



Office of the Regional Chair | Jim Bradley

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November 27, 2023

Niagara Region Police Services Board
Attention: Jen Lawson, Board Chair
5700 Valley Way
Niagara Falls, ON L2E 1X8

Dear Chair Lawson,

RE: The Niagara Regional Police Service 2024 Budget

I trust this letter finds you well.

As the Regional Chair, I believe it is my duty to reiterate the concerns raised by my colleagues on Regional Council, as well as many constituents, regarding the budget presentation brought forward by the Niagara Region Police Services (NRPS) on November 23, 2023. While I am not writing this letter on behalf of Regional Council, I believe that the concerns outlined here are shared by many of my colleagues.

Firstly, I want to acknowledge the significant efforts put forth by the NRPS in ensuring the safety and security of our community. The concerns outlined in this letter, and shared during the November 23 meeting, are not intended to reflect on the dedicated service of the individuals who serve our community.

However, as elected officials we are duty-bound to be good stewards of public resources, ensuring that our budget balances affordability with the need to provide adequate service in all of our diverse service areas. I am sure you would agree that it is crucial for Regional Councillors to engage in a thorough examination of *all* the complex components of the Region's overall budget, including the NRPS. This exercise of examination is especially important in light of the exceptionally challenging economic circumstances facing our residents and businesses.

Concern #1: Expansion of non-essential FTEs

One of the primary concerns being raised about the NRPS budget is the inclusion of over 40 new FTEs and their potential impact on the affordability for the public. In a year where many individuals and businesses are grappling with financial uncertainties and historic rates of inflation, I would suggest that it is paramount we exercise responsible fiscal restraint. As guardians of the public purse, we must ensure that any increase in the budget is not only justifiable, but absolutely essential to ensure the safety and well-being of our residents.

To be frank, based on the information provided in the November 23 presentation, it is my assessment that many of the requested new FTEs do not appear to be essential to provide adequate police service

to Niagara. The rationale shared with Council does not make the case that these positions are vital to the continued safety of the residents of Niagara.

Set aside the new officers being requested, the 2024 NRPS budget includes 12 civilian positions that would require an expenditure of over \$1.5 million a year. As a comparison, the Niagara Region provides numerous essential and mandated services in areas such as EMS, homelessness, safe drinking water, long-term care and public health. While I can assure you there are significant needs in every corner of the organization for more personnel, the 2024 budget actual realizes an overall *reduction* in our FTE count. This was accomplished through both an innovative use of resources as well as the realization that we need to make some sacrifices to achieve the most affordable budget possible.

To this end, I encourage the Board to consider the exploration of opportunities for shared services with the professional corporate services offer by the Niagara Region. Collaborative efforts can lead to significant cost savings and operational efficiencies which will be passed on to the taxpayer. The current economic climate demands innovative solutions, and shared services can be a powerful tool in stretching our resources to meet the needs of our growing community. Examples of where shared services with the Region may be successful include your request for an IT Equipment Support Technician, two Enterprise Project Coordinators, a visual content creator and a communications training coordinator.

Concern #2: Accounting Practices Regarding Gapping and Leap Year Funding

A second area of potential savings is in regard to how the NRPS plans to fund the two additional working days in 2024, as well as its policies regarding salary gapping. Both of these items are exercises in accounting rather than the provision of adequate policing and they could result in savings of \$1 million combined.

In specific regard to the additional working days next year, this pressure is being felt by every business line under the control of the Niagara Region and is not unique to the police. It appears the NRPS approach on this issue is out of step with how this financial pressure is being managed by the Region and its other ABCs. I would encourage the NRPS to consider adopting a similar solution to what is being realized elsewhere to ensure a consistent approach across the Region. I am aware there is a NRPS reserve contingency fund of over \$1 million that could be allocated to offset this pressure – use of these funds would be aligned with how other areas of the Region are addressing the cost of additional working days.

Finally, I would respectfully suggest that financial management staff from both of our organizations meet in order to gain a better understanding of how these adjustments to budget planning could result in savings for Niagara's taxpayers.

Closing

I urge the Police Services Board to carefully reassess their 2024 budget, examining each new area of spending through the lens of whether or not it is absolutely essential for the provision of adequate policing. For added context, it is my understanding the NRPS is the *only* area of the Region's overall budget that is bringing forward such an increase directly related to FTEs that far outpaces the rate of inflation.

I appreciate the commitment of the NRPS to our community and the challenges they face in maintaining public safety. However, in the interest of the financial well-being of our residents, I strongly recommend a thorough review of the budget, with a focus on affordability, fiscal responsibility, and innovative approaches to maximize our resources.


It is essential that we prioritize expenditures on items that are absolutely crucial to maintaining public safety. We must be diligent in our approach to guarantee that every dollar allocated is utilized efficiently and effectively.

The Region has taken every necessary step in an effort to limit our 2024 budget increase to only cover those costs outside of our control (global inflation and Bill 23). I only ask the police take a second look at the budget to ensure it does not include unnecessary increases; I respectfully request that the Police Services Board take whatever steps that are needed to avoid putting pressure on thousands of homes and business owners who are already struggling significantly.

I look forward to the continued collaboration between the Niagara Region and the Niagara Region Police Services Board to address these concerns and ensure the best interests of our community are met.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim Bradley". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Jim Bradley, Regional Chair
Niagara Region