



**PORT COLBORNE**

**Subject: Future of Healthcare in Port Colborne: Mid-Point Public Engagement Results**

**To: Council**

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

Report Number: 2025-71

Meeting Date: March 25, 2025

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**Recommendation:**

That Chief Administrative Officer Report 2025-71 be received; and

That Council establish a Healthcare Advisory Committee to ensure residents have adequate access to, and knowledge of, healthcare services in the City of Port Colborne; and

That Council approve the Healthcare Advisory Committee Terms of Reference, attached as Appendix B; and

That Council direct the Healthcare Advisory Committee to propose a draft Healthcare Services Strategy by the end of 2025; and

That Council approve the motion regarding Provincial Healthcare Advocacy as outlined in the letter, attached hereto as Appendix C; and

That Council direct staff to forward the petition regarding the Port Colborne Hospital and Urgent Care Centre received at the March 11, 2025 Council meeting to the Ontario Minister of Health.

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**Purpose:**

This report presents Council with a comprehensive summary of public engagement activities and feedback gathered between January 29 and March 10, 2025, regarding the future of healthcare in Port Colborne.

It also recommends the establishment of a Healthcare Advisory Committee, provides a suggested Terms of Reference for the Committee, and outlines some initial suggestions for work the Committee could undertake, including conducting a more comprehensive

review of the feedback collected during the City's healthcare public engagement campaign to date, suggesting any additional public engagement efforts, and recommending the most appropriate next steps for the proposal from Lockview Medical Group that involves expanding into the empty space inside Niagara Health's Port Colborne site.

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### **Background:**

On December 3, 2024, Council considered Report 2024-255 regarding the Port Colborne hospital, including a request from Niagara Health for a \$6.2-million local share contribution to the South Niagara Hospital and a proposal from the Lockview Medical Group to expand primary care services in Port Colborne. At that meeting, Council requested that staff bring back a comprehensive public engagement plan to gather feedback from the community regarding the primary care proposal, the local share contribution, and the future of the Niagara Health site in Port Colborne.

On January 28, 2025, Council considered report 2025-19 regarding the proposed community engagement plan aimed at gathering this important feedback. At that meeting, Council requested that staff provide a mid-point update on results gathered to date at the March 25, 2025 Council meeting. This report provides a summary of the engagement activities and feedback received from the public between January 29 and March 10, 2025.

Overall, the engagement plan aimed to gather feedback from the community through various in-person and virtual channels. It sought input from the community about the future of healthcare in Port Colborne, focusing on key issues such as the expected closure of the Urgent Care Centre, the future use of Niagara Health's Port Colborne site after Niagara Health leaves, potentially providing funding to Niagara Health to support the build of the new South Niagara Hospital, and the proposal from Lockview Medical Group to expand primary care services in Port Colborne.

The engagement campaign included 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. The plan included:

1. Online survey
2. Paper survey
3. In-person open houses
4. In-person town hall
5. Virtual town hall
6. Pop-up engagement opportunities
7. Meetings with various City committees and working groups

The detailed results and findings from each of these activities 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 will be posted on [www.portcolborne.ca/healthcare](http://www.portcolborne.ca/healthcare) (for surveys received between January 29 and March 10, 2025).

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## **Discussion:**

Public engagement activities related to the future of healthcare in Port Colborne launched on January 29, 2025.

Quick stats about the engagement activities to date:

- 1,863 people completed the survey (1,612 online and 251 on paper – responses received between January 29 and March 10, 2025)
  - 11,271 open-field comments to analyze and categorize
  - Average time to complete the survey: 16 minutes (online survey)
  - Estimated completion rate: 64% (online survey) – this is the number of people who started and finished the survey. Long surveys with more than 15 questions typically have a completion rate of 40-42%
- 87 people attended the in-person open houses
  - 58 people attended the in-person town hall, while 38 tuned into the livestream
  - 22 people joined the virtual town hall, while 4 watched the recording on YouTube

Additionally, three meetings with City committees and working groups are scheduled for March and April (Seniors Advisory Committee, Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee, Social Determinants of Health Advisory Committee)

The survey currently remains open, with a proposed deadline of April 30, 2025.

Detailed results from the surveys and a summary of feedback collected at the town halls and open houses is available in Appendix A of this report.

Overall, participants reported that the closure of the Urgent Care Centre is a major issue for them, with 84% of respondents believing a 24-hour facility is necessary. Many residents have used the centre in the past year and are concerned about travel difficulties, long wait times at other hospitals, and the impact on vulnerable populations.

Additionally, while the proposed \$6.2-million contribution to Niagara Health for the South Niagara Hospital is largely opposed, some respondents may support making the contribution if urgent care centres in Port Colborne and Fort Erie remain open. There is also a strong demand for more family doctors, as only half of respondents have a family doctor in Port Colborne, and nearly half must travel elsewhere for primary care. Long wait times for appointments further exacerbate frustrations.

The community strongly supports expanding healthcare services locally, including more walk-in clinics, diagnostic imaging, and urgent care. The Lockview Medical Group proposal is seen as a potential benefit by 46% of respondents, with supporters citing improved local healthcare access, job creation, and economic growth. However, concerns remain about the lack of clear information regarding the project.

A proposed housing development with a medical centre at the Niagara Health Port Colborne site received 86% support, though respondents questioned infrastructure capacity and the affordability of housing. Meanwhile, 56% of respondents support the City pursuing a primary care facility at another location, provided it does not impact taxpayers. Lastly, 74% support establishing a Healthcare Advisory Committee to ensure diverse community voices are heard and promote transparency in decision-making.

As noted, staff recommend Council establish such a committee and have included a proposed Terms of Reference for the Committee, attached as Appendix B to this report. Staff recommend that Council direct the Healthcare Advisory Committee to propose a draft Healthcare Services Strategy by the end of 2025. The strategy should include, but not be limited to, all components noted in the Terms of Reference. For clarity, this includes the further consideration of feedback collected as part of ongoing public engagement regarding the future of healthcare in Port Colborne; making a recommendation to Council regarding what, if any, additional public engagement activities should be pursued; and consideration and recommendation to Council regarding the most appropriate next steps for the proposal from Lockview Medical Group. The Committee would not be tasked with providing recommendations regarding the future of the Niagara Health's Port Colborne Site, as decisions related to the property itself may be best considered alongside other adjacent properties on the waterfront, including the Sugarloaf Marina and Grain Terminal, both of which the public has recently been invited to provide their feedback on.

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### **Internal Consultations:**

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 in Port Colborne, develop a draft terms of reference for a new Healthcare Advisory Committee, and provide suggestions on the best way to move the issue of healthcare forward in the best interest of the community.

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### **Financial Implications:**

This report is focused primarily on reporting results from the public engagement activities related to expanding primary care in Port Colborne, the future of Niagara Health's Port Colborne site, and the local share contribution towards the new South Niagara Hospital. All costs related to the public engagement activities are captured in the 2025 operating budget.

The establishment of the Healthcare Advisory Committee and any related costs that may develop could be funded from reserves (potential reserves include the contingency fund or the subject matter expert reserve).

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### **Public Engagement:**

This report provides a detailed summary of an ongoing public engagement campaign aimed at gathering feedback from residents about the future of healthcare in Port Colborne. It covers the period of January 29 – March 10, 2025 and is meant as a mid-point check-in opportunity to Council and the public to receive results gathered to date.

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### **Strategic Plan Alignment:**

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillar(s) of the strategic plan:

- Welcoming, Livable, Healthy Community
  - Economic Prosperity
  - Increased Housing Options
  - Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure
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## **Conclusion:**

The feedback gathered through the City's healthcare public engagement efforts to date underscores the community's concerns and priorities regarding the future of healthcare in Port Colborne.

Residents have expressed strong support for maintaining access to urgent care, expanding primary care services, and ensuring that healthcare facilities remain available within Port Colborne. The responses indicate a clear preference for a local healthcare strategy that prioritizes accessibility, sustainability, and transparency.

Given these findings, the establishment of a Healthcare Advisory Committee would provide a structured approach to addressing these concerns, ensuring that residents' voices continue to shape the future of healthcare in Port Colborne. The Committee will play a vital role in reviewing public input, assessing potential healthcare developments, and advising Council on next steps, particularly regarding the Lockview Medical Group proposal and the future use of the Niagara Health site.

As the public engagement campaign continues, further analysis of community feedback will help refine the City's approach. By advocating for provincial healthcare funding and working collaboratively with stakeholders, Port Colborne can pursue solutions that best serve the needs of its growing and aging population. The City remains committed to engaging residents, supporting evidence-based decision-making, and ensuring that Port Colborne's healthcare landscape evolves to meet the needs of its people now and into the future.

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## **Appendices:**

- a. Mid-Point Public Engagement Results Report
- b. Healthcare Advisory Committee Terms of Reference
- c. Provincial Healthcare Advocacy Letter/Motion
- d. Mid-Point Public Engagement Results Presentation

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.