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COUNCIL MEETING

INFORMATION SERVICES DIVISION

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REPORT IS-2025-04
April 8, 2025

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SUBJECT: **IT Strategic Plan**

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                    Services/Chief Financial Officer (CFO)

APPROVING   **Scott Barnes**
MANAGER: **Information Services Manager**

APPROVING   **Stephanie Nagel**
DIRECTOR: **General Manager of Corporate and Enterprise**
                    Services/Chief Financial Officer (CFO)

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WELLAND approves the City's Information Technology (IT) Strategic Plan and;

That Council approves hiring a Project Administrator as recommended in the plan to be funded through the Operating Surplus Reserve for the remainder of 2025.

RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN

This recommendation is aligned to Council's strategic priorities of ensuring "**Economic Growth, Environmental Stewardship Health & Well-being and Livability**" by modernizing the City's technology infrastructure and implementing sustainable IT practices through improved digital services and facilitating better access to information and resources.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City of Welland developed a five-year IT Strategic Plan to modernize its technology infrastructure and align IT investments with municipal priorities. Stakeholder engagement, peer benchmarking and a current state assessment were conducted to develop recommendations to modernize, maintain and update the City's IT infrastructure and practices based on changing technologies and economic circumstances. The plan focuses on four strategic priorities: enhancing citizen engagement, optimizing internal operations, modernizing IT infrastructure,

and strengthening cybersecurity to help ensure an efficient and secure digital future. The plan includes adjustments to the City's Information Services (IS) team to execute the strategy with a recommendation to hire a new role in mind 2025 to drive and coordinate the initiatives of this strategy.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Welland operates with an in-house IT Department, referred to as Information Services. In the past few years, there has been steady growth and a rapid change within the City's culture resulting in an increased reliance on technology to help deliver our programs and services to residents, businesses, and other stakeholders. The ongoing nature of these conditions is the motivation behind the City's desire to develop an IT Strategic Plan that aligns with the City's overall strategic plan. Strategic Plan initiatives linked to specific risks and security plans are discussed in a companion report in the closed session of this meeting.

Five-Year Strategic Plan

The City developed a five-year IT Strategic Plan (Appendix I) to guide the modernization and strategic management of its technology infrastructure. The plan provides both short-term and long-term recommendations to address the City's evolving IT needs.

To ensure the recommendations were practical and effective, benchmarking was performed against municipalities of comparable size and complexity. The resulting plan was designed to be adaptable, allowing staff to modernize, maintain and update IT systems in response to technological advancements and economic conditions. The IT Strategic Plan was aligned with the City of Welland's Strategic Plan, ensuring that technology investments supported broader municipal objectives.

The plan also identifies anticipated costs of just over $2 Million over the 5 years. The costs do not include additional staffing; however, it is noted that the IS team will need to add additional resources (2) and adjust current responsibilities to better align with the strategy. The IT Strategic Master Plan identifies the need to hire a Project Administrator in 2025 to drive and coordinate the initiatives of the strategy.

Information Services Resourcing:

The current staff complement for IS consists of a Manager and four staff. Three of those staff are unionized with the Manager and Network position as non-union. As noted, through benchmarking and reviews of the current state within the City of Welland, the consultants have identified a need to adjust responsibilities of some of the existing roles and to add additional staff resourcing by hiring a Project Administrator and an Infrastructure Analyst. Without additional staff and focus on the strategic priorities, systems could fail, service levels will be impacted, and the organization puts its data and overall sustainability at risk. The City is dependent on systems to administer every aspect of daily operations. Outages and system failures could result should Council not commit to adding resources and focusing on

Information systems as identified through the recent work of Blackline consulting and as recommended through this and the closed session report to Council.

The recommendation in this report is to hire the Project Administrator immediately to continue this journey of increasing our security, reducing risk, providing more digital services for residents and provide better data for decision-making while increasing automation and enhancing service standards.

Without additional IS staff who are dedicated to executing the priorities of the strategic plan, it is unlikely that current City staff will be able to deliver the expected benefits of the plan within reasonable timeframes. At this current time, our IS staff are almost fully occupied with day-to-day operations. Without acquiring a position focused on the agenda of the strategy, staff will find it impossible to make the required changes for how we work, deliver service to residents and protect our data and systems.

Corporate-wide staffing levels and computer use have grown dramatically, and Welland has evolved into a mobile workforce. New, more sophisticated systems and work methods continue to proliferate, most requiring more protection, administration, and support. Keeping the lights on, ongoing support, and working on the many new initiatives and projects underway have taken priority. Today's workloads are challenging with current staff levels.

Cyber-crime has dramatically accelerated in the municipal sector. Protecting the corporation from malicious attacks, ransomware, data breaches, and other cyber threats requires constant attention and an evolution of methods.

The IS Manager and the CFO attended a half-day session in 2024 through AMO and a partnership with Toronto Metropolitan Municipality "Cybersecurity for Municipal Councillors." The session included staff and Council members and is highly recommended for Councillors who want more information on the risks with real municipal examples to guide future decisions. AMO is offering this again later in 2025 on October 21, 2025 with the idea that Councils need to be informed to "Prevent, Prepare and Respond" to the daily risks and the extent of the activities required by staff and Council to protect the corporation from various cyber attacks.

The IT Infrastructure Analyst position that is recommended will be reviewed and included in a future budget as staff and Council follow the path of the IT Strategic Plan as presented and recommended by staff and Blackline consulting.

Current State Assessment

As part of the development of the IT Strategic Master Plan, an in-depth analysis of the current IT environment was conducted. This analysis was informed by an engagement and interview process with IT staff, the Corporate Leadership Team, and representatives from each department and division. Feedback was gathered on existing corporate and departmental technologies, as well as visionary approaches

for future enhancements. Elected officials were interviewed to assess council-related technology use and needs. A peer analysis was also performed, comparing the City's IT environment to those of similar municipalities to ensure the plan reflected common practices. This comprehensive approach ensured the IT Strategic Plan addressed the perspectives and requirements of all key stakeholders.

The current state report identified key areas for technological improvements, including asset management, ticketing systems, work order management and risk mitigation strategies such as data backup, network redundancies and cybersecurity planning. The action plan provided a clear roadmap for enhancing IT services, outlining measurable objectives for hardware, software, and infrastructure. These recommendations were designed to support both internal City operations and external service delivery, ensuring the strategy aligned with broader municipal priorities.

Improvements and Recommendations

The IT Strategic Plan groups ten initiatives into four strategic priorities to position the City to leverage current and emerging technologies, ensuring adaptability to future advancements in municipal IT. Key activities required for implementation were outlined, with each initiative prioritized and accompanied by a detailed breakdown of cost and expected staff effort.

During the development of the IT Strategic Plan, we learned that our vendor was ending mainstream support for our current financial system, in 2029. We have therefore made the replacing of this system a priority within the implementation plan.

DISCUSSION:

The IT Strategic Plan defines a clear vision and mission aligned with the City's overall corporate strategic objectives. The plan includes four key strategic priorities, and ten initiatives aimed at enhancing the City's digital capabilities. Three of the strategic priorities are as follows:

Enhance Citizen Engagement:

Improve how citizens interact with City services. This includes exploring a portal for priority services and continuing to digitize citizen-facing services.

Optimize Internal Operations:

Improve how City staff conduct their day-to-day operations. This includes adopting a vision for replacing core systems and acquiring systems to fill gaps in technology.

Modernize IT Infrastructure and Assets:

Organize and upgrade IT assets to address risks with the current state. This includes replacing unsupported servers and building redundancies in the City's network infrastructure.

Overall, risks and more in-depth discussion was had in the in-camera session earlier this evening, with the accompanying report, as IT is an ever-evolving area with many factors affecting risk including cyber security which is an important focus in all organizations.

In addition, this report also requests the addition of a critical new non-union FTE, IT Infrastructure Analyst. This position is supported by the Mayor to be included in the 2026 Mayor's draft budget.

FINANCIAL:

The financial details of each initiative are outlined in the IT Strategic Plan (Appendix I) and summarized in Appendix II the IT Strategy Budget to align to the recommendations and timelines. The overall estimated impact is just over $2 Million for the 5-year plan, exclusive of the recommended two additional staff resources. In order to start the IT Strategic Plan initiatives as outlined in the report, the position of IT Administrator should be considered and hired in 2025 to maintain timelines and costs. The costs for this position, if approved for 2025 would be funded through the Operating Surplus Reserve. The anticipated cost for 2025 would be approximately $80,000 including benefits, dependent on timing of the hire. The Operating Surplus Reserve balance on Dec 31, 2025, unaudited is over $1.5 Million. For 2026, this position would form part of the base budget.

Staff recommend working within the current budget for 2025 to complete tasks identified, future budgets will be impacted with some significant investments upcoming to address the challenges including acquiring a new Finance/ERP system to replace the current system which is approaching end of life.

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix I - IT Strategic Plan

Appendix II - IT Strategic Plan Budget