

Tuesday, June 11, 2024

Dear Mayor Horwath and Councillors,

### **Stormwater Fee Financial Incentives Program**

The Hamilton Chamber of Commerce is Hamilton's oldest institution, and it is incumbent on our organization to raise concerns when Hamilton's business community is not properly consulted on decisions that will impact our members financial viability.

In our letter from last June 2023, the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce sought formal consultations and engagement with the business community to understand the impact of the Stormwater Rate Structure. The Hamilton Chamber of Commerce is again sounding the alarm that outreach to the business community has been inadequate.

Phase 2 of the Stormwater Fee implementation, consultation with business was minimal and engagement next to non-existent. A clear metric that highlights this deficiency is the mere 34 survey responses from the over 12,000 commercial, industrial, institutional and mixed-use properties impacted. Council would never accept such a low response rate, if so, few homeowners had been reached to provide input.

It is critical that businesses have information and an ability to plan for the stormwater fee structure change. Given the weak economy, high interest rates, lower households spending, businesses in Hamilton are struggling to maintain their financial health. Additional unplanned expenses at this time, could further impact our member's viability.

To address this omission, we request that part of the \$100,000 communication budget approved at GIC and before Council on Wednesday, be allocated to outreach and education efforts to the business community to help prepare our small and medium size businesses adjust to the new rate system.

Furthermore, we ask Council to reconsider the proposed credit program on greenhouse operations. Greenhouse operators are important food producers, who also make significant capital investments in their operations. Greenhouse producers who can demonstrate a stormwater management system redirecting water to their operations, should also be eligible for a 90% credit similar to that provided to properties who fully discharge to Lake Ontario.

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Additionally, we urge Council to explore zero-interest or low-interest property-assessed loans to help small and medium size businesses in our city in making stormwater-efficient upgrades to their properties. This kind of program would allow commercial and property owners to borrow to cover the upgrade and repay the loan over time as a surcharge on their property tax bills. The loan is secured as a tax lien attached to the property and can be transferred if the property is sold.

A variety of small and mid-size businesses, including automobile services, car dealerships to strip malls and quick service restaurants, would benefit from an impact analysis of this significant shift. We strongly encourage Council to consider these recommendations during your deliberation on Wednesday.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G.D.', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Greg Dunnett  
President & CEO  
Hamilton Chamber of Commerce