

**November 18, 2022**

**Re: 2022 City of Hamilton Municipal Budgeting Process**

Dear Members of the General Issues Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide pre-budgetary comments as you begin deliberations on the 2023 City of Hamilton municipal budgeting process.

As President and CEO of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, one of Hamilton's oldest institutions at 177 years old, I have the privilege of speaking for our 1,000+ members that employ over 75,000 people in our community.

Throughout the past several years, the Chamber has been a lifeline for local businesses hosting over 50 webinars on pandemic response related subjects, conducting advocacy to all three levels of government based on the feedback of our members, and partnering with the City to operate the Hamilton COVID Concierge for Business support service, which has provided direct, one-on-one support to hundreds of Hamilton-area businesses.

Throughout 2022, public health circumstances have evolved into a more familiar and stable pattern that has allowed businesses to return to normal operations in nearly all sectors of our economy. With the return to workplaces and regular patterns of work, many businesses are keen to refocus on doing what they do best, and to best understand how to advocate for their interests, the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce undertook a membership consultation during Summer 2022.

**2022 Hamilton Chamber of Commerce Municipal Election Priorities**

Based on the feedback received through our membership consultation, we generated the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce's 2022 Municipal Election Priorities and distributed among all candidates during the election period. This document serves as an advocacy blueprint for our organization and membership that we will continue to advance over this Term of City Council to ensure that Hamilton is *Ready for Business*.

Our members have indicated several supportive actions that the new City Council ought to implement to ensure the short- and long-term success and viability of our diverse, local economy. The Chamber has compiled our findings into seven priority areas based on the feedback we received. These seven priority areas are: Leadership; Vision; Labour; Investment; Housing & Affordability; Transportation; and Climate Change. Contained within each are a suite of recommendations and supportive actions that will help to achieve Hamilton's economic goals and bolster its business community.

We have attached the Chamber's 2022 Municipal Election Priorities to this correspondence for ease of access, but will also detail a few key considerations for Council's attention.

## **Leadership & Vision**

Hamilton businesses, particularly small enterprises, have been saddled with a debt load that is threatening their survival. They want to see municipal leaders who will shape policies that support conditions for recovery, growth and investment. Mayor and Council need to be cognizant that, if the city isn't giving businesses value for their tax dollar, then they might take their business elsewhere.

Our members face increasing business taxes while receiving less services for their tax dollars. Paired with the rising cost of living and the impacts of inflation on our supply chain, our City must deliver more value for its local business taxpayer. This is the sentiment that our members have expressed, and it continues to create a stigma that deters new investment in our City.

Our members repeatedly communicate that economic growth continues to be bogged down by red tape at City Hall. Excessive regulation and unnecessary bureaucracy result in increased costs and administrative burdens on Hamilton's business community. Our members have reported they continue to have issues with timeliness around approvals of building permits, as well as the absence of a self-service tool to check on the status of building permits.

While Hamilton has seen improvements related to development fees, more work is required to make the municipality a more desirable place to operate a business rather than our neighbouring communities. Businesses eyeing Hamilton have identified development fees as one of several roadblocks to setting up shop here. Combined with the levels of bureaucracy at City Hall, it often leaves businesses looking at other GTHA communities in which to invest.

## **Labour & Investment**

Hamilton's business community also continues to have trouble in attracting and retaining talent. In fact, this is one of the most significant barriers to growth. The Mayor and Council need to attract the next generation of workers and entrepreneurs by making Hamilton a destination for jobseekers to live in and work in.

People in their 20s and 30s have different needs than people in their 50s and 60s, and it's that thinking that must drive forward thinking decisions at City Hall. The Mayor and Council must build community infrastructure that speaks to the generation they want to attract. Businesses need a diverse mix of staff to train along with experienced people to ensure the knowledge gap is filled. Council ought to work with the business community

and support the work of Economic Development to attract the next generation of talent to our community.

We must also collectively advocate for improvements to the immigration process as well as the recognition of international credentials to upper levels of government to respond to the chronic labour shortages we are currently experiencing. Hamilton must prioritize actions that the municipality can take to ensure a continuous supply of local quality labour. The Hamilton Chamber of Commerce believes City Council needs to continue its efforts in marketing the city as a welcoming community, and ensuring Hamilton is a place where entrepreneurs want to live, work and play.

## **Transportation**

Transportation needs across our City remain a major issue and need to be addressed and prioritized by the incoming Mayor and Council. We need to look at ways to improve our public transportation and transit network to benefit all residents of Hamilton. Public transportation to many places in the former municipalities is insufficient, and while improvements have been made, more work needs to be done to address frequency, schedules and routes to these areas of Hamilton.

Moreover, we must ensure that our major employment nodes and centres are receiving sufficient transit services to facilitate employee commuting to their places of work. Effective and reliable public transportation is as much of a public service as it is an economic driver that enables employers to recruit and retain talent. For many, the decision to live and work in a community is tied closely to their ability to get around, and namely, to and from their places of work.

Our public transportation infrastructure remains notably insufficient in many parts of Hamilton, particularly on those routes with heavy commercial vehicle traffic. The incoming Mayor and Council must work with our local business community to ensure priority roadway investments are being proactively made to protect the integrity of our existing road infrastructure and to plan our future network demands.

## **Housing & Affordability**

Ontario is in the midst of a housing crisis. Housing prices and rental prices continue to soar, and Hamilton is not immune to it. As of July 2022, the average price of a home in Ontario was \$831,473. Here in Hamilton, the average price of homes sold in July 2022 was \$793,062, a nearly 2% year over year increase. According to the Canadian Real Estate Association rent prices are skyrocketing, too, leaving many people having to choose between putting food on the table or heating their home.

The decision to work in a community is often largely tied to the ability to live in that community. In order to preserve our ability to attract and retain talent in Hamilton, we

must prioritize housing development of all types. We need more multi-unit residential developments and must ensure that we are building housing for people in all stages of their lives.

Hamilton will be facing significant change to its current approach to housing development approvals as we need to more than double the pace at which we are currently building housing to keep up with forecasted demand. The decision to focus future housing development through intensification will create opportunities and challenges that this Council must be prepared to address.

Moreover, inflation is creating significant hardships for many in our community, including our businesses. The impacts of the rising costs on materials, energy, rent, labour, transport, and debt servicing are taking a significant toll on many local businesses. These costs are reflected in the costs of goods and services we all rely on, and Hamilton City Council must champion policies and actions from upper levels of government to help address the deleterious impacts of rising inflation on our community and its economy.

## **Climate Change**

As one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gas emissions in the entire province, Hamilton's economy is subject to undergo significant transformation. As our traditional sectors decarbonize and we continue to attract new investment from clean tech and green economy entrepreneurs from around the world, the next Council must ensure it is actively working towards the advancement of the private-sector's climate-related goals.

The city is already on track to support and advance Hamilton's economic transition, but we must ensure we keep our foot on the battery-powered "gas pedal" to collectively secure Hamilton's fair share of public and private investment dollars that will enable our economy to thrive and potentially lead Ontario's transitional economy.

Our industrial bayfront holds incredible decarbonization potential, and the Hamilton Chamber is committed to pursuing investment and technological adoption to assist with the challenge at hand. Council must share this same desire to transition our economy to clean up our airways and waterways while preserving significant economic activity and employment for Hamiltonians.

## **Conclusion**

Once again, thank you to the General Issues Committee for the opportunity to provide comments today.

The Hamilton Chamber of Commerce looks forward to the conversations in the months ahead as the municipality plans financially for 2023. In light of the lingering impacts of

the pandemic, these budgetary decisions are more important than ever as we balance fiscal responsibility with progressive and ambitious policy making to improve our community for all Hamilton residents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "GDG". The letters are stylized and connected, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the signature.

Greg Dunnett  
President & CEO  
Hamilton Chamber of Commerce