



Many policies impacting the agri-food sector are established by provincial and federal governments. But there are still decisions being made at municipal levels that can support agriculture. Land use policies, taxation and development charges, financial support and community engagement are all opportunities for municipalities to support agricultural economic development in their communities. How will you support the agriculture industry in your municipality?

Response to NNFA questions submitted by Gary Burroughs

We, in Niagara-on-the-Lake, are very fortunate to live in an unusual kind of community - it's agricultural but it's urban. We have world class tender fruit and vegetable farms, vineyards, and wineries. We also have experienced growers who have been working their farms for generations. They bring their expertise and experience to a strong Agriculture Committee that supports Town Council. For example, they have been able to help provide sufficient water resources for most of our community - a water supply that is paid for and operated by growers.

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One of my five stated priorities, includes supporting our agriculture community and agri-businesses, including in the following areas:

- We have an excellent Agriculture Committee that advises Council but Council must support them on issues such as mapping of agricultural lands and water sources and working with other levels of government.
- We need to preserve the Green Belt and existing urban boundaries.
- Cannabis will be legal with Federal and Provincial laws governing growers, wholesalers, retailers and users. Local governments will also have a say. We need to determine our 'say'.

Another of my stated priorities relates to Tourism, which is an integral part of our community but we must balance ever increasing tourism with other needs. This includes the needs not only on our urban residents, but also the needs of our rural community. Specifically, we must have a coordinated plan, with the Town, Region and Province all working together, to not only promote tourism, but to manage the significant impact on traffic and parking and other issues, including the availability and suitability of our infrastructure for farm implements.

In addition to what is very briefly summarized in my priorities, I believe we can further support your industry in the following ways:

1. In the mapping of our water courses, the Region, and the Province continue to use maps that are inaccurate. For example, swales that have long disappeared, are still considered fish habitat and this has affects setbacks for new builds on farm property. The Town must lead in coordinating efforts with other levels of government to deal with this.
2. Tourism is the backbone of our Town, and Agri-tourism has grown significantly in the past few years. This helps to provide financial stability for the growers. The Town needs to allow farm operations to expand to respond to new farm business opportunities.
3. Phragmites is becoming an increasing challenge. Phragmites is particularly invasive in our water supply systems, blocking it in several areas. While plants are cut as often as possible and at a significant cost, this only stops the spreading of seeds by ducks, geese, and other wildlife, it does not kill the plant, which seems to expand each time that it is cut. There are effective sprays for killing phragmites, but our growers are very hesitant to use them. We need to address the phragmites situation in the following ways:
 - The Town should help to coordinate a program to spray and kill phragmites. The irrigation system currently is closed down each year in mid-September to allow drainage ditches to dry up. This provides an opportunity to spray and kill off the phragmites without any effect on water courses.
 - The Town must better educate urban and some rural residents to increase their awareness of the devastating effects of phragmites. It is everywhere in our community. Residents can cut it to halt the spread of seeds.
 - The Town needs to arrange for the safe disposal of the cut phragmites so that we don't just spread the plant and make matters worse.
4. Regarding the availability of natural gas in our rural areas, the Town was working with Enbridge to develop a system to convert biogas into usable natural gas, which could be returned to natural gas lines (as a credit). This could only work on larger farms with biogas operations and, obviously, use natural gas. I understand that the price of natural gas has dropped due to fracking and the program was dropped. In my experience, Enbridge is willing to work with the Town and, if gas availability is an issue, the Town should be at the table to ensure we meet growers needs.
5. Regarding the availability of high-speed internet in our rural areas, we contacted Bell Canada and asked them to share their plans for our community.

Not unexpectedly, their current plans for Niagara on the Lake are focused on higher density areas with a FTTP (fibre to the premises) solution. There already is FTTP in areas of Virgil and the Old Town, principally in new developments. Other urban areas, other than new developments, will be dealt with from 2022 to 2024.

They currently are looking at a WTTP (wireless to the premises) solution for the rural areas. They believe it provides an opportunity to use 3.5 MHz spectrum, where it is available. Depending on conditions, such as distance from the tower and interference from trees, this should increase speeds by up to 25 MBs. This fixed wireless technology has gone live in a number of communities, including Orangeville, with promising results. While the opportunity is still being assessed, it should cover a very high percentage of the rural

area between St Catharines and Niagara Falls. Current plans are to roll this out, starting in 2019 with completion in 2022.

Bell also mentioned that a lot depends on a Town Council that will help them get through the issues and deal with these opportunities.