



Pelham welcomes the opportunity to be a partner in governance reform in Niagara.

Governance Review in Niagara

March 5, 2026

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park Toronto, ON

The Honourable Rob Flack
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Toronto, ON

CC: Sam Oosterhoff, MPP Niagara West
Bob Gale, Regional Chair, Niagara Region

Re: Pelham's Position on Governance Review & Niagara's Future

Premier Ford and Minister Flack,

Pelham welcomes the opportunity to be a partner in governance reform in Niagara.

Pelham is a successful small town that boasts strong housing growth, responsible taxation, and residents with a deep attachment to the community. It is a wonderful place to live, and everything I do is with an eye to keeping it that way.

Pelham supports governance changes in Niagara and has several recommendations for consideration. Ontario's concerns regarding municipal operational efficiencies, housing construction, and the large number of elected officials across Niagara are legitimate and can all be addressed without forced amalgamation. As a distinctive, viable community, Pelham would not benefit from amalgamation. Amalgamation is clearly not wanted by a majority of residents.

Change is Welcome

I want to both thank and congratulate Regional Chair Gale for his leadership in pushing us into the governance conversation. I am generally supportive of the Chair's vision for governance reform in Niagara, other than his references to potential future amalgamation. I also formally signed the joint declaration with eight municipalities that oppose amalgamation and are open to meaningful change at the Region of Niagara.

Governance changes that Pelham can support include a future with fewer elected officials, transferring responsibility for water and wastewater distribution/collection to a

third-party dedicated service provider, and potentially assuming regional staff and assets to maintain what are currently regional roads.

Specifically, a third-party service provider, staffed by professionals and removed from direct political control, would be a better model for water and wastewater services. This is in keeping with the new *Water and Wastewater Public Corporations Act, 2025*, which enables the provision of water and wastewater services independent of local politics. Pelham's experience with the Regionally owned and operated Fonthill water tower replacement is a great example of the need for change. This project began in 2019, has been deferred and delayed on multiple occasions, and presently does not even have an official start date or year. This has impacted Pelham's plans and forced multiple changes to construction schedules for local roads and growth-related infrastructure.

Pelham can foresee a prosperous future with either no regional government or a reduced role for the Regional Municipality of Niagara. If these changes are made, Niagara would experience an overall reduction in government and an end to overlapping authority and jurisdiction, all while maintaining local democracy and independent town halls.

Preference for Local Autonomy

While systemic change is welcome, local autonomy matters. Pelham is a flourishing and vibrant community that functions very well. Pelham's high rate of growth and new home construction, highlighted in the table below, demonstrate the track record of Pelham being an effective partner for the Provincial government in building more housing and providing responsive services to residents.

Budgetary Year	Levy Growth
2023	1.55%
2024	3.16%
2025	2.09%
2026	2.69%

Pelham is also a financially sustainable community, with increased reserves and a decreased backlog of infrastructure projects. Further, after deducting voluntary additional contributions to reserves of roughly 2% each year, Pelham's tax increases have been at or below the rate of inflation for the past four years, indicating true sustainability and fiscal responsibility.

In working with our West Niagara neighbours, Pelham has found several prudent ways to reduce operational costs, while protecting autonomy and independence. Pelham

shares a legal department with the Township of Wainfleet, a Library Board with the Town of Lincoln, environmental staff with Lincoln, and is currently exploring opportunities for shared Information Technology resources with neighbouring municipalities.

Anyone who attends one of Pelham's award-winning festivals or events can see that residents have an obvious attachment to the current structure of their community. When the topic of amalgamation was brought to the forefront by Chair Gale not two weeks ago, I instructed Town staff to seek public input. A short video I created supporting governance change, but opposing amalgamation, has more than 20,400 views in a municipality of 20,000 people. We have received hundreds of online responses, a majority of which oppose amalgamation. I have no idea how many people have called, texted, or simply stopped me on the street, but this is the most consequential issue our community has faced during my time in office.

On behalf of the residents of Pelham, I wish to clearly state that change is welcome, but please respect local democracy and allow Pelham to continue serving its residents through a responsive Town Hall at 20 Pelham Town Square.

Good governance does not require amalgamation for Pelham to continue delivering quality service and cost savings to residents.

Timelines and Pragmatic Concerns

Pelham has proudly signed the March 4, 2026, joint letter to the Premier, as one of eight municipalities, in which we propose working with the Province of Ontario to improve Niagara's governance by reducing duplication of services and reducing the number of elected officials.

We would welcome an opportunity to participate in any forum, review committee or working group that Ontario deems appropriate for these conversations. These conversations should occur after the 2026 municipal elections, so that all those involved have a strong mandate from their communities. By focusing on service delivery and governance reform, other than amalgamation, together we can create a better Niagara.

Recommendations:

Pelham proposes the following action items as serious, meaningful proposals to start a results-oriented conversation:

1. Pelham does not require two seats on Niagara Regional Council. Having the Mayor sit on the upper-tier council is an adequate voice for the community. Weighted voting at the upper-tier municipality level exists elsewhere in Ontario and could be implemented in Niagara to address population disparities. It is entirely fair if the vote of the Mayor of Pelham counts as a single vote, while the vote of the mayor of larger populated cities might count as three votes. With changes like these, achieving fewer elected officials is possible while still recognizing the importance of local representation and local democracy.
2. Focus analysis upon the water system, which is a major impediment to growth in Pelham. Water supply and wastewater treatment should not be political issues. Ontario has shown thoughtful leadership by passing the *Water and Wastewater Public Corporations Act, 2025*, which enables the provision of water and wastewater services independent of politics. Implementing this in Niagara would be a dramatic change that could produce a brighter future where toilets still flush, and taps don't run dry.
3. Let's take a hard look at current Regional operations to identify further savings and to determine if the Regional Municipality continues to be needed. Three years ago, the Region lost most of its planning authority, but there was virtually no change in staff numbers, as planning staff were largely absorbed into other departments. The size of two non-statutory departments - economic development and the DEI office - would benefit from a structural or operational review. Chair Gale has correctly identified the Region's empire-building cultural issue, where things always get bigger. We can address organizational culture at the Region, without reducing local democracy across Niagara.
4. Is there a compelling argument for the continued existence of the Region's Roads Department? All municipalities in Niagara must provide road maintenance services, and each municipality has a larger road network than does the Region. Regional facilities and staff can be downloaded to municipal partners for operational service delivery. Similarly, we should explore whether shared service boards or municipal service boards would be effective delivery models for many of the Region's remaining functions.

Summary

Pelham has demonstrated that it is a good provincial partner for new home construction, with at least a decade of high growth to prove it. The reward for high growth, fiscal responsibility and open collaboration with neighbours should not be forced amalgamation. Amalgamations, like a good marriage, should only involve willing parties. Pelham's residents clearly enjoy having a responsive Town Hall and social media has exploded with pro-local-control sentiment since this issue became public.

Pelham looks forward to meaningful dialogue on governance and working with both Chair Gale, our neighbouring municipalities and the province to build a better Niagara together.

Respectfully,



Marvin Junkin, Mayor
Town of Pelham