

March 4, 2026

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

Re: Regional Governance in Niagara

Dear Minister Flack,

Following my earlier correspondence on options for improving governance in the Niagara Region, I received considerable feedback from regional councillors, local councils and residents about both the process and the substance of that discussion.

While I heard criticism with the initial lack of advance consultation, it was widely acknowledged that the current structure of 126 municipally elected officials across 12 municipalities and 31 members at Regional Council is not as lean, efficient or affordable as it should be.

In addition to many phone calls, emails, meetings, and letters (including the letter received today from mayors of the lower-tier municipalities), I also held a special regional meeting on February 26th. Throughout this process I heard from the public, regional councillors and mayors. They:

- Agreed that we must reduce duplication and improve coordination and shared services, rather than defend the status quo.
- Expressed support for reducing the overall number of elected officials at both tiers.
- Raised weighted voting at the regional table as a fair way to reflect population differences while preserving a voice for every municipality.

I have also heard from several major private-sector employers, representing more than 12,000 employees across Niagara, who have written in support of streamlined, more decisive local governance.

In light of these discussions and consultations, I propose the following made-in-Niagara option, effective at the start of the next municipal term in fall 2026:

1. Regional Council composition

That Regional Council be composed of the 12 municipal mayors plus a Regional Chair, directly addressing concerns that the current body is too large to operate efficiently while maintaining a clear voice for every municipality.

2. Weighted voting based on population

That each mayor's vote at Regional Council be weighted according to population in increments of 15,000 residents (e.g., a municipality of 100,000 residents would have six votes; a municipality of 6,000 residents would have one vote), reflecting both representation by population and municipal diversity.

3. Rationalized local council sizes

That, beginning in the same term:

- St. Catharines will have 12 municipal councillors plus the mayor,
- Niagara Falls will have 8 municipal councillors plus the mayor;
- Welland, Niagara-on-Lake, Thorold, Pelham, West Lincoln, Grimsby, Lincoln, Port Colborne Fort Erie will each have 6 municipal councillors plus the mayor,
- Wainfleet will have 4 municipal councillors plus the mayor.

This delivers a clear and consistent reduction in council size across Niagara.

4. Mandated exploration of shared services and efficiencies

That you consider assigning a commissioner, or similar, after the municipal election to explore shared services and other efficiency measures, building on the many ideas raised by councillors and mayors.

This package reflects what we have heard: Niagara needs meaningful governance reform, smaller and more effective councils, and a more efficient regional decision-making table, while avoiding the disruption and risk of full amalgamation at this time. It preserves local identities and accountability, reduces the number of elected officials, and creates a Regional Council structure better able to respond to Niagara's fiscal and infrastructure challenges.

I believe this option strikes a pragmatic balance between fiscal responsibility, democratic representation and local autonomy, and will command broader support across Niagara than any immediate move to full amalgamation.

You will find that this recommendation, representing 74% of the population, is also supported by the majority of the region's mayors including:

- Mayor Siscoe of St. Catharines, pop. 136,803
- Mayor Diodati of Niagara Falls, pop. 94,415
- Mayor Campion, Welland pop. 55,750
- Mayor Easton of Lincoln, pop. 25,719
- Mayor Junkin, Pelham, pop. 18,192
- Lord Mayor Zalepa, Niagara-on-the-Lake, 19,088
- Mayor Grant, Wainfleet, pop. 6,887

I am grateful for the opportunity to provide this advice to the Minister.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Bob Gale
Regional Councillor
Niagara Region