

To: Budget Standing Committee
Cc: Senior Leadership Team
From: Brian York, Director
Date: October 18, 2019
Subject: Government Relations

Background

In 2019, St. Catharines City Council updated the Strategic Plan for the city to provide guidance and a methodology to both community and the corporation. Government at all levels remains one of the City's largest stakeholders and impactful sectors. St. Catharines has long enjoyed an enviable relationship with the provincial government having its former MPP working on behalf of the community for more than four decades.

With a significant change in provincial governance in 2018, the contract position of Government Relations Advisor (GR Advisor) was approved by Council to aid in the advancement of the City's strategic priorities in areas impacted by local, provincial, federal government programs, policies and legislation. Over the past 10 months, the position has assisted the corporation in cultivating vital relationships and has aided in the development of a government relations strategy that transcends and benefits all departments.

Position Details

Government relations activity is heavily contingent on environmental factors (i.e. government in office, policy directions, budgetary commitments) therefore, achieving success requires an approach that is fluid, focused on managing relationships and where timing and opportunity is seized upon. The GR Advisor role is constantly exploring methods of strengthening the City's partnerships with regional, provincial and federal governments to advance projects that align with the city's Strategic Plan. While government relations relies greatly on building and strengthening relationships with both elected and non-elected officials, there are measurable elements that can be tracked. They are outlined in the table attached as Appendix 1.

Relationship to Strategic Plan

The four pillars of our Strategic Plan are the collective vision of Council and city staff and serve to guide the municipality as it grows and experiences change. The role of the GR Advisor is to further the city's goals as they align with the priorities of the regional, provincial and federal governments.

The city's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) has created a strategic work plan that summarizes projects, actions and initiatives that contribute to each of the 11 newly stated objectives of the updated 2019 Strategic Plan. The role of the GR Advisor has the ability to support all 11 of the objectives and more specifically the following;

Economic Prosperity

- Continue to implement the Economic Development Strategy (2017-2022) with particular focus on investments, employment and partnerships to attract, retain, and grow the economy of the city.

Social Well-being

- Improve transportation and overall connectedness (all modes, including GO Rail, VIA Rail, and inter-municipal transit and active transportation), incorporate urban design guidelines and provide complete streets in city neighbourhoods.

Cultural Renaissance

- stable sustainable cultural support and funding
- addressing Heritage Preservation

The city further recognizes that a key component of supporting the execution of the strategic plan is the identification of external funding to help resource projects and initiatives. To that end, a project team has been assembled with a core mandate that includes identifying and applying to funding opportunities on a regular basis. A key component of the project team is the government relations advisor position. This dedicated resource is tasked with following up and maintaining meaningful relationships with key contacts at external organizations who manage the various funding portfolios.

Conclusion

We are currently in a time of uncertainty and change: government policy is becoming increasingly unpredictable. As an example, the current provincial government has made unprecedented expeditious changes to planning legislation. It is more important than ever to evaluate, prioritize, and communicate the community's voice to upper levels of government and aid senior leadership in communicating the city's strategic priorities and position to both elected and non-elected officials. Removing the government relations position and resource will not only put the work back on the desks of SLT and Council but could also inadvertently undo a year's worth of relationship-building with other levels of government. Another effort led primarily by the GR Advisor position was the preparation and coordination for the annual AMO conference (Appendix 2).

The GR Advisor role will continue to seek out meaningful ways to measure and monitor performance while taking into account the qualitative and quantitative elements of progress. In order to grow in influence, SLT maintains that we must present a clear and consistent approach to government relations – hence the request to fund the position for 2020.

Appendix 1

Action	Number of Occurrences
Meetings with Upper-Level Government Officials	
• Regional Official / Staff	8
• Provincial Official / Staff	16
• Federal Officials / Staff	10
• Upcoming / Pending remainder of 2019:	6
2019 Total / Pending	40
Submissions to provincial/federal consultations authored or directed to department	
• Primarily or Co-Authored:	3
• Directed to appropriate department for comment:	7
2019 Total	10
Conferences / Events / Roundtables, Attended or Provided Staff with Briefing Notes	
• AMO Coordination: See Appendix 2	
2019 Total	26
Reports, Memos, Research, Provided to Mayor / Council / SLT & Staff	
2019 Total	23
Collaborative Activities & Projects (Interdepartmental Cooperation, Intergovernmental Cooperation, Non-Government Cooperation)	
2019 Total	7
Identified or Co-Authored Funding Opportunities for the Corporation	
• \$120k in grant funding secured for EDTS programming	
2019 Total	2
New Contacts	
2019 Total	121

Please note the categories identified in the above table do not encompass all of the work the position has undertaken this year, only activities which can be meaningfully measured, and in many cases does not include numbers for the latter half of October, and the months of November and December.

Appendix 2

St. Catharines Participation at the AMO 2019 Conference

Over the past few years, a significant part of the annual AMO Conference is the opportunity for the Council and staff delegation to meet with various Ministers/Deputy Ministers and senior provincial staff. This year's effort was coordinated and led by the GR Advisor position. This involved working with SLT and all departments to discuss and prioritize challenges and opportunities in coordination with both the Mayor's and CAOs' offices. The position also worked closely with regional staff on areas of mutual interest to enhance the presentations to the province, and ensure messaging remained concise and consistent.

Coordination and consultations for the conference begin late spring/early summer and continue until the conference start in August, with follow-up taking place within a week of returning. Efforts include;

- Working with SLT and the Mayor's office to identify city priorities to take to provincial cabinet ministers.
- Working with the province to finalize meeting attendance and provide background information to provincial departments.
- Working with regional government relations officer to coordinate on issues of shared importance to ensure our message is consistent with the region, demonstrates cooperation and coordination within the region. St. Catharines was the only municipality to work with the region leading up to the conference.
- Provide the Mayor, Councillors and senior staff ministerial biographies, background notes, and articulated asks to take to meetings.
- Schedule meet ups for councillors and city staff ahead of provincial delegations to review materials and arrive at various meeting locations promptly.
- Attend meetings at AMO, take notes, make contacts, and be the point person at the city for follow up post-conference.
- Work with corporate communications and the Mayor's office to coordinate social media posts and a news release following the conference.
- Follow-up with ministerial staff in the week following AMO.
- Solicit feedback from councillors on ways to improve AMO experience for attendees from the city.