To: All Municipalities in Ontario

Re: Niagara Health System – Hospital Improvement Plan

By way of background, the Regional Municipality of Niagara consists of twelve area municipalities and seven local hospitals, which were individually governed by a Board of Directors. In 2000, the Province created the Niagara Health System (NHS) to improve patient care and save money. Eight years later, the Niagara Health System has a $17 million deficit in 2007 and has not achieved the objectives of the original hospital restructuring plan. Consequently, the Province ordered the NHS to develop a Hospital Improvement Plan for the next five years.

The NHS released its Hospital Improvement Plan on July 15, 2008, which amongst other things, provides for the incremental closure of Douglas Memorial Hospital (DMH) in Fort Erie.

DMH operated in the black for many years with an emergency department, ambulatory surgery, 39 beds and all of the other operations and facilities generally found in a small hospital. DMH is distinct in that it is an ambulatory surgery centre where routine minor surgeries are performed five days a week with a program tailored to Fort Erie managed by the local doctors and surgeons with specialists from the area utilizing the surgery and conducting clinics. This hospital model is the most cost effective method of health care as opposed to an acute care hospital. Centres of Excellence are the most expensive hospital model. The way of the future is ambulatory care hospitals for simple and routine surgeries and not utilizing acute care hospitals for these treatments. In order to sustain the model of ambulatory care hospital, it requires an emergency department, surgery, beds, x-ray equipment and a lab.

The NHS proposes to phase out the emergency room surgery at DMH, ultimately closing the hospital and most likely turning it into a long-term care facility. Such action will cause family doctors to leave the community and will create a health care vulnerability such as we have never seen before.

At the Council Meeting of September 8, 2008 a number of local doctors and specialists addressed Council on the matter, resulting in the passing of the following resolutions:

**THAT:** In recognition of public accountability and democratic principles, the Municipal Council of the Town of Fort Erie hereby supports the efforts of Peter Kormos, MPP to introduce a Private Member's Bill calling for the public election of all hospital boards in the Province of Ontario as part of the municipal elections commencing in 2010, and further

**THAT:** This resolution be circulated to all municipalities in the Province of Ontario for support. (CARRIED)

**THAT:** The Municipal Council of the Town of Fort Erie hereby petitions The Honourable David Caplan, Minister of Health to legislatively enact the protective status of the Rural Hospital designation as previously defined in 1998 under The Rural and Northern Health Care Framework by the Conservative Government and apply the designation to the Douglas Memorial Hospital in the Town of Fort Erie and all other qualifying hospitals in Ontario, and further

**THAT:** This resolution be circulated to all municipalities in the Province of Ontario for support. (CARRIED)
The Hospital Improvement Plan is being reviewed by Dr. Kitts, Provincial Advisor. Local public consultation is expected but the outcome is unknown.

Since 1998, small hospitals in Ontario were protected under the Rural and Northern Health Framework. It has now been dissolved by the current government since it was a policy and not enshrined in legislation. The status was achieved in 1998 when small hospitals were previously threatened in Ontario. It is now only a matter of time that other small hospitals in Ontario will be subject to “improvement plans” which in reality means closing the hospital.

Finally, it is important that hospital board members be elected. The Niagara Health System budget is close to $400 million and there is no public accountability, transparency or accessibility to information.

We look forward to your support in these matters. Please advise our Clerk, Carolyn J. Kett, of the action taken by your municipality.

Sincerely,

Douglas G. Martin, Mayor

Contact Information:
Carolyn J. Kett, Town Clerk
Town of Fort Erie
1 Municipal Centre Drive
Fort Erie, ON L2A 2S6
Phone: 905-871-1600 x 2211
Fax: 905-871-4022
Email: ckett@forterie.on.ca

c.c.  The Honourable David Caplan, Minister of Health and Long Term Care Fax: 416-326-1571
Juanita Gledhill, Chair, LHIN Fax: 905-945-1992
Dr. Jack Kitts, President and CEO, The Ottawa Hospital Fax: 613-739-6638
Betty-Lou Souter, Chair, NHS Fax: 905-323-3800
Debbie Sevenpiper, President and CEO, NHS Fax: 905-323-3800
Peter Kormos, MPP Fax: 905-732-9782
Kim Craitor, MPP Fax: 416-325-0818
Tim Hudak, MPP Fax: 416-325-0998
P. Partington, Regional Chair Fax: 905-687-4977
John T. Teal, Co-Chair, Mayor’s Task Force NHS Improvement Plan Fax: 905-871-9151
Wayne H. Redekop, Co-Chair, Mayor’s Task Force NHS Improvement Plan Fax: 905-894-5356
H. Schlange, Chief Administrative Officer
R. Wilson, GM, CDGC