.94% 1
19-29	5.88% 2
30-49	32.35% 11
50-69	44.12% 15
70+	14.71% 5
TOTAL	34

## Question #2

### Question #2

Subject: Request for Plain-Language Briefing on Proposed Holding Company and GBEs

Dear Mr. Bryon Boles

We request that the City provide a clear, plain-language briefing on the proposed Port Colborne Holding Company (HC) and associated Government Business Enterprises (GBEs) before any by-law is passed. This will help Council and residents fully understand the structure, roles, and potential impacts.

The briefing should include:

Definitions: What is a Holding Company? What is a GBE? How do they relate?

Ownership & Reporting Diagram: City → HC → GBE(s), including board appointments and reporting to Council

Business Case: Purpose, objectives, services, financial overview, and risk assessment

Governance & Oversight: Board structure, Council oversight, and simplified shareholder declaration

Timeline: HC incorporation, GBE formation, and public reporting schedule

Transparency & Reporting: Frequency of reports and how the public can access information and provide input

Plain-Language FAQ: Key questions such as "What is a holding company?" and "Why is it needed?"

We recommend that this briefing use simple language and diagrams for easy public understanding. Including such a booklet with the survey would make public consultation more meaningful, ensuring informed feedback from residents who may not have technical or legal expertise.


Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

Port Colborne Residents

## Support yes or no

Survey Question:

 #3 Financing and Taxpayer impact.

The question — "Using the GBE structure would allow the City to secure financing separate from core finances, helping to deliver infrastructure projects without direct impacts on the municipal tax base water/wastewater rates

Do you support the idea of establishing a GBE to help fund and deliver major infrastructure projects (such as water and wastewater servicing for the Eastside Employment Lands)?" —presents an incomplete and potentially misleading premise.

It suggests that a GBE can fund infrastructure "without direct impact" on taxpayers or ratepayers. However, any borrowing or financing vehicle ultimately relies on public revenues or user fees for repayment. If a GBE encounters financial challenges, the City — and by extension, taxpayers — will bear the risk.

Moreover, this appears to be more than a theoretical question. Public discussions, funding announcements, and planning efforts indicate that the Eastside Employment Lands and related wastewater infrastructure are already moving forward. Residents deserve full disclosure of any existing financial commitments, agreements, or liabilities tied to these projects.

A responsible position is:

"Support cannot be given without clear disclosure of the GBE's governance, financing mechanisms, risk exposure, and long-term obligations. Claims of 'no direct impact' on taxpayers or ratepayers must be independently verified. Public accountability cannot be outsourced through a separate legal structure."


### Conclusion

Residents are being asked to provide opinions on complex structural, financial, and governance issues without the necessary information to make informed judgments. Before seeking public endorsement, the City should release a transparent, comprehensive explanation of the GBE's proposed design, authority, financing, risk management, and accountability measures.

Respectfully,

Public Comment:

Response to GBE Survey


 Question #4:

Which of the following factors are most important to you when the city makes decisions about how to fund and deliver infrastructure? (Select all that apply)

“Evaluating if this answer is clear, unbiased, and complete.”

1) Minimizing tax increases and user rate impacts

Good priority — nobody wants higher taxes or water bills.


 But too vague.

It doesn't say how the city plans to minimize tax impacts — for example, whether that means borrowing more, creating a GBE (like a municipal corporation), or deferring maintenance. “Minimizing” can sometimes mean pushing costs down the road rather than reducing them overall.

Verdict: Important but incomplete — needs transparency on what trade-offs are being made to achieve it.

2) Keeping infrastructure publicly owned and controlled

Very important — ensures accountability and long-term control over essential assets like water, wastewater, and roads.


 Still somewhat vague.

“Publicly owned” can still mean a city-owned corporation (GBE), which might operate at arm's length — technically public, but with limited council oversight. So, it's important to ask: what kind of public control are we talking about — direct or indirect?

Verdict: Strong principle — but it needs clarification that “publicly owned” means not privatized or corporatized beyond council control.

3) Attracting investment and supporting job creation

Worthwhile goal — economic growth supports the community.

 But can conflict with #1, #2, and #6.


Sometimes “attracting investment” means offering tax breaks, subsidies, or infrastructure spending that benefits developers before the public sees a return.

Verdict: Sounds good politically — but can justify risky spending if not paired with proof that the investment benefits outweigh the costs.

4) Ensuring transparency and accountability

Crucial.

If the city is using a GBE model or any financing mechanism, transparency is the only safeguard against poor decisions or hidden liabilities.

 Still vague.

It doesn't define what “transparent” means — will public documents, business plans, and financial details be open to residents?

Verdict: Essential — but needs to be defined (e.g., mandatory disclosure, public reporting, independent audit).

5) Delivering projects in a timely way

✓ Important for efficiency.

Delays can raise costs and frustrate development.

⚠ Can be misused.

"Timely" sometimes becomes an excuse to rush approvals before proper consultation, environmental review, or financial due diligence.

Verdict: Reasonable goal — but only if timely doesn't mean hasty.

6) Limiting financial risks to the city

✓ Very important.

Protects taxpayers from long-term debt or liability.

⚠ But vague again.

How is "risk" defined and managed? Does it include hidden liabilities (like guarantees, operating deficits, or GBE debt)?

Verdict: Key principle — but only if the city includes off-balance-sheet risks (like GBE borrowing or deferred maintenance) in the definition.

✓ Summary of best practice choices:

If this were your survey, the most responsible choices (from a resident's and taxpayer's perspective) would likely be:

✓ #1 (Minimizing tax and rate impacts)

✓ #2 (Keeping infrastructure publicly owned and controlled)

✓ #4 (Ensuring transparency and accountability)

✓ #6 (Limiting financial risks to the city)

Other (please specify):

The City should require that any governance entity or development corporation involved in infrastructure delivery ensure developers can fully fund all necessary infrastructure and servicing without imposing major costs on the City or its taxpayers. Additionally, the governance body itself should act as a major financial contributor or enforcer of risk-sharing, so that both public and private parties share responsibility fairly. The City should also collect appropriate developer fees and community benefit charges to fund major infrastructure needs. These measures will help protect taxpayers, ensure transparency, and make development financially responsible and sustainable.

✓ #1 (Minimizing tax and rate impacts)

✓ #2 (Keeping infrastructure publicly owned and controlled)

✓ #4 (Ensuring transparency and accountability)

✓ #6 (Limiting financial risks to the city)

## “Public Comment – GBE Structure, Oversight, and Financing.”

Subject:

Public Survey Comment – Concerns Regarding the Proposed GBE Structure and Related Survey Questions

We are writing to provide input regarding the City’s survey questions on the proposed GBE (General Business Entity) structure for delivering and financing major infrastructure projects. These questions, as currently worded, cannot be answered responsibly by residents without key information and context.

Survey Question:

### #5 Comfort with the GBE

The question asking residents “How comfortable are you with the City using a separate legal entity (the GBE) to deliver and finance major infrastructure projects?” lacks the essential details required for an informed response.

Before residents can assess comfort or support, the City must clearly disclose:

Who will oversee or control the GBE — Council, staff, private investors, or an independent board — and who will be financially accountable if costs escalate or projects fail.

How it will be funded (taxes, user fees, bonds, or private investment) and how transparency and public reporting will be ensured.

Where these projects will be located, and how they will affect surrounding neighbourhoods, roads, and infrastructure.

What specific projects are proposed, including their purpose, scale, and estimated costs.

How big and how long-term the financial, environmental, and operational commitments will be.

Without these details, any answer on “comfort level” would be purely speculative.

Survey Question:

### #6 Oversight and Maintaining Public Control

The question on oversight — “If strong oversight measures are in place, such as a council-appointed board, annual reporting, and financial transparency, how much confidence would you have in the City’s ability to maintain public control of the GBE?” — assumes facts not yet in evidence.

The public has not been provided with key details such as:

Board composition and accountability: How many members? Who qualifies? Are they residents, staff, or private investors? Are they paid, and by whom? Who can remove them for conflict of interest?

Reporting: To whom will reports be submitted — Council, the public, or both? Will they include full audited statements or brief summaries?

Financial transparency: What will this include — open procurement, contract disclosures, budgets, consultant fees, or risk exposure?

Public control: Legal ownership alone does not guarantee practical control. Long-term contracts, debt obligations, or public-private partnerships could erode public authority over time.

A reasoned position is:

“Confidence depends entirely on details that have not been disclosed. Without knowing the board’s size, authority, accountability, and transparency mechanisms, it is impossible to assess whether true public control can be maintained. Oversight in principle means little without enforceable rules, citizen access, and protections against privatization or conflicts of interest.”

## Question #7


### Survey Response — Question #7:

“Government Business Enterprises (GBEs) can help the City deliver large infrastructure projects efficiently, access financing separate from the municipal budget, and attract investment while potentially generating revenues or using a user-pay model to reduce taxpayer costs. At the same time, GBEs carry risks, including financial exposure if revenues fall short, governance complexity, operational reliance on limited users, and the need for strong transparency and accountability. Acknowledging both benefits and risks provides a more complete and thoughtful perspective.”


### Question #7

#### Other (please specify):

The survey does not identify the second GBE, the Holding Company, which is a key player in infrastructure delivery. This omission limits transparency and prevents residents from fully understanding the financial risks and responsibilities involved. The Holding Company’s role, funding, and business case should be publicly disclosed so that the community can provide informed input and hold decision-makers accountable.

 Survey Response — Question #8:

“Before establishing the GBEs, I encourage Council to carefully review financial exposure, including borrowing and potential impacts on taxpayers, and ensure robust governance with qualified Boards and professional management. Procurement, transparency, and conflict-of-interest policies should align with City standards, and operational agreements must be secure to prevent service disruptions. Overall, safeguards and oversight must balance the benefits of faster infrastructure delivery and revenue generation with public accountability and long-term risk management.”

 Question #9

While we support the City doing proper due diligence and community engagement, these steps are not innovative — they are standard and required under Ontario’s Municipal Act when creating a municipal corporation or GBE. True innovation would mean going beyond the minimum requirements by making the process fully transparent. This includes sharing the draft business case, governance structure, shareholder agreements, and financial risk analysis with the public before any bylaw is passed. Residents should clearly understand how the proposed Holding Company and District GBE would operate, be funded, and remain accountable to Council and taxpayers. Transparency and plain-language communication will build real public trust and make the process genuinely innovative.

Clarity on Definitions:

Explain in simple language what a Government Business Enterprise (GBE) is: a city-owned entity that operates like a business to provide services or infrastructure.

Explain what a Holding Company is: an entity that can own or control one or more GBEs. It is not directly delivering services but manages and finances its subsidiaries.

How a Holding Company Can Be a GBE:

The holding company itself may borrow, invest, or manage assets and could technically operate as a GBE if it generates revenue through its subsidiaries.

Clear distinction should be made: the holding company is more about management, while the GBE is about operations.

Simplifying for Public Understanding:

Use diagrams or simple examples showing the relationship: City → Holding Company → Individual GBE(s).

Explain in one sentence the “flow” of funding, accountability, and operational responsibility.


Risks & Need for Transparency:

Potential for financial risk if borrowing or projects fail.

Possible confusion about accountability: who answers to Council and the public?


Need for public reporting: financial statements, business cases, and project updates should be available.

Any sale, partnership, or restructuring of the holding company or GBE should be disclosed.

 Other Considerations:

Public should understand why this structure is being proposed—e.g., efficiency, access to financing, or attracting partners.

Encourage Council to provide plain-language summaries of business cases before approval.

 Survey OTHER:

Holding Company

The survey does not identify the second GBE, the Holding Company, which is a key player in infrastructure delivery. This omission limits transparency and prevents residents from fully understanding the financial risks and responsibilities involved. The Holding Company’s role, funding, and business case should be publicly disclosed so that the community can provide informed input and hold decision-makers accountable. Respectfully,

this would be innovative:

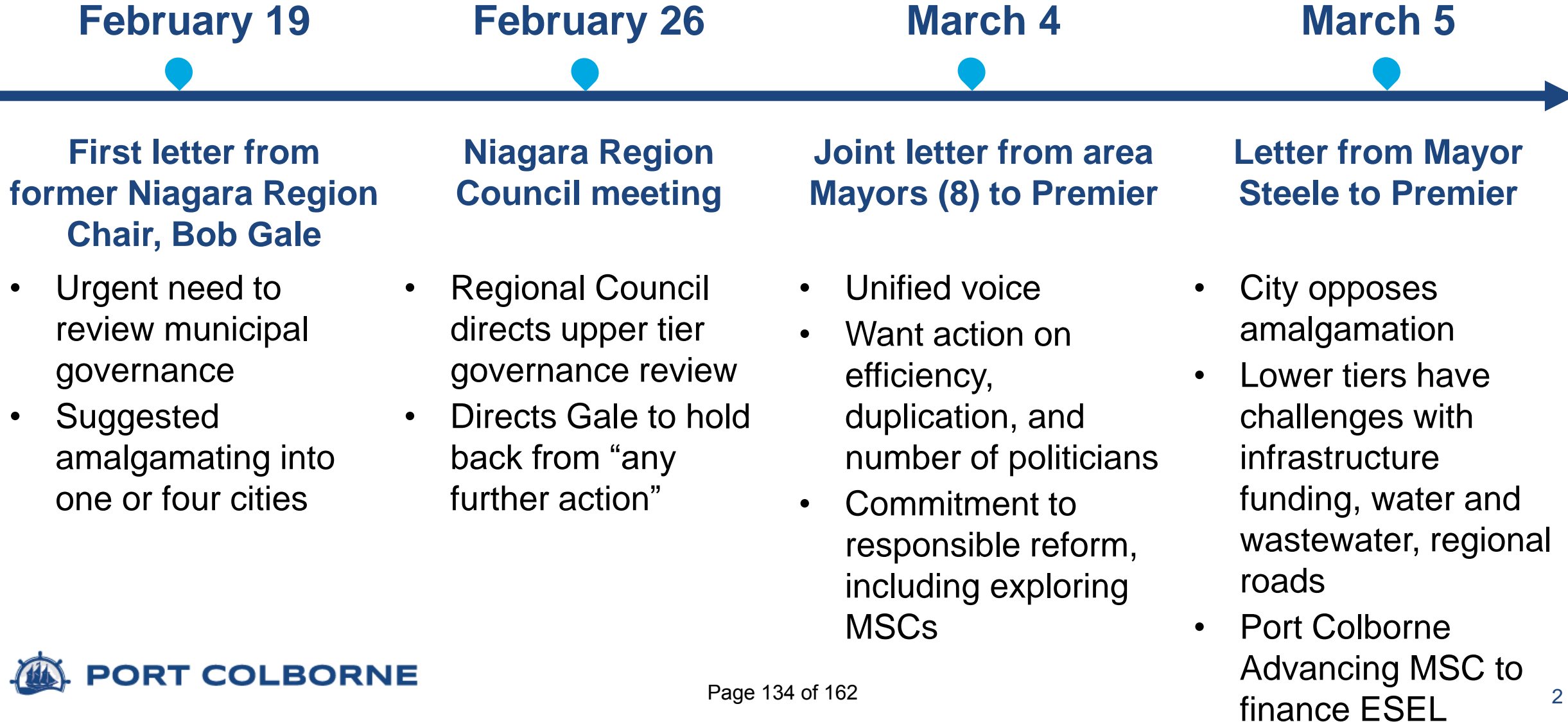
# Update on Niagara Governance Discussions and Municipal Service Corporations Community Input and Next Steps

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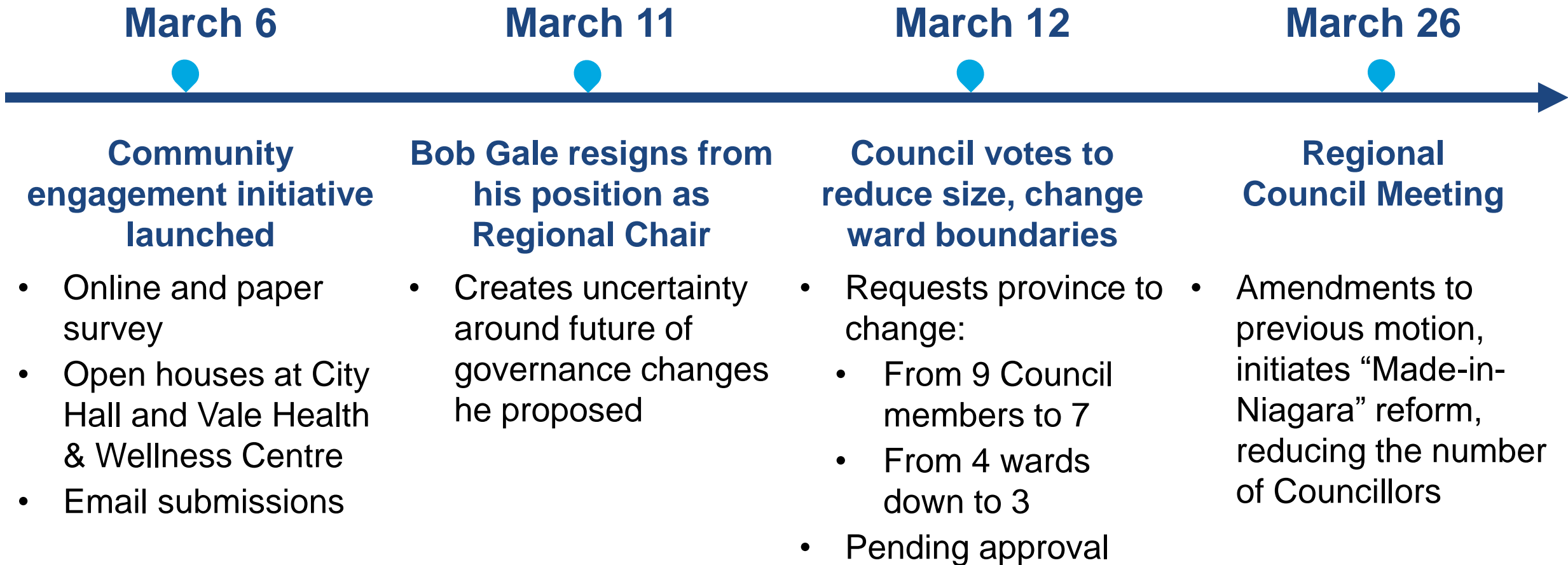
**Council Meeting**  
April 28, 2026



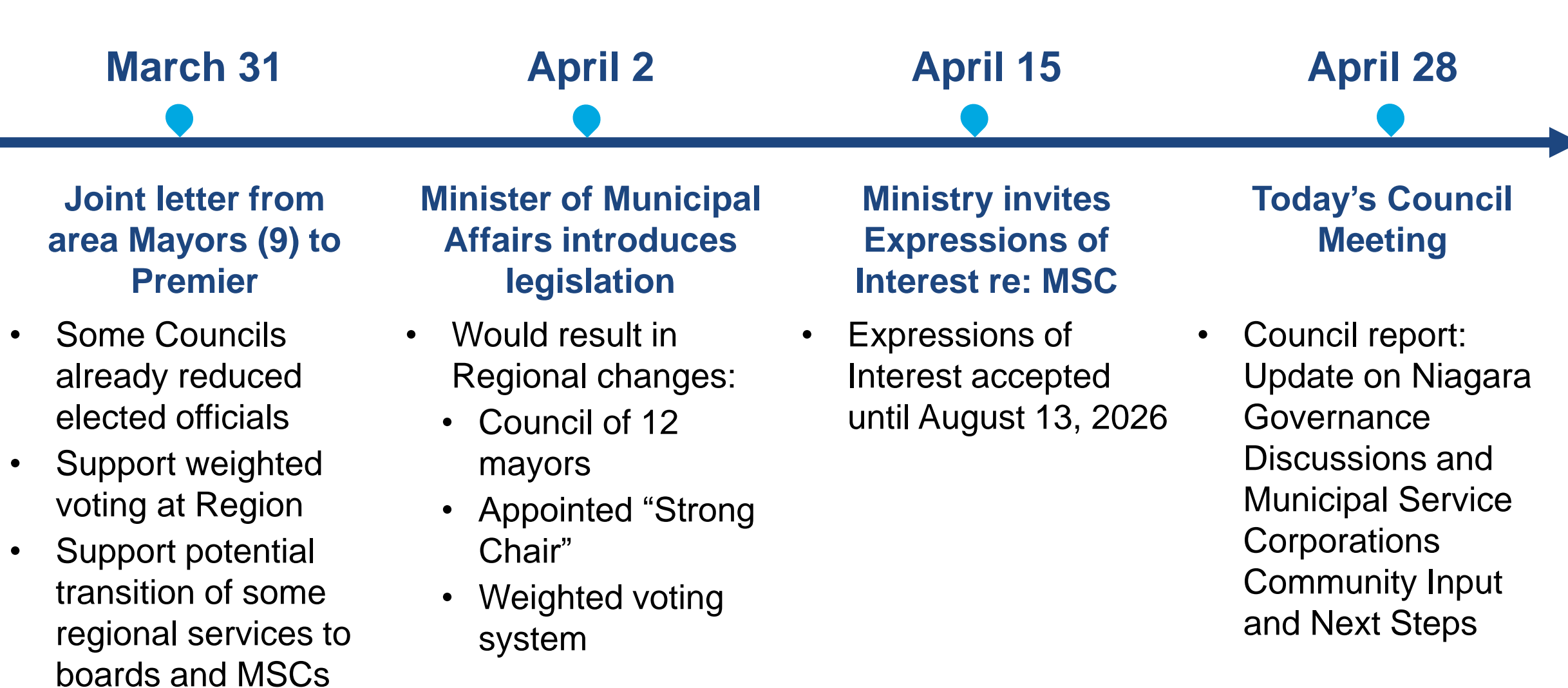
# Timeline: Governance Discussions in Niagara



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# Engagement Plan Goals & Objectives



## Inform the community

Ensure residents have clear, accessible information about governance discussions in Niagara and what they mean for Port Colborne.



## Gather feedback

Provide multiple opportunities for residents to share their perspectives, priorities, and concerns.



## Promote inclusion

Engage a broad range of voices, including those who may not typically participate in municipal discussions.



## Identify concerns and opportunities

Analyze feedback to understand community priorities and identify key risks, concerns, and opportunities.



## Ensure transparency

Share results openly and demonstrate how community input informs Council's decision-making.



# Community Engagement Activities

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1. Online survey
2. Paper survey
3. In-person open houses
4. Comment cards and sticky note activities
5. Email submissions to Mayor's Office

Engagement  
period began:  
**March 6, 2026**

Results as of  
**March 31, 2026**

Survey still open;  
engagement  
ongoing.

# Engagement Quick Stats

- **Survey Recap**

- 405 total survey responses
  - 347 online surveys
  - 59 paper surveys
- Survey remains open
- 94% full-time Port Colborne residents
- 269 open-ended responses received

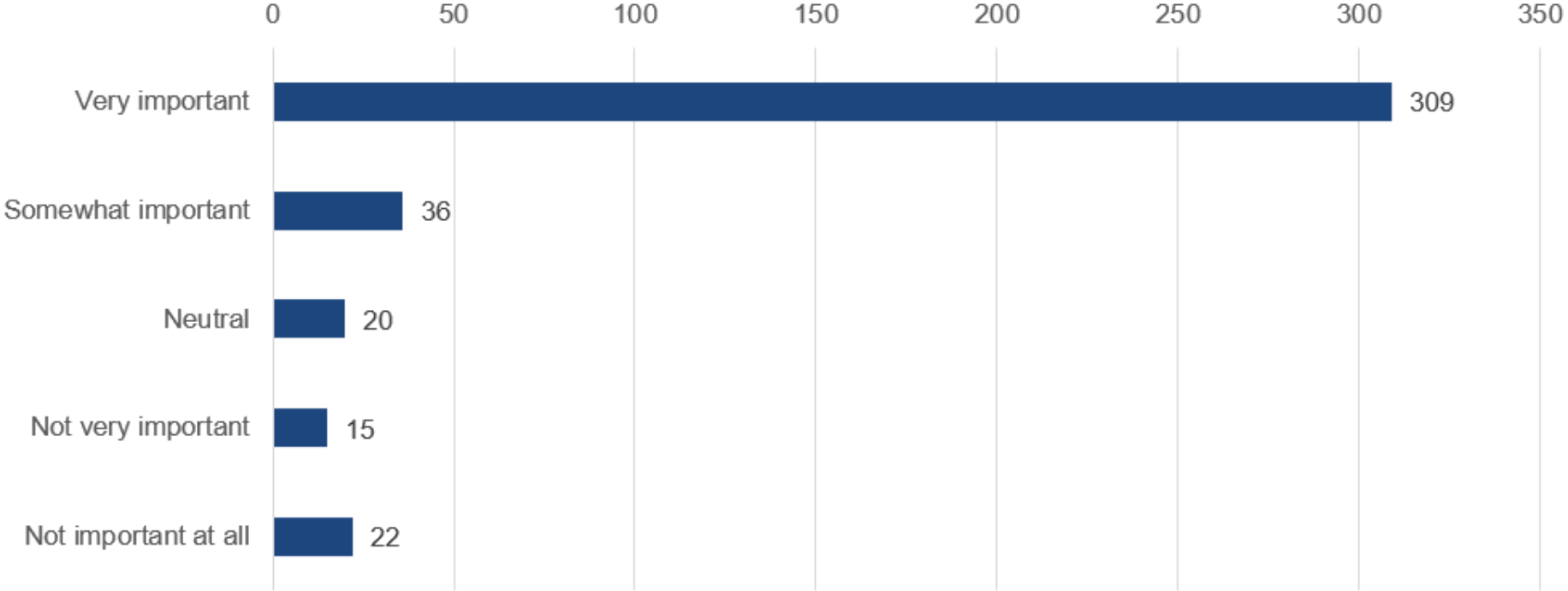
- **Open House Recap**

- City Hall: March 12 – 49 participants
- VHWC: March 14 – 34 participants
- Information and interactive stations to gather feedback



# Port Colborne's Independence

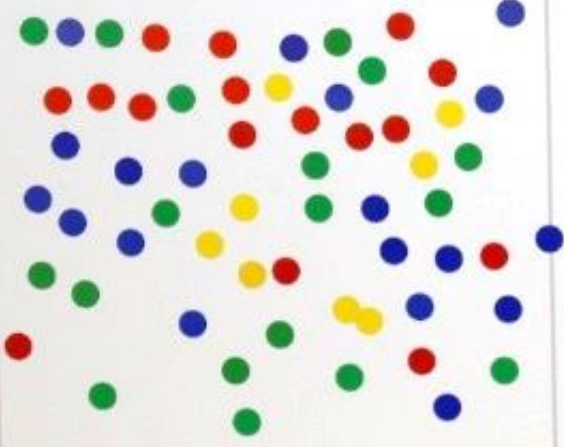

**Q3. How important is it to you that Port Colborne maintains its status as an independent municipality?**



**85% of respondents said they felt it was either very or somewhat important for Port Colborne to maintain its independence.**

# Do you believe Port Colborne should remain an independent municipality?

Use a sticker to vote for your preference

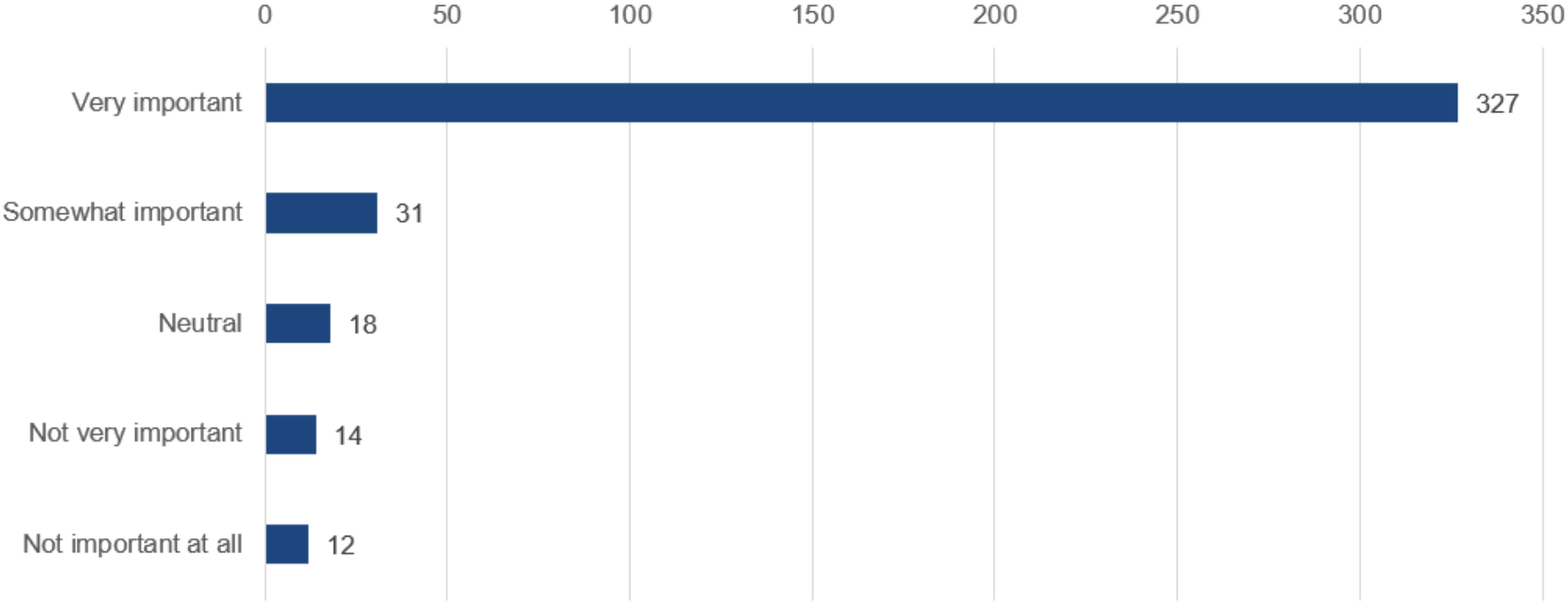
● Yes	Unsure	No
		



PORT COLBORNE

# Local Decision-Making

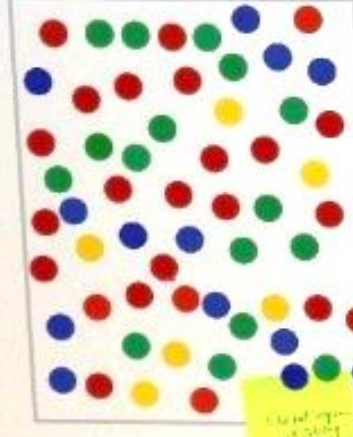
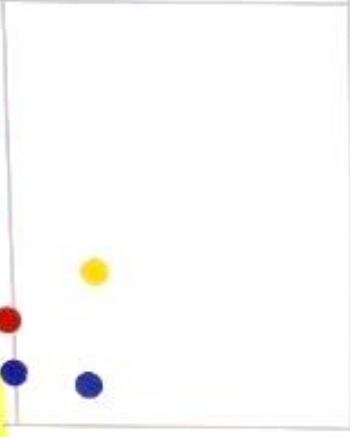
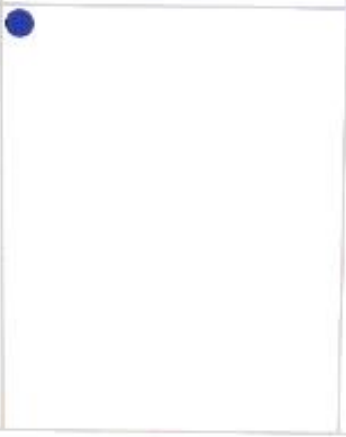
**Q4. How important is it to you that that decisions affecting Port Colborne residents are made by local municipal representatives?**



**89% of respondents said they felt it was either very or somewhat important that decisions be made by local representatives.**

# How important is it to you that Port Colborne maintains strong local decision-making?

Use a sticker to vote for your preference

Very Important	Somewhat Important	Neutral	Not Very Important	Not Important
				

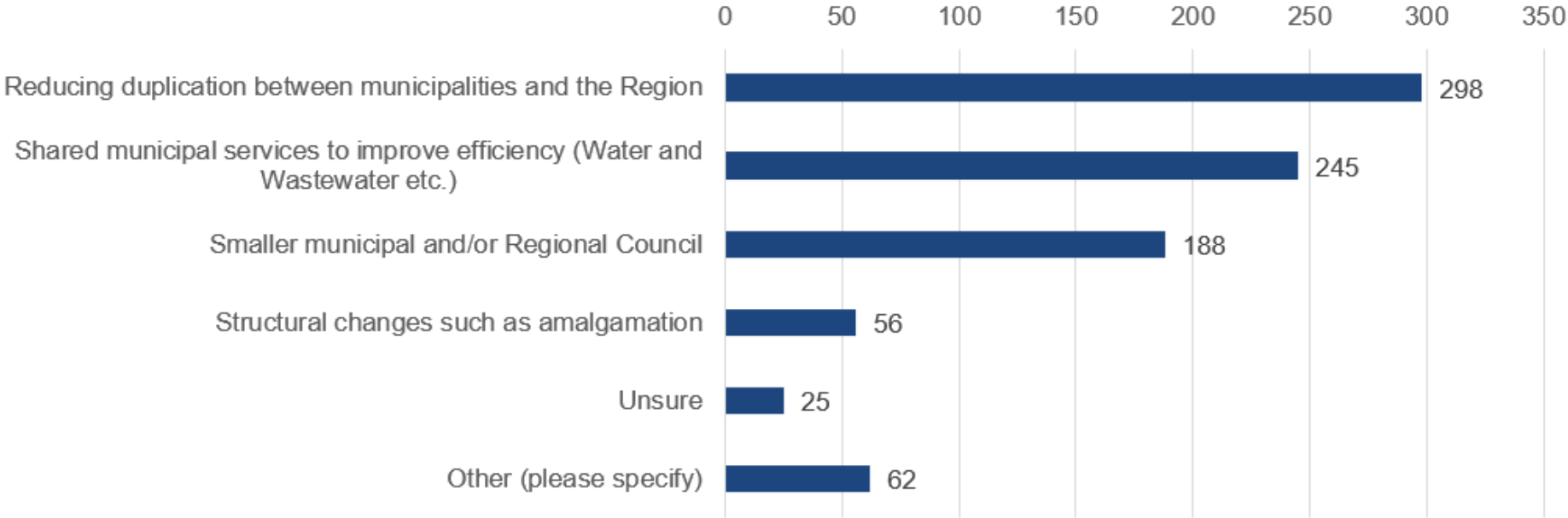
Handwritten notes on a yellow sticky note attached to the bottom of the 'Very Important' column.



PORT COLBORNE

# Approaches to Improve Collaboration

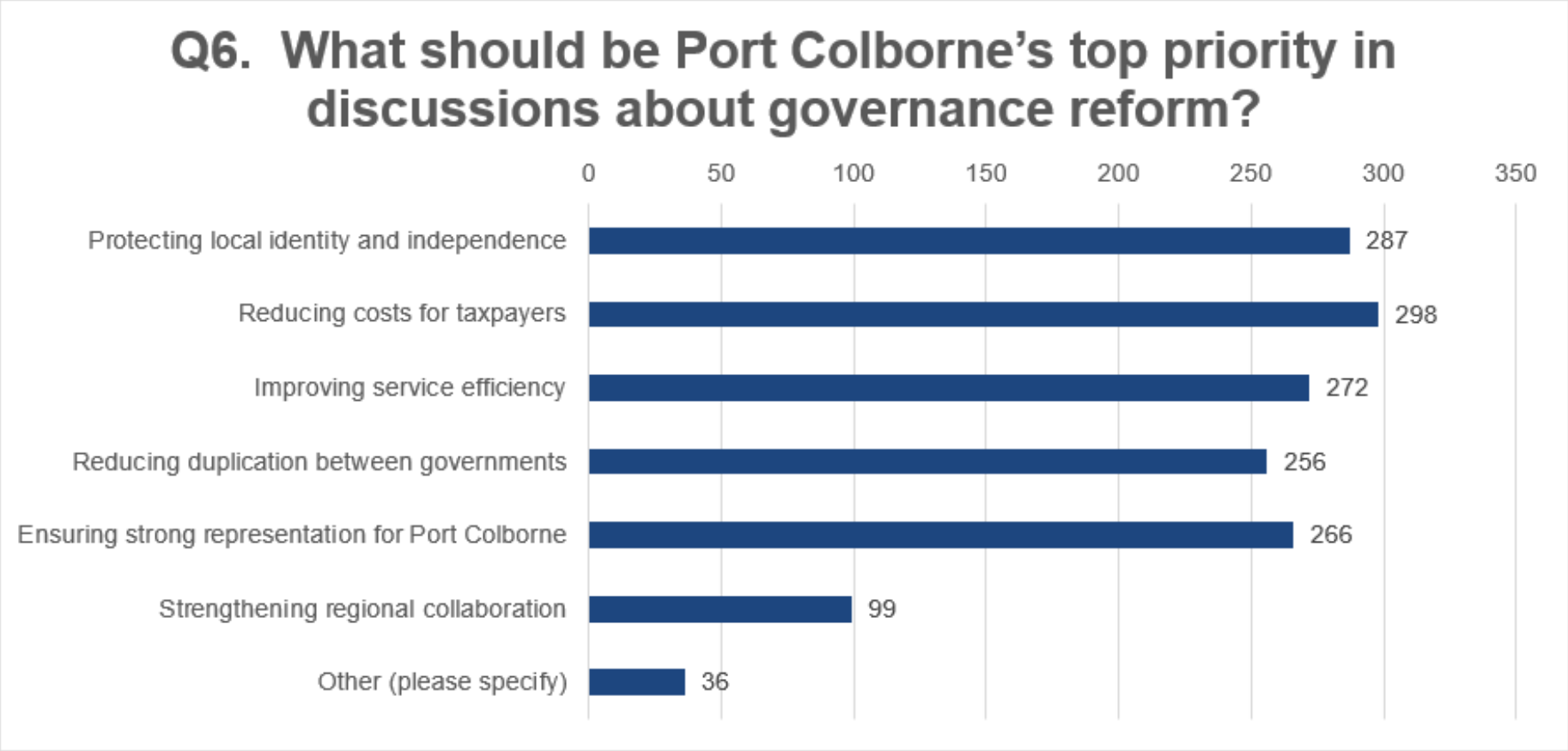
**Q5. Which of the following approaches should be explored to improve how municipalities work together in Niagara?**



**SELECT ALL THAT APPLY**

**75% of respondents were supportive of reducing duplication between municipalities and Niagara Region.**

# Port Colborne's Top Priority



**SELECT ALL THAT APPLY**

**74% of respondents were in favour of reducing costs for taxpayers, as a top priority.**

**71% were in favour of protecting local identity and independence, as a top priority.**

# What should be Port Colborne's top priority if governance changes occur?

Use a sticker to vote for your top 3 preferences

Reducing costs for taxpayers	Improving efficiency	Reducing duplication	Ensuring strong local representation	Strengthening collaboration across Niagara	Other ideas (write on a sticky note)



# Concerns about Potential Governance Changes

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## Loss of Local Voice and Representation

Strong concern that Port Colborne will have less influence in decision-making, particularly within larger or centralized models.

## Loss of Local Identity and Community Character

Fear that amalgamation or restructuring would erode Port Colborne's unique identity, history, and small-town feel.

## Increased Costs and Taxes; No Proven Savings

Concern that governance changes – especially amalgamation – would lead to higher taxes, water rates, and overall costs. Skepticism that amalgamation would deliver financial benefits, with many citing past examples where costs increased.

## Marginalization of Smaller Municipalities

Concern that larger cities (e.g., St. Catharines, Niagara Falls) would dominate decisions and resources.



# Concerns about Potential Governance Changes

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## Loss or Reduction of Services

Fear that local services (especially healthcare, transit, and community services) would be reduced or relocated.

## Lack of Transparency and Public Consultation

Concerns that decisions are being made without clear plans, sufficient data, or meaningful public input.

## Governance and Democratic Concerns

Issues raised about unelected positions, weighted voting, and reduced democratic representation.

## Service Inefficiencies and Bureaucracy

Frustration with existing duplication and inefficiencies, with concern that changes may not resolve these issues.

# Recap: Key Findings

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- 1. Opposition to amalgamation**
- 2. Local representation matters**
- 3. No clear business case**
- 4. Concerns about duplication and efficiency**
- 5. Cost pressures seen as regional issues**
- 6. Preference for alternative solutions**
- 7. Equity and identity concerns**
- 8. Support for governance reform**

# A Solution to Explore

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## City-Owned Municipal Service Corporation

- Recommending further research
- Could be used to own and operate all water and wastewater infrastructure in Port Colborne, which may include assets currently operated by Niagara Region located within the Port Colborne boundary

**Goals: Reduce duplication;  
lower and stabilize water and  
wastewater rates.**

# What is a Municipal Service Corporation?

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## City-Owned Municipal Service Corporations

- Separate, municipally owned corporation created to deliver specific public services or manage infrastructure.
- Operates like a business, but it's publicly owned.

# Addresses Key Community Concerns

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**Would allow the City to maintain local control and ownership, while directly addressing key concerns raised by community:**

- Reducing duplication
- Stabilizing and lowering water and wastewater rates
- Improving service coordination by centralizing under one organization
- Enhancing overall efficiency

# Past Exploration of Municipal Service Corporations

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**City has been formally exploring this option since February 2025**

- As a way to fund, construct and maintain public ownership over the water and wastewater infrastructure serving the East Side Employment Lands
- Previous public engagement “Government Business Enterprise”
- **Broader governance discussions have resulted in evolving this thought to expand scope and include a larger city-wide model.**

# What Are The Recommendations Today?

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1. Direction to begin formal engagement with the **province** and **regulatory** bodies to advance a possible City-owned Municipal Service corporation to assume ownership and operation of **all water and wastewater infrastructure** in Port Colborne, which **may** include assets currently operated by **Niagara Region** located within the Port Colborne boundary

# What Are The Recommendations Today?

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2. Direction to submit a formal **Expression of Interest** to the Province of Ontario, confirming the City's interest in exploring and potentially pursuing the establishment of a City-owned Municipal Service Corporation.

# What Are The Recommendations Today?

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3. Direction to prepare a **comprehensive business case** for establishment of a City-owned Municipal Service Corporation, including:

- Financial analysis
- Governance structure
- Legal and regulatory considerations
- Human resources and labour relations impacts
- Service delivery models
- Risk assessment
- Implementation requirements

# What Are The Recommendations Today?

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4. Direction to explore the **potential transfer of ownership of roadway** and related infrastructure **currently owned by Niagara Region** within the Port Colborne boundary to the City, in the event that a City-owned Municipal Service Corporation including Regional water and wastewater infrastructure proceeds

# What Are The Recommendations Today?

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5. In the event the potential transfer of ownership of water and wastewater infrastructure from Niagara Region to the City proceeds, direction to prepare a **comprehensive business case** outlining the integration of **roadway** and related infrastructure into ongoing City operations

# What Are The Recommendations Today?

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6. Direction to coordinate with Niagara Region to request their support of the City's efforts to determine the feasibility of establishing a City-owned MSC, including, but not limited to, providing access to:

- Information related to the water and wastewater system
- Asset management reports
- Relevant data
- Historical operating and maintenance records
- Facility access to undertake inspections of the infrastructure

# What Are The Recommendations Today?

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7. Direction for Mayor Steele to bring forward the following motion at Niagara Regional Council, as soon as possible:

That Regional Council direct its Chief Administrative Officer to support the City of Port Colborne's efforts to determine the feasibility of establishing a City-owned MSC, including, but not limited to, providing the City of Port Colborne and its consultants with access to information related to the water and wastewater system, such as asset management reports, relevant data, historical operating and maintenance records, and access to facilities to enable the City to undertake inspections of the infrastructure

# What Are The Recommendations Today?

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8. Direction to develop and implement a **communications and engagement plan** to support resident understanding of a City-owned MSC, including its purpose, potential benefits, and implications for local service delivery, as well as the potential transfer of Regional infrastructure to the City of Port Colborne

# What Are The Recommendations Today?

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9. Direction to **submit comments** to the Province about the proposed changes to legislation regarding a provincially appointed “**Strong Chair**” and **weighted voting** at Niagara Region. Comments should be consistent with shared messaging from local area municipalities and previous joint correspondence.