

March 27, 2026

CL 6-2026, March 27, 2026

COTW 1-2026, February 26, 2026

Correspondence Item COTW-C 1-2026, March 26, 2026

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Correspondence from Regional Chair Bob Gale respecting Municipal Governance Reform

Correspondence Item COTW-C 1-2026

Regional Council, at its meeting held on March 27, 2026, passed the following motion:

That Correspondence Item COTW-C 1-2026, being correspondence from Regional Chair Gale respecting Municipal Governance Reform **BE RECEIVED**; and

Whereas Regional Chair Gale has confirmed publicly that he has not engaged in any discussion with or received any directive from the Premier of Ontario or the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing regarding a governance review in Niagara or potential municipal amalgamations;

Whereas there has been no data, business case or specific information presented that would confirm any anticipated cost savings, efficiencies, enhanced services, or improved outcomes for the residents of Niagara as a result of any proposed governance changes;

Whereas significant decisions on local governance that will have a multi-generational impact and should be informed by comprehensive public consultation with the Niagara communities;

Whereas Premier Doug Ford has publicly reiterated on February 25, 2026, that “if it's going to go [governance changes], then it has to be from Niagara by Niagara. It has to have approvals from the majority of mayors, has to have approval for majority of the elected officials.”, and further that, “And hopefully 70- 80% of the population agree.”, which implies the necessity for public consultation and support on any proposed governance changes.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

1. That a governance review of Niagara **BE INITIATED** to address areas of duplication and improve service efficiency based on data, a business case with financial analysis and public consultation, including local area municipalities, commencing this term of Council;
2. That the Chief Administrative Officer **BE DIRECTED** to:
 - a) Meet with the Local Area Municipality Chief Administrative Officers as soon as possible regarding next steps for the governance and services review, including the potential for hiring outside assistance, and report back to Council no later than the next Regular Council meeting;
 - b) Establish with the Local Area Municipality CAO's the scope of work to be undertaken in connection with the governance and services review; and
 - c) Cooperate fully with the Local Area Municipality CAO's and share Regional data as may be requested by them and anyone engaged to assist in the governance and services review;
3. That this resolution and amendment **BE FORWARDED** to the Premier and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Local Area Municipalities and the local MPPs.

A copy of Correspondence Item COTW-C 1-2026 is enclosed for your reference.

Yours truly,



Ann-Marie Norio
Regional Clerk
:kl

CLK-C 2026-035

Distribution List

Premier of Ontario
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Local Area Municipalities
Local Area MPPs



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COTW-C 1-2026

February 19, 2026

Dear Niagara Region Mayors,

Enclosed, please find a letter that I have submitted to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in my role as Regional Chair, outlining the urgent need for municipal governance reform here in Niagara. This letter highlights the ongoing issues Niagara's fragmented, outdated and unwieldy governance structure continues to cause, including unsustainable tax increases that hurt residents and threaten the loss of jobs and investment, delayed decision making and a lack of coordination on priorities like transit, housing service delivery and economic development.

This letter makes clear the urgent need for change, but it also makes clear that any changes must be locally informed and supported here in Niagara. Based on previous consultations with many of you, and previous reports, I am deeply contemplating a 4-city or a 1-city model to maximize efficiencies and benefits to the communities we serve.

To that end, I am writing to you all to request your input and co-operation as we review potential governance changes to address the challenges our region faces. The changes under consideration should include but not be limited to a reduction in the number of municipal elected officials in the region - currently 126, which is more than the number of MPPs in the entire provincial legislature - as well as a potential municipal restructuring, including consideration of municipal amalgamations, that streamlines the governance process, reduces the size of government and brings taxpayers better value for money.

I welcome any written comments you wish to share with me. I recognize that there will be a range of views on the best path forward and I am committed to ensuring that Niagara's voice is clear, constructive and focused on better outcomes for our residents and businesses. To support swift consideration and implementation of potential changes, I will be submitting initial recommendations to the minister no later than the first week of March. **Please ensure you have communicated your feedback to me no later than Tuesday, March 3, 2026.**

The goal of these changes is simple: To adopt an outcome that is locally informed, that protects taxpayers and their hard-earned money, and that provides residents of Niagara with the best possible level of municipal services. Thank you to each and every one of you for the passion you show for your communities.

Sincerely,

Bob Gale
Chair, Regional Municipality of Niagara



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February 19, 2026

The Honourable Rob Flack
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Government of Ontario
Delivered via email: minister.mah@ontario.ca
CC: Robert.Dodd@ontario.ca Robert Dodd, Chief of Staff to Minister Flack

Re: Regional Governance in Niagara

Dear Minister Flack,

Over the past several months, Niagara Region has been engaged in an increasingly difficult budget process that has laid bare the failings of our municipal governance structure. Throughout our deliberations and public reporting, several patterns have emerged that, taken together, raise serious concerns regarding waste, abuse and a culture of casualness with taxpayer dollars. These concerns are inconsistent with the expectations of both municipal taxpayers and the provincial government, and are made all the more serious by the current economically precarious environment. These patterns are exacerbated by an outdated and unwieldy municipal structure, with 126 elected officials at the municipal level in Niagara - more than the entire provincial legislature at Queen's Park.

This governance structure has resulted in a decision-making process that has led to successive tax increases of roughly 7%, 9.6%, and 6.3% over the past three years, driving the regional tax levy up by almost 25% over a single Council term. This is an egregious affront to Niagara taxpayers and is not sustainable. On top of that, the Region is carrying a deferred capital backlog in the order of \$2.7 billion, meaning Council has been pushing core infrastructure costs into the future, where they will land on taxpayers' backs with even higher tax hikes, more debt, or both if nothing changes.

In this context, Council's recent decision to delay final approval of the 2026 operating budget pending a detailed Chair's review is not a procedural footnote; it is a signal that the system, as currently structured, is no longer capable of delivering the level of fiscal discipline and administrative efficiency that the moment requires. Moreover, this dysfunction threatens to undermine the provincial government's ambitious agenda for Niagara, including its Destination Niagara strategy, which was announced last December by Premier Ford, as well as its ongoing work to build infrastructure and attract jobs and new investments to the region.

Accordingly, I would like to inform you that as Regional Chair, I will be initiating a process of consultation and review with local mayors to address these serious concerns. Specifically, I will be seeking their advice and input on reforms that are reflective and informed by local considerations, that provide taxpayers with better value and that support economic growth in Niagara. These include a reduction in the number of municipal Councillors and a municipal restructuring in the Region, including potential amalgamations.

This process would:

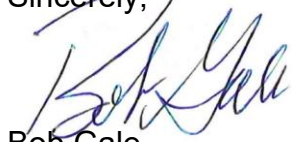
- Send a strong signal that Niagara is prepared to confront waste, abuse, and the cultures that allow them at a structural level, not just case by case;
- Create an opportunity to rationalize overlapping functions, reduce administrative duplication and bring large-ticket spending decisions into clearer focus for taxpayers; and,
- Align Niagara's governance with the province's broader objectives on housing delivery, infrastructure resilience, investment attraction, job creation and prudent fiscal management.

My goal, working closely with local mayors and communities, will be to propose changes that will also materially support the province's priorities on housing, transit and tourism. A rationalized structure would also enable a truly regional transit network, integrating local routes, inter-municipal services and GO Transit connections, so that new housing and key tourism nodes are supported by reliable, connected transit instead of being constrained by fragmented decision-making and competing local priorities. Niagara's residents are being asked to absorb higher costs of living, rising interest rates and significant uncertainty. They are entitled to a municipal governance structure that is lean, accountable and demonstrably serious about stewarding their tax dollars. The status quo has had many chances to prove itself. The evidence now points strongly toward the need for change.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss this review and to assist in next steps.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Bob Gale

Regional Chair, Niagara Region