



July 28, 2023

Dear Mayor Annette Groves:

**RE: Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Request for Endorsement**

On behalf of the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Network's (NEBN) Board of Directors, we are engaging with municipal leaders, such as yourself Mayor Groves, along the Niagara Escarpment to build more awareness and support for our newly established organization. The Niagara Escarpment Biosphere (NEB), which has previously been attached to the Niagara Escarpment Commission, has been reconstituted to be a non-governmental organization. This is a critical shift in oversight responsibilities as the NEBN has been established to support the management of the NEB as a community-led, grassroots organization that will work to meet the criteria and standards required by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Man and the Biosphere Programme.

UNESCO directed a renewed NEB model as it was no longer appropriate to have management oversight connected within a government agency. In 2021, the Transition Leadership Committee and Plenty Canada (an Indigenous not-for profit organization working to share resources with Indigenous Peoples and community groups around the world in support of environmental sustainability) signed a memorandum-of-understanding to work together on developing this new co-governance structure. Work has been progressing and last Spring (2022), the NEBN became officially incorporated under provincial regulations.

The NEBN is now the official entity that is working on a renewed mandate and continued designation of the NEB. We are at a point now where we need your help. As a municipality within the Niagara Escarpment area, we need your leadership and the endorsement of your Council to re-commit to the community's support of the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere. With the NEB designation currently under UNESCO review, your endorsement will be key in ensuring we maintain this important globally recognized designation.

We have drafted a proposed motion and we are asking you to put it before your Council for endorsement. If you require a member of the NEBN to attend a Council meeting to help gain your Council's support, a member of our team will be more than willing to attend. Also, we have included some additional facts about the NEBN, and you can also check out our website <http://nebnetwork.org/> or email us at [info@nebnetwork.org](mailto:info@nebnetwork.org) to learn more.

Thank you for your consideration in this very important matter.

Sincerely,

Walter Sendzik, NEBN Board Member and former Mayor of the City of St. Catharines

Cc: Patrick Robson, NEBN Chair  
Charlene Winger, NEBN Vice-Chair  
Amanda Harwood, Plenty Canada

## Sample Municipal Resolution in Support of NEBN

**Whereas** the Niagara Escarpment, from Queenston in the south to Tobermory in the north, has been recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a World Biosphere since 1990;

**And whereas** the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere (NEB) provides a range of very positive returns to Ontarians, including but not limited to promoting biodiversity of both flora and fauna, open landscape, productive agriculture and agri-tourism, traditional Indigenous knowledge and cultural history, eco-system services, a living laboratory for learning, carbon sequestration, climate change mitigation and adaptation;

**And whereas** the NEB is integral to the protection and enhancement agenda for the Great Lakes, especially since several of Ontario's major riverine systems have their headwaters within the NEB that in turn feed into each of Lake Huron, Lake Erie, Lake Ontario and Georgian Bay;

**And whereas** oversight of the NEB has successfully transitioned from the Ontario governmental agency, the Niagara Escarpment Commission to a citizen-centred, not-for-profit organization, namely the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Network (NEBN);

**And whereas** the NEBN has been established as a Co-Leadership model between Indigenous and Non-indigenous leaders, with a key objective of establishing the future direction of the NEBN as a model of delivering on the worthy goals of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as a demonstrated commitment to the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;

**And whereas** the NEBN has made and continues to demonstrate its commitment to partner engagement and collaboration across many sectors and interests, including municipal, environmental, tourism, educational, youth, economic, research, and more;

**And whereas** *municipality's/agency's name here* has demonstrated its commitment to the integrity of the NEB through policy and action over many decades;

**And whereas** the NEBN is seeking continuation of the official UNESCO Biosphere designation for the NEB, with the support of those who call the NEB home for work, play and study;

**Now therefore be it resolved that the** *insert municipality's/agency's name here* strongly supports the continuation of the UNESCO Biosphere designation for the Niagara Escarpment and for the oversight model that has been established with the NEBN.



### **What is the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere?**

In recognition of its unique ecological characteristics, the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere (NEB) located in south-central Ontario was designated as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Biosphere in 1990. It is the largest continuous stretch of forested area remaining within Ontario reaching 725 km from Lake Ontario to tip of the Bruce Peninsula. It encompasses two major biomes (Boreal Forest and Temperate Broadleaf Forest), contains 30+ regions/municipalities, and many other diverse natural and urban environments.

The NEB is comprised of three separate zones, including core zones, buffer zones and transitional zones, enveloping approximately 194,555 hectares of land. The unique composition of these three characteristic zones allows for the NEB to conserve biodiversity while simultaneously promoting sustainable development where appropriate. Given the expansive area of the NEB, it is appropriate to accommodate the needs of a number of partners and provide ample opportunity for community engagement. UNESCO does not subscribe to any single model of governance, therefore, governance across the Biosphere's of different countries varies significantly, depending largely on the objectives and goals of partners and nearby communities.

### **What is the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Network?**

Following the most recent periodic review of the NEB by UNESCO, fundamental changes were required to maintain the critical UNESCO Biosphere Designation. A key recommendation was how the NEB was governed and how it engaged with partners - especially Indigenous Peoples. To guide a governance transition, a Transition Leadership Committee (TLC) has been established to facilitate the transition.

The NEB has transitioned from a government oversight model to a citizen-led model, including emphasis on meaningful Indigenous engagement and partnership. In fact, TLC is in a co-management framework with Plenty Canada, an Indigenous led organization working to share resources with Indigenous Peoples and community groups around the world in support of environmental sustainability. The Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Transitional Leadership Committee has been working to establish the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Network (NEBN) as the new entity that will focus on maintaining the biosphere designation in partnership with all communities within the NEB. In March 2022, the NEBN became officially incorporated under provincial regulations.



### **What is the difference between the Niagara Escarpment Commission and the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Network?**

The Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) is a provincially legislated body with a responsibility that focuses on its land use mandate under the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act, guided by the Niagara Escarpment Plan. Ensuring compliance with its regulatory land use policies is an important function of the NEC.

The goal of a UNESCO Biosphere is to promote biodiversity, conservation and relationships between humans and the environment. A recent UNESCO review of the NEB noted a need to better measure conservation, biodiversity, and human relation impacts, not just compliance. This includes promoting biodiversity not only within the NEB but also on adjacent lands. Although this work has been on-going by community groups for many years across the Niagara Escarpment, it has not been captured and networked in a way that provides meaningful inputs into the NEB.

The NEBN is a separate, provincially incorporated entity that will address the missing pieces of the UNESCO designation that includes measuring impacts on the biodiversity of the NEB. The NEBN is a community-led organization that includes partners within the NEB - including an important co-governance model with Indigenous Peoples.

### **Why your support is important to the NEBN?**

To continue to maintain the important Niagara Escarpment Biosphere designation from UNESCO, the NEBN needs the support of First Nations, elected officials, community leaders, educational institutions, environmental groups, business organizations - in essence all groups that see the importance of the Niagara Escarpment as it has been protected for generations.

Through resolutions, stories, letters, and testimonials, the NEBN needs to verify to UNESCO that there is a strong and unified, cross-societal base of support for the continuation of the NEB. Additionally, it is important for UNESCO to see the widespread support for the NEBN as the networking agency that connects the Niagara Escarpment in a way that celebrates all of its benefits – environmental, cultural, economic, and social – with our communities.