

EMBRACING GROWTH



Mark Mitanis

A new strategic plan that will guide priority-setting and decision-making in the **City of Port Colborne** over the next three years includes goals to attract business investment and to increase affordable housing in the growing **Niagara Region** community.

At its meeting on May 25, Port Colborne city council unanimously adopted the [2020-2023 Strategic Plan](#). The plan identifies six community and corporate pillars that are supported by specific action items to achieve the city's vision of a "vibrant waterfront community embracing growth for future generations." The city's mission statement is "to provide an exceptional small-town experience in a big way."

Growth projections made by the Regional Municipality of Niagara included within the 2014 Regional Policy Plan indicate that the total population of Port Colborne is expected to grow from 19,300 people in 2006 to 24,100 people in 2031. But City of Port Colborne strategic initiatives manager **Gary Long** said that the city has generally had to "throw [population growth projections] out the window" as they are constantly

being updated in step with the rapidly changing demographic and housing realities of the region.

"We did a development charges background study a couple of years ago, and at the time they were projecting about 45 or 50 new housing units every year," Long told *NRU*. "Right now, based on development proposals that we're working on, that we're expecting, and that we have in the queue, we're dealing with [approximately] 1,300 to 1,500 new housing units to come online over the next two to three years. We certainly see a lot more growth and population growth over the next 10 years."

Long added that the city is expecting to welcome 5,000 to 10,000 new people between now and 2041, but he thinks that figure will be exceeded in the next few years alone.

Port Colborne mayor **Bill Steele** said the city is well-positioned to accommodate new growth, and is well-connected to nearby communities like Welland and Fort Erie via Highways 140 and 3. Steele said the city is on developers' radar for housing projects of all types, including affordable housing.

One of the goals of the strategic plan is the creation of an affordable housing strategy and action plan, and city staff are already finalizing a request

for proposals to retain a consultant who will begin work on the strategy. One in four residents in Port Colborne are at risk of homelessness because over 30 per cent of their net income is spent on housing, and half of those at risk of homelessness are over the age of 55.

"There's already a lot of data and evidence that indicates that there's a shortage of affordable housing units in Port Colborne, and right across the region," Long told *NRU*. "We don't want to duplicate [efforts] and spend resources on confirming what we already know. I think we're looking to create some solid options for the city

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Image showing an aerial view of the City of Port Colborne, and the mission and vision statements embedded within the city's 2020-2023 strategic plan. The city envisions itself as "a vibrant waterfront community embracing growth for future generations", and states its mission as being "to provide an exceptional small-town experience in a big way."

SOURCE: CITY OF PORT COLBORNE

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and for council to consider in terms of creating more affordable housing units—whether that be development charge exemptions, financial incentives, community improvement plan grants, and possibly, changes to our Official Plan and zoning by-laws.”

Steele said that the city, which is bisected by the Welland Canal and located on the Lake Erie waterfront, is looking to enhance its marine industry and to attract new business investment. Maritime commerce has always been a critical component of the city’s economy, and Steele said that will continue into the future.

“What we’re looking at as a community in our business development is how we can reestablish ourselves in the marine business, and [to] open us up to more shipping and more dockage, so that ships are coming to Port Colborne to load and unload their cargoes, as opposed to just sailing through the canal,” Steele told *NRU*.

Attracting new marine businesses will also help the trucking and rail industries, Steele said, which will be required to haul the products through the region.

“It does create jobs, so that when people want to settle

here, there’s a job waiting for them—as opposed to [Port Colborne] just being a bedroom community,” Steele told *NRU*.

There are a multitude of opportunities to redevelop canal-facing properties to add uses that aren’t necessarily related to marine commerce, Steele added. City staff are working with the **St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation (SLSMC)** to revitalize a property that is approximately 35 hectares in size at the northern end of the city along the Welland Canal which Steele said could accommodate a mix of land uses.

“We’re working with the SLSMC to move faster on that to redevelop, and it doesn’t have to be marine-related,”

Steele told *NRU*. “We’re hoping that we can convince the SLSMC to let that go to any type of commercial or industrial development.”

The city is also hoping that the **Hamilton-Oshawa Port Authority** will acquire industrial lands along the east side of the canal from the federal government for future marine-related businesses.

One of the actions referenced in the strategic plan is the city’s real estate project. Long said city staff have been developing an inventory of city-owned surplus properties and have been marketing those to prospective investors and developers.

“We’re really looking to maximize the value of city lands and looking at the highest and best use of those lands,” Long told *NRU*. “The city owns several acres of industrial land, and we’re working through some environmental studies to determine how much is buildable and how much is

environmentally protected. I think we are really providing an additional layer of resources and scrutiny to make sure that we’re positioning these lands for the marketplace, and then allowing the private sector to do what they do best. But right now, we’ve got some industrial land that we need to do some work on in terms of making it developable.”

Long said that the city’s real estate project also serves as a matchmaking service for private-sector developers to identify and acquire potential redevelopment sites. “We’re acting as sort of a matchmaker, putting private-sector interests together to build residential subdivisions and commercial developments, and putting folks together for industrial development as well,” Long told *NRU*.

Port Colborne is focusing on ensuring coexistence and integration between existing

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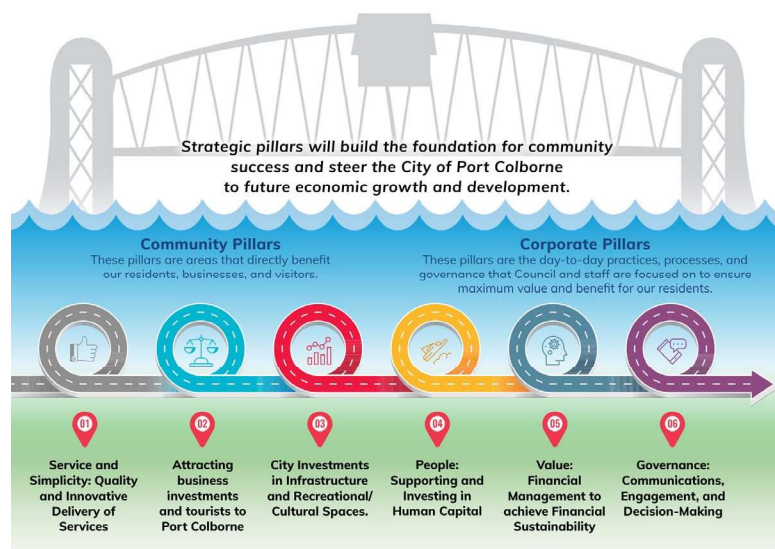


Image showing the six strategic pillars identified within the City of Port Colborne’s 2020-2023 Strategic Plan. The plan will be a guiding document to assist city council and staff in setting priorities, allocating resources, and making decisions for the remainder of the 2019-2022 council term and into the next. Each pillar is accompanied by a number of specific proposed action items, including the development of an affordable housing strategy and action plan, and a comprehensive review of community improvement plans.

SOURCE: CITY OF PORT COLBORNE

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and future industrial marine uses, residential uses, and recreational uses, Long told *NRU*.

“For probably 200 years, industry and residential and recreational uses have worked and coexisted in Port Colborne, and we’re confident that any partner, such as the Hamilton-Oshawa Port Authority, will take that into account,” Long told *NRU*. “They’ve certainly made this work in Hamilton, and we know from other

experiences and other port cities from around the world that industry, recreation, and residential can coexist.”

Steele said that through the strategic plan, its vision and mission statements, and its proposed actions, the city is trying to create an atmosphere for economic development, which will facilitate further population and job growth in Port Colborne.

“Does Port Colborne need to get from a little over 19,000

people to maybe 30,000 or 35,000 people? I think they do,” Steele told *NRU*. “I think that’s the number of people that can help sustain business here, and help with the tax base and move things forward.” 🌱

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The property is currently designated as Employment Areas, although the City is currently undertaking an MCR and is accepting formal requests to convert employment lands to allow for a mix of uses, of which the vendor is actively in the process of submitting a request. In addition to the current MCR, the vendor had previously filed a request through OPA231 and subsequently appealed the decision. This appeal is still ongoing, allowing the opportunity for conversion through multiple avenues.

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