



PORT COLBORNE

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July 9, 2025

Lynn Guerriero
President and CEO
1200 Fourth Avenue
St. Catharines ON L4V 0A9
lynn.guerriero@niagarahealth.on.ca

RE: Response to Letter Dated June 2, 2025 – *Decision Requested: Partnering for the Future of Healthcare in South Niagara (December 3, 2024)*

Dear Ms. Guerriero,

Our letter is in response to your correspondence dated June 2, 2025, regarding Niagara Health's self-imposed deadline of September 12, 2025, for a decision on the proposed ownership transfer of the Niagara Health Port Colborne site and the \$6.2-million local share request toward the future South Niagara Hospital.

We appreciate the degree of planning involved and understand your desire for clarity as preparations continue for the opening of the new hospital in Niagara Falls. With that said, we hope you can appreciate that we find this deadline aggressive and unattainable at best.

We encourage you to take a moment to consider this situation from the perspective of a City Councillor or a long-time resident who has followed the evolution of healthcare in Port Colborne closely for many years. Two primary concerns merit attention and present an important moment to pause and reflect.

First, the land was generously donated by the citizens of Port Colborne, and in the 1940s, the community united to raise funds to support the construction of what was then the Port Colborne Hospital.

Secondly, as you know, the City of Port Colborne's official position is to keep the Port Colborne Urgent Care Centre open – a stance shaped by extensive public feedback gathered by the City earlier this year. This position was formally communicated in an April 2025 letter from the City, addressed to Premier Doug Ford and the Honourable Sylvia Jones, and copied to several other relevant officials and organizations.

These two issues underscore the complexity and significance of the decisions now before us. It is essential to consider the longstanding community investment and local perspectives that have shaped healthcare in Port Colborne. Thoughtful, collaborative dialogue – rather than pressure under an unnecessarily short timeline – is critical. A respectful process, not one driven by ultimatums, will lead to the most constructive outcome for all parties involved.

Since the Port Colborne hospital was amalgamated into the single organization now known as Niagara Health, the community has witnessed what can only be described as the gradual dismantling of the hospital's intended purpose. For some, it has felt like a slow bleed; for others, like death by a thousand cuts over the past two decades.

Port Colborne City Council has no oversight of the healthcare system, and the system is very complex with many independent organizations with independent objectives. Our recent public engagement revealed that our community feels their healthcare needs are not being adequately met. The potential permanent closure of the Port Colborne Urgent Care Centre in the coming years is expected to further exacerbate existing barriers to care in our community, particularly for vulnerable populations.

Based on our understanding, Niagara Health's position appears to be that the most effective way to improve healthcare in the region is through a three-hospital model with centres of excellence, while leaving the delivery of primary care to the broader primary care sector, outside of Niagara Health's direct mandate. Once again, if our understanding is accurate, local primary care providers appear to support this approach in principle; however, they have emphasized that additional resources are needed to strengthen primary care services in the community. The province has similarly indicated a desire to improve primary care. We understand that the province will be seeking applications for funding to expand primary care services across Ontario in the fall. We also understand these funding opportunities will allow local physicians to roster more local patients, service un-rostered patients, and support the expansion of interprofessional health professional services while maintaining and improving diagnostic services.

This highlights a fundamental issue with the timing and framing of your recent letter. We are essentially facing a 'chicken-and-egg' dilemma. Should we not first ensure that primary care and related health services are strengthened before removing an essential safety net? While we recognize that primary care may fall outside Niagara Health's direct mandate, we respectfully urge you to demonstrate leadership in this moment and advocate for the communities you serve.

Let us take a moment to acknowledge how different and more productive this conversation could be if, before drawing a line in the sand with a September 12 deadline, we all stepped back to consider the following:

- The build of the Niagara Falls hospital was awarded at \$3.6 billion. Port Colborne's local share only represents 0.17% of that budget.
- As your correspondence from June 2, 2025 indicates, Niagara Health already sees the community share of Port Colborne secured through the land associated with the current Port Colborne Site.
- Later this fall, Council will receive a comprehensive, evidence-based, and attainable healthcare services strategy, developed in consultation with healthcare partner agencies – including Niagara Health – subject matter experts, and the community from Council's newly established Healthcare Advisory Committee. We appreciate Niagara Health has already confirmed attendance for the Healthcare Advisory Committee meeting on July 23, 2025.

The City recognizes there may be a pathway to improved primary care services in Port Colborne in the near future, based on an anticipated funding application from the healthcare community to the province this fall.

In summary, we recommend revisiting this timeline discussion once there is greater clarity from the City's Healthcare Advisory Committee and a clearer understanding of potential provincial funding for primary care and related health services in the fall.

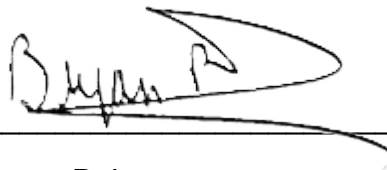
As always, we are happy to meet at your convenience to discuss this matter in more detail. We remain confident that we can improve healthcare together.

We ask for your continued collaboration and patience as this critical work progresses.

Sincerely,



Bill Steele
Mayor
City of Port Colborne



Bryan Boles
Chief Administrative Officer
City of Port Colborne